

JARED PADALECKI

JENSEN ACKLES

NO CODENAME

BY CLEX_MONKIE89

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Title: No Codename

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Pairing: Jared/Jensen

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Summary: Jared's got a brand new show, tons of things to keep him busy, and pretty much the most awesome costar he's ever met. Okay, so maybe he has some less than entirely pure thoughts about said costar sometimes, but he's, like, eighty-three percent sure Jensen thinks impure thoughts about him, too. Sometimes. Possibly. Now he just has to stop being so chicken-shit and actually make a move.

Warnings: Non-AU, bad jokes, lots of food grossness, jokes about various things in bad taste (STDs, eating disorders, Chad Michael Murray, dating Chad Michael Murray, Texas, Texas mothers, The Little Mermaid, and more), and boys acting like boys.

Notes/Acknowledgments: Betad by waterofthemoon. Without her, this fic would be gibberish. The rest of my flailings are in the Author's Notes, because I'm not going to force everyone to read them.

Their first meeting goes something like this.

"Hey man, I'm Jared, nice to meet you; you're Jensen Ackles, right? Dude, I have your posters all over my walls, well, had them; my little sister came and took 'em all back when she heard I got to look at you every day. Like, I never really watched soaps or any of that shit, but you fucking kicked ass on *Dark Angel*; Alec was the fucking shit, man! You got to be all smart and kickass—oh, hey, that's probably why they call it 'smartass,' ain't it? Bet that was fuckin' fun to play, man. I was on *Gilmore Girls*; my character's name was Dean, too, but I wasn't cool or any of that shit, I just played some dork who got to make out with Lexi and sock Chad once, but man, who doesn't dream of slugging him at least a couple of times, right? Hey, would it be weird if I asked you for an autograph so I can prove to my sister and her friends and my jackass brother that you aren't some drugged-out coke dream fueled by the pressures of Hollywood—Vancouver, really, I guess—getting to me?"

"...Was any of that English?"



Their first day of shooting is almost ruined by Jensen's inability to sleep like he's people.

Call time is five-fifteen, and at ten to five, the van is still sitting in front of his hotel. The driver is on the phone with Kripke—"Please, call me Master"—and Jared is laying in the leg space between the seat with his feet shuffling restlessly on the ceiling.

There are five more worried phone calls—three to his room and two to his cell—before some scrawny bellhop comes out and tells them to move their van. Jared can't get back to sleep, and he can *hear* Kripke on the other end of the driver's phone, screaming and freaking out in general.

It takes some maneuvering, but Jared manages to roll himself over and belly-crawls out of the van before making his way to the front desk. Getting a new key to Jensen's room is ridiculously easy, and Jared is baffled as to why Jensen doesn't check in under an alias. Though, given, Jared's motivation is less because he's afraid of being discovered by a horde of fans and more because he gets a kick out of answering to "Mr. Bond."

Jared's rehearsing the conversation he's going to have with Jensen about why he should probably lock his door at night when he makes his way into the suite. The conversation is quickly derailed when he sees Jensen stretched across the bed, one arm thrown out with the other tucked under his back. His legs look like they *must* be broken—there's no other way for them to bend like that—and he's completely tangled in the comforter. He thinks about grabbing a chair and launching himself feet-first onto Jensen, but he stops himself when he realizes that A, Jensen is only *playing* his big brother, and B, Jensen is not 6'7" like Jared's real big brother and will probably snap in half. So he settles for the next best thing.

Jared mostly misses Jensen's errant arm when he pounces on the bed with a loud yell of, "Come on, Jennybear, rise and shine! Time to wake up, Jenny!"

Unfortunately for Jared, Jensen's aim is way better than his, even half asleep. Jensen's roll is too quick for Jared's still sleepy eyes to follow, and it's only the simultaneous knee to his kidney and fist slamming into his head that make Jared think twice about jumping on people who are, basically, strangers, to wake them up.

"*Dang*, boy, what the fuck?"

Jensen's hair is half-flattened, and his face has pink-red creases from his pillow on it. There's a crusted path of drool leading from his mouth to his cheek and then down to his chin. One eye is squeezed shut, and the other is squinting. The sound he makes isn't exactly human; it reminds Jared of the orcs from Lord of the Rings, fresh-made and mad as hell.

"Um. Good morning, starshine?"



They start shooting two hours late, a great start considering that just a few hours earlier, most everyone was afraid their new star had overdosed or killed a hooker and ran off to hide the body.

Sadly for everyone, but mostly for Jensen and Jared, shooting went ridiculously long to make up for it. Kripke was a champ, though, a real king, and let them leave at only a little past midnight.

Jared doesn't remember all the details. He was sore and achy and fucking *tired*, and one moment they're on the I-5 after dropping Jensen off at his hotel, and the next thing he knows, Jensen is screaming like a maniac next to the van—and when the fuck did they go back to *his* hotel?—about evil technology and high school dropouts. Apparently, Jensen couldn't get into his room and couldn't show ID to prove he was himself—because it was in the room with all the rest of his important things, because Jensen apparently is not an actual human until he's been awake for at least four hours—so he was stranded until Kripke or whoever was in charge of their rooms managed to get the hotel to do something.

It's about one by the time Jensen seems to give up, quits his fit, and decides that declaring to the world at large that he's going to lie down on the couch right there in the lobby and sleep until someone *makes* him move is a good idea.

"Shut the fuck up, you big drama queen. Just come crash in my room already. Makin' me miss my sleep just because you don't know how to open a fuckin' door..." He's not sure if Jensen can even understand him. There's Texas, and then there's *Texas*, and neither one of them is even slightly coherent right now.

When Jensen's jacket hits his face, Jared figures he was understood. Rather than try and pick a fight, he just wads the soft fabric into a pillow and kicks his legs over Jensen, making himself as comfortable as he can in the van.

During the elevator ride up to Jared's room, Jared refuses to give back Jensen's jacket, and the eleven floor ride is spent in a half-assed, inept game of tug-of-war that ends with Jared falling ass first onto his floor when Jensen suddenly lets go. Jared vows revenge from his spot on the cold tile, and Jensen only kicks him a little as he walks over him.

Once they're in the suite, after Jared has moved the coffee table and all the crap he's managed to pile on the floor in such a short time, they discover that the fold-out couch isn't. It's just a pretty looking couch with shitty cushions and no excuse for the giant pain in the ass—and back, and neck—Jared gets every time he sits on it. "Guess you got the couch anyway, huh, dude? I think there's an extra blanket here. Feel free to hunt."

"Fuck that shit; I'm not sleeping on the couch!"

"It's my room!"

"Dude, I'm a middle child. I will hissy fit all over this damn room until you give in and I get the bed. You might as well just save time and forfeit now."

"I'm a middle child, too, and I'm not sleeping on that short-ass thing." The staring contest doesn't even last a full minute; Jared yawns, and Jensen twitches, and they split it down the middle. Literally.

"Whatever, I've got left side."

Jared's already sitting on his side of the bed, trying to make his fingers understand how to undo the double-knots in his laces. "Good with me. I sleep on the right, anyway."

Jensen's pants are already undone and halfway down his ass when he asks, "You don't mind if I sleep in my jockeys, right?"

"Hey, man, sleep naked for all I care. I don't know how I'm still awake and talking right now."

That combination of words seemed to be some magic key because when Jared blinks his eyes open, he's flat out across the bed, and Jensen is smacking his stomach lightly. "Come on, Jay, wake up. Don't make me take off your pants when you're asleep, dude, I don't see any good kind of relationship starting out with this."

"Did you know that Luke kidnapped Laura and raped her before they fell in love?"

"What?"

"My momma made me watch The Soap Network with her when I told her about the show, " Jared says blearily, rubbing his eyes. "Soap operas are scary, dude."

"You can say that again."

"Soap operas are scary, dude," Jared repeats, giggling a little.

"So if I rape you, by your soap-stained logic, we'll live happily ever after?" Jensen asks. He sounds confused or disturbed or tired or something. Jared's barely awake; thoughts like tone are confusing to him right now.

"Well, when you say it like that, it just sounds *weird*."

"How about you take off your own pants and we'll just hate each other from now on, okay?" Jensen tries to compromise.

"Can I hate you in secret?" Jared asks. He doesn't think he can hate Jensen, so if he promises to hate him in secret, then he can like him and just pretend.

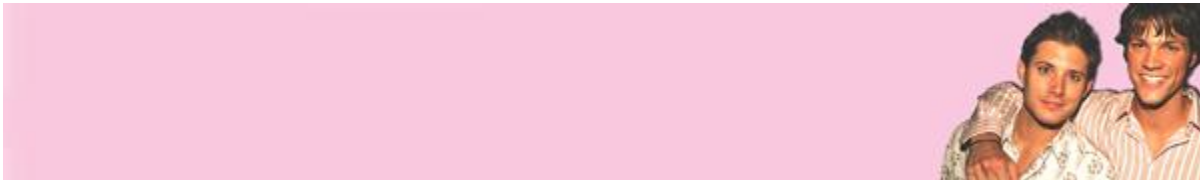
"Can you *keep* a secret? I've known you less than two days, and you've already told me every bad prank you ever pulled in high school."

Jared makes a scoffing noise, followed by a gurgle that he thinks was meant to convey words. He fumbles with his belt and shucks his pants down, kicking them off the bed and halfway across the room. Jared climbs over to his side of the bed and snuggles into three pillows and much more than his half of the blankets. Jensen doesn't complain—probably because he's tired like a normal person for once.

Jared hears rustling and grunting—almost definitely Jensen getting some degree of undressed. Jared keeps his eyes closed because he respects Jensen's privacy and, more importantly, he is not a masochist. There's a tugging at the comforter, and Jared keeps his death grip on it until he decides he wants the pillows more and loosens his grip.

Jared is almost asleep a few minutes later when Jensen suddenly smacks him across the chest. "Dude, Jared. Jared! You don't, like, cuddle in your sleep or anything, do you? Jared?"

The only response Jensen gets is a sound somewhere between a mostly fake snore and a cough.



For the record, Jared is not a sleep cuddler.

He is, however, an occasional sleep *kicker*, as evidenced by the size fourteen heel print right in the middle of Jensen's sternum when he wakes up on the floor in the morning.



This starts a pattern that continues throughout all the rest of filming.

Jensen oversleeps, Jared gets the scrawny red-headed guy working graveyard to give him a key—which deactivates Jensen's own room key—and goes to wake him up. They work late, and the same scrawny red-headed guy who thinks Jensen is nineteen feet tall with floppy hair refuses to give Jensen a working card, so Jensen crashes with Jared and wakes up with some random bruise somewhere on his body and then spends his lunch being driven to his hotel so he can get a working key before the "stupid little bastard" gets to work. Jensen sleeps in his own room and is

woken up by Jared, and then the cycle starts itself again.

It never occurs to either of them for Jared to just *give* Jensen his working card.



By some miracle of coffee and icy water, Jensen is awake and mildly coherent when they pick him up on the fourth day. He and Jared make small talk about late night TV, older brothers, younger sisters, the 'Boys, the Mavs, the Spurs, and a dozen other subjects for about a sentence each.

"You live here in LA, right?"

"Yeah," Jared says. "I mean, not really. I got a house here and shit, but I'm kinda all over the place between here and my Momma and Daddy's and Chad's place and all that. But—"

"But you have a house here, right?"

"Well, yeah."

"Why're you staying in a hotel then?"

"Oh, man, three am wakeups are *not* my friend. I'm, like, conscious and shit, but I don't wanna, like, wake up and hop in my car and go crashing into a Starbucks or something because I'm still half asleep and shit. What about you, I know you got a place here. Why ain't you there?"

"Stalking me, Padalecki?"

"Yeah. And you need to water your plants more; the fichus by the window looks half-dead."

"Dude. Are you psychic?"

"Seriously? I was right?"

"No, dumbass. I don't even have *plastic* plants."

"Man, shut up. Seriously, what's the matter, broke the key to your apartment?"

"Fuck you. And yes, I have a place here. But man, fuck that shit. Free room with someone else making your bed and cleaning up after you? Like I'm gonna pass that shit up."

Jared snorts and manages to find the energy to roll his eyes. "Lazy ass motherfucker."

"Damn skippy."

"Choosy moms choose Jif." Jared doesn't need to open his eyes to see the questioning look on Jensen's face. "Peanut butter. Y'know, Skippy, Jif, that Peter Pan one."

"Yeah, man." Jensen yawns. "I got that. I watched TV growing up, too."

If anyone asked him, Jared wouldn't be able to say *exactly* why he smiled at that.



After fifteen days straight of shooting, they finally wrap. It has been fifteen days of waking up *way* before the ass-crack of dawn, working sixteen hour work days, and doing take after take after take until their will to live is *almost* but not quite extinguished. Jared is glad it's finally over. Not just so he can get some rest, but because it was starting to look like Jensen might set fire to the set and then jump in from the tallest building or tree or moose or something.

Jared couldn't make himself watch the dailies. He always ended up begging for just one more take, so when Kripke asks if they want to see a very shitty, very pasted together version of the pilot, Jared all but runs screaming in the other direction. This works in his favor, though, because if not for that, he never would've caught Jensen as he finished clearing out the last of his things from his temporary trailer.

The goodbye is awkward, neither of them willing to say the words because of some bone-deep superstition that it will jinx them, will mean they won't get picked up and this will be the end of the ride. They joke and kid and trade numbers, they say they'll call, and when they go to leave, Jared loses his mind. He tries to resist, tries not to do it, but he just can't help himself. Chad fucking warned him—"Don't fucking *hug* anyone, dude. Hollywood doesn't do that. And you creep people out, too."—but he just couldn't resist.

It's the longest, most awkward ten seconds of Jared's life. When they break, and Jared heads into his trailer, it's all he can do not to slam his head into the wall repeatedly.



It's the beginning of May, about a week or two before Upfronts, when Jared gets word that the WB wants them to start filming again.

It's not a full season, not even the standard thirteen—they just want them to start filming and go until the network says stop. He's only really been on *Gilmore Girls*, so he has no idea if that's good or not, but no one looks like they're about to kill themselves in the office, so he figures it's not bad.

A week later someone's assistant's assistant's assistant's secretary calls Jared to tell him to be in New York for Upfronts.

Chad makes fun of him, of course, but he has every fucking right to freak out. He's never really been *on stage* at the Upfronts before; that was Alexis and Lauren's thing.

It's kinda cool, though. Jensen's even more awesome than he remembers, which Jared seriously did not think was even possible, and he doesn't seem to mind the fact that Jared can't seem to shut up for even three seconds the entire night.

Jensen's girlfriend is even awesome, which is unfair on about fifteen levels. She speaks Polish, she's big on animal rights, and she's absolutely hilarious.

Sandy almost deafens him when he tells her this the next day on the phone.

"She was Maxim's model of the year last year! I can't believe you didn't tell me you were meeting her."

"It's not like I called Jensen up and asked if he had a hot girlfriend to bring."

"Next thing you go to, you're bringing me with."

"She's dating Jensen, I'm pretty sure you aren't gonna get anywhere with her."

"Yeah, and I'm dating you. Ask me how much I love your dick."

"Point."



Jared doesn't actually remember most of the All Stars thing. There were probably cameras

involved at some point. And execs. Jensen was probably there, too. He *knows* they had alcohol.

All Stars is *so* fucking much more fun when he doesn't have to spend a half an hour proving he's legal every time he wants a drink.

And apparently, according to Sandy, he climbed Jensen like a tree. Which isn't exactly unexpected, but Jensen didn't freak out. Which just rocks.



Jared finds out they got picked up for a full run a few weeks before his birthday. He's laying on the sofa in his momma and daddy's house, Sadie on the floor in between the couch and the table and Harley sprawled over him and drooling on his chest. His cell rings, and he blames the heat and being tired on why he didn't bother to check the caller ID.

When he's told they've been picked up for the season, his response is, "You know what, Chad? Fuck you. You're a fucking douchebag. This shit wasn't funny yesterday or the day before or last week. Quit it with the fucking calls already, or I swear I'm gonna come down there and drown you in a lake."

Fifteen minutes later, his phone rings again, and this time it's Kripke—Eric—on the other line. The combination of mortification and excitement causes Jared to leap from the couch. His haste causes him to forget two very vital things: Harley, who was asleep on him and who immediately clawed and scrambled in an attempt to not plummet to the ground, and Sadie, who had the bad misfortune of being asleep right where Jared's feet came down. Between the dogs barking and Jared flailing and yelling, he manages to overturn the couch and send himself through his momma's good glass coffee table.

Jared showed up to his first day on his brand new TV show with four stitches in his ass and a big pink donut to sit on. Jensen glues sprinkles to it during lunch, and Jared blows nine takes of emo because he can't stop giggling over Sam's newly iridescent pants.



They aren't even four days into filming the second episode, and they've already got six quasi-interviews under their belts, though, given, the interviews are less about the upcoming show and

more about their past roles. Jared's tired and hungry, and he swears that if one more person needs to ask "just one question" while he tries to make it to the food tent, he will throw himself on the ground and start kicking and screaming for his bottle. Or a pastrami and swiss on rye with mustard. And a steak. He could *really* go for a steak.

Sadly, the caterers have no steak, so Jared settles for three sandwiches, a salad, a small bag of Fritos, and two oranges. Had he known that the very second he sat down, Jensen would appear from whatever interdimensional portal he uses to get around and start stealing food off his plate, he would have grabbed more.

"Dude, you're laying it on *way* too thick."

Jared looks around for a moment and can't help but wonder if maybe he started slathering butter on his sandwich while he wasn't looking. He didn't. "What?"

"All that shit about Sandy. 'I met my girlfriend when we were working on *Cry_Wolf*, isn't she hot?' and 'yeah, when I was working on that movie I met my girlfriend, Sandy. Man, I love her *so* much! She's the love of my life!' 'I have a girlfriend, and she's totally hot, and I totally love her, and we totally have tons of manly straight sex, and the only cock I want anywhere near my body is mine.'" It's not the best imitation of himself that Jared's ever heard—way too high-pitched and just this side of lisping—but sadly, it's not the worst one, either.

"I don't say 'totally' that much."

Jensen snorts, and Jared's eyes can't help but follow the small bit of ranch-covered carrot that goes flying out of his mouth and into what is now Jensen's salad. "You know, most guys wouldn't focus on that part of the conversation."

"Is it still a conversation if you're just talking *at* me?"

"We've got two more interviews this afternoon, Godzilla. I'm just trying to give you some pointers. It's cool if you're bearding it up and all—I'd be a hypocrite to judge. I'm just saying that all that overcompensation crap sends off sirens. Next time try for less Tom Cruise and more Justin Timberlake."

"Wait, you're gay?"

"Nothing that looks this good is straight."

Jared freezes with his sandwich halfway to his mouth. "That's the saddest thing I've ever heard in my life. You stole that from a TV show, didn't you?"

"Or a movie, whatever. I'm only half gay, really."

"Front half or back?"

"I bet that was funny in your head, wasn't it?"

"Shut up. And Sandy's not my beard. I'm hers."

Jensen's mouth is, thankfully, empty this time when he scoffs. "Bullshit."

"No, seriously, her publicist set it up. He seems to think that guys don't like chicks they don't think they have a shot with, and lesbians aren't exactly big fans of dick."

"The dude's obviously gay."

"And stupid," Jared adds. "Guys fucking *love* lesbians."

"Straight guys, at least."

"Bi ones, too, apparently," Jared points out.

"True, true," Jensen agrees.

"Speaking of lesbians, you know I have to ask."

"Joanna, right?"

"No, I wanna ask if your other girlfriend likes to muff dive."

Jensen scoffs at him. "Joanna's not my girlfriend."

"Seriously? Oh, duh," he says, feeling supremely stupid. "The hypocrite thing."

"No, dude, she's not my beard. We're friends. Sometimes we fuck, but we don't really date. She's better arm candy than Chris, and she doesn't get drunk and fuck as many random strangers as him, either."

Jared nods his head like he has any idea at all who Chris is, while debating with himself if he should get more food or not. He's not exactly hungry, but he's not full, either.

"And?" Jensen prompts him. Jared has no idea what he's being prompted for.

"...And what?"

"*And*. Come on, man, tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"I just told you I swing both ways; now it's your turn," Jensen says, looking expectant, "You're dating a lesbian, for fuck's sake. You're about as straight as I am, admit it."

"I'm less straight, actually."

"...Oh. Well, fuck you; I had this whole thing worked out to get you to confess for nothing."

"Sorry?"

Jensen shrugs. "Eh, not a big deal. But now I've got a week and a half with nothing to do."

"I could always fake being straight, and you could go back to trying to wheedle it out of me?"

"Nah, may as well just move on to phase two."

"Phase two?"

"Don't worry about it. There's only minimal risk of physical harm involved."

Jared shrugs and fishes a baby tomato out of the salad. It's almost to his mouth before he remembers the carrot and drops it back into the Styrofoam bowl. "S'less risk than everything else I do."

"Judging by the donut, I'd have to say you're probably right about that."

They sit in silence for a few minutes, smacking each other's hands away from food and chewing quietly. "You *do* know—" Jensen pauses and sucks something from his teeth before spitting it out and starting again. So attractive. "You *do* know that she's your beard, right?"

"She is not," Jared says.

"You're gay, and you have a girlfriend," Jensen says slowly. "She's your beard."

"She's not my beard," Jared says back, just as slow. "I don't even have a boyfriend." It's like Jensen doesn't know *anything*.

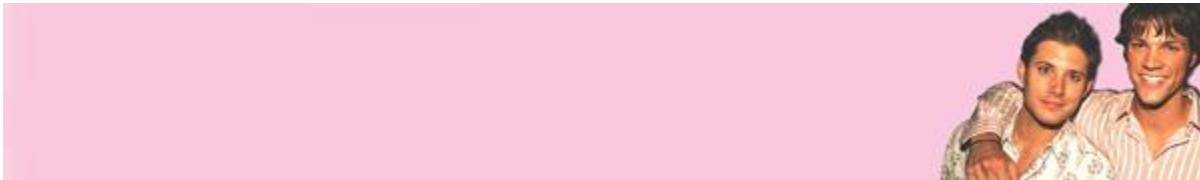
Jensen stares at Jared for a long moment. "While I'm sure that makes sense on Planet Jared, it means nothing here on Earth. *Beard*."

"Does, too," Jared argues, distracted. There's a PA on the other side of the set who's either taken up jumping jacks or has been trying to get their attention for a while now. "Come on," he says, swatting at Jensen's arm lightly. "I think I see Nutter sharpening knives for us. We better get back on set."

"Yeah, whatever," Jensen scoffs, getting up. "Does not."

"Does, too." Jared spits out his gum, mentally sliding himself into Sam's headspace.

"Really, *really* does not." Jensen grins back at him. It's all teeth and no eye-crinkles—almost Dean, but with enough Jensen that Jared misses his cue in all of the first three takes because he can't stop thinking about it.



Jensen snatches the bagel right out of Jared's hand and takes a bite, tearing off a large chunk before handing it back.

"I know there are more bagels around here somewhere."

"Yeah, but yours already has cream cheese on it. Next time, don't forget the jelly, though."

"I don't like jelly. It's messy, and I get it all over, and then wardrobe yells at me and makes me change."

"My mom asked me if I had romance with you."

Jared pauses with the bagel halfway to his mouth. "What?"

"She talks like she's from movies, right?"

"Your mom thinks we're fucking?"

"Don't be so crude," Jensen says. "She wants to know if we have romance. I told her you're a bad boyfriend who doesn't bring me flowers. I also gave her your number, so beware of Richardson area codes."

"But we aren't going out. Are we?" Jared is pretty sure he would notice if they were. Dating Jensen would be a memorable thing like that. Or something.

"You never take me out anymore," Jensen says. It's not really a complaint, but it's so deadpan that Jared is actually a little impressed, despite himself.

"You fellate coffee cups and growl at fans," Jared taunts him, sliding back into familiar territory.

Jensen scoffs. "Even I can't fellate a coffee cup."

"No wonder we aren't going out." It's out of Jared's mouth before he thinks about it.

Jensen raises an eyebrow in a look that's half Dean, and Jared can't help but be jealous. Only two weeks into real filming, and Jensen already has movements and tics that are all Dean, whereas the only things Jared has that scream *Sam* are a deeper voice and the annoyed face Meggy made at him for nearly six years straight.

"If your dick is as big as a coffee cup, you need to see a doctor because someone you fucked had something very wrong with them," Jensen tells him.

Jared squashes his first instinct, because his Momma taught him right, and instead responds, "He said that the sores were from riding horses."

"I'm sure they were, Seabiscuit," Jensen laughs at him, ripping off another huge chunk of bagel.

Jared waits until he gets half of it in his mouth before saying, "They weren't *that* infected. The pus was more like a thin vanilla shake. It wasn't, like, cream cheese thick or anything."

Jensen pauses mid-chew, and Jared knows that face well from his own big brother. He knows Jensen's trying to decide if he's bothered enough to stop eating.

"And, I mean, it's not like they smelled *that* bad. It didn't really bother me until I was going down on him because, you know, when you're down there, you're already waiting for things, so if one of those bur—"

Jensen spits the bagel out right there, little half-chewed bits of it bouncing off of Dean's boots, and shoves the uneaten part back on Jared's plate. "Sick fuck. Keep your bagel, then. I don't want it anyway."

Jared can't hold back the cackle, and he doesn't even try when Jensen pushes himself off the table and walks away.

He's laughing so hard that he almost doesn't hear his phone ringing. A number he doesn't know with a *214* area code flashes across the screen, and he stops laughing.

"You gave her my *number*?" Jared yells across the tent. Jensen pumps a fist in the air as he continues walking, and Jared's pretty sure that he can hear Jensen's own evil laughter exiting craft services with him.



Shooting wraps early. The last of the day's shots are finished, so there's a full twenty-six hours before they have to be back on set again. Jared's relaxing in the van, last night's PJs still too thin against the unexpected wind.

Jensen climbs in, fully dressed with actual shoes and not just ratty old slippers, like he's the one who's the morning person. Jared thinks he probably still wins, though, because Jensen's shoes are boring and grey, and his are fuzzy and *pink*.

"You didn't really go down on someone infected, did you?"

Jared's eyes dart to their driver, not because he's worried—even Jared can't crash a car that hasn't started yet—but because he doesn't want to scare the poor girl. To her credit, she doesn't even seem to acknowledge that there's anyone else in the car with her.

"I have better taste than that."

Jensen settles in next to him in the second row, legs kicked up on the backs of the first row. His left knee is touching Jared's right, and even though his calf is cramping a little, Jared doesn't have the willpower to move. "Pun intended, of course," Jensen says, handing him a huge Styrofoam cup.

Jared takes a tiny sip and burns his taste buds. Hot chocolate. "Of course."

"Good," Jensen says, gulping down what's probably half of his equally large cup of coffee. Jared absently wonders if Jensen's tongue is burned and sandpaper-rough like his. "'Cause I don't think I can bring myself to fuck someone who is clearly way too stupid to consent."

Jared snorts; he can't help it. "Please, like you've ever topped before."

"Blow me."

"Not unless you're infected," Jared says. "Lack of pus is a deal breaker for me."

"Damn. Guess I'm gonna have to call up that skeezy dude from your movie."

Jared rolls his eyes. "Chad's not that skeezy."

"And yet, you knew it was him I was talking about."

Jared takes another sip, the hot chocolate no longer scalding. "He didn't *really* fuck Paris, you know."

Jensen just smirks, head tilted back and eyes closed behind his ridiculously cool aviators. "Sure."

They ride in silence for a while after that. The silence not exactly comfortable, but it's by no

means awkward.

The van pulls up to a stop, some traffic accident involving a Volkswagen. Jared looks out the window. "Is that a moose?"

Jensen doesn't even open his eyes. "Smallville set. Probably Lana's newest stalker."

"It's much hotter than the last guy they got," Jared teases.

"Yeah, that dude looked like the north end of a south-bound mule."

"Completely hideous," Jared agrees.

They start moving again—at more than five miles an hour, even—and the quiet is easier this time, calmer.

Jared's phone start vibrating in his right slipper, and he doesn't bother trying to move to get it. "Thanks for giving your mom my number, by the way."

"My pleasure. Thanks for telling Kripke you think I'm bulimic."

Jared doesn't even try to stop the grin pushing itself forward. "Anything I can do to help you in this difficult time of need."

"They're hiring me a nutritionist."

"Your momma has my cell number."

"They're probably gonna turn Dean into a pig now because you told them I shove my finger down my throat."

"That's not true," he objects. "I told him I saw you throwing up behind craft services."

"I was throwing up because of your sick-ass story."

"Yeah, I might have forgotten to mention that part."

"You're a dick," Jensen says, with no real anger in his voice.

"Your momma asked me if I 'practiced proper hygiene.' In my *ass*."

The driver snorts at this, a small huff of air, followed by what is clearly stifled laughter.

Jensen doesn't bother trying to stifle his. "Okay, yeah," he pants out. "You probably win that one."



The night shoots just plain suck.

Jared can't bring himself to ask Jordan to fuck up his sleep schedule just because Jared's gonna be nocturnal for two days, and he can't just leave them alone. From previous attempts, he knows that Harley won't sleep if there isn't a person to lie on and that Sadie will get into everything, probably to entertain Harley.

She knocked over his bedroom TV the last time Jared spent a full night out—he tries not to crate them unless he absolutely *has* to because they look so betrayed when he lets them out—and Jared nearly had a heart attack when he saw the blood on his carpet. It was only a small cut on one of Harley's hind legs, but it could have been worse.

So he takes them with him to set.

Jensen gets picked up first, something that Jared will never not find fucking *hilarious*, so by the time the van arrives, he's already half asleep again, face smushed into the far window. Jared stands there for a few minutes, trying to figure out how to get Sadie and Harley into the back row without them slamming into the back of Jensen's seat.

It's moot, though, because Jensen isn't as asleep as he looks.

"I didn't know it was take your kids to work day," he says. "I would've brought a couple of cheeseburgers or something."

He knows Jensen's being mostly sarcastic, but it doesn't stop the little flip thing his stomach's been doing for the last week. "Jordan, the guy who watches them during the day, can't stay here all night because he's got this crazy girlfriend who thinks she's his fiancée, and I can't leave them alone because last—"

Jensen flaps his hand around while making some half-duck face, and Jared laughs because he realizes Jensen's trying to do Dean's "stop" hand from the Pilot. "I am nowhere near awake enough to understand any words coming out of your mouth, much less care about them. Just get in here so I can go back to sleep, okay? There's no way your sasquatch ass can get back there without someone needing to call for the jaws of life."

"That was a pretty big monologue for someone who says they're asleep. I think you're secretly a morning person, aren't you, Jensen? You're up with the sun and singing to the birds like Mary Poppins, right?"

Jensen flips him off and curls back into the window. Jared herds the kids into the van, Sadie first with Harley following her faithfully, and then climbs in himself to play the lamest, most un-fun game of live action Tetris ever.

Sadie's usually good and tends to fall asleep as soon as she gets in a car, so Jared doesn't feel guilty about ignoring her for the moment. He has to make sure Harley doesn't make them crash while he stakes out this brand new place and its new smells.

Harley settles down in a few minutes, snug half under the seats, tail thump, thump, thumping happily against Jared's ankle. Sadie's got herself snuggled up on the seat, stretched long so Jared has to lift her hind legs to have somewhere to sit. She's got her snout buried in the bend of Jensen's far arm with a paw digging into his stomach and the other close enough to Jensen's crotch that Jared's squirming in sympathy.

"Sorry," he says, whispering more because of Sadie than Jensen. "They get all narcoleptic when they see people sleeping. I'll take her."

Jensen smacks his hand—*smacks* it like he's a little kid reaching for the cookies—and scratches between Sadie's ears with his free hand. "She's my little nap buddy," Jensen says. "Aren't you, baby girl?"

"You're gonna spoil her, you know."

"Whatever, I bet you feed them right from the table, don't you?"

"Can't do that; if you feed 'em from the table, they get confused about where their food comes from. That's how come you get them begging at the table for food, 'cause they think that's where you feed them from."

"I'd mock you if I could remember the name of the guy who brings all the animals on Leno."

"Jack Hannah. You watch Leno?" Jared asks, cocking an eyebrow at him. "I figured you for Letterman."

"It's funnier when he bombs than when Letterman does. What about you, you don't really think he's funnier, do you?"

Jared shrugs, "His set is brighter. Letterman's is depressing." It might be lame and kind of dumb, but it's the truth.

Jensen doesn't say anything, and when Jared glances over, Jensen's staring at him. "You are a *very* odd duck, Padalecki."

Jared has a couple of comebacks for that one, including pointing out that Jensen talks just like his

nana, but he bites them all back. "Quack, quack."

Jared laughs and tries to block the chapstick Jensen throws at him.



"How's Hoover Boy doing? Is he just as hot in person?"

Jared hates Sandy, he really does. He has no idea why he still picks up the phone for her. "Don't call him that."

"You of all people should know that is *so* not an insult, Jared. And you called him it first. I'm not going to change his name just because you actually know him now."

"I was drunk."

"And it serves you right."

Jared groans as he flops down on the bed. His body aches too much to even work up the brain power for that one. "What does that even *mean*?"

"Exactly," she says, and he hangs up on her. She's worse than Chad, he fucking swears it. Even Chad knows better than to call right after work ends. Sandy's just evil. The phone rings again, and Jared sighs.

"Just because Sofia-with-an-F won't go down on you doesn't mean you get to call me up and torture me."

"You're just being bitchy because your big, gay, ass-crush doesn't want to have babies with you."

"Ass-crush?" Jared asks, distracted. Harley's standing by the door, his nose just poking around the corner. Jared switches ears and pats the bed. Harley trots over and hops up, licking Jared's face.

"You want his ass. Ass-crush."

"I'm tired, and I want to go to sleep. Leave me *alone*. Please?" Jared is aware that he sounds like a five-year-old, but he can't seem to make himself care. He's been up since four and just spent three of his nine hours at work falling over logs and sliding down rocks because he has all the coordination of a drunken monkey.

"You're usually more fun than this."

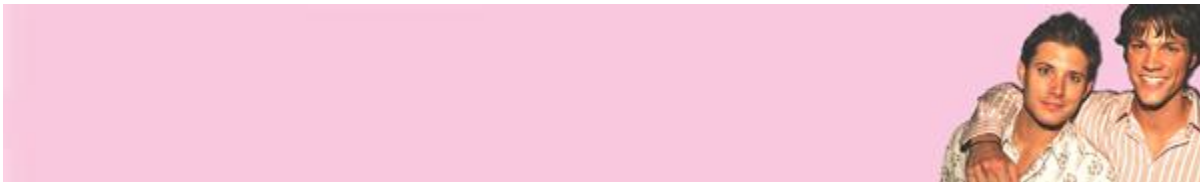
Jared scoots up on the bed and lies down against the pillows, curled on his side. Harley follows after, fitting himself up against Jared's chest, face tucked under his armpit. "Usually I only have a bunch of words to memorize. Now I have to say weird shit like 'wendigo' and try not to knock my eye out with a shotgun."

"I don't think I like you when you haven't slept."

"Then let me sleep."

"It's only four."

"Don't care, sleeping now, love you, don't call till morning."



The ringing of his phone is what wakes Jared up. He's tempted not to answer it—he's comfy where he is with Harley on one side, Sadie panting on the other—but the damn thing is a foot away from his head and loud as shit.

He doesn't answer it *somebody better be dead* because the one time he ever did, it was his momma on the other end, and she told him off so bad that his ass hurt in sympathy. "*Please* be something important."

"Hell yeah, it's important. I'm bored, and the fucking crapass TV in this room won't hook up to the DVD player. I'm coming over to steal yours, okay?"

"Jensen?"

"No, it's Eric. I'm flying up from LA to use your TV for two hours." Jensen's voice sounds weird, higher than usual and kind of scratchy. It occurs to Jared that he has no idea what time it is, so he glances at the clock and groans.

"Is it six am or six pm?" Jared asks, scrubbing his hand over his face.

"If it were six am, we'd be on the way to work right now."

"Shut up, I'm tired. What's about my TV?"

"What's about your TV?"

"What's *this* about my TV." It's not a question, just a correction. "I just woke up. Don't make me hang up on you. I'm pretty sure that would prove Sandy's point somehow."

"What?"

"Nothing. The TV?"

"Oh, right. I'm bored, and I want to watch a movie, so I need to come borrow your TV."

"Why?"

"Why, what?"

"Why for my TV?"

"Did I really wake you up?"

"I'm good, I'm good," Jared makes himself sit up. "Okay. So you want to come watch a movie because... you can't watch a movie?"

"The DVD player won't hook up to my TV because my hotel is shitty. So I'm coming over there."

"Yeah, okay," Jared agrees, yawning loudly. "Oh, hang on, lemme check my TV first."

"What?"

"Don't wanna make you come all the way over here if mine's like yours," Jared says, trying to work his way off the bed. It'd probably be easier if he didn't have to climb over a sleeping German Shepherd without waking her up. He swings a leg over, trying to hop over her, and misjudges where the floor is, landing with a hard, bed-shaking thump.

There's a small voice yelling Jared's name from his phone, now lost somewhere around the bed. His ribs ache surprisingly bad for such a short fall.

"The fuck was up with that, man?" Jensen asks when Jared finds his phone again, trapped after having landed in last night's underwear.

"Nothing," Jared groans, pushing himself off the floor. "I'm good. 'M good, 'm fine. S'just a little fall."

"You sure about that? Cause it sounded kind of like when Godzilla crashes through Tokyo. Without all the screaming Asians."

"You forgot to mention the bad dubbing."

"If you can't see them, it isn't badly dubbed."

"Huh? But... you're watching a movie. Why wouldn't you see them?" There's nothing but silence on the other end of the line. "Is it 'cause I'm on the phone?"

Jensen's laughing on the other end of the line, cracking up and wheezing into the phone. "Dude, I'm never gonna let you live this down."

"Live what down?" Jared asks, moving the TV on the dresser. "Well, fuck. Mine doesn't have A/V jacks either. Guess you're shit outta luck."

"Damn."

"Yeah," Jared says, crawling back on the bed and laying his head on Harley's stomach.

"Bummer. What did you wanna watch, anyway?"

"It's this football movie. S'called..." Jensen starts, trailing off for a moment. "The Receivers."

"You woke me up because you wanted to watch a football movie?"

"Yeah. It's queer cinema. You know, coming of age story, young kid in the closet, all that stuff."

"A queer football movie called The Receivers?" Jared pauses for a moment to let his brain process this. "You know it's probably porn, right? Bad porn, at that."

Jensen doesn't say anything for a moment, and it takes everything Jared has not to laugh at him. "I thought it would be like *The Replacements*. But gay."

"*The Replacements* is pretty gay."

"Yeah, but too much tit for you, right?"

"Bite me."

"You wish," Jensen laughs.

There's an extremely awkward moment of silence there before Jared's brain clicks over and reminds him to *say* something. "*You wish.*"

"What are you, twelve?" Jensen hardly pauses before continuing. "I'm bored. Let's go get something to eat."

"You eat when you're bored? No wonder you make yourself throw up."

"Whatever, man, come on. Don't act like you aren't hungry. You're always hungry."

Jared can't argue that one. "Okay, so maybe I eat a little bit. There's nothing wrong with that."

"Absolutely not, let's go eat."

"I was sleeping. Why do you wanna make me move and do things?"

Jensen makes this sound, something like a sigh or a grunt. It could be Harley, though. "Dude, come on. It's *Wednesday*. Don't make me be that creepy, pathetic guy waiting for the table for one in the middle of the week."

"Ooh, you're gonna take me somewhere with tables? Fancy."

There's another silence on the phone, but this one doesn't last as long. "Where do you eat that they *don't* have tables?"

"There are drive-throughs."

"You're a cheap date, aren't you?"

"I'm a classy whore. I don't put out for less than steak."

"Then I guess we're going to a steakhouse."



"You are *really* committed to your jokes, aren't you?" Jared asks, trying to decide between the porterhouse and double cut prime rib.

"You're the one who mentioned steak first, asshole. I had a taste for it."

"Uh-huh, sure you did."

"Fuck you. A man can crave a rib-eye." Jensen snatches the lemon wedge from Jared's water and squeezes it into his Dr. Pepper, dropping it in after and stirring it with his spoon. "And if you order the salmon, you're walking home."

"What about the lobster? Can I still get a ride in your super gay Jeep if I get the lobster?"

"My SUV is not gay. A Range Rover is a perfectly acceptable vehicle. And what exactly *is* a gay Jeep anyway?"

"Yours."

"Oh, well, I guess you got me there with that logic." Jensen says, turning the page on his menu. "You're right, my *Range Rover* is completely gay. It only wants to fuck other Range Rovers."

"Stop saying Range Rover," Jared complains. "It's weird." He kind of wants to throw the lemon wedge from his water at Jensen, but this is the kind of semi-classy place that would probably frown on that.

"It *is* a Range Rover. And it's not weird. You calling it gay is weird." Jensen still hasn't looked up at Jared. For some reason, that makes Jared nervous.

"It's a Jeep," Jared repeats, snatching the bread out of Jensen's hand.

"No, it's not," Jensen says, grabbing the bread back from Jared. "A Jeep has no roof and, like, fucking cloth for doors and no windows. I drive a Range Rover."

"Fine, whatever, you drive a Range Rover," Jared concedes.

"Thank you," Jensen says, *finally* looking up at Jared.

Jared grins. "A really gay Jeep Range Rover."

Jensen shakes his head and smiles. It's a small smile, barely there, but his eyes crinkle right at the edges, and Jared's stomach backflips. "Just shut up and order your steak, Elton John."

"That was mean," Jared says, as serious as he can. "I don't know if I want the steak anymore. I might get a salad."

"Who the fuck do you think you're kidding?" Jensen asks. The look on his face is all Dean: eye crinkles gone, with an overly cocky set to his jaw. "If you just ordered a salad, you'd end up stealing my food. And I'm not about to pay a hundred and fifty dollars so you can eat a salad and a steak while I sit here and watch in horror."

"In horror?"

Jensen levels a look at him that's a little less Dean this time. "I've seen you eat."

"I'm not that bad," Jared says.

"Your dogs run and hide when you have food."

"See, now that's just not true," Jared says. "Harley would never run from food. And *you* chew with your mouth open. And spit while you talk." He pauses. "It's kinda gross, if you think about it too long."

"You think about me eating?" Jensen asks.

"Well, you make it sound weird when you say it like that."

"How does it not sound weird?" Jensen asks.

"I dunno, but you make it sound creepy. It's not like I jerk off thinking about you eating a cheeseburger," Jared says just as their water arrives to take their orders.

It's a toss-up for which one of them is more mortified, Jared or the kid with his notepad and bright red face. Jared loses because the kid smiles—big and red and only a little strained—and goes right on with his business like nothing happened. "Would you like to hear today's specials?"

Before Jared can say anything, Jensen cuts in and tells the waiter, "Not if you want to keep your spleen."

"*Dude.*" Jared doesn't care how bad the guy's timing was. That was just fucking uncalled for.

"*American Psycho,*" the kid—waiter—nearly shouts. "Christian Bale kicks so much ass. Have you seen him in *Batman?*"

Jared is still a little lost, but Christian Bale and *American Psycho* are ringing a bell. Jared remembers Bale running naked with a chainsaw and how uncomfortable it was to pop a boner a foot away from your friends.

"Not yet, I haven't had the time," Jensen admits, ducking his head and looking more adorable than any grown man should. "I'm glad you know the movie. Otherwise, that probably would've

been a little awkward."

Jared snorts. "Yeah, that would've been the awkward part of this. Not the thing about me jerking off—which I don't do, by the way. At least not to you eating."

Jensen chuckles this deep, short laugh that sounds like it's coming right from his chest, but their waiter speaks up before Jensen can. "I can come back if you'd like some more time to decide."

"No, no. Wouldn't want Jared to eat any more of his foot over there. What're the specials?"

Their waiter—who is clearly new, if only for the fact that he hasn't actually introduced himself to them yet—rights his posture, shoulders back and chin out, like Jeff always looked when he knew he was walking towards a spanking.

"Our special this week is the Kodiak burger, a 20-ounce Kobe beef hamburger, topped with Vermont farmhouse cheddar, Portobello mushrooms, and sautéed sweet onions on a parmesan roll." There's a pause, and then he adds, "I think I need my spleen for something, but you can have my appendix if you'd like."

It takes Jared a moment to formulate a response, and all he can do is stare at Jensen. "You planned that."

"As much as I would love to take credit for that, I could not have planned it if I tried."

"I know what I want. I want the double porterhouse, as rare as you're allowed to make it. Put a sweater on it and run it through a warm room. I also want the western Australian jumbo lobster tail. And the mac and cheese for the side."

"Dude, that's, like, a hundred and fifty dollars."

"You can afford it."

"Just so you know, I'm officially considering this a down payment."

"Payback is a tasty, tasty bitch."



It's a relatively quiet drive back. There was some hand-slapping over the radio early on—"Hands off, grabby, driver picks the music."—before they both agreed on a station. Now it's mostly silence, only broken by the occasional low, off-key string of lyrics from Jared.

"I hope you know I just spent my rent for the next two months because of you," Jensen says.

"Whatever," Jared scoffs. "I've been buying your dinner for the last two weeks."

"Yeah, at *McDonald's*."

"At sixty bucks a pop, man. Six days a week. For two weeks. That's, like, seven hundred dollars."

"At least half of that is you," Jensen protests.

"Still more than tonight."

"By, like, ten bucks."

Jared rolls his eyes. "You act like I didn't share."

"Tomorrow you're buying."

"No," Jared says. "Tomorrow I'm gonna see if there's a suite with an oven so I can eat real food again."

Since Jensen's driving, Jared can only see about half of Jensen's face, but there's no mistaking that eyebrow and the set of his jaw. "You can cook?"

"Yeah. I mean, I'm not great at it or anything, but it's a hell of a lot better than fast food every night."

"Huh. You know, if they give you one, I just might let you cook for me."

"Oh, you might *let* me?"

"Hey, I don't let just anyone slave over a hot stove for me."

"Aw, I feel so special. You gonna—oh, wow, we're already here?" Jared asks as they pull up to his hotel.

"Yeah, it's a lot faster when you don't drive in circles for an hour."

"Fuck you, what kind of person doesn't have fucking GPS nowadays? And next time, you can try to work Google Maps on your phone."

Jensen cackles like the big freak he is. "Mapquest, bitch."

The non-date is officially over, but Jared isn't exactly eager to get out of the car and go back up to his room just yet.

"If you were a girl," Jensen starts, "and this was a date, this would probably be the point where I would kiss you goodnight."

Jared ignores the nervous twist in his stomach. "If you were a guy," he says, "and this was a date, this would probably be the point where *I* would kiss *you* goodnight. Too bad you aren't and it isn't, huh?"

"I know you may not realize this, what with you never seeing a real one before, but I am *all* man."

"Are you sure? I mean, you *are* awfully girly looking."

"Get out of the vehicle already."

"Vehicle? What are you, eighty?"

"Shut up."

"Okay, so I was sitting here trying to think of a way to invite you up that doesn't sound like a come-on, but I give up," Jared says. "I have a TV and movie channels, and as much as I love Sadie and Harley, my kids aren't exactly the best conversation in the world. And I totally forgot this earlier, but I have a new laptop, so we could even watch something on that."

"You have a laptop?"

"I was tired, okay? I forgot. My old one, Chad broke the disc drive on it, and I never got around to getting it fixed."

"Oh, no, I see how it is. You just wanted me to buy you food, didn't you?"

"Yes. Yes, I did. Now I can tell your mom you gave good romance," Jared says as he climbs out of the car.

Jensen looks absolutely horrified. "Dude. Not cool."

"Serves you right, this is what happens when you give her my number. I'm gonna go take care of the kids so they don't try to escape or maul you." Jared doesn't give Jensen a chance to respond, just closes the door and heads into his hotel, almost forgetting the extra steak on top of the Range Rover.

Jared gets on the elevator with another person, this small girl who comes up to about the middle of his chest. They're having a pretty impressive game of "fifth grade science," Jared peeking at her in her Superman pajama bottoms and holey Jack in the Box t-shirt and shifting his eyes back to his reflection in the doors when she nearly catches him. He'd bet good money she's doing the same thing, too.

He's good for about three floors.

"Is that your real hair?" Jared asks her.

"What?" she asks. Her voice squeaks a little, and her eyes are big and shocked. "Oh, uh, yeah. I've been growing it since as long as I can remember." One of the hands hugging the laptop to her chest goes up to her hair, pushing the long, dark brown curls further back.

"It's really pretty. What kind of conditioner do you use?"

"Uh, Pantene. You know, the ones with the commercials?" Her entire face pinches closed in a wince after she says it, and Jared suddenly remembers that this girl has probably seen him on TV at some point.

"Yeah, they do those 'maybe she's born with it' ones, right? No, wait, that's Maybelline. They do makeup. Are Pantene the 'is it a salon' ones?"

"I don't know, I think that might be TRESemme. Pantene had the 'don't hate me because I'm beautiful' ones when I was little."

"Oh, right." Jared laughs. "With the big helmet hair!"

"Yeah, those ones." She doesn't look quite as uncomfortable anymore, but she *does* look a little scared.

"I'm scaring you, aren't I? I am *so* sorry. I just did a twelve hour shoot today, and I've only got about two hours of sleep in me, so my brain ain't even workin' yet. I swear, I don't usually go on and on about people's hair."

"It's okay, I'm used to it. Everyone usually wants to pet it or something, so you're already totally less weird than them."

Jared knows better than to ask right then, but only barely. "It *is* really pretty. But I'm going to stop talking about your hair now before you run and tell your friends how creepy I am."

"I don't think you're creepy. I promise."

"Aw, thank you! So, what're you in town for?"



It's half an hour later when Jared finally makes it up to the room. Jensen's not in there, and Jared would be lying if he said he wasn't disappointed. Jared didn't think he was flirting *that* much. But Jensen was pretty quick to point out, several times, just how not a date the dinner was.

Clearly, this is Sandy's fault. And Chad's. Chad's the one who said he acts like he wants to fuck everyone. That rat bastard psyched him out.

It's right about then, once Jared sits down and isn't immediately covered in slobber and scratches, that he realizes his dogs aren't in the room.

He's got his phone turned back on—twelve missed calls and three new voicemails—and Jensen dialed before his brain even catches up with his fingers. Jensen answers with, "Don't worry, they looked like they were about to go nuts and start eating the furniture, so I took them out."

Jared's heart is still pounding in his chest, possibly a little less out of worry than it was thirty seconds ago. "You could'a left me a note, man. I thought you went all Chad on me and kidnapped them."

"Chad kidnapped your dogs?"

"The last time he came to LA. He packed them up while I was at work and took them back to North Carolina so I would have to come down there to get them back."

"That's..." Jensen trails off. "Yeah, I don't know what that is. Illegal?"

"I don't know, maybe? Chad was just pissed 'cause I had to work, so we couldn't hang out much. So he took them so I'd have to go down there and not work."

"How long had you guys been dating then?"

"Shut up."

"What?"

"Don't 'what' me," Jared says.

"You guys weren't dating, then?" Jensen actually sounds surprised. Like maybe he wasn't joking.

"It's *Chad*. That'd be—" Jared fumbles around, trying to find some word to describe just how freakish the thought of him and Chad dating is. "That'd be like incest."

"You know what they say, if you can't keep it in the pants, keep it in the family."

Jared almost feels like he should say something, since they play brothers and all, but he manages to stop himself. Today is a good day for his filter. "I'm gonna hang up now, and you can—"

"Come open the door. We're halfway down the hall."

It takes a good ten minutes for the insanity to cool off, Sadie trotting off to find her food and Harley running off to do something that will no doubt cause some kind of damage. Jensen's got his boots off and sitting on the counter, even though Jared has told him at least a dozen times tonight alone that they don't chew on shoes.

"What the hell happened to you, anyway, man? How long does it take to ride an elevator?"

"It was a complete accident," Jared says. "I got onto the elevator with this girl with really pretty hair, and it turns out she's a fan! So we got to talking, and she's in town with her dad and her sisters for her cousin's wedding. Also, she's in school to be a vet, isn't that cool? Oh, and, hey, did you know I have fans petitioning for me to come back to *Gilmore Girls*?"

Jensen is sitting there on the couch, his bottle of Diet Coke halfway to his mouth and this look of mild horror on his face. "You... you *willingly* talked to a fan? What did she do, lure you away with candy? Man, you gotta quit doing that; someday you're gonna get kidnapped and sold on the internet."

"She gives *great* hugs," Jared tells him.

"I can't even tell if you're joking."

"Why would I joke about hugs?"

Jensen just shakes his head and smiles that one smile he has, the one Jared *knows* means Jensen is trying really hard not to laugh at him. "I got nothin'. There's no response to that."

"Hugs are *serious business*, Jensen. You can tell a lot about someone from the way they hug."

"Is that so?" Jensen asks, clearly humoring him.

"Duh. A guy gives you a hug, right? He tosses one arm around you and practically bends at the waist to make sure nothing possibly touches. He's either gay and so far in the closet he can't even see the door, or he's straight and terrified of someone thinking he's gay."

"You've thought about this way too much."

"Shut up. It's useful information."

"So, what do my hugs say about me?"

Jared doesn't even have to think about that one. "That you *clearly* had a very sad childhood."

Jensen doesn't flinch or anything—the last person Jared said that to *flinched*, and they've never been the same since then—but he gets this sad look on his face. "I don't give good hugs?"

"No, no, you give great hugs. *Amazing* ones. It's just, you know. You don't hug people; they have to hug you."

"That's not true."

"Yes, it is. You never hug me. I always have to do it first."

"I've known you for, like, three weeks."

"*Exactly*," Jared says, like that's the answer right there. "And you haven't hugged me. I'm always the one who has to start it."

"I didn't realize we were at the hugging stage. I thought this was just you not comprehending personal space."

"Well, yeah, that too." Jared's been getting the 'hands to yourself' speech since literally before he can remember. "But also, *hugs*. I like hugs. They feel good, and they make people happy. I hug my friends. You're my friend, ergo, you get hugs."

"I'm not—" Jensen pauses and makes some sort of Jay Leno-esque head wobble before continuing. "Five."

"That was a pretty long pause there."

"I couldn't decide whether to say 'four' or 'retarded.'"

"So you decided to add a year instead?" Jared asks, going into the bedroom to grab his laptop.

Jensen raises his voice, not loud enough that he's yelling, but just enough so that Jared only has to ask him to repeat himself twice. "I *said*, my word choices are not on trial here. And I'll try to hug you more, all right?"

Jared lobs two pillows at Jensen in quick succession as he comes back out of the room. "Dude, don't." He shrugs the blanket off his shoulders and onto the couch before setting the laptop up. "I like your hugs because they aren't... nervous?"

"Was that a question?"

"I think so. Here, put the pillow behind your back like this. Otherwise, you won't be able to sit still 'cause the couch sucks."

"What's the blanket for?"

"I get cold when I watch movies." He shrugs, wrapping it around himself like a really odd-colored cocoon. "And I don't really mind that you don't give hugs because you aren't one of those guys who just stands there all stiff and awkward when you *get* hugged, so that makes up for it. 'Sides, I hug enough for both of us. If you started hugging, too, then everyone would think you actually like people."

"Don't mock me, people are creepy. Where's the movie?"

"It's in there." Jared nods towards his laptop sitting on the coffee table, unwilling to wiggle an arm free for even a moment. "I fell asleep watching *Boogeyman* the other night, so I figured we should watch it."

"You just forgot to grab one, and now you're too lazy and comfortable to get back up again, huh?"

"You're so cynical. It makes me a little sad for you," Jared tells him, fighting back a yawn.

"If you're tired, man, we could—"

"No, I'm good, don't worry about it. Yawning doesn't actually mean you're tired. It just means you aren't getting enough air in your lungs."

"I would ask why you know that, but I'm sure I don't actually want to know."

"I don't know, I think I read it somewhere or something. You gonna hit play, or should I get out the nail polish?"

"Nail polish?"

"I was gonna say something about braiding each other's hair, but yours isn't long enough. Now

stop stalling so we can see all the stuff Eric recycled to the pilot."

"Bitch, bitch, bitch. Act like I'm your maid or something."

"Thanks, now I'm going to have nightmares of you in a French maid uniform."

"Brought it on yourself there, man."

"T'ch, whatever," Jared scoffs.

Jensen hits play, finally, seventeen hours later, and Jared makes himself comfortable. He moves the pillow up near the upper back of the couch and rolls on his side, body facing Jensen and head tilted just enough to see the screen.

"You know there's an entire other side to the couch, right?" Jensen asks him.

Jared feels his face heat up. Sandy's right—he's completely fucked. He *never* blushes. He sits back up, loosening the blankets so he can move better. "Sorry," he mumbles. "Didn't mean to—I'll just move."

"No." Jensen's hand darts out, grabbing onto his arm. "I just meant, you know. That you might be more comfortable. 'Cause of the arm. So you wouldn't have to curl up like a potato bug. If you're fine here, I don't mind you sitting next to me. Or anything."

Jared smiles a little, ducking his face 'cause he knows it's kind of pathetic—even though he can't really make himself care that much—and curls back up to watch Sam Winchester version 1.0.



Jared's not awake. Not really. He can be described as conscious only using the very loosest of the definitions. Something's pushing him into a sitting position, and there's a voice, it sounds familiar, saying something about keys and hips.

He forces his eyes open—and that takes so much fucking energy—and it's all blurs. Jensen. That's Jensen sitting next to him, pulling things out of his pockets.

There's noise, something weird and random, repeating over and over until all of a sudden it stops mid-repeat with a click. And then Jared's eyes open again, but everything's too bright, so he lets them close.

"m'on. Down," Jensen says, and his voice sounds as blurry as he looks.

There's something pulling at him—Jensen. Jensen's pulling at him and saying something about cold and something else.

Jared's lying down again, and it's not bright anymore, so he falls asleep.



The first thing Jared notices when he wakes up is that his knee is bent weirdly over the arm of the couch and will probably be sore all day. The second thing he notices is that the air feels warm and that he's got a blanket over his head.

Jared's not awake. That's his excuse for why he notices the knee and the couch and the air and the blanket before he realizes that the soft, warm thing under his head and arm is Jensen's stomach—Jensen's *bare* stomach because somehow Jared's hand is tucked underneath Jensen's rucked up shirt.

And, of course, it only gets better. Or worse. Probably worse in this case because Jensen not only has a hand in Jared's hair, he also has morning wood. It's just not fair. It's like walking into a room with a bag full of candy and not offering to share.

It's wrong, Jared knows this, but he just lies there for a minute, soaking it all in. The feel of Jensen's fingers gently running over his scalp, restless and twitchy like he's playing Playstation in his dreams. His soft, warm skin and the trail of fuzz Jared is valiantly not letting himself play with. Not to mention the *impressively* tented denim only mere inches from Jared's face.

He mentioned the thing about it not being fair, right? 'Cause it really, really isn't. At all. Jensen doesn't even have the decency to be straight, *no*, he's got to be bi and single and chock fucking full of mixed signals. Bastard. Jensen shouldn't flirt with him and then do things like point out how they aren't on a date.

And he sure as hell shouldn't do things like let Jared fall asleep on him. Jared's not *that* hard of a sleeper, and it's not like Jensen couldn't've slipped out or gone and taken Jared's free bed or anything.

Jared makes a decision to end the torture—mostly because otherwise he might do something really, really, fantastically, horribly stupid—and tries to move himself up and off of Jensen without waking him up or brushing against any embarrassing parts. Unfortunately for his brilliant plan, Jensen is apparently not quite as asleep as Jared first thought. That or he just woke up. *Please* let him have just woken up.

And then Jensen moves.

Jared knows it's going to happen before it does, but he can't do anything to stop it. Jensen's hips wiggle, and his leg slides free from Jared's weight, knee kicking out and connected with the arm that's currently holding all of Jared's precious balance. Jared's arm buckles, and he falls. Face-first. Right into Jensen's fu—freakin' crotch.

Jared *rears* up, flailing and trying to get himself off the couch and away from Jensen's cock. Of course, Jared is still trapped under the blanket that's tucked between Jensen and the couch. This means that not only does Jared not manage to get himself into any kind of upright position, he also brings Jensen windmilling off the couch.

When all is said and done, Jared ends up on the floor in front of the couch, ears ringing with sweaty, red-faced, wide-eyed Jensen Ackles straddling him and panting. With *nothing* fun to cause it.

Jared fell asleep in Vancouver and woke up in *Hell*.

"The steak has a twelve-hour time limit," Jared forces out, trying to make himself laugh at the completely improbable retardation of the last five minutes. "You're not getting anything fun until you buy me another."

"How about we don't talk about this again, and I buy you steak and lobster for life?"



Jensen plops down into the chair next to him so suddenly and heavily that Jared's almost sure the thing is about to give way underneath him. "Who the fuck heard of starting a work week on a Friday?"

"It's not that bad," Jared lies. Sometimes he just likes disagreeing with Jensen. It's fun.

The look Jensen gives him is one Jared usually sees him direct at people who offer him decaf. "We're starting work. On a *Friday*. It hurts me, Jared. Deep, deep inside."

"Way deep down by where the part of you that likes people gets locked away?"

"I like people," Jensen protests.

There's no way not to scoff at that, so Jared doesn't even bother trying to hold it in. "You do not, you big liar."

"I like 'em when I don't have to talk to them."

"Or be around them."

"I like people fine. They just need to be sane, not wear a wedding dress to meet me, and respect my personal bubble."

"Your personal bubble is bigger than Texas."

"Nothing is bigger than Texas."

Point for Ackles, negative twelve for Padalecki for forgetting something so vital. "True. It's bigger than Canada."

"There's nothing wrong with that. Space is very important."

Jensen just looks so solemn when he says it, like a little kid explaining why Santa doesn't eat brownies. "You're cute. You're an idiot, but you're cute."

"The personal space bubble is very important. You're less likely to catch a cold if you respect it."

"Yeah, that's why you want to keep fifty feet from everyone. It's that darn immune system of yours."

"That, and the fact that I don't like freaks touching me. I don't even like non-freaks touching me."

It might be part of the disagreeing thing, but Jared feels like he pretty much has to touch Jensen now, so he slings an arm around his shoulder, pulling Jensen close to his side. The director's chairs they're sitting on wobble and creak, and Jensen shrugs his shoulder off, shoving at him as his chair lands back onto all four legs again.

"So you want me to respect your bubble more?" Jared asks. Not that he has any intention of actually doing it.

"You bruised my cock with your face, yesterday," Jensen says, almost but not quite deadpan. "I'm pretty sure we're past the personal bubble part of this friendship."

Jared's laugh is awkward and stilted. "That's too bad," he teases. "I was going to offer to help you overcome your fear of being touched by randomly hugging you all the time."

"You *already* randomly hug me all the time."

"Well, yeah," he concedes. "But I was gonna do it more often."

"That's impossible. Any more often, and you'd be hanging off me twenty-four-seven."

"Which just goes to show how much I'd be willing to sacrifice to make your therapy work. Imagine how hard it would be for me to *eat* if I had to hug you twenty-four-seven."

"So now you're not content with thinking about me eating, you're trying to get me to fantasize about you eating, too? You know, there are people you can talk to about your oral fixation."

"Oh, I have the oral fixation?" Jared scoffs. "You fellate coffee cups."

"You used that one, like, a week ago."

"No, I didn't."

"Yeah, you did, right before my mom called you. Repeating yourself means you lose."

"I don't lose; I didn't remember!"

"And you not remembering is why you lose for an entire week."

"No, I think the director is why we *both* lose for an entire week." Jared is aware that he's probably pouting, but he figures he has a right.

"Jackson's not that bad," Jensen says, clearly trying to be the voice of reason. Jared needs no reason. "You're just pissed because he yelled at you."

"He *yelled* at me, Jensen. Actual yelling."

"Dude, you kept complaining about the script."

"The script is *bad!* And it had *so* much potential!" He can see Jensen rolling his eyes, but it really does need to be said. "I like the theme: you know, good kids going off to college and finding themselves confronted with totally new value systems. And it's completely relevant to Sam, especially at Stanford, and Shiban hardly even *tried* to make that connection. It barely even reads as the theme of the episode!"

"I don't think anyone who wasn't raised by an English teacher would even come close to thinking about that."

"It's *obvious*. I mean, it's only been, what? Two weeks since Sam came back? Three?"

"I didn't see it."

"You're hot, though. Hot boys don't need brains."

"I'm not a boy. I went through puberty. I'm a guy now."

"Prove it," Jared says before he can stop himself.

"I think the director screaming at one star a day is good enough, thanks."

"I wasn't blaming him, though. I was just saying they didn't give him anything to work with. I mean, come on, they mashed in the 'aren't you glad you didn't turn on the light' story with the Hookman. The *Hookman*, Jensen. They have *nothing* in common!"

"You're kinda cute when you're nerdy."

Jared can't help it; he blushes. And then tries to find a nonchalant way to hide his face as much as he can because it's more than a little bit embarrassing. He struggles for something to say, some kind of comeback or something, but he draws a blank.

"What's the matter? Oh, oh, did I break you? Are you finally out of words?"

"Shut up," Jared says, conveniently turning away, his right arm coming up between the two of them to scratch at some space on his neck.

"You are, aren't you? Man, if I knew this was all it took to get some peace and quiet, I would've told you sooner."

"I'm not cute," he gets out finally.

"Yeah, you are. It's kind of adorable. Like a big puppy or something."

"I'm like an animal?" Jared asks. "Oh, that's flattering."

Jensen rolls his eyes and scoffs while rearranging himself in the cheap chair. It's actually much more difficult than it looks; Jared knows this because the last time he tried to put any of his weight on the arms of one of these chairs, the entire thing fell apart, and he gave himself a concussion. "You can't try that shit with me. I've seen you with your kids; you know that's not an insult."

"I'm nothing like my puppies. Sadie's *way* smarter than me, and I think Harley's figured out how to open the balcony door by himself when he has to go potty."

Jensen arches an eyebrow—not the way Dean does, one jumping way up to his hairline, but the way *Jensen* does, all smooth and slow, like he isn't sure if he actually wants to do it or not. "Go potty?"

"Shut up, that's not the part you were supposed to focus on."

"Right, because that was supposed to be about how you aren't a gigantic puppy dog."

"You're completely ruining this for me." Jared tries to pout, but he knows it never really works right when he tries.

"Aw, come on. I like dogs." Jensen punches his shoulder. Really punches it, like some dorky loser who watched too many corny fifties sitcoms growing up. "I mean, yeah, all the drooling and humping my leg can get annoying, but for the most part, it's not bad."

Jared pauses for a moment because he's not entirely sure how he should respond to that. "Was that about dogs or me?"

"Doesn't it hurt you a little that you have to ask that? And, also, it totally proves my point."

"Does not."

"Does too. You're a big, drooling, leg-humping puppy. Except your mouth isn't as clean."

Jared smiles an evil, evil smile. Though, given that it's on Jared, it probably looks less evil and more mildly disturbing. "That's 'cause of all the pus-covered cock, right?"

"I'm leaving now." Jensen says, climbing out of his chair. "You're a sick bastard, bye."

"What? Hungry suddenly? Bring me back some cottage cheese," Jared yells at Jensen's retreating form.

Jared likes Jensen.

He might be starting to admit that he maybe likes Jensen a little more than as a good friend. Possibly more than as a hot guy he might want to make out with, too, but he's still getting used to the "more than a friend" part for now.

Jared's pretty sure Jensen likes him, too. Like, ninety percent sure. It would be higher, but Jensen keeps turning it into a joke when it gets too close to kissing or something that resembles a real date or anything.

Of course, Jared does the same thing, too, and he likes Jensen. So it's only a ten percent deduction, which sounds like a lot but totally isn't.

It's like they're trapped in an epic game of gay chicken. Gay chicken is a game that Chad introduced him to way back in the day when they used to get really bored and really drunk a lot.

The idea, basically, is to be as gay as you possibly can with another guy and not be the one to flinch first. In theory, anything goes. In reality, Jared has only ever seen it get further than a quick kiss once, and that's because Chad is competitive enough to grab all over another guy's

junk in the name of winning.

Anyway, it's like that, and no matter how hard Jared tries, Jensen just keeps flinching.



Karma, much like NyQuil, is surprisingly fast-acting.

After twenty minutes of Jensen "method acting" Dean falling on Sam coming through the window—complete with sharp elbows and knees getting him right in the calves and kidneys—they get an hour for lunch and a location switch for the next scene.

Jared keeps tripping as he comes out of the local jail. On the fourth take, when he finally remembers the drop from the door to the ground, they make it halfway down the street before he bends over and throws up all over Jensen's cue. Everybody is freaking out and yelling for PAs and medics, and, swear, someone would think he'd just been hit by a car, the way they're all acting.

Jensen's not panicking as badly as everyone else is—God, Jared really hopes he's not like Chad and throws up when he sees someone else do it—but he definitely looks worried. Jared wobbles, and he can feel that Jensen's got a hand fisted in the back of Jared's waistband, which is weird but probably smart. Grabbing him by the waist right now might not be the best idea in the world.

"See what happens when you ruin cottage cheese for me, man? God smites you."

"God doesn't care about your cottage cheese."

"God cares about everything," Jensen assures him.

"I think I'm gonna throw up again," Jared says, and he does.



The on-set medics—Tommi-with-an-i and Jayson-with-a-y—give him as full a work-over as they can. He doesn't have a fever, his glands aren't swollen, his body doesn't ache beyond the crick in his neck from yesterday morning, and his stomach doesn't even really hurt. Not too

much, at least. Tommi says it's probably food poisoning, and Jayson agrees, telling him to go lie down for a little bit and see if he feels better. On the plus side, this means Jared might actually be able to swing a kitchenette so that the fast food places stop trying to kill him.

His stomach doesn't really hurt, which he told them. It just feels a little shaky and kind of rumbly. And that's completely reasonable, considering that he just threw up three times in half an hour. Nonetheless, he ends up in Jensen's trailer, trying to nap on that *thing* that tries to call itself a couch.

Jensen vetoed Jared's own trailer before Jared could even suggest it. He thinks Sadie and Harley will want to play and keep him up—clearly, Jensen's never had pets before because when he's sick, they just come cuddle in bed with him. They're *great* cuddlers.

Jared doesn't really sleep—he always has a hard time sleeping if Sadie and Harley are nearby but not *there*—but he dozes; closing his eyes to the sounds of Tool and opening them to Pearl Jam. More often than not, Jensen's there when he wakes up, though that's usually because it's Jensen waking him up, making him sit up while he forces 7-Up and saltines into him.

After the third round of force-feeding, Jared has trouble getting back to sleep. It's significantly colder without Jensen next to him, and the stupid, lumpy couch is uncomfortable. And it's cold. And his blanket's scratchy and too small for him. And he's lonely.

Jared only hesitates as long as it takes him to find his phone in Sam's billion and twelve pockets before he calls one of the PAs. Caitlyn's nice, and he never lets her get his lunch for him no matter how many times she offers, so he doesn't feel bad calling in a favor now.

The next time Jared wakes up, Jensen's got a pull-top water bottle filled with 7-Up—if the bubbles are any indication, at least—and he looks tired and worn out. There's dirt and dried mud crusted at Jensen's hairline and the spot between his jaw and ear, where Lucy, the P.A. owned by the makeup girls, can't seem to get to. He's balanced on the very edge of the couch seat, trying to avoid sitting on Jared's legs or Sadie, who is currently lying underneath them, twitching her tail lazily.

"My stomach hurts now," Jared tells him, rubbing the sleep out of his eye.

"That could maybe have something to do with the three hundred pound monster you've got lying on your chest," Jensen points out oh-so-helpfully.

Jared wraps his arms around Harley, scratching at his head where it's tucked against Jared's neck. "He's not three hundred pounds," Jared protests. "And he knows I don't feel good, so he's comforting me. And don't make fun of my puppy, jerk."

"I think they stop being puppies once they outweigh full-grown humans." Jensen's hand is running through Jared's hair, smoothing it off his forehead. Jared's pretty sure Jensen doesn't even realize he's doing it, and he's not about to point it out to him and risk stopping. It's *so* much

better than when Sandy does it.

"They're always gonna be my puppies, the same way Momma always calls me J.T. and Jeff always calls me his baby brother."

"I'd point out that you didn't give birth to them, but I'm a little afraid of what your response would be. Also, I told you not to move. I thought the whole point of you staying in my trailer was so the dogs—"

"Puppies," Jared corrects him.

"I thought the whole point of you staying in my trailer was so *Sadie and Harley* didn't maul you in your sleep. And you're sick, you're not supposed to be up and running around, trying to wrangle in hyper mutts."

"It's sad how little you know about *puppies*, Jensen. And I didn't go anywhere. Caitlyn loves me and went and got them for me."

"Caitlyn's not the tiny one, is she?"

"No, big girl, taller than you. Black hair, rings all through her lip?"

"That was a girl?"

"That's pretty offensive."

"Her guns are at *least* twice the size of yours," Jensen points out. Jared can't help but notice that Jensen's hand hasn't stopped moving yet.

"She loves me. We're going to run away together and I'm going to marry her."

"I don't think her girlfriend would like that."

"She has a husband," Jared tells him. He may or may not be rolling his head back into Jensen's hand, closing his eyes and enjoying the comforting motion. It's not like he could be held responsible if that's what he *was* doing. Jensen has nice hands.

"Really?"

Jared doesn't need to look at him to picture his face. "You're only bi because you can't pick a gay guy out of a parade, huh?"

"That's a trick question; they're all gay."

Jared huffs out an amused snort, and before he can think of a comeback—because he's *sure* there's gotta be one somewhere in that—he's asleep.



Jensen wakes him up for dinner sometime after dark.

There's a steak, fries, a large salad, and spinach casserole for Jensen and chicken broth with crackers and 7-Up for Jared.

It smells so horrible that Jensen ends up spending his entire lunch break rubbing Jared's back and wiping down his forehead in between dry heaves.



"C'mon, Sasquatch, up."

Jared honestly can't remember if Jensen left him in the bathroom or if he crawled back in there; all he knows is that he's taking up the entire three feet of bathroom floor and part of the hallway and that Jensen is trying to make him *stand*. Because he is *evil* and wants Jared to hurl all over him. If he could hurl. Okay, so maybe he just wants Jared to dry heave and make hurling *noises* all over him.

"Hey, Jared, come on, buddy. Time to go home. Sleep somewhere that doesn't bend you like a pretzel." Jensen's pulling at his arms, but Jared really doesn't wanna move.

"Lea' me here, I'll be good. The set's safe."

"You're not sleeping alone on an abandoned lot when you're sick. Come on, arms around my neck. We're going to the van." Jensen's pulling him up, and even though he feels too tired to move, Jared *knows* he's too tired to resist. He stumbles a little because he forgets Jensen's shorter than him, and they almost go down in a heap.

Jensen rights them quickly, though, getting Jared an elbow's length away and steadier on his feet. It'd probably be further, but Jared's still got his arms hooked around Jensen's neck with no intention of letting go. He proves this by leaning forward, arms tightening as he leans his weight against Jensen's chest.

Jensen's arms wrap around his waist, holding him in place so they don't both fall. "You feeling any better?"

"You give really awesome hugs," He murmurs into the skin of Jensen's neck.

"Come on," Jensen says, pulling lightly at Jared's waist. "Gotta get you home, man. You need to help me out if we're gonna do this without killing ourselves, okay?"

Jared's tired. So, so, *so* tired. And Jensen really does give fucking kickass hugs. He just grunts and lets Jensen lead him to the van.



He wakes up again in Jensen's room. Jensen's got him wrapped up in about fifty billion blankets with a bottle of water next to him. There's no Jensen in sight, though, and that makes Jared sad for some reason, even though he knows Jensen's probably just in the living room area.

He debates calling for Jensen, but his exhaustion wins out.



The next time he wakes up, he's almost mid-vomit by the time he's fully conscious. He misses the trash can left next to the bed and gets noodles he doesn't remember eating all over the floor and part of the blanket.

Jensen's suddenly right next to him with a wet washcloth and a really, really cold bottle of water. Jared's stomach hurts so bad that he can't even bother trying to hold back the tears. It feels like there's a knife in his stomach, twisting the muscles around and digging in deeper and deeper.



When he wakes up in the morning, he's curled against Jensen's chest. Jensen's got entirely new blankets wrapped around them, free of vomit and kind of scratchy, but still warm.

"You okay?" he asks.

Jared jumps a little, or he would if he had any energy. "Thought you were asleep."

"Nah. Just didn't wanna wake you up. You needed the rest."

"Mm. Sorry about the clinging," Jared says, snuggling closer.

"You know, when most people apologize for things, they stop doing them."

"I'm sick. I deserve cuddles. And you were dumb enough to make sure I didn't sleep in my trailer, so now you suffer."

"You're not sick," Jensen tells him. "You have food poisoning."

"I have no spleen anymore because I vomited it up. That counts as sick."

"You don't have a fever, so you aren't sick."

"You don't always get a fever when you're sick."

"Just... go back to sleep," Jensen says. "We have to be on set in five hours, and you need to get rested enough to be all pretty. Or at least not as butt-ugly as usual."

"You're so nice to me."



Jared gets an extra day off in case it's the flu. Jensen curses Jared and dead-legs him when he climbs out of bed at ass o'clock in the morning.

"Poor me, having to sleep all day long. I might even get bored at some point and have to roll over."

"Cram it, Padalecki, or I'll make sure all the grips use your toilet without flushing."

"Hey, I just shared a bed with you. Ain't much grosser than that."

"You know, it was *my* blanket you threw up on."

"Just doing my part to get rid of that rancid Ackles smell."

Jensen throws the t-shirt he slept in at Jared's head. "You love my smell, jackass. Get some sleep today, alright?"

"Dude, I got food poisoning."

"You ran a fever for most of the night."

"I did?"

"Yeah, a small one."

Oh. Well, Jared's still pretty sure it doesn't mean anything. "It could still be food poisoning."

"Man—"

"It could," Jared cuts him off. "People totally get fevers with food poisoning sometimes. I think. And you said it was a small one anyway."

"Jared, please. All I'm saying is that you should get some sleep and drink a lot of water."

"God, *Momma*," Jared whines. "I'm not a baby."

"Nope. You're a big boy now. And big boys need their rest."

"I feel like you're hitting on me in a really creepy way."

"It might be less creepy if you didn't just compare me to your mom."

"It might be less creepy if you didn't just treat me like your kid."

"That's what happens when you play *Winchesters*," Jensen says. "The lines between creepy and hot just keep getting more blurred."



So apparently, Jared's body has a limit to how much it can sleep in a twenty-four hour period. That limit is sixteen hours.

That would be awesome, if not for the fact that Jared fell asleep at about three o'clock yesterday afternoon. Meaning that he slept in all the way to six in the morning.

Whoo.

He lies in bed for a while, trying to get back to sleep and failing before he gives up. He's still tired enough that he doesn't particularly want to get up but awake enough that he doesn't feel like staring at the ceiling.

Lucky for Jared, his phone is within arm's reach, and bugging Jensen is way more fun than any kind of morning TV could ever possibly be. He scrolls down to the Ss and clicks on Starshine.

The text he sends says, *I need to pee.*

A few minutes later, his phone chirps and dances across the nightstand.

Starshine (Cell)

What do u want me 2 do abt it?

He sends back, *Go for me?*

Starshine (Cell)

Not pssbl.

Jared texts back a quick, *You suck*, and doesn't bother setting the phone on the table again while he tries to find something at least somewhat decent on cable this early.

Starshine (Cell)

Only if u ask nice.

Pretty please? With a cherry on top?

Starshine (Cell)

I didnt no ur a virgn. xplains lots,

Jared, being the mature, responsible adult that he is, responds in a very mature and responsible way. He sticks his phone down his shorts, takes a picture, and sends it to Jensen.

There's nothing for about ten minutes, and Jared is sure he crossed a line. Then;

Starshine (Cell)

Jensen is blinf now, this is bpb from lighting,



Jared's yelling answers in the form of questions at the TV set when Jensen calls.

"Are you gonna ralph all over me again if I get you food? Because that is just not one of my kinks, dude."

Jared smiles as he hits mute on the remote. "It worries me a little that I feel like we've already had this conversation."

"I blame you and your damn bagel," Jensen tells him. "What do you want, fast food or delivery?"

"I want to escape, that's what I want. I've been trapped in here all day—"

"It's not like I locked you in, Rapunzel," Jensen interrupts.

"Your hotel is surrounded by other hotels and a gas station," Jared continues. "That doesn't leave a lot to do."

"Crybaby."

"Let's go to a bar. I wanna eat hot wings and get drunk."

"Of course you do—you didn't do crap today. I wanna sleep."

"Come on, Jensen," Jared begs.

"No."

"Please?"

"No."

Jared can tell he's breaking. He has to be. Jared's good at annoying people until they give in to him. "Pretty please?"

"Dude—"

"Pretty, pretty please, with a cherry on top and extra sugar and that weird hard shell stuff you like?"

"It's Magic Shell, and it's not weird." Jensen sighs. "Can't we go tomorrow?"

"I don't wanna go tomorrow," Jared says. "I work tomorrow. I'll just wanna go home and sleep like an old man after work."

"I'm not old!"

"You're practically ancient."

"Am not!"

"Prove it. Let's go to the bar."

"I'm not falling for that that easily."

Jared knows Jensen is going. He knows that tone of voice, and right now, it's just a matter of him saving face. "If you get me drunk enough, I promise to flash my boobs like *Girls Gone Wild*."

Jensen grins. "Well, why didn't you say that to begin with?"



Jared is starting to think that maybe his Great Aunt Agnes was right and God *does* hate gay people.

In the time Jared's known Jensen, he's had to have his ass stitched, split his lip open on Jensen's crotch—or, technically, the table after flailing off of Jensen's lap—been yelled at by a director, gotten food poisoning/the flu/whatever it was that knocked him flat for a day and a half, and now, broken his hand on the face of some drunk guy who thought Jared was staring at his

girlfriend.

In conclusion, God hates gay people. Or just Jared. Probably just Jared.

"God doesn't hate you," Jensen tells him while he thumbs through an Entertainment Weekly from a month ago. "He just thinks it's funny when you get hurt. Which proves he's a guy because if God were female, she'd just make you cry a lot."

"I don't know what you're saying."

"That's because you're stoned."

"No."

"You are completely in your happy morphine place right now."

"Am not," Jared protests. And he isn't totally. His hand doesn't throb like hell anymore, but he's sober enough to feel a little embarrassed that he made Jensen call his parents and Chad and Eric so Jared could tell them all he was dying. Only a little, though, because it's something he would've done sober if he were bored enough. Except to his parents, but Momma knows his morphine voice by now, so she just gave him the 3 am long distance version of a head pat and went back to sleep.

"That was pretty impressive, by the way," Jensen says. "I don't think I've ever seen someone your size backhand a dude in the jaw."

"I didn't know he was there. I said I was sorry."

"Yeah, you really aren't supposed to apologize to the people who are trying to beat your ass, man."

"Vinegar and honey," Jared tells him, wisely. At least, Jared thinks it's pretty wise. He might've just drooled on himself while slurring it— there was a fair amount of beer and a couple of shots before they got jumped.

"I don't think that applies any more once the bees start attacking you."

"I always feel bad for them when they sting me, you know?" Jared says. "Because they die after their stingers get stuck in you."

"You don't really, do you?" Jensen asks. He's looking at Jared all askance-like, and Jared can't figure out why.

"Don't really what?"

"Feel bad for bees that sting you."

"It's not their fault, Jensen. They're built that way."

"You feel bad for vampires, too, don't you."

"That's just stupid," Jared scoffs. "Vampires aren't real. And if they were, it would be like us eating cows. I don't want to die because I eat steak, Jensen. It tastes really, really, good. Would you want someone to just come along and stab you because you ate a t-bone? No, you wouldn't because Texas boys weren't meant to be vegetarians."

"You're right," Jensen says. "The morphine isn't doing anything to you at *all*."

"Shut up," Jared tells him. "I can hear you rolling your eyes."

"You could also see me rolling them if you weren't completely stoned on morphine."

"You suck. And it's flies, anyway, not bees."

"What?" Jensen asks.

"You catch flies with honey instead of vinegar, not bees."

"Why would you want to catch flies?"

"So they aren't flying around anymore."

"But won't the honey attract *more* flies?"

"Yes," Jared agrees. Honestly, it's like Jensen never learned anything in school sometimes. "Then you have a big ball of fly-covered honey and no flies by your food."

"What if the honey is *on* my food?"

"Well, if you're eating bee vomit, then you shouldn't have a problem with a couple of flies on your food."

Jensen doesn't respond, and when Jared looks over, he can see Jensen rubbing his eyes, his face all scrunched up. "Jared just... go to sleep until the doctor gets here."

"But I'm not tired," he protests.

"Do it to save your life," Jensen begs him.

"I don't get it."

"If you don't go to sleep soon, I am going to murder you just to shut you up."

"You're a sucky best friend," Jared says.

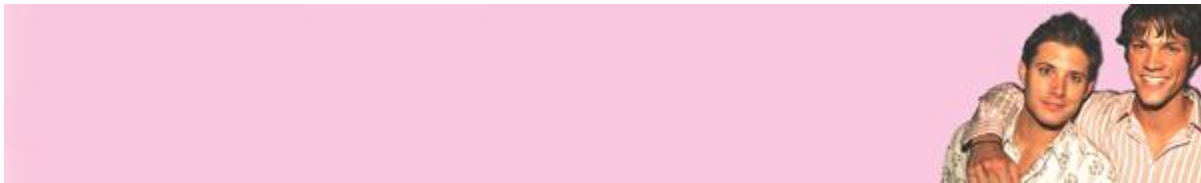
"Yes," Jensen says. "Now shut up."

"Fine," Jared says. "Hey, did you know that eggs are basically chicken periods?"



The good thing about getting food poisoning and then going stir-crazy and breaking his hand on some guy's face is that he looks really fucking pathetic. Which means that when he begs to get a room with a stove and a fridge, he's a lot harder to say no to.

Seriously. No one's gonna say no to a doped-up kid in a soft cast with dry heaves. Jared being the one with the dry heaves, of course. Not the soft cast. That would be weird.



Jensen has taken it upon himself to watch Sadie and Harley while Jared moves rooms. And by "taken it upon himself" Jared means that he woke up this morning to a text message stating that Jensen was gonna go "bond with his God-Babies" and that Jared was not to bother them. He even used a happy face.

Apparently, Jensen has decided he is now Harley and Sadie's godfather. Jared doesn't know whether to be proud or worried that he's rubbing off on Jensen.

That okay, though, because Jared has a lot of stuff, and he hates having to crate them just because he misses Hot Pockets and spaghetti. He takes his time and moves his stuff between the rooms at a leisurely pace, stopping every trip or two to watch a TV show or something.

Halfway through the fourth trip, his phone dings at him, letting him know he has a new text.

Starshine (Cell)

Your dog ate my empty Starbucks cups. Should i b worried? also i was collecting them and the

bstrd ate them!

Jared laughs and shoots back, *Why do you collect Satrbucks cups, freak? Training yourself?*

He gets another text as he's stepping out of the elevator, but he doesn't have a free hand to check it until he sets his bags down. The new room is nice. A lot bigger, and Jared would've sprung for the suite in the first place if he knew how different it was from the pseudo-suite he had.

Starshine (Cell)

It was a joke at my own expense, idiot. my hotel room is a wreck. i think thr was chcolate in 1. plz advise.

Jared sighs. Jensen clearly needs to spend more time around dogs. But probably not at his hotel because Jared is pretty sure he remembers something about animals not being allowed there. He texts, *How much Chocolate? M&M or Hershey's bar?* as he heads back down to the old room.

He spends the elevator ride down texting back and forth with Jensen.

Starshine (Cell)

like less tahn m&m but harley's stomach is making gurgling sounds and he wont stop licking my f legs. is this normal?

Well, you DO have tasty legs, he types, laughing to himself. *Also, sweat = salt = licking*

Starshine (Cell)

what do u kno about my legs? i'll never nap in my trailer again u creepy leglicker. so u think harley = ok?

It's your fault, dude. You should get scrawnier legs if you don't want them licked. Milk is your worry now.

Starshine (Cell)

oic, u can't resist my meaty thighs. kinky fucker. also ?? milk? is he gonna throw up? ew.

You have totally hot thighs. YUM. Harley won't throw up, but he might get the runs.

Starshine (Cell)

even tho theyre all bowlegged? and thats totally awesome. brb vets office. y, i still have the address

It takes a little juggling, but Jared manages to text back a response while unlocking the door again. *Bowlegs are hot 8 a million. How much milk do you put in your coffee?*

Jared manages to make it all the way back up to the new room again without getting another text. He tries not to let it worry him, but he thinks maybe there needs to be an app that makes you be

absolutely sure you want to send everything in the text before you send it.

He gets another text as he's making his way out the door and decides to stay for a few minutes instead, taking a seat on the couch.

Starshine (Cell)

what are you talking abt? i drink it black. do you mean i'm 1/2way to the vets for nothing?

Jared decides he can totally deal with Jensen ignoring the first part of his text. Especially since Jensen might actually be on the way to a vet because he thinks Harley's hurt. He grins to himself and responds, ...*Yes. There wasn't enough chocolate to hurt and if you don't use milk he's okay.*

The next response doesn't take nearly as long as the last one did.

Starshine (Cell)

ur laughing at me right now aren't u? fine f u, i'm just tryn 2 b a good pupsitter while u sit on ur ass and laugh at me.

Jared does laugh at that. And saves a screenshot of it before he responds. *Pretty much, yeah. It's okay though, Sadie and Harley love Crazy Uncle Jensen.*

Starshine (Cell)

f u man see if i ever let them stay w/ uncle jensen ever again.

"Let them?" Jared asks his phone. The phone doesn't answer, thankfully. *You kidnapped them, dude. I'm allowed to mock.*

Jared waits a few minutes for a response. After about ten minutes, he assumes Jensen has turned around and headed back to his hotel. With a sigh, he slides his phone into his pocket and gets back to work.



Jared flops down in the chair next to Jensen's once Kim calls cut. "I think my Momma's picking out rings."

Jensen doesn't even look up from his PSP. "Of course she is."

"It's gonna be big and pink with the diamond in the shape of a *heart* or something, and if you don't wear it, it means you don't love her." Jared thinks about it for a minute. "Or the baby Jesus."

Jensen's character dies in a flail of limbs and a flurry of bleep. "Dude, the baby Jesus freaks me out. Don't tell my mom."

"I'm gonna tell her you're converting to scientology like Travolta."

"Xenu *is* my one true God, you know," Jensen tells him, pausing and looking up at Jared.

"I always liked Gabrielle better," Jared admits. Not that Xena wasn't badass. He likes sidekicks, though.

"You would," Jensen says, going back to his game.

"What does that even *mean*?" Jared asks.

"What'd you tell your mom?"

"I told her I wanted a June wedding, but she thinks December would be better."

"I fucking hate the snow," Jensen says. "Why does it have to be December?"

"*You* call my mom and tell her she can't have her snowy wedding."

"Yeah, right, because I look like I'm suicidal."

"It's the bulimia. It makes you doubt your self-worth."

"I thought that was the chronic character bleed you told my dad I had," Jensen says.

Jared grins. He'd been saving that one for almost an entire week. "Papa Ackles mentioned me? What'd he say? Did you tell him hi for me? He told me that if I didn't treat you right, he'd bury me beside Mack's last boyfriend."

"Please," Jensen scoffs. "He doesn't know where Mack's last boyfriend is buried. He always makes me and Josh do all the hard work. Those chainsaws are heavy, too," he adds.

"This is why we just don't let Meggy date," Jared tells him. "It saves money on clothes. Blood's a bitch to get out."

"And you *are* a size fifty-three," Jensen agrees.

"That's with the water weight."

"You better lose that shit before the wedding, man. We're getting you a classy dress."

"No mumus?" Jared asks, his best heartbroken look on his face.

"Not for my Jarebear," Jensen says.



Jensen is worried, Jared can tell. He's good like that.

It's a reasonable worry. Not only does he have to dive into a nasty, slimy, cold lake with a freaking wetsuit on under Dean's clothes, but he then has to try not to drown himself or kill a kid.

And, okay, sure, there are EMTs on hand, but. Still.

Jared's pretty sure he remembers reading somewhere that you can drown in a tablespoon of water, and that lake is a *lot* of tablespoons worth of water.

Okay, so maybe Jensen's not the one who's worried. Or as worried as Jared.

Whatever, Jensen's got the easy part. Jared has to stand there and *watch* Jensen hopefully fake almost drowning.

Jensen throws a gummi bear at him from the other side of the trailer, causing Jeannie to smack Jensen with a hand covered in hair gel. Serves him right. The bear bounces off of Shannon's chest and gets caught between Jared's undershirt and his Non-Official Makeup Shirt (trademark pending).

"Your aim *blows*, dude," Jared calls out. He fishes the gummi bear out of his shirt, almost dropping it for a second at first, and launches it back at Jensen, pegging him right in the side of the neck.

"Quit freaking out," Jensen tells him, throwing another bear across the trailer. Jared's the one who gets smacked this time, but he manages to catch the improvised cannon ball in his mouth, which is at least forty points, so the smack is worth it.

"I'm not freaking out," Jared somewhat lies, chewing the gummi bear.

"At least spit out your gum before you start eating the missiles," Shannon begs him.

"It's not like it's Thanksgiving turkey gum," Jared says. "Coke and gummi bears go together."

"Careful," Jeannie says to Jared. "Someone might take that out of context and get you thrown in

rehab."

"You're freaking out like a scared little girl," Jensen says.

"Jeannie loves me best," Jared says, sticking his tongue out at Jensen.

"She only wants you for your hair." Jensen picks out a handful of green gummi bears to eat. "We don't joke about drugs," he tells Jeannie.

"No?" Jeannie asks as she artfully rearranges Jensen's hair again because he won't sit still.

"Afraid the studio will think it's real?"

"Afraid our mommas will," Jared says, tilting his head back so Shannon can get at his neck with her makeup wedge. "My momma wears a lot of rings, and she would fly up here just to smack me with them."

"Mine carries Steven King novels in her purse just so we'll listen when she threatens to hit us with it," Jensen says.

"Meggy says Mom's reading *Cujo* now," Jared tells him.

"Told you letting our mothers talk was a bad idea."

By the time they're done with hair and makeup, Jared forgets why he's worried about anything.



For all of Jensen's bluster and teasing and mocking— and there was a *lot* of mocking—he's still overly-hyper when they actually have to film the scene in the lake.

It's a quick shoot, Jensen shaking out his nervous energy and then wading into the water.

Kim is good, gets it in four takes and doesn't demand a thousand extra just to be sure and for that alone Jared decides Kim is his favorite director.

Jared might be waiting at the edge of the shore for Jensen. Possibly. It's just a habit, that's all. He isn't worried or anything.

He's still there when Jensen trudges out of the water, shoulders pulled down with the weight of his soaked clothing. Jensen makes it close enough to Jared that Jared can see how fast he's blinking, trying to get his eyes to focus, even though his contacts are in the case in Jared's coat

pocket.

The smirk Jensen gives him is so smarmy and filthy and full of himself that Jared knows it's only a matter of time before it makes its way into Dean's arsenal. Then Jensen shakes himself like a dog, getting water all over Jared, and throws his hands up in the air, screaming, "I am *Aquaman!*" at the top of his lungs.

"Oh, really?" Jared asks. He can't help it—he shoves Jensen, two hands to his collarbones, and pushes, watching Jensen windmill his arms as he back flops into the lake water.

Jared can hear the crew laughing and whistling around them, and he grins; it's not often he gets one up on Jensen.

Jensen climbs out of the water again and walks back up to Jared, thankfully not showering him again. "I think I have a fish in my pocket."

Jared can't help the laugh that escapes at the look Jensen's giving him. "Does Flounder wanna go home, Ariel?"

"Flounder wants Sebastian."

"Don't fuck up my childhood like that, man," Jared complains.

"It's your brain, sicko." Jensen wipes sand off Dean's jacket. "I think I got violated by an eel."

Jared rubs his nose with his hand, trying hard to hide his grin and points to a stringy piece of plant clinging to Jensen. "You've got some kelp hanging out of your pants there, Aquaman."

"It's not kelp," Jensen says, digging the plant that is not kelp out of his pants. "Kelp lives off the coast of Northern California."

"How do you even know that?" Jared asks.

Jensen's cheeks get red, and Jared mentally gives himself six points. "I watch a lot of nature documentaries."

"Nerd."

"Shut up."

"Dude, you were just talking about Aquaman and nature docs." Jared reminds him. "How is that *not* nerdy?"

"I thought I told you to shut up."

"This is *not* your day, man," one of the grips tells Jensen. "*Jared* zinged you."

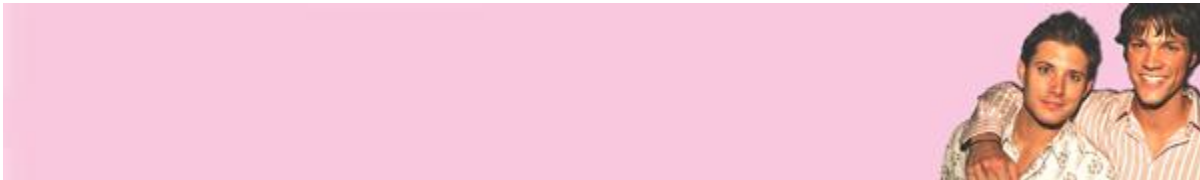
Jared knows he should be offended by that, but really, Jensen makes him stupid a lot.

"He did not," Jensen argues.

"I did," Jared points out. "I zinged you. That was a total burn. Do you need some aloe for the immense burn I just gave you?"

"I let you have it," Jensen insists.

Jared laughs. It would probably be more accurately described as a cackle, but Jared always thought that word sounded weird. "Sure you did, Aquaman."



Jensen starts taking Sadie and Harley more often. Jared has stopped referring it to kidnapping, mostly because Jensen refers to it as a joint custody agreement, and that makes Jared kinda stupid.

Starshine (Cell)

ur dogs really love car rides. i think theres dog slobber on my back window.

They do. Jared texts back. Harley will give you lots of kisses when you hit a red light.

Starshine (Cell)

they were too busy making faces at the car behind us and making honk motions at the truck drivers while i sweated bullets.

Jared laughs, because he can imagine it, and Jensen drives kind of like a grandma anyway. *Aw. I will buy you a speci treat to say sorry. You still like cottage cheese, right?*

Starshine (Cell)

omfg ihu sfm. y u gotta, man?

He wishes he could see Jensen's face right now. *Because your MOM keeps calling me to make sure I'm treating you right.*

Starshine (Cell)

that's just cuz YOUR mom keeps calling her to find out when i'm coming home. ya know.

The difference between those are that Jared's momma keeps asking him when he's gonna bring Jensen home, too, and he's pretty sure Momma Ackles doesn't bother asking Jensen if Jared's treating him right. *Hey, you gave her my number. She wanted to meet her future in-laws. I can't say no to my Momma Ackles.*

Starshine (Cell)

jesus h christ himself wouldn't be able to say no to my mom. ps sadie's decided it's singalong time. how do i shut her up?

You don't. Turn it up and sing with her. That's what Jared does, anyway.

Starshine (Cell)

because she+me+garth brooks doesn't sound like a disgustingly sad country song AT ALL. does she like nirvana?

Jared suppresses an involuntary shudder. He likes country, yeah, but Garth Brooks has always grated on his nerves for some reason. *She prefers Foo Fighters, but does a great version of Pennyroyal Tea.*

Starshine (Cell)

discovered she hates radiohead. covered her ears with her paws. hilarious

She does that with Rolling Stones songs, too, which Jared will never stop finding funny, considering her name. *Yeah, she's Not A Fan of Thom Yorke. If you put on that one CD I gave you with those Bill guys she'll love you forever though*

Starshine (Cell)

um the one the hotle girls gave u? never even opened it. fans are not 2 b trusted.

Jared rolls his eyes and responds. *Don't be such a Jensen. There's only a couple of naked pics on the CD.*

Starshine (Cell)

wait of u, the bill guys or the fans? b/c dnw strange women or old guys naked on my laptop

...Did you call me old, or the Bill guys?

Starshine (Cell)

the bill guys. you are a wee immature dumpling.

You know you want my dumplings. Jared counts it as a point for him when Jensen doesn't text back.



There's a giant party for the premiere, and everyone stops working early so they all have time to shower, eat, and get an insane amount of alcohol to get trashed on.

They take up an entire wall and use a projector to watch it because there is no such thing as a TV big enough for the whole crew to see. Except maybe the Jumbo-Tron, but that's a little overkill.

They turn the room in a really weird makeshift theater. Couches and chairs get carried off the different sets, director's chairs get claimed and traded, and anything that looks like it might not snap directly in half from the weight of a human being is used like it was meant to be sat on. Half the crew is still on the floor or standing along the sides of the room.

Actual popcorn is being passed around, and M&Ms and Skittles are being lobbed back and forth among everyone. Someone even tosses a full-sized Coffee Crisp half-way across the room without hitting anyone.

Jared will consider tonight a success if he gets through it without throwing up.

He hates watching himself act, which is pretty normal for actors, in his experience. Even Chad can't handle it, and Chad probably doesn't actually know what shame is.

He's eager to see Jensen, though. Watching him is kind of amazing, and Jared can't help but feel a little jealous whenever he catches Jensen on one of the monitors when he's reshooting.

"The makeup girls totally snagged one of the beds," Jensen tells Jared, plopping down next to him. Jared managed to call dibs on the couch of one of the victims' family members. He doesn't really remember which victim, there have been a lot in the four episodes they've got in the can. It's a pretty ugly couch, though, and not very comfortable, so it's probably going to get reused a lot.

"That's hot," Jared deadpans. "Think they're gonna pillow fight?"

"Shut up," Jensen says. "You get any popcorn?"

"Nope. I prefer my rat droppings unbuttered and not in my stomach." Jared grins.

"You ruin popcorn for me, and I will *castrate* you," Jensen tells him.

"You're no fun." Jared pouts.

"Whatever. I need beer if I'm gonna have to watch this," Jensen says.

"The boom mic guy has a case," Jared tells him, holding up his own bottle to demonstrate.

Jensen snags the bottle from Jared and drains it. It's actually a pretty impressive chug, since the bottle was a little bit more than half full.

"Go right ahead, Jensen," Jared says, staring anywhere but at Jensen's throat. "I wasn't drinking that or anything."

"It was getting warm anyway," Jensen says, dismissing him with a wave of his hand. "You didn't want it."

"Maybe I was gonna play a drinking game," Jared argues. "You just ruined it."

Jensen rolls his eyes and nudges Jared with his knee. "Quit your yapping, the show's about to start."

Jared would respond, but a clip of Eric starts up, thanking them all and introducing the show, and then Jared is too busy being alternately horrified of himself and *so proud* of Jensen to say anything.



The next couple of days are boring.

Well. Boring compared to everything else. There's no food poisoning, no near drowning, no broken bones, no arrests—that arrest the last time was *not* their fault, and the boom operator, Chris, totally didn't hold any hard feelings—nothing like that.

Most of the days passed with Jared and Jensen trading PSPs back and forth and Jared thoroughly decimating Jensen in all of his games.

"It's pathetic, man," Jared tells him.

"Shut up." Jensen flicks a piece of lettuce at him.

"Why do you even have these games if you suck so much at them?" Jared asks, trying to grab a piece of cucumber. Jensen makes stabbing motions at him with a fork, catching his thumb with it.

"I do not suck at them," Jensen says, ignoring Jared's totally cultivated pout. Spoil sport.

"You really do." Jared steals Jensen's fork and a giant bite of his salad. He hates French dressing, and Jensen always drowns his salad in it. But it's the principle of the thing, so Jared steals half anyway. "I beat you by, like, four thousand points on this."

"You didn't *beat* me," Jensen says. "It's a one player game."

"All of your games have me on their high scores, dude," Jared tells him as he successfully snatches a cherry tomato away.

"If you squirt that at me, I will smear mayo in all of Sam's pants," Jensen warns him. "They're new games."

"Uh-huh." Jared grins, biting down on the tomato. The plan was for it to burst and the tomato to hit Jensen with its juice, but the tomato had other ideas, and it split in the back, causing Jared to inhale quickly before bending over and coughing out tomato parts.

"Did anyone ever tell you how fucking annoying you are?" Jensen asks, lowering a water bottle into his line of vision.

"My brother, every time I beat him at chess," Jared croaks out, taking a swig from the bottle and righting himself again.

"So, what, you're Rain Man at games or something?" Jensen asks him, smacking him on the back like Jared's mom used to do every time he tried to shotgun a Pepsi when he was little. He wasn't very good at it.

"Games aren't a box of toothpicks. They take skill," Jared says.

"Toothpicks take skill," Jensen says. His hand is still on Jared's back. Not that Jared is specifically noticing it or anything. "You could stab yourself in the gums with one if you don't know what you're doing."

"I don't think that's a politically correct Rain Man reference, dude," Jared says, stealing Jensen's fork and taking a giant bite of salad with most of the still-crunchy bits of lettuce.

"You don't even like that dressing, dude." Jensen says, scowling.

"Food is better off your plate," Jared says. He thinks he heard that in a movie somewhere. Maybe it was just from Josh or Meggy. The Padalecki household was a dangerous place at dinner time. He still has a scar on his hand from the time Jeff accidentally stabbed him with his fork for real.

"What are you, three?" Jensen asks, stealing back his fork. "Oh, nice, now there's sasquatch spit

all over my fork."

"It's your fault for not getting two," Jared tells him as he contemplates just shoving his hand into Jensen's unreclaimed salad.

"Do it, and I will murder you," Jensen says.

"I wasn't gonna do anything," he lies. Stupid Jensen and his stupid observantness.

"You were, too," Jensen says.

"Like what?"

"I don't know, but it would've ended with me being hauled off by Mounties and you being a pale corpse with a fork sticking out of his eyeball."

"You're a violent person," Jared says.

"I'll call Eric and tell him you're depriving me of my food. That's enabling."

Jared knew that eating disorder thing was gonna bite him in the ass one day. "I think you need anger management, Jennybean."

Jensen stills, and Jared cheers on the inside. "You didn't."

"Dude, I think your grandma likes me more than you now," Jared grins at him. He's been sitting on that name for a *week*, just waiting for the perfect time to use it.

"I can't believe you called my grandma," Jensen groans, abandoning his food to hide his face in his hands.

"Actually," Jared starts out gleefully, "*she* called *me*."

Jensen doesn't respond. And then doesn't respond again. And Jared waits a whole thirty seconds before he asks, "Don't you want to know how she got my number?"

"Not—"

"Papa Ackles gave it to her," Jared blurts out. "He thought she should know about your totally hotter, smarter, better half. She wanted to know what color my Christmas scarf should be."

"Of course she did," Jensen said, dropping his hands. He doesn't look mad, which is definitely a plus, but he does look sort of resigned. It hurts Jared a little, right in the pit of his stomach, and he doesn't want to think too hard about exactly why.

"I didn't think it was that bad," Jared says, fidgeting a little.

"You will," Jensen warns him. He still doesn't seem mad, though. The ball of hurt in Jared's stomach stays, even as they get called back to set for the next scene.



It doesn't take long for Jared to understand.

It's benign at first. It starts with normal calls—asking how tall he is, what size he wears, would he prefer a sweater instead of a scarf, what shade of pink does he want—and then starts to turn.

It only takes two days for her to bring up great grandchildren.

"Yeah, she's been telling me for years that homosexuality is no excuse for not giving her great grandbabies to spoil," Jensen says. He's lying on the floor of the kitchenette, face-to-snout with Harley, having a staring contest while Jared tries to not ruin their dinner.

"You could have warned me," Jared mumbles, ripping up some basil.

"By the way, Jared, if you happen to talk to my grandparents, mom's mom assumes all roommates are gay now because of my aunts, and dad's mom wants me to knock up some random girl so she can show off baby booties." Jensen loses the staring contest and shoots Jared a rightfully incredulous look—maybe Harley lost it, technically. There are rules against sticking your tongue in your opponent's nose.

"Your family is fucking weird, man." Jared carefully drops the tomato pieces into his new sauce pan. Despite his best efforts, it splatters his wrist, and he yanks it back with a curse, sucking on the injured spot near his palm.

"Whatever, your family are Polish giants." Jensen pushes himself off the floor, Harley trailing after. "I think your brother doesn't get that I'm a dude."

"You *do* have pretty eyelashes," Jared agrees, adding sugar to the sauce.

Jensen bats his very pretty eyelashes and shoves Jared, knocking him a little off balance for a minute. "He keeps calling me Jennifer."

"That's just Jeff. He calls Chad 'Chadina,'" Jared tells him. "Try this." He holds out a spoon of with some of the sauce on it.

Jensen tries it and makes a face as he thinks about it. Jensen's face is very expressive. It frustrates Jared a lot. "You know, when you said you could cook good—"

"Cook well," Jared interrupts for the hell of it.

"Okay, *mom*, cook *well*," Jensen starts again, "I thought you were totally pulling that out of your ass. Don't you dare!" Jensen stops him, throwing a hand out in the universal—or at least American and Vancouveran—symbol for stop. Jared pouts a little. He's pretty sure there were about a dozen different foods he could've ruined right there.

"You can't just *hand* me opportunities like that, Jensen. You gotta make me work for it."

"What do you know about work?" Jensen rolls his eyes. "You got discovered before you could drive."

"Now who's the stalker?" Jared grins at him.

Jensen rolls his eyes and continues on. "I was picturing, like, burgers or something."

"You're never gonna let me live that down, are you?" Jared groans. It's big and over-exaggerated, and it makes Jensen laugh just the way Jared likes. He'll remind Jensen of that stupid night every day if he can hear that laugh in return.

Jared prefers not to dwell on why, though. The deep end of that pool is pretty scary, and Jensen is too good at deadpan for Jared to guess things confidently.

"It's been, like, two weeks," Jensen says. "There's still a lot of mileage out of that, you kinky bastard."

"Chicken parmesan isn't that hard. And you can't have it delivered to your room." He might have wanted to impress Jensen a little, too. Maybe. But only because Jensen thought he couldn't cook. It's a pride thing.

"Room service," Jensen says simply, grabbing a beer out of the fridge.

"Room service doesn't count," Jared tells him. "They use fifty dollar cheese and charge you eighty bucks for it."

"Have you ever actually *ordered* room service?" Jensen asks him. "Because, man, I think you're overpaying."

"Just shut up and hand me the garlic," Jared says.

"Didn't you just put some in?" Jensen asks.

"Not enough," Jared tells him. "This is my momma's recipe, dude. She'll know if I get it wrong."

"You should've just used Ragu or something." Jensen pokes his finger at the hot pan, presumably to try and get more of Jared's super *awesome* sauce. There's gotta be some way he can make a joke about that.

"My sauce is way better than the fake stuff," Jared says seriously. "And it's cheaper."

Jensen pauses for a moment, a half-horrified look on his face. "Please tell me this isn't a segue into baby talk again."

"It is now," Jared declares. "Did you really yell at your grandma about adopting?"

"Dude, she tried to talk my sister into being a surrogate. For me and the unknown partner I don't have yet," Jensen says.

"She did not."

"She did." Jensen shudders.

"Me and your sister would make some hot babies, man," Jared says.

"And if you had any interest in girls, I would probably knock the crap out of you for that," Jensen says, draining the last of his beer.

"Aw, don't worry, Jennifer. You're the only girl for me," Jared says, reaching out a hand to pinch his cheek.

Jensen swats his hand away and goes to get another beer while Jared starts frying the chicken cutlets.



Jared doesn't know why he bothered to call Sandy. She's completely useless *and* a lesbian, so it's not like she knows how to date *straight* guys, much less gay guys. Or bi ones. Or any.

"You're stupid," he tells her.

She laughs at him from the other end of the line somewhere down in LA. "If I'm stupid, and you're calling me for help, what does that make you?"

"Stupid enough that I should put on a helmet and go try out for the Mavs," Jared groans.

"Aren't they basketball?" Sandy asks, confused.

"I am so proud of you right now for knowing that," Jared tells her. She has a knee-jerk reaction against sports that makes Jared sad in his heart sometimes.

"Wait, you don't wear a helmet in basketball," she continues, ignoring him. Jared gets no love out of this friendship. "I'm pretty sure that was not PC of you, Jared."

"No," he says. "It was a football helmet. Because the Mavs are so bad, they don't even know what sport they're playing."

"If you have to explain the joke, it isn't funny," Sandy tells him.

Jared can't help pouting a little. "Jensen would've gotten it."

"Which is why you should tell him you like him," Sandy says, completely unreasonably.

"It's a good thing you don't like guys because you don't know anything about them."

"I've known you for years, Jared," Sandy reminds him. "You cannot possibly think I believe guys, especially you, don't ever talk about their feelings."

She has a point, technically. "But that's now how it works with Jensen. I can't just sit him down and ask him on a date or something."

"Why not?" she asks.

Jared groans into the phone and folds himself over his table, face pressed into the cold wood. "You are no help."

"Call me when you grow balls," she says, hanging up on him. She doesn't sound pissed, but she's probably pretty annoyed at him.

Serves her right. She gives shitty advice and tells him about going down on her girlfriend. She deserves headaches.



"Man the fuck up and get your boy, brother."

Jared doesn't know what is wrong with him that he thought calling Chad would ever be a good idea.

"Hey, assmunch, you still there?"

"I'm not getting him drunk, Chad." The fact that he needs to tell Chad this... well. He's Chad. As much as Jared loves him, there's a reason he and Sophia split, and a heavy lack of any kind of common sense on Chad's part had a lot to do with it.

"Then keep him sober. Who the fuck cares? He wants your sweaty ass all over his sheets, dude." Jared cannot believe Chad made that sound gross. It's gotta be a hidden talent or something. "Suck it up and suck him down."

"Why do I bother calling you?" Jared asks him.

"Because you're a giant fucking pussy who wants to cry about not doing anything like a punk. Ah, fuck! Damn it, dude, you got me blown up!"

"Are you playing a game?" Jared asks incredulously.

"Your life is not that interesting, dude," Chad says. "I need something to keep me awake while you bitch about your shit."

"You're a sucky friend," Jared tells him.

"You want Hoover's ass," Chad responds.

"I hate it when you and Sandy talk to each other," Jared groans.

"Lesbians love me, dude. Yes! Fucking score, bitch! Eat it!" Chad howls into the phone. There's some kind of clattering in the background, and Jared really hopes it's just a thrown controller and not another person.

"It's nice to know where your priorities lie, dude," he tells Chad.

"You just want me to tell you to sit and wait for What's His Fuck to make the first move," Chad says. "I know you wear a lot of pink, but you're a man, dude. Act like one."

There is something seriously wrong with Jared's life when Chad is a voice of reason. "Fuck you."

"Buy me a six-pack, and I'll think about it."

"I'm hanging up now."

"Peace out, cock breath."

"G'night, dickweed."



Jared doesn't know where his life went wrong.

And it must have, at some point. If there is ever a point in your life where Chad Michael Fucking Murray—as he prefers to be called—is the voice of reason, you should probably check yourself into rehab and reevaluate your life.

And when he agrees with Sandy about something? There's no hope.

All the same, Jared is not going to go tell Jensen he wants to go steady and marry him like Sandy wants him to do, and he's not going to have random sex with him like Chad is cheering for.

There *is* a middle ground between horny and true love.

Sandy is a girl, and she's the kind that's weirdly stereotypical about wanting everyone to get together and love each other forever and ever, despite her weirdly crunchy, sarcastic exterior. She really only gets sarcastic around him, though, so it maybe shouldn't be as big of a shock as it is.

But Chad is Chad. He's a guy, which helps, but he's also a giant dick with a tiny brain when it comes to anything that isn't sex. Or is more than sex. Or different. Or involves people.

He needs to talk this out. Get all the junk in his brain out into the ether and sort it through. Thinking about it on his own isn't doing anything because he can't do anything but focus on all the horrible things that could happen—like Jensen deciding he doesn't want to go further than their weird little not-really-flirting or only wanting to get laid.

He tried writing it out, and then writing a pro and con list—Sandy is a ridiculous human being, who the hell suggests a damn *list* to someone having a pretty big crisis?—but he can't untangle his knotted mess of issues and admittedly stupid paranoias.

What Jared really needs is Jensen. Jensen is the person he goes to when he needs an ear and it's two in the morning, or eleven at night, or one in the afternoon. Jensen can defuse him on those days when every single fucking thing is annoying him for no reason—usually with a hug, and Jared knows how weird it is to Jensen, but Jensen does it *anyway* because he's Jared's best friend.

But Jensen is his best friend. Who he likes as more than a friend, and who might maybe like him as more than a friend, too, but who also might just like him like he likes—liked?—Joanna. A friend who is nice and cool and all, but who you have sex with sometimes and not much else because you don't think it would work or Howard Stern makes fun of you or something.

Okay, so Jared doesn't actually *know* why Jensen and Joanna stopped the quasi-dating thing they were doing, but that's not the point.

The point is that Jared needs his best friend to talk actual *real* common sense to him. And pretty much the only person more awkward to have this conversation with would be his mom. Or Jensen's mom. Or his Great Aunt Agnes.



"You know what I realized the other day?" he asks Jensen.

"Man, I told you that smell wasn't normal," Jensen says, stealing Jared's orange. Shows what he knows; Jared doesn't even *like* oranges. He only gets them for Jensen.

"You are totally my only friend up here," Jared tells him. He didn't realize exactly how much he had secluded himself until he tried to call other, saner friends last night and realized how different a long-distance friend is from an almost live-in one.

"Aw, sweetie, don't worry. Your mom and I have been looking at play groups for you." Jensen laughs, pinching Jared's cheek hard enough to sting. Jared swats at his hand but can't really keep the grin off his face.

"Seriously. I always thought that people who said they only had a few friends were, like, really weird or antisocial or something."

"Most people aren't still friends with people they met in pre-K, dude."

"Todd is awesome and always saved me the best glue sticks, dude. You're just jealous because all your friends ate your paste." Jared offers Jensen a strawberry, and Jensen shakes his head and then immediately steals a strawberry out of Jared's coffee mug.

"It's true. I lived a sad life before I met you and got to keep all my paste," Jensen says solemnly.

"I don't even know exactly what I should say to that," Jared admits.



Jared tries to talk to Todd about it, since he remembers that he exists again.

It's pretty awkward. Todd's an awesome friend, but there's always a really weird element to every conversation when you've known someone since you used to wet your pants on purpose.

In Jared's defense, Jeff told him that gym was where they tied up little kids and pulled them with cars to make them taller. Jared's brother was kind of an ass.

Anyway, it's awkward, and he gives up about ten minutes into it, which is good because Todd's girlfriend is pretty high-maintenance and calls Jared up screeching—her word, when she inevitably apologizes later—about Todd being late and how she's completely sure he's cheating on her and confirming that Jared would tell her if Todd had someone else, right?

Maybe Todd isn't really the best person to have this conversation with after all. Even aside from the general weirdness.



"What is wrong with you?" Jensen asks Jared, letting himself into Jared's room.

Jared pauses his game, not eager to get eaten by nurses before he can find a save point. Or ever, really. "Did you drive over here just to ask me that, man? Because I think a phone would take less time."

"I drove over here to make you come see a movie with me, but I got halfway here, and then my phone rang," Jensen tells him, setting his boots on the counter. Jared still hasn't broken him of that yet. "And now I've been sitting in the parking lot for fifteen minutes because my mom hadn't stopped yelling at me yet."

"Wait, are you yelling at me because your mom called me and I answered? I don't think that's really fair, dude."

"No, I'm yelling at you because you told my mom I treated you like shit!"

"I don't think I actually said that."

"Half an hour of my mom screaming at me for being That Guy says different."

"I wouldn't say that about you, dude," Jared tells him honestly. He's trying to think back over the last conversation he had with Jensen's mom, but he's drawing nothing but blanks. Jensen's death-glaring isn't really helping him, either.

"You had to have said *something*," Jensen says, exasperated. "I'm pretty sure she didn't just call out of the blue to say I did you wrong."

Oh, fuck.

"Did she actually say that? That you did me wrong?" Jared is gonna kill his whole family, he swears, he really is.

"Are you having a different conversation than I am?" Jensen asks him. He's staring at Jared like he's an idiot. Which, given, is not really far off right now.

"No, I mean those words exactly." This is very important, and Jared needs to make sure he's not wrong before he demolishes his bloodline for no reason.

"Yes," Jensen says. He still clearly has no idea what's going on, but it probably doesn't take an idiot to realize Jared might know.

Jared doesn't know how to answer. There are a lot of ways this could end in bloodshed. "I think my momma called your mom," Jared finally says.

Jensen is quiet for a moment, and he has this look on his face. He looks absolutely *devastated*, and Jared hopes it's a fake-out because otherwise he probably deserves the scummy feeling he's got in the pit of his stomach right now. "You told your mom I treated you bad?"

There are about a million things Jensen could have focused on. So, clearly, he picks the one that has the most convoluted, annoying, frustrating explanation. Jeff fucking *said* giving Jensen a keycard was a bad idea. Why doesn't Jared ever listen to his brother?

"I—I didn't," Jared stutters. "It's not like it sounds."

"How could it possibly be any other way?" Jensen asks him. He looks so fucking *betrayed*.

"I wasn't, I told, I was talking to Jeff and I was just venting, you know?" Jared says, getting up from the couch. "Ranting because I had to get shit off my chest, and Meggy was listening in because she's gotta stick her nose into everyone's business and Jeff was home for the weekend, and then she went and blabbed to Momma because that's what she does. I swear, Jensen, I never badmouthed you to my momma, I wouldn't."

"But you badmouthed me to your big brother," Jensen says. He's standing stock still, but his face hasn't changed, is still just as open and hurt as it was. Just as unhidden as it always is with Jared.

"I didn't," Jared tells him. "I didn't. I was just ranting. It wasn't even about you, it was about me, and you just came up because that's what you do. You're Jensen, you know?" He knows Jensen will get it, even if he won't get it *completely*. It's them against the world up here, and there's a reason their mommas know that they can call either one of them to get a hold of the other.

"Did I do something wrong?" Jensen asks him. "I mean, I know I've had kind of a short fuse lately, but you know you can talk to me, right? About anything?"

Jared almost laughs. He stops himself because he's not an idiot, but he almost does it. "You're my best friend, man, you know that. But I *can't* talk to you about everything, okay? I can't if it's about you. You get it?"

Jensen snags the edge of Jared's shirt. He doesn't even realize he's been backing away, not until Jensen tugs again and Jared shuffles closer. Tiny, small steps. Still trying to keep some kind of a safe distance. Neutral, or something like it.

"You can talk to me," Jensen tells him, whispering and leaning close until their foreheads touch.

It's Jared's move now. His heart is beating hard with a mixture of excitement and mindless terror, and every fiber of his body is screaming at him to make a joke or break away or do *something*. His hand finds Jensen's—the one not clutching his shirt—and he slides his fingers between Jensen's—interlocking them and squeezing tightly, just once.

Jensen squeezes back, and even with his eyes crossed and blurring, Jared can make out the edges of his smile.

The knot in his stomach loosens as he nudges forward, pressing a kiss to Jensen's waiting mouth, and vanishes completely when Jensen kisses back.



They're on their way to the hair and makeup trailer for the fifth time today when Jensen elbows him and says, "They're gonna make Sam shave his head soon if you keep doing that," It's possibly true, but Jared can't help it. He touches his hair; it's a thing. He doesn't mean to have to go get it fixed fifty times a day.

"It's not my fault my hair is so awesome I can't stop touching it," Jared says, stomping on Jensen's loose shoelace.

Jensen stumbles and almost takes the handrail off the stairs he's attempting to climb. "Asshole," Jensen says, righting himself. "If by 'awesome' you mean 'greasy and possessed,' sure."

Jared stamps the dirt off his shoes even though the floor is already a giant mess. "You're such a sweet-talker," he coos, reaching over to pinch Jensen's cheek. If he happens to pinch it just a little too hard, that's Jensen's fault for squirming.

Jensen smacks his hand away, and Jared does a victory dance on the inside at the glimpse of Jensen's mottled red cheek.

"Are you trying to actually pull my face off?" Jensen asks, rubbing at it.

"Big baby," Jared scoffs. "Here, I'll kiss it better," he says, planting a big, sloppy kiss on the side of Jensen's face.

"Gee, thanks, *Mom*," Jensen says, shoving Jared towards Jeannie. She welcomes him with open hands and an evil glint in her eye. Jared is man enough to admit he's a little scared of her.

"You know, dude, if you're gonna keep calling me 'mom,' this is gonna be a really weird relationship," Jared says. It's funny how little that word scares him now, even knowing all it entails.

Jensen spits a gummi bear at him from the makeup chair and grins.

Jared grins back.