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fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 1)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:55:00 : 43-54 minutes

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Rain hits the car relentlessly. It patters against the roof and rolls down the fogged windows in rivulets like tears.

Jensen keeps his forehead pressed against the glass. He watches absently as his hot gusts of breath steam up the freezing window and then disappear, steam up and disappear, over and over again.

His hands rest limply in his lap. There is an ear bud shoved into his left ear but he's not really listening. He thinks the music may have stopped. It's hard to tell with all the noise.

His eyes flutter closed and then begrudgingly open again, watching listlessly as the cold, wet earth blurs as they pass it by and leave it all behind. It feels like it's freezing in the car. It gets colder and colder the further north they go. Goose bumps pimple his pale arms and he crosses them loosely over his chest.

"This sucks," his little sister says again. It's the same phrase she has repeated over and over for the last three hundred miles, like saying it just one more time will make them change their minds and turn around. Jensen doesn't turn his head to look at her. Her presence next to him feels almost like a stranger's. He wonders when that happened. "I don't *want* to move."

"I know, sweetie," his mother says from the passenger seat. The voice she reserves for his sister is indulgent and sugary sweet. "None of us do, but it can't be helped. Your father has to go where the company sends him. And we'll be closer to your big brother. You'll make new friends, baby."

"I want *my* friends," Mackenzie whines, and Jensen grits his teeth against the sound.

"We *all* made sacrifices, dear," their father says in a bored, placating drawl. "You don't see Jensen complaining, do you?"

Jensen tenses and squeezes his eyes shut. It's always the same reaction every time

attention is focused on him. If he doesn't acknowledge it, it'll go away.

"That's because Jensen didn't have any friends to leave behind," Mackenzie says coldly, and Jensen lets out a deep breath. No one moves to correct her. They'd be lying if they did.

"This is all a part of His plan," Donna says, sounding so sure of herself. Of Him; of this omnipresent being that is more important than anyone. More important than family. "Good things will come to you if you have faith. You'll see."

Jensen stares at the back of his mother's head; at her perfectly coiffed hair that she spent an hour on even though all they are going to be doing is sitting in the car all day. His eyes shift back to the scenery – the wet, black asphalt and the rolling brown fields. He watches as the earth changes, reshapes and forms anew. Gone are the wide, flat plains of Texas. They've been replaced with the rolling golden hills of California. His new home.

It doesn't matter where he lives; things will never change. He'll still have to wake up every day and pretend. Hide. Be the perfect middle child in a perfect, God-fearing family.

Jensen's eyes slip shut as his head tips back against the seat. The car rolls smoothly down yet another freeway. They're never ending, connecting and intersecting like veins. Jensen has seen enough asphalt to last him a lifetime.

His breathing evens out and he soon drifts into a light, uneasy slumber.

Carrying all of this weight is exhausting.



There is a house in a small town in northern California full of energy and warmth. The blaring sound of a catchy pop song blasts from the speakers inside, loud and rhythmic. Rain hits the window in an unrelenting pitter patter that can only be seen, not heard.

There's too much life crammed into the tiny house to hear the sad, quiet sound of the rain. There's too much laughter.

Jared sits on the counter in his cramped little kitchen, bare feet thump-thumping against the cabinet door in an uneven rhythm that doesn't even come close to matching the music. There is flour on his cheek and smeared across his shirt in deformed handprints, and he's pretty sure there's egg in his hair.

"Chad!" Jared calls out, pointing a wooden spoon menacingly at his best friend. "We can't make cookies if you keep eating all the damn dough. Stop it!"

Chad looks over at Jared with an arched eyebrow as he licks sugary dough from his lips. He looks from the spoon to Jared's face, raising one finger in the air and moving it slowly towards the bowl.

"Don't do it," Jared warns, and Chad laughs.

"What are you gonna do, Jay?" Chad asks. "Gonna spank me with that big spoon, baby?" He turns around, bending over and thrusting his ass back towards Jared. "Go on, make it hurt."

Jared places his foot on Chad's ass and pushes. The action sends Chad sprawling to the floor to land in a crumpled pile under the sink.

"Hurt enough?" Jared asks innocently, and he smirks when Misha gives him a high-five. Sandy and Sophia pepper Chad with rainbow sprinkles, getting the confection in his hair as he pulls himself up off of the floor.

"And you call yourself my friend," Chad admonishes, shaking his head like a wet dog and sending sprinkles flying in every direction. Sandy giggles and holds her hand up to protect her face from the candy attack. "We have approximately twenty-seven *thousand* cookies already made, and I get grievously injured when I try to sneak some fucking *dough*?"

"You can have cookies at the meeting tomorrow," Jared tells him, hopping off of the counter when the oven timer dings to signal that another batch is ready. He generally lets the girls or his mother do the baking since he tends to disintegrate appliances when he gets near them. But taking them out of the oven? He can probably accomplish that.

"I don't *want* cookies," Chad whines, looking for all the world like he's about to stomp his foot like a toddler. "I want the dough!"

"Just let the baby eat the dough," Sophia says as Jared pulls on his mom's oven mitts and takes the last tray out of the oven to cool. "We have enough."

"Listen to the pretty girl!" Chad calls out, kissing Sophia's cheek before snatching the bowl and hopping onto the counter.

"Hey now," Sandy warns, slinging her arm around her girlfriend's waist and pulling her in close. Sophia backs her against the refrigerator and tangles her fingers in Sandy's long hair as they kiss softly.

Jared watches them fondly and leans back against the counter. Misha wraps his arm around Jared's shoulders and leans in slightly.

"Man, good job on that petition," Misha tells him, and Jared turns to face him. "I hear they

aren't going to cut the budget for the drama department now."

"Yeah," Jared replies, feeling the familiar rush of pride blossoming in his chest. He helped people. He did that. "I'm glad. You guys need your drama class."

"That we do," Misha replies, bright blue eyes going serious. "But when are you gonna go after something that's just for *you*?"

Jared's smile dims a little and he looks over at Sandy and Sophia, so in love it hurts to watch them sometimes. He wonders what having that sort of bond would feel like, what it would be like to hand over your heart like that. Sign here, no questions asked.

"I don't know," Jared responds, lips quirking up again as he shrugs. "When I find something I want?"

Misha just smiles and presses a quick, friendly kiss to Jared's temple before hopping off of the counter and snatching some dough from Chad. They tussle over the nearly clean bowl until Misha finally uses his impressive flexibility to get Chad into a leg lock.

Jared runs his fingers through his hair and tries not to think about how he feels like he's missing something. He watches his best friends, listens to them laugh, and decides that it's enough.

For now.

He can't go searching for something if he doesn't even know what it is he's looking for.



Jensen gets unceremoniously dropped off in front of his new high school minutes before the first bell is set to ring. His mother has just finished chastising him for taking too long to get ready. Jensen was downstairs fifteen minutes before they left, dressed and ready to go while his mother watched the news. He doesn't bother trying to contradict her.

He steps out of the car and she pulls away from the curb as soon as the door is shut, leaving him alone. He stands frozen on the sidewalk and stares at the campus with wide eyes.

Whereas his previous high school was one giant building, cold and institutionalized, this one is different. It's extensive and sprawling like a college campus, one school made up of a ton of smaller buildings with open, airy walkways that let the sun shine on your face for a much needed break while running to your next class.

He's never changed schools before. In his old town everyone knew him. More specifically, they knew he didn't like to be bothered. He was invisible there, and he preferred it that way.

Now he can feel countless pairs of eyes appraising him and he feels exposed, like a bright light against a black sky. He ducks his head and slumps forward as he walks through the crowd. He can feel their gazes heavy on his shoulders, each set of eyes weighing him down until it feels like he's struggling through quicksand.

He can feel his cheeks flush, blood pulsing between his ears as his heartbeat pounds a staccato rhythm in his chest.

The bell rings and he is forgotten. Students scatter like they're roaches and the bell is the light, sending them skittering in every direction. Jensen freezes as they rush by him, disappearing into classrooms while he stays glued to the concrete.

Silence falls over the hall and Jensen finally looks up to find that he is alone. His eyes trail along rows and rows of dark blue lockers sitting in the shade of an overhang, over brightly colored flyers and handcrafted posters.

It's a whole new world.

Jensen swallows hard and covers his eyes with his hand as he takes a deep breath. It's like the mask he wore at home doesn't fit here, and he has to learn how to hide himself all over again.

He takes a moment to roll his shoulders back and lift his chin, relying on years of practice to smooth out his distressed expression, flatten the crease in his brow and let a cool indifference wash over his bright eyes.

Once he's calm on the outside, terrified on the inside, he steps into the office and places his paperwork on the desk. He looks right into the friendly, warm gaze of the receptionist and introduces himself with a polite smile.

She asks him how he is and he tells her that he's excited to be here, that he can't wait to start.

Jensen is an exceptional liar.



Lunchtime is Jared's favorite time of the school day. It's not that he doesn't enjoy learning, he does, but he loves getting to catch up with everyone. He likes knowing how people did on the tests they were stressed over and how their projects are coming.

He enjoys hearing what sort of jobs people are applying for, what colleges they're hoping to get into. He takes pleasure in knowing if there is anything he can do to help.

Jared knows nearly every single person at his school by name, and everyone seems to know him. It's not a popularity thing. Jared is just genuinely friendly. He really likes talking to people, helping them, and his fellow students just seem to gravitate towards him.

Jared risks a glance at his cell phone and his eyes widen when he realizes there are only about fifteen minutes left of lunch. He stops making fun of Sophia's pom-poms and stands up, climbing onto the table and standing on either side of his lunch tray.

"Hey everybody, listen up!" He shouts, hands cupped around his mouth. Chad, Sophia, Sandy, and Misha all pound their fists on the table and the noise level in the cafeteria drops. Most people are used to Jared's unorthodox announcements by now.

"I just wanted to make an announcement!" He continues, booming voice reverberating off of the walls. "Due to you guys continually being *awesome*, the Gay Straight Alliance has officially outgrown Mrs. Crawford's classroom. We have nearly tripled our already impressive size since the beginning of the year and that is seriously incredible, people." He has to pause when people start clapping, and it makes him grin.

"I just want to let everyone know that from now we will still be meeting Tuesdays after school, but from now on we'll be in the lecture hall over in the Tech building. Today's meeting is gonna be a good one, so bring a friend. We made cookies, and that's really something you shouldn't miss out on."

"Amen!" Chad shouts, throwing his hands up in the air.

"So we'll see everyone at three –" He trails off when his eyes land on a boy across the cafeteria. His face isn't familiar in any way, and this face isn't one he'd soon forget.

The boy is staring at him with wide eyes, mouth slack like he just can't believe what he's seeing. Jared suddenly knows the feeling. Intimately.

He has a crumpled schedule in his right hand and Jared knows that this is the new boy he's heard mentioned today. The cute one, the quiet one.

When a new student arrives Jared usually likes to introduce himself, offer his assistance or a friendly ear. This boy goes beyond that. The desire to be face to face with him is amazingly strong. It's like he needs him to be a part of his life, like he might be the answer to problems Jared didn't even know he had.

Like he's something Jared has been missing.

In his hurry to get off of the table he steps on his untied rainbow shoelaces and slips, grappling with nothing but air as he falls. He ass hits the edge of the table on the way down and his tray of food flips over, landing on top of him when he hits the floor.

People start laughing, but not really *at* him. Jared has been a spastic klutz since kindergarten. By now it's sort of routine.

He just gets up and wipes the gravy off of his face with a napkin, blushing only slightly as he makes his way across the crowded cafeteria. The boy is still staring, and Jared is close enough now to see how his startlingly green eyes widen as he approaches.

"Hi," Jared says breathlessly once he comes to a stop in front of him. "I'm Jared Padalecki."

The boy freezes, eyes darting around the room before he clears his throat. He takes a deep breath like he's steeling himself and meets Jared's gaze.

"Uh," he says, eyes flicking up towards Jared's hairline. A glob of mashed potatoes rolls down Jared's forehead and sticks to his eyebrow. Jared brushes it away and smiles sweetly. "Jensen Ackles."

Jensen's mouth turns up into the tiniest of smiles, and Jared wishes with a fierce intensity that he would grin. He would bet money that Jensen's smile could light up a room – hell, an entire city block.

But Jensen's eyes are incredibly sad and all Jared wants to do is make him laugh. He's nearly overwhelmed by a sudden rush of emotion, the subtle swoop in his belly when Jensen looks him in the eye. There are freckles dotting the bridge of Jensen's nose and it's the most adorable thing Jared has ever seen.

"You're covered in gravy," Jensen says slowly, and Jared blinks.

"Huh?" Jared asks. He's distracted by Jensen's voice. It's soft and honey-thick, words dripping off of his tongue in a sort of lazy drawl. It sounds almost southern – at odds with his own voice and all the other fast-talking Californians he's used to. He likes it.

"Gravy," Jensen repeats, gesturing at his torso. "All over your shirt."

"Oh," Jared says, looking down to see the congealed gravy from his school issued meatloaf clinging to his clothes. "I have another one in my locker. Come with me."

Jensen stiffens for a moment, looking around rapidly before licking his lips and nodding. He slides his hands into his pockets and turns to walk with Jared out of the cafeteria. The walkway is nearly empty and they are silent except for their footsteps echoing off of the cement. Jensen seems quiet by nature, but Jared is just trying to think of something to say.

He's never wanted anyone to like him so badly before. He's never had to work for it.

"So how is your first day going?" Jared asks when they stop at his locker. He tries to focus on the lock and Jensen's face at the same time. Jensen looks startled every time Jared looks at him or talks to him, like he's confused and unsure of what to do with the sudden attention.

"It's alright, I guess," Jensen says awkwardly, reaching up to scratch the back of his neck. "It's a little weird starting a new school halfway through senior year. Everyone already has their friends and they aren't interested in making new ones. But that's okay, really."

"I'd love to be your friend," Jared says honestly as he pulls a plain black tee shirt from his locker. Jensen looks at him for a long moment, eyes shuttered and cautious before he finally smiles tentatively. It's still small, but Jared knows he can make it brighter if given the chance.

"Maybe," Jensen replies, blinking and furrowing his brow like he's surprised by his own answer. "I mean, sure?"

Jared grins and pulls his ruined shirt over his head right there in the middle of the hall, crumpling it up and shoving it into his locker while hoping his mom can get out gravy stains. Jensen's eyes land on Jared's exposed chest and stomach for a moment before he swallows nervously and looks away. Jared pulls on the new shirt and feels warm all over.

"So you're coming this afternoon, right?" Jared asks, pulling a pack of strawberry gum from his back pocket. He pulls a stick out with his teeth and offers the pack to Jensen. He nods politely and takes a piece.

"To where?" Jensen asks, popping the gum into his mouth and looking around again. The boy has to be carrying more tension than any person Jared has ever met. He can feel it coming off of Jensen in waves, can nearly see the bunching of his shoulders and the stiffness of his neck.

"To the GSA meeting," Jared replies easily. "I'm the president. It'd be a good way to meet other people like us, and like I said – there will be *cookies*."

Jensen's jaw falls open to reveal pink gum against perfect white teeth. All the blood rushes from his face, leaving him pale as a ghost. He shakes his head and Jared tilts his head to the side, confused.

"What do you mean 'people like us'?" Jensen asks tightly, taking a step back. His eyes widen a little and he holds up his hands like he's surrendering. "I'm not – I mean, I'm *straight*, Jared. I don't even – why would you think I'm not?"

Jared furrows his brow and looks Jensen up and down. Aside from his exceptionally pretty face, Jensen looks perfectly nondescript. He is wearing a soft looking blue cotton shirt and artfully distressed jeans. His hair is messily ruffled with minimal gel and there is dirt under his fingernails. There is nothing about him that screams homo but Jared's gaydar has never failed him.

"Oh," Jared says flatly. He remains unconvinced. "I've never been wrong before."

"Well, sorry to break your record," Jensen says, sounding almost panicked as his eyes dart around the nearly empty hall like he's afraid someone will overhear them. "But you're wrong about me."

Jared knows the look in Jensen's eyes. He saw it in their varsity quarterback's when he cornered Jared in the parking lot after school and confessed that footballs aren't the only thing he's interested in catching. It was evident in the eyes of their ASB vice president when she told him outside their Chemistry class that her parents would kill her if they ever found out. He's seen it in the eyes of too many GSA members fidgeting in their seats during meetings like someone is going to burst in and find them.

It's the look of someone terrified of everybody finding out who they really are.

There are plenty of people in this school keeping secrets, desperate for someone to trust. Jared strives to be that person. He lets them all unload on him, dump their worries and anxieties and life altering secrets on him until he feels like his back is going to break from the weight of it all.

Jared just looks at Jensen for a long moment, watches his perfect teeth make an indent in his fleshy lower lip. Jared knows how lucky he was to have such an understanding family, just as much as he knows that some kids will never have such a blessing. It hurts him to know how many teenagers out there are struggling with who they are. He looks into Jensen's eyes and knows he's just found a prime example.

"That's a shame," Jared says, aiming for casual but he gets the feeling the look in his eyes is too intense. He pitches his voice low and flirty and tries to ignore the butterflies in his stomach. "Because you're absolutely gorgeous."

That seems to catch Jensen by surprise because his eyes snap back to Jared's like a magnetic pull. He takes great delight in the way Jensen flushes, a stunning pink color slipping from his hairline and running down underneath the collar of his faded blue tee. He looks ready to bolt, like he wants to flee but his head and heart are at war and his feet are prisoners of the battle, unable to move.

Jensen doesn't say anything – just looks at Jared with these sad, helpless eyes that break

Jared's heart. He wants to bundle Jensen up and protect him from all the hatred in the world.

But he can't. Not until Jensen lets him.

So instead Jared leans into his locker again and pops open one of the rubber tubs of cookies stacked there. He pulls one out and hands it over. Jensen takes it, eyeing the rainbow colored sprinkles dubiously before looking back up at Jared.

The bell rings and Jared grabs his backpack off of the hook. He gives Jensen his warmest, widest smile – one he hopes tells Jensen that he is someone he can trust, someone that he can be himself with. No matter whom that person may be.

"I'll see you around, Jensen," Jared says casually but with a hint of a promise. Jensen opens his mouth like he's going to say something but then snaps it shut, glancing at the cookie before meeting Jared's eyes again. The conflict in them makes Jared ache, and he stands there as Jensen just nods and turns on his heels to walk away.

Jared shuts his locker and presses his forehead against the cool metal. His heart is racing and the butterflies in his stomach have multiplied tenfold.

They've known each other for less than fifteen minutes, but Jensen already owns a tiny piece of Jared's heart.

And Jared gets the feeling that if Jensen asked, he'd happily hand over the whole thing.



Jensen walks home from school in a daze.

It's cold outside but he was so nervous that morning that he forgot to grab a jacket, and he shivers in the February air, nibbling at his lips as he thinks.

The day had been fine, if not a little overwhelming. Everyone had been welcoming and receptive of him, asking him questions and offering to show him around the school.

He gave polite and vague answers to their questions, and graciously declined their offers. He began planting seeds in their minds, subtly letting them know that he was lackluster and uninteresting, that he'd be better off ignored in favor of people more deserving of their friendship. He was well on his way to being invisible.

And then he stepped into the cafeteria and saw that *boy*.

There he was, just standing on top of a table, shouting out loud. Making himself the *center*

of attention. And he was happy about it! He was smiling and laughing and clapping his hands together. *Everyone* was looking at him, and he was just... fine with it. Pleased, even.

Jensen didn't understand.

He was planning on finding some hidden corner, some socially invisible spot to hurry through his meal, but once he saw that boy he just sort of froze and he didn't even know why. And then their eyes met.

The boy fell down, creating a scene and making a spectacle of himself, and he still had a smile on his face. Then he started making a bee line for Jensen, eyes locked on his face as he sauntered over to him. That's the only word Jensen could come up with to describe it – sauntered. He exuded confidence and he took every step like he knew exactly where he was heading. People started looking at *Jensen* then, making *him* the center of attention, and he felt sick to his stomach.

But then the boy stopped in front of him. There were mashed potatoes in his hair and he grinned at Jensen like he had just won a prize, like the damn *sun* had just risen, and for some reason Jensen's heart started beating faster and slower at the same time.

Jensen wants to say he was beautiful, but that isn't right. Boys can't be beautiful, and they definitely can't think another *boy* is pretty. So he wasn't beautiful, but he was handsome. He can say that, right? Probably not out loud.

He said his name was Jared, and he wanted to be Jensen's *friend*. And for some reason, when usually he would have turned and ran in the other direction, Jensen said yes.

He wanted to get to know this boy – wanted to get to know someone for the first time in his entire *life*.

But then, within five minutes of knowing each other, Jared called him on it. On his *secret*. Jensen has been lying and hiding and perfecting himself for *years*, and this boy just took one look at him and *knew*. Just like that.

It was the scariest moment of Jensen's entire life.

He denied what he was to Jared, but he couldn't deny the sparks he felt when this handsome (not beautiful) boy handed him a cookie with rainbow sprinkles and their fingers brushed. It was heat and electricity and excitement, something Jensen had never experienced before igniting in his belly like a fire that couldn't be contained.

He walked away from Jared in that hallway, scurried and fled like the coward that he was, but he knows he won't be able to stay away from Jared.

He can still taste the cookie on his tongue.

He's so afraid.

The next time Jensen looks up he can see his new house looming in the distance. It's a cookie-cutter house in a picture-perfect neighborhood with flowers in the garden and an honest to god white picket fence.

Jensen turns up the path, footsteps slow and precise as he makes his way towards the front door. He takes a deep breath, squares his shoulders, and makes his way inside. He is greeted with silence.

It's not uncommon.

Sometimes he wishes he could get a dog, just so he'd have someone that would be excited to see him. Someone that didn't expect anything from him other than ear scratches and the occasional treat.

Jensen can hear movement in the kitchen and he closes his eyes. He has to walk by the kitchen to get to the stairs to go to his room. He looks straight ahead and tries to walk by quickly, falling back on the old childhood adage of *if I don't look at you, maybe you won't see me*.

No such luck.

"Jensen," his mother says sharply, and he freezes. Tension coils in his shoulders and he spins slowly on his heels to face her. He clasps his hands behind his back, nervous fingers gripping the bottom of his backpack.

"Hi," Jensen says, swallowing hard. The ingredients for apple pie are spread across the counter and Jensen closes his eyes. He'd almost forgotten that some people from their new church are coming over for dinner and his mother wants to impress them. Jensen begins to mentally steel himself, preparing for a night of casual conversation sprinkled with judgment and hate disguised as faith and belief.

His stomach turns at the thought of it. He doesn't agree with these people but there's no way he can let them know that.

"How was school?" She asks, but it doesn't really look like she cares. She's too busy chopping apples. "Aside from making a horrible impression by being late on your first day, of course."

"It was, um, fine." Jensen bites his lip and furrows his brow, forcing out the lie. "Uneventful."

“Did you meet any nice girls?” She asks, and Jensen stiffens. His heartbeat quickens the same as it always does at this question and Jensen’s fingernails dig little half moon crescents into his palms.

“Not really,” Jensen says. He ducks his head so his mother can’t see the pained look in his eyes. “It was only the first day. I’m trying to get settled in.” She sighs disapprovingly, sweeping all the apples into a bowl and wiping her hands on her apron.

“Your brother was dating all the time by the time he was your age,” she reminds him. Jensen resists the urge to roll his eyes, feeling small and worthless. Not a day goes by that he isn’t compared to his big brother. Josh is the epitome of a perfect child, and Jensen learned at a young age that he will never measure up. So he’s just stopped trying. Jensen hums thoughtfully, nodding and focusing on a magnet on the refrigerator that reads *good things come to those who wait*.

Jensen is losing his patience.

“Well, go do your homework,” she tells him, not even looking at him. “Dinner is at seven. And good heavens, Jensen. Your father and I work hard to buy you nice things, and you wear those ratty old jeans? Put on something nice. The Johanssons are bringing their daughter. She’s about your age and if you try, you might even look presentable.”

Jensen just nods and takes the opportunity to escape. He trudges up the stairs, fingers dragging and catching on the banister. Once he’s inside his room he drops his backpack on the floor and leans back against the door, head hitting the wood with a soft thump as he presses his palms flat against the door.

That wasn’t so bad. She was preoccupied with making dinner, too busy to really concentrate on tearing him down.

The walls of this room are plain, boring white. He hasn’t really unpacked and there’s nothing in this room that makes it feel like *his*, but that’s okay. This house is huge and there isn’t a single spot anywhere in it that feels like home.

Jensen can’t help but remember that just a few hours earlier he was smiling. It was brief and fleeting, but it happened. He *laughed*. Jared’s wide, dimpled grin pops into his head, sudden and unexpected. He thinks of the way Jared made him feel, the terrifying fluttering in his belly that he got whenever Jared spoke – when Jared called him *gorgeous*.

Jensen thinks of what he wants, what he can never even imagine having, and closes his eyes.

A tear slips down his cheek and he absently wipes it away. His khakis and button-downs

are still in a box, and if he wants to have the time to pick out and iron something that might make him look respectable, like a son someone could be proud of, he better get started.



It's dark by the time Jared finally gets home.

Right after school he had a student body council meeting, and then directly after that he went to the drama club meeting. He's not even an official member of the drama club (no time) but since half of his best friends are in it, he swings by sometimes to see if they need any help. That and they asked him to come so they could thank him for organizing the petition.

It was no big deal, really. He was happy to do it.

As soon as he unlocks the front door and steps inside he's attacked by two giant dogs. They jump up on him and slam him against the wall, whining and wagging their tails. Jared reaches down to scratch at their ears, one hand on each furry head.

"Hello, children," Jared laughs, kneeling down so they can give him kisses. "You miss me?"

Sadie barks like she understood him and Harley just runs around in circles. Jared chuckles again, tossing his backpack in the general direction of the sofa as he makes his way towards the kitchen.

He takes out a bottle of juice and drinks directly from it as he looks over the calendar stuck to the wall. There is something written on nearly every date, and Jared memorizes the upcoming week.

He sort of wants to add *met Jensen omg!* to today's date, but he figures that would be pretty lame.

He does it anyway.

The front door opens as he's sticking the pen back to the wall and the dogs start all over again. He hears his mom trying to quiet them down and he laughs.

"Jared, are you home?" Jared shouts out the affirmative. She meets him in the kitchen still wearing her work apron, hair spilling out of her messy bun. She looks exhausted and Jared frowns slightly. "Hey, kid."

"Hola means hello," Jared replies, pouring her a glass of soda (from a bottle he hasn't slurped on). He sets it in front of her as she takes a seat on one of the barstools at the

counter. “Long day?”

“Thanks,” she replies, taking the glass and drinking half of it down. She burps and Jared laughs. “You know it. How was school?”

“Oh, Mom. Oh. *Mom*,” Jared replies excitedly, holding up his hands and waving them around as he hops up on the stool next to her. “There’s a new *boy* at school.”

“I take it he’s cute.” Sherri smirks and Jared holds his hands to his chest.

“Mom, he’s so pretty there isn’t even a word for it. I would literally have to invent a new one, and it still wouldn’t do him any justice,” he says, heaving a dreamy sigh. “He has *freckles*. Green eyes and freckles!”

“Oh my,” she says, feigning a swoon. “Gonna ask him out?”

Jared’s smile falls, lips jutting out into a pout, and Sherri furrows her brow. Jared gets asked out a lot; both by boys at his school and delusional girls that don’t understand that he’s pretty much the gayest thing on two legs. He goes on dates sometimes, but he’s so busy. His life is such a whirlwind and he’s never clicked with anyone that made him want to slow down and relax a little.

Jensen though, he thinks he could slow down for.

“I’m pretty sure he’s gay, but like, when I invited him to a GSA meeting he acted like I asked him to strip naked and dance on a float in the pride parade,” Jared says, crossing his arms on the counter and resting his cheek on them. He looks up at his mother with sad eyes and she ruffles his hair. “I think he’s so far in the closet that he hasn’t even come out to himself.”

“Poor kid,” Sherri says sadly, smoothing Jared’s hair back from his forehead. “That’s too bad.”

“Yeah,” Jared says, sitting up and fiddling with a piece of paper on the counter. “It’s just – I think I could like him, and I think maybe he could like me.”

“Well, what are you gonna do?” She asks. Jared looks over at her. He spots a bag of candy on top of the refrigerator and gets up to grab it, looking down at it thoughtfully before turning his gaze back to his mother.

“I’m going to be whatever he needs,” Jared says softly. “And right now? He needs a friend.”



Jensen trudges towards his first period English class a few minutes before the bell rings.

His crumpled schedule is in his hands, edges frayed and torn by his nervous fingers.

He's staring at his shoes, which he is often prone to do, as he walks over the threshold to the classroom. Something compels him to look up, and he meets a pair of excited hazel eyes.

It's Jared, waving at him and gesturing to an empty desk next to him. Jensen freezes and stares at Jared wordlessly. Someone walks into him, a slight nudge of his shoulder that gets him moving again.

It's like he's walking through molasses, struggling with each step until he reaches the empty desk. He sets his bag on the floor and sits down, fingers curling around the bottom of his chair. He's afraid to meet Jared's eyes but he is unable to look away. They're just so... entrancing. Jared's gaze makes him flush with heat. It makes him feel important.

"Hi!" Jared says breathlessly, pink lips stretched into a wide grin as he leans in slightly. He has tiny brown moles on his face and Jensen knows he shouldn't notice these things. "You weren't in this class yesterday."

"Uh, yeah," Jensen says, reaching up to cup the back of his neck. His hair is cut short and neat and Jared blows his own messy bangs out of his eyes. "I missed it yesterday because I was getting a tour of the school."

"Well, I'm glad you're here now," Jared says easily, like he has no problem whatsoever expressing his every feeling. "Who showed you around?"

"Um." Jensen furrows his brow as he thinks. He didn't pay much attention to her, just sort of followed her around while she spoke. She was nice, though. She tried hard to make him feel welcome. "Katie, I think her name was." When Jared just looks at him he thinks harder, glancing over at him. "She was tall. Long blonde hair? She was funny."

"Oh!" Jared says, clapping his hands together. "Cassidy. We like her."

"Okay," Jensen says, drumming his fingers on the desk. The bell still hasn't rung and people are still trickling in. Jensen hides a yawn behind his hand, blinking when his eyes water slightly from the action. Dinner last night had been particularly painful. The pastor himself was there, talking with Jensen's parents about their beliefs. Their *core values*. Jensen had been unable to sleep after that.

"So," Jared says. Jensen looks over at him again. He looks wide-awake, hazel eyes so bright and warm that Jensen gets lost in them for a terrifying moment. "Did you like my cookie?"

Jensen blushes at that and ducks his head. He thinks of the way he felt when their fingers brushed, the way he slowly broke off tiny bites of the cookie all through his History class and ate them bit by bit, dropping rainbow sprinkles all over the smooth, shiny desk.

“I – yes, I did. It was good, thank you,” Jensen squeaks out, scrunching his eyes shut and biting his lip. Jared leans closer and braces one hand on the corner of Jensen’s desk. Jensen shrinks back against his chair, turning his head and opening his eyes to find Jared mere inches away. He can feel the body heat coming off of him in waves, furnace-hot in contrast to the cool air of the classroom.

Jared opens his mouth to speak but the bell rings and effectively cuts him off. The teacher calls the class to order and Jared sighs, pulling away and slumping back in his seat. Jensen lets out a breath and clears his throat, putting his palms on the desk and listening as the teacher begins to talk.

Thankfully she isn’t like the others. She doesn’t make him stand up and awkwardly introduce himself like he’s interesting. Like he’s someone they should all care about.

“We have a new student. Jensen,” is all she says. Jensen bites his lip as everyone shoots a curious glance his way. The attention lasts for only a second before she continues. “We don’t have a book for you yet, but you can share with Jared.”

Jensen nods, jumping slightly when the sound of a desk scraping across the floor reaches his ears. He looks over to see Jared lining up their desks and opening a textbook. He smiles encouragingly as he positions it between them.

Jensen feels red-hot and his fingers tremble slightly as he touches the edge of the book. Jared is so *close* and Jensen doesn’t know what to make of it.

He wants to run away, but the scary part is – he likes it. He *likes* being so close to Jared in some terrifying, insane way. He can smell the soft scent of Jared’s cologne, something subtle and spicy. He stares at Jared’s wrist, at the curve of it, the soft jut of bone. He has rubber bracelets around his wrist, two black and one pink. His fingers are long and tipped with short, clean nails. He’s so close. Jensen could touch him if he wanted.

He tells himself he doesn’t. He tells himself it’s not a lie.

Jensen doesn’t relax all through class. He sits with his back ramrod straight, hands resting lamely in his lap as he looks down at the book. Jared sprawls, looking far too large for the tiny school desk. He stretches and chews on his pen and doesn’t sit still. He fidgets, taps his foot and drums his fingers. He squirms and plucks at his bracelets. He never stops moving. He is fascinating.

Jensen remains still.

Near the end of the period Jared suddenly leans over to the left to dig through his backpack. His thin tee shirt rides up and Jensen glances over, eyes landing on the exposed strip of soft looking tan skin over the slight curve at the small of his back. He jumps when he realizes what he's doing and he jerks as if he's been shocked. He swallows hard as shame rolls in his belly.

Jared sits up and sets something on Jensen's desk. He jumps a little at the sudden proximity and looks down at the object – a small, shiny piece of candy. It's a Hershey's Hug from what Jensen can tell. He stares at it and Jared places the tip of his index finger on the top of it, sliding it closer. Giving it to him.

Jensen clears his throat and looks from the candy to Jared again. Jared just smiles warmly and slides it closer before pulling his hand away and turning his attention back to the teacher, unwrapping his own piece of candy. Jensen looks down at the candy and feels his heart thundering in his chest as he slowly reaches out to take it.

He unwraps it with shaky fingers, dropping it and catching it in his palm. He finally just pops it in his mouth and rolls it on his tongue, closing his eyes as the chocolate melts.

When he opens them again he can see Jared looking at him from the corner of his eye. He turns his gaze towards Jared, but he just ducks his head as a wide smile splits his face and his bangs fall in his eyes.

Jensen swallows and closes his fingers over the balled up foil in his palm. He brings his fist up to his mouth, surprised to feel his lips curving upwards.

Jared makes him smile.



Jared pretends that he's not watching the doors of the cafeteria out of the corner of his eye. He pretends to eat his pizza, with the waxy cheese and the cardboard crust, chewing every bite distractedly while he unintentionally ignores all of his friends as they talk.

It's just – he can't get Jensen out of his mind. Ever since he first caught a glimpse of those green eyes he's been completely transfixed and captivated in a way he hasn't been in a long time. It's almost the same sort of feeling he gets when he discovers a new cause to fight for, someone to help. But it's more than that. He just – he *needs* Jensen in his life.

As if conjured by Jared's thoughts, Jensen makes his way into the cafeteria. His head is lowered and his gaze is trained on the floor as he makes his way to the food line. Jared

stares unabashedly, watching Jensen's every move.

Jensen picks out his food blindly – a stale slice of pizza, an old apple, and a carton of chocolate milk. He fumbles with the crumpled bills in his pocket as he pays and a coin falls from his shaky fingers to roll underneath the register. Jensen closes his eyes hard like he's waiting to be reprimanded and then takes his tray and escapes hurriedly, shoulders hunched and head low.

Jared aches for him.

He watches Jensen make his way across the cafeteria, most likely towards an empty table in the back. Alicia steps in Jensen's path. He jolts a little and stumbles to a halt, curling in on himself even more. Alicia is a blonde, leggy junior that wears far too much eye make up and smokes behind the gym between classes. She puts her hand on Jensen's arm, acrylic nails touching Jensen's skin, and he shrinks away.

It's like Jared stands before the thought even occurs to him, cutting Chad off mid sentence as he walks over to Alicia and Jensen.

"Hey!" He says, sidling up next to Jensen. He turns and blinks owlishly up at Jared from behind his glasses. "I was looking for you. We still on for lunch?"

"Uh, what?" Jensen replies nervously, shifting his weight from hip to hip. Alicia looks miffed, painted lips curling in a slight grimace.

"I was just asking Jensen if he wanted to eat with us," she says, far too casual. Jared pastes on a smile.

"Sorry!" He chirps. "I called dibs this morning." He puts his hand low on Jensen's back and guides him towards the cafeteria doors. Jensen goes willingly, biting his lip as he looks anywhere but at Jared. He leads them outside and takes a deep breath of the cool air as he tilts his face up to the afternoon sun. Jared loves the juxtaposition – the deceptively bright sun disguising the cold air.

There are a few picnic tables scattered behind the library that are usually abandoned during lunch and Jared leads them there. He sits down on one side and motions towards the other. Jensen nods and sits down, setting his tray down carefully.

"Thanks," Jensen says softly. Jensen looks up and Jared's smile is dimmed by Jensen's eyes. They're so expressive; like a book splayed wide open, even though it's obvious Jensen tries so hard to hide what he's feeling. Even worse, they always look so *sad*, like years of pain have built up inside of him and he isn't sure what to do with it. Jared would give anything to see those intense green eyes light up with happiness.

“Oh, you’re welcome. You looked like you needed to be rescued,” Jared says once he realizes he’s been staring. Jensen blinks and shakes his head a little like he had been staring too.

Jensen shifts awkwardly as his nimble fingers pick at his barely edible pizza. He opens and closes his mouth repeatedly like he doesn’t know what to say, brow crinkled as his cheeks turn pink.

“Hey, we don’t have to talk,” Jared says softly, splaying his palms on the table. Jensen looks up at him as he gnaws on his bottom lip. Jared sort of wants to reach over and pull his lip free before it bruises, but he doesn’t dare close that distance. “We can just sit here, enjoy the sunshine. That’s fine by me.”

“Okay,” Jensen says. He looks a little relieved. He opens his carton of milk and takes a slow sip, licking his lips as he sets it back down on the table. Jared fights against the sudden urge to bounce up and down in his seat. He’s ridiculously excited to be alone with Jensen even if they aren’t talking. He just hopes he can manage not to kiss the bridge of his nose. That’s pretty much all he’s been able to think about since the moment they met.

Jared spends the next few minutes sneaking little surreptitious glances at Jensen from the corner of his eye. He has freckles on the tip of his ear and a mosquito bite on the inside of his wrist. Jared is enthralled with every bit of him.

He’d pay to hear Jensen’s life story.

Jensen is staring off to the side. His bottom lip is red and full from biting down on it so much. Suddenly Jensen pushes his tray away, cheeks bright pink and brow furrowed.

“Why – why are you doing this?” Jensen asks suddenly. Jared’s gaze snaps to him, warm and attentive.

“Doing what?” He replies curiously, tilting his head to the side. Jensen glances up at him through the thick, honey colored fringe of his eyelashes, eyes bright and round.

“You... you’re trying to be my friend, right?” Jensen says softly, like the concept is completely foreign to him. He looks scared but also a little hopeful. “That’s what this is?”

“Beauty *and* brains,” Jared says, throwing Jensen a wink. Jensen just swallows hard and looks down at the table. Jared’s smile fades. He isn’t sure how to act around Jensen. It’s hard enough to resist the urge to hug him. He hugs everybody and, well, he’s never wanted to hug anyone more than he wants to hug the sad boy in front of him. The next words are almost painful to get out. “I could leave you alone, if you want?”

“No!” Jensen says. His eyes widen and he rolls his lips into his mouth like he didn’t mean to let that slip out. He looks up at Jared and his stomach flips. “I – keep doing it, okay?”

“You got it, Jen,” Jared says. The nickname rolls off of his tongue like he’s used it forever. Jensen meets his eyes and gives him a tiny, private smile.

It could be his imagination, but Jensen’s eyes look a little bit brighter.

Onto [Part 2](#).

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/249859.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/249859.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 2)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:55:00 : 43-55 minutes

[Back to Part 1.](#)



They eat lunch together for the next two days after that.

It's like they came to an unspoken agreement. They meet in the cafeteria and get their food and then Jared guides him to some random, secluded spot on campus with a hand placed low on his back.

On Tuesday it was the empty football field. They sat in the grass and Jared leaned against the goal post, long legs stretched out in front of him. On Wednesday it was the abandoned cement path that runs behind the tech building. It's like Jared has searched out all the secluded spots on campus. It's like he's showing Jensen all the best places to hide.

They don't talk all that much. When they do it's mostly about superficial things in an effort to get to know each other. Jared asks him about his old school and tells him about his new town. He talks about his friends with such a reverence that Jensen feels guilty for taking him away from them.

Jared flicks little bits of food at him and knocks their feet together, but he doesn't get too close. He's giving Jensen time to warm up to him and get comfortable around him. Thing is, Jensen has never been more comfortable around anyone in his entire life.

But at the same time, he's never been more terrified of anyone either.

Jared makes him think things that he shouldn't, *feel* things that he shouldn't, and it scares him. He tries to push those things to the back of his mind, but it's hard when he's faced with Jared's expressive eyes and wide, bright smile.

Seeing Jared has become the highlight of Jensen's day – the bright spot he looks forward to. But Jared makes him *want*, and that's bad.

Jared is confusing. Jensen knows he should run away but he *can't*. He can't give Jared up, not now. Not even when he shakes him up so badly.

Jensen walks into the cafeteria on Friday and tells himself that this is a bad idea.

He spent years trying to shove that secret part of himself into a tiny little box and put it in the back of his mind. He's worked so hard on never revealing that bit of himself, but as soon as he first saw Jared standing on a table in the cafeteria it all went to hell. It's like Jared took the box, shook it up, and dumped it upside down on Jensen's carefully sculpted life.

Jensen knows he shouldn't be doing this.

He runs his hand through his hair and squeezes his eyes shut, and then turns to walk away before Jared can find him. He has to put a stop to this. He has to stop giving himself false hope. His plan backfires massively when instead of escaping he smacks right into Jared's broad chest.

"Whoa, Jen!" Jared calls out with a laugh. The nickname makes Jensen's heart do a little somersault. He freezes, every muscle in his body locking down until he can't move. Jared's hands are on his shoulders, long fingers curling around his biceps and burning where they brush his bare skin. Jared smells like sugar and clean sweat and Jensen jerks out of his grasp.

"Sorry," he mumbles, keeping his eyes trained on the ground. Jared has rainbow shoelaces in his black Chuck Taylors and he's sort of everything Jensen wishes he could be. Everything he knows he'll never have.

"Hey," Jared says softly. He reaches up to put a finger under Jensen's chin and lifts his face. Jensen's eyes flutter open and he swallows again, gaze fixed on Jared's friendly eyes. "You never have to be sorry about anything with me, okay?"

Jared drops his hand with a crooked, bashful smile and Jensen wants to cry and scream *why can't I have this?* Instead, he just forces his features into a blank expression. It's easy by now. He's been doing it for years.

"Ready to go?" Jared asks. Jensen can't do anything but nod. Jared places his hand against the dip of Jensen's spine, the tip of his thumb brushing the waistband of Jensen's jeans. He leads him out of the cafeteria and into the cool air without any food. Jensen looks over at him with a confused expression. "Oh, I thought it'd be nice to get off campus today. I know this great little pizza place. And it totally beats the school's mystery loaf."

Jensen bites his lip. He's never seen Jared outside of school. Right now it's like a fantasy, an escape. Leaving school with him would make Jared bleed over into his real life and blur all the lines.

“Jared, I don’t think – “ He starts, but Jared cuts him off by curling his fingers in the hem of Jensen’s shirt and giving it a yank.

“Come on,” Jared says with an awkward little smile. He almost looks nervous. “It’ll be fun. I have cupcakes. My mom made them. And they’re just chocolate. No gay toppings this time.”

“Okay,” Jensen says, nodding to himself. He’s not sure he could actually deny Jared anything. “Sure.”

They walk off campus in relative silence. Jared hastily explains that they aren’t *technically* supposed to leave during lunch but so many people do that they don’t really even try to enforce it. He gives Jensen a guilty little look like he’s done Jensen some great disservice, like he could ever be capable of hurting someone.

A car horn sounds behind them and Jensen jumps, inwardly cursing himself when it turns out to be a carful of people waving at Jared. He’s so jumpy all the time, caged up and tense. He doesn’t get what Jared sees in him.

And that’s the thing – the giant elephant in the room. Jared knows what he is and he doesn’t *care*. Jensen is torn between just confessing his secrets to this tall, gangly boy with the dimpled grin or keeping up this ridiculous charade and pretending Jared can’t read him in a way that is honestly pretty terrifying.

Jensen chews on his lip and squints against the crisp February air. Jared starts talking; rambling like it’s his second nature. Jensen just walks alongside him, a tiny smile unknowingly tugging up the corners of his mouth.

It’s nice to have someone to fill the silence.

The pizzeria Jared leads them to is only a few blocks from campus. It’s a tiny brick building tucked away in the corner of a shopping center. A bell chimes when they enter and Jensen looks around. The place is nearly empty and Jared bounces up to the counter.

An elderly woman peeks her head out from the back and when she sees Jared her entire face lights up. She comes up to the counter and grins at him, something warm and fond in her eyes.

“Jared!” She shouts. Jared smiles widely. “My little activist. It’s been too long.”

“I was in here last week,” Jared tells her with fond exasperation. She just keeps grinning. It makes the corners of her eyes crinkle.

“Exactly,” she replies. “Too long.”

“It won’t happen again,” Jared says. He looks over his shoulder at Jensen and motions him forward. Jensen steps up next to him and shoves his hands into the pockets of his jeans. “Susan, this is Jensen. He just moved here.”

“Hello Jensen,” she says fondly, and Jensen smiles and ducks his head. “Oh, shy *and* gorgeous.”

“Hey, don’t go breakin’ my heart,” Jared admonishes. Susan winks at him. “How’s Isabelle doing?”

“Better,” Susan says, and her eyes lose a little bit of their playful sparkle. “She’s a tough little girl.”

“She is,” Jared agrees. Jensen doesn’t miss the way his brows furrow slightly in concern.

“She wanted me to tell you thanks for the teddy bear,” Susan says, voice thick with emotion. “She also said she wants to marry you when she grows up, but I don’t think I was supposed to tell you that part.”

Jared blushes and Jensen is suddenly fascinated with the way his cheeks turn pink. Susan reaches out to pinch Jared’s cheek and he wrinkles up his nose.

Jared is beautiful.

The thought hits him like a punch to the gut, because as obvious as it is, he’s never allowed himself to think it. He stands there staring blankly ahead, barely listening as Jared gets their food and leads him to a table.

He sits down and tries not to panic. In less than five days this *boy* has completely mixed him up, forced him to feel things he vowed to never let himself feel. His carefully placed mask is slipping and Jared continues to be a little more perfect at every single turn.

“Isabelle is Susan’s granddaughter,” Jared says once they’re settled in opposite sides of the booth. “She has leukemia.”

That snaps Jensen out of it. It makes his problems seem miniscule in comparison.

“Oh no,” he says. He nearly reaches out to touch Jared’s hand where it rests on the table. He resists at the last moment and instead lets his hands rest awkwardly on either side of his plate. Jared just gives him a soft, resolved smile.

“It’s okay,” he replies. “She’s responding well to treatment. She’s going to be fine.”

“Good,” Jensen breathes. Jared gestures towards his pizza as he picks up his own slice

and Jensen tears off little pieces of it. His stomach is fluttering too much to really eat. He's alone with Jared, pressed into this tiny booth tucked away in a hidden corner. Isolated.

"So how is it going so far?" Jared asks before taking a huge bite of pizza. He talks with his mouth full and somehow it's charming. "Everyone better be being nice to you."

"Yeah," Jensen says, furrowing his brow. "They are, I guess. I don't really talk to anyone but you. I'm – well, I'm not great at talking to people."

"You lie!" Jared says, letting out a mock gasp. Jensen looks up in time to see Jared wink at him. Jensen laughs a little and reaches up to rub at the back of his neck.

"I guess it is pretty obvious," Jensen says, looking out of the window as he continues. "People talk about you a lot."

"Whatever they said about pink spandex, it isn't true," Jared retorts immediately. Jensen looks back at him with a tiny smirk.

"No," he continues. "Not in a bad way. It's just – I'm sort of amazed by how often your name pops up in random conversations. Like you're a part of every story worth telling."

And it's true. People talk about Jared all the time. Stories about how he made them laugh or helped them with a problem, everything up to and including how awesome his mom's cookies are.

It's like he's touched everyone's life at some point or another, and Jensen is sort of in awe of him. It's amazing how one person can have an impact on so many lives and still have time to live his own.

When he meets Jared's eyes he sees something indecipherable in them. If he didn't know any better, he'd say Jared looks sad.

"It's cool," Jensen reassures him, and Jared blinks a few times. He smiles a little and runs his hand through his hair.

"No, that's not – " He cuts himself off and looks at Jensen head on. "I've sort of always liked to help people. Everyone feels like they can talk to me, I guess." He gives Jensen a meaningful look at that, like he's giving him a hint. Jensen *wants* to talk to him. About everything, even.

"My parents had all these people from the Baptist church over the other night," Jensen blurts out, and he figures that's close enough. He blinks a few times, surprised that he's actually talking about this. "It was pretty horrible. We've been here for less than a week and they're already trying to impress the pastor."

Jared's eyes go soft, not full of pity but understanding. Jensen looks away and pulls his bottom lip between his teeth. But when Jared just leans in closer, Jensen finds himself leaning in as well.

"Ah," Jared says, clearing his throat and threading his fingers together. "I'm, well, not the most popular person with that crowd." He looks up at Jensen, meets his gaze, and Jensen fights the urge to look away. "Your parents are really religious, then?" Jensen swallows and nods.

"I – I can't be myself around them," Jensen says in a pained whisper. It's the closest he's ever come to admitting he's not the good little straight boy he was raised to be. Jared purses his lips and reaches out to touch Jensen's wrist. Jared's fingers are hot like a brand against his skin and he shivers.

"Some people refuse to see the good in others," Jared says, voice pitched low and serious. "Just because of something some stranger said was wrong thousands of years ago. They judge, and they hate, without even bothering to try and understand."

Jensen's throat tightens and he looks at Jared desperately. His heart is pounding in his chest and he stares at the tiny mole next to Jared's nose as his vision blurs slightly.

"You're amazing, Jensen. I've only known you for a few days and I can see that," Jared continues, fingers curling around his wrist and pressing against the delicate skin underneath. "I'm so sorry that anyone has ever made you feel like you can't let yourself be happy."

"I want to be," Jensen whispers as his eyes slide shut. He can't take looking at Jared's gorgeous face anymore. "I don't even – I can't remember what it even feels like."

"You *will*," Jared says adamantly, and it sounds like a promise. It sounds like *you can be yourself with me*. Jensen is shaking. He can feel his hand trembling in Jared's loose grasp and he pulls it away because his emotions are too close to the surface. He's too close to letting them out, and he can't do that. Not now.

He sits back in his seat and presses the heels of his palms into his eyes, trying to regain his composure.

When he finally looks at Jared again, he's gazing out of the window and chewing a bite of pizza. Jensen sees it for what it is – an escape route, and he takes it gratefully.

"I believe you mentioned cupcakes," Jensen says, and he's proud of how steady his voice is. Jared looks at him and gives him a comforting smile. Pizza grease shines on his lips and Jensen's belly clenches shamefully.

“They’re in my backpack,” Jared says, wiping his fingers on a napkin and tossing it onto his plate. “We’ll have to eat them on the walk back.”

“Okay,” Jensen says, and gets up to follow Jared, who takes out his wallet and pulls out a ten.

“Put that away!” Susan shouts. Jared rolls his eyes like he was expecting it.

“You caught me,” he replies. He hands the money to Jensen underneath the counter. Jensen looks at him with confusion and Jared vaguely gestures towards the tip jar. “Tell Lizzie I said hello, okay?”

“Of course,” Susan says. As she leans out to pat Jared’s cheek, Jensen stealthily slips the ten into the tip jar and wonders just how much more amazing Jared can possibly get. “You two are gorgeous together, if you don’t mind me saying.”

Jensen freezes, feeling hot and cold at the same time – feverish at the mere implication.

“I wish,” Jared says with a flirty wink. “But no, Jensen here continues to break my heart by being straight.”

“Well, that’s a shame,” Susan says, and turns to head into the back again. Jensen relaxes slightly and shoots Jared a grateful and embarrassed look. Jared just bumps their shoulders together and gives him a little smile that proves just how well he can keep a secret. The smile fades quickly, brows knitting together, and Jensen frowns. It’s obvious Jared doesn’t like to lie.

Jared’s eyes are a myriad of colors – burnt gold shifting to bright blue around the edges. The moment he notices that is the first time he’s ever thought that there might be a reason to stop keeping secrets. Like maybe there’s something that could be worth coming clean for.

The air outside is freezing cold and Jensen regrets forgetting his jacket yet again. His mother says he’s scatterbrained and he’d forget his own head if it wasn’t attached. Absentmindedness is a horrible quality in a person, according to her, and she thinks he has it in spades. Jared puts his backpack on the ground and unzips it to take out the small container holding two cupcakes.

He looks up, brows knitting in concern when he notices how badly Jensen is shaking. He sets the container on the ground and stands up to unzip his hoodie.

“No, it’s okay,” Jensen says adamantly, and Jared just rolls his eyes. He drapes the sweatshirt over Jensen’s shoulders and he immediately melts into the warmth of it. After a

moment of deliberation he slips his arms into the sleeves. It's soft and black, a little worn and faded from too many washings. He zips it up only to realize that he's nearly swimming in it. "Thanks. But aren't you cold?"

"I'm good," Jared says. He takes the cupcakes out of the container and hands one over. "I'm always warm."

Jensen knits his brow and licks some of the chocolate frosting from his thumb. He's always cold. He can't help but think that it sounds like a sign.

Jared asks for Jensen's phone on the walk back to campus. Jensen crumples up the paper wrapper from his cupcake and sticks it in his pocket, licking his thumb clean before digging it out of his jeans and handing it over.

Jared plays with the buttons and Jensen can only assume he's programming in his number. Jensen bites his lip and squirms a little. Jared is no longer just the boy he sees at school, no longer an escape. Jared is slowly but surely worming his way into Jensen's life. He's inextricable now.

Jensen needs him.

When they get back to campus Jared squeezes his shoulder and gives him a warm smile. He lets Jensen know to call him if he needs anything and tells him to have a good weekend.

Jared fidgets a little, mouth opening and closing like he wants to say something else, but he just smiles and walks away.

Jensen still has his jacket. He looks down at his hands, curling his fingers into fists and pulling the long sleeves over them as he walks to class.



Jared is in an uncharacteristically bad mood when he gets home late that night. He drops down onto the sofa, dislodging Harley and Sadie from the rumpled cushions. He stretches out onto his back with a sigh and stares at the ceiling with his hands interlocked on his stomach.

He's still on the couch when his mom comes home, flipping through the channels but not really paying attention to anything on the screen. She drops her purse on the coffee table and does a little double take when she sees him.

Jared pouting is out of the ordinary – a very rare occurrence. She sits down at his feet and rests her hand on his knee.

“What’s wrong?” She asks. Jared just lets out a sigh. “Tig, tell me.”

“I had lunch with Jensen today,” Jared mumbles, and his mother furrows her brow. “I took him to Susie’s.”

“I don’t see how that’s bad,” she says slowly. “I thought you liked him?”

“Oh god, I *do*. He’s just so *sad*, Mom,” Jared says, looking at her hopelessly. “It’s written all over his face. He’s devastated all day, every day, and I want to take it away. I want to help him.”

“Well,” she says thoughtfully as she pulls Jared’s feet into her lap and bites her lip. “Jared, did he *ask* for your help?” Jared narrows his eyes slightly and swallows hard before shaking his head sadly. Sherri lets out a tiny sigh and pinches the bridge of her nose. Jared blinks, watching her closely.

“Look, Jared. I have seen so many kids come in and out of this house, sleeping on this very couch, because you wanted to help. Help them come out to their family, or get away from a bad situation. You’ve helped kids whose parents hurt them, and you’ve helped kids who’ve gotten mixed up with drugs. Christ, Jared, you’ll help anyone with their damn homework if they ask you to. But all those kids had something in common. They all came to *you*. You can’t force help on someone who hasn’t asked for it.”

“He *can’t* ask for it, Mom!” Jared cries, pulling himself into a sitting position. “His parents sound like these religious psychos, and I just know that he’s grown up hearing that being gay is sick and evil and wrong, and now he’s realizing he is and he’s freaking terrified.” Sherri’s eyes dim and she looks pained for a moment. “People like Jensen are the *reason* I fight so hard. He needs me!”

“I know that,” Sherri replies softly, reaching out to cup Jared’s flushed cheek. “But you’ve gotta understand that you can’t save everybody.”

“I know,” Jared admits. He looks at her and his eyes are bright and determined. “But Jensen? Mom, I *have* to save him. I just – I need to.”

They stare at each other for a moment, and Sherri sighs as she pushes Jared’s hair back from his face. He’s working himself up, getting upset enough that his eyes sting. He hasn’t cried in so long. But he can’t help thinking of Jensen’s eyes and the pain in them.

Jared’s phone goes off with a shrill chirp that makes them both jump. Jared blinks and wipes at his eyes as he pulls it out of his pocket. He has a text from an unfamiliar number and he furrows his brow as he opens it.

Hey. It's Jensen. I still have your jacket, sorry.

Jared grins suddenly, heart speeding up just from a text message. But this means something. Jensen contacted him just because he felt like it. It feels like a tiny step closer to him asking for help. It gives Jared hope and makes him feel lighter than air.

"Jensen?" Sherri asks. Jared nods excitedly as he creates a reply, thumbs moving so fast they slip on the tiny keys. He misses the way Sherri's brow wrinkles as she bites down worriedly on her bottom lip.

Don't worry about it. It looks good on you. He sends the reply and sighs deeply, slumping back against the cushions.

He knows Jensen will come to him eventually. All he has to do is wait.



Jensen bites down on the tip of his thumb as he stares at the reply from Jared. He'd been so nervous to send the message, nearly deleting it three times before finally hitting send.

But now he's smiling, and he's wearing Jared's jacket. It smells like him and Jensen sort of wants to leave it on forever. He sighs, a small smile playing at his lips as he pulls the sleeves of the jacket over his hands. He stares at the wall and loses himself in a daydream. It's not something he often allows himself to do.

"Hey." Jensen jumps, nearly falling off of the bed as he whips around to look at the doorway of his room. Mackenzie is standing there, strawberry blonde hair falling in her face as she bites down on a thumbnail, half covered in chipped pink polish.

"Oh, hi," Jensen says, clearing his throat and shifting his hips a little. He gives her a tiny smile that feels incredibly fake and reaches up to scratch the back of his neck.

His relationship with his little sister is sort of awkward. One day they'll get along and the next he's just her weird older brother. But right now she's looking at him like she cares, like she wants to keep him rather than disown him.

"How's school going for you?" Mackenzie asks, coming into his room and shutting the door. Jensen rolls his lips into his mouth because his first instinct is to smile at the question and that's odd. He raises an eyebrow as Mackenzie roams idly around his sparse bedroom and randomly touches things.

"It's...good, I guess," Jensen says carefully, looking up at her. "Better than the last. How about you? I know you were sad about leaving."

“Well, as it turns out,” she starts, heaving a dramatic sigh. “Seventh grade is no more or less awesome no matter what school you’re suffering through it in.”

“That’s what you’re doing? Suffering?” Jensen asks. He’s not sure she knows the meaning of the word. She just shrugs and plops down on Jensen’s bed like they do this all the time.

“No, I’m – it’s nice here,” she admits. She shrugs her shoulders like that’s her apology for how much of a brat she was about the whole thing. “I’ve made some friends.”

“That’s good,” Jensen says, nodding as he stares down at the frayed edges of his sleeves. He imagines Jared picking at the loose threads, always moving. Mackenzie pushes his shoulder playfully and leans in to rub his back. Jensen furrows his brow. This is new.

“And you,” she begins, clearing her throat and starting over. “You seem – well, happier. You’re different almost.”

“What?” Jensen asks. He jerks away from her and turns to face her with wide eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Whoa, calm down.” she laughs and holds her hands up, flipping her hair over her shoulder. “I’m just saying. You smile more. Or well, you smile. Period. That’s good. Did you make some friends?”

“Uh, yeah,” Jensen says, taking a deep breath and meeting her curious gaze. “I think I did.”

“I’m happy,” Mackenzie says, clapping him on the shoulder and getting up. “Because they make you happy.”

She nods at him as she leaves the room and closes the door behind her. Jensen blinks a few times, shaking his head with a small smirk. His baby sister is an enigma, but then again, pretty much all girls are that way to him.

Jensen reads the reply from Jared again. He smiles to himself before putting the phone on the nightstand and falling back onto his bed. The sheets are soft and the moon is a bright orb hanging just outside his window. He sighs happily and lets his eyes slip shut.

He falls asleep wearing Jared’s jacket.



On Monday Jared gets to first period a little late. Sadie had gotten out of the yard and Jared spent half an hour chasing her in his pajamas. She’d thought it was a game, ducking and dodging and refusing to come when Jared called her.

He needs to spend a little more time training his dogs.

He has a slight scowl on his face when he finally trudges into his English class with a tardy slip in his hand. He forgets why he was even upset when he looks over to see Jensen watching him. His messenger bag is slung across the empty desk next to him like he's saving it for someone. For Jared.

He hands his late slip over to Mrs. Chandler and practically bounces down the aisle to the back of the classroom. Jensen pulls his bag off of the desk as Jared drops into it. Jensen gives him a soft smile and Jared grins back, biting down on his lip when Jensen lets out a soft snort.

"What?" He mouths. Jensen glances at the teacher before leaning over and plucking something out of Jared's hair. He holds up a leaf and Jared rolls his eyes, smacking it out of Jensen's hand. He lifts up his desk to move it closer but Jensen holds up a shiny new copy of their textbook with a small shrug. Jared deliberates for a moment and scoots closer anyway.

He rifles through his bag for a Hershey's Hug and sets it on Jensen's desk, same as he's done every morning since that first time. Jensen smiles as he pulls it over and picks it up. He unwraps the candy and pops it in his mouth, sucking on it as he wads up the foil and flicks it at Jared. It hits him in the middle of the forehead and Jared's jaw drops as Jensen laughs silently.

This is incredible. He's never seen Jensen in such a good mood before.

The teacher stops talking soon after that, letting them loose to work on their essays. Jensen takes his notebook out of his messenger bag and opens it to a page of notes taken down in small, neat font. Jared doesn't have notes. He was too busy staring at Jensen to take any.

"How was your weekend?" Jared asks once the volume in the room starts to climb. Jensen shrugs, dragging his eraser over a doodle in the corner of his paper.

"Long," Jensen says, wrinkling up his adorable little nose. Students are usually happy when their weekends seem long, but Jared gets what Jensen means. It was unbearably long. Almost endless. "So, what secluded location are you dragging me off to today?"

"Well, actually," Jared says, tapping his pen against his paper, "I know this great little place called the cafeteria."

That gets Jensen to look over at him, one brow raised over the rim of his glasses. He looks confused and just a little nervous. Jared runs his hand through his hair and leans in slightly.

“You’ve gone and made yourself a mystery,” Jared tells him, and Jensen just blinks. “My friends want to officially meet you.”

“But you’re friends with everyone,” Jensen says like he’s only half joking. Jared laughs slightly at the apprehensive expression on Jensen’s face. “I don’t want to meet everyone.”

“Okay, my *best* friends,” Jared clarifies. “They want to meet you. Have lunch with us?”

“Jared, I don’t –“ Jensen starts, but Jared pokes him in the shoulder. He gives Jensen a reassuring smile and touches his wrist, fingers barely brushing the jut of bone.

“It’ll be fun,” he says, pleading Jensen with his eyes. “I promise.”

“Okay.” Jensen relents and smiles nervously. “I’ll be there.”



Jensen sort of hides in the bathroom for five minutes after the lunch bell rings, sitting on a toilet and chewing on his thumbnail.

He has two options here. He can chicken out, find Jared later, and apologize. He’s pretty sure Jared would forgive him and then Jensen could continue to keep Jared to himself, selfishly making him ditch his friends day after day. But Jensen doesn’t want to be that person.

The other option is to suck it up, to go out to the damn cafeteria even though he feels seconds away from throwing up. He doesn’t understand why he’s so nervous – if these people are half as wonderful as Jared he has nothing to worry about.

Jensen sighs and gets up, trying not to glance at his reflection in the mirror on his way out the door. He walks down the hall slowly, gnawing on his lip as he enters the cafeteria with his head lowered. Someone grabs the back of his shirt and he jumps, whirling around so fast he finds himself chest to chest with Jared, the taller boy’s arm wrapped around him and Jensen’s hand on his chest.

They stare at each other for a moment; Jensen’s face tipped up towards Jared’s, mere inches apart. He watches as Jared’s eyes go dark, cheeks flushing pink as his fingers stay curled in Jensen’s shirt. Jensen can feel his own cheeks fill up with blood and his pulse pound in his ears as his hand stays pressed against Jared’s body.

“Hi,” Jared breathes. His hand slides down to the small of Jensen’s back before he steps away. Jensen blinks a few times, eyes flicking down to his hand as it slides down and off Jared’s chest. “Thought you were gonna bail on me.”

It takes a few tries for Jensen to get his voice back.

“Wasn’t,” he finally breathes. Jared’s answering smile is radiant. It’s like the world starts up again. Jensen suddenly remembers where they are, realizes what they were *doing*, and he takes another step back. Jared’s eyes dim a little and he feels slightly guilty.

They get in the food line and Jensen grabs items blindly. All he can think about is the way Jared felt up against him, his arm wrapped firm and tight around Jensen’s waist. He closes his eyes as conflicting emotions tear at his belly. He shouldn’t be feeling like this. Shouldn’t *want* this.

But God help him, he does.

Jared nudges him with his shoulder once they get to the register, jarring him from his thoughts. They pay for their food and Jared leads him towards his normal table with one giant hand pressed against the small of Jensen’s back as they maneuver through the crowd.

Once they reach the table everyone stops talking and turns to look at him. Jensen forces himself to keep his head up and even manages to smile.

“Is this the illustrious Jensen?” The girl is tiny, with pretty almond eyes and long brown hair. Jared has talked about his friends enough that Jensen can guess who they all are. The girl that just spoke is obviously Sandy, and the girl pressed up against her side has to be Sophia. The blond guy is Chad and the blue-eyed guy must be Misha. Jensen sort of feels like he knows them all already.

“It is.” Jared laughs and sets his tray down as he sits at one of the round table’s four benches. There isn’t an empty one so Jensen is forced to sit next to him, thighs pressed tight together and elbows knocking. “Jensen, this is Sandy and Sophia. And that’s Chad and Misha. They’re all crazy and you don’t have to listen to a word they say.”

“Hi Jensen!” They all chirp, and then they crack up together.

“We’re like the goddamn Bradys,” Chad says as he throws a tater tot at Misha. “Fuckin’ pathetic.”

“Your face is fucking pathetic,” Misha retorts. He throws a celery stick and hits Chad right between the eyes. “Fifty points!”

“That’s it,” Chad growls. “I’m about to commit a hate crime.”

“Let’s try to behave for once,” Jared says. He glares playfully at Chad who just sticks his tongue out in return. The light catches on the shiny metal stud piercing it and Jensen’s eyes widen.

“So, Jensen,” Sandy says sweetly. “Where’d you move from?”

“Texas,” Jensen says slowly, fiddling nervously with the cap of his soda bottle. “Near Dallas.”

“Ooh, that’s quite a change,” Misha replies, leaning in and looking interested. “How are you handling all the *scary liberals* out here in California?”

“Well, I haven’t burst into flame yet,” Jensen says. The unexpected joke surprises him. He knocks on the table top with shaky fingers. “So, there’s that.”

“Gorgeous *and* funny,” Sophia says in a rough voice. “Better hang onto this one, Jay.”

“Anyway,” Jared says quickly. Jensen blushes and ducks his head. “I’m meeting with Jane tomorrow after school.”

“GLSEN Jane?” Chad asks.

“Yeah,” Jared replies. “She’s going to give me the info for this year’s Day of Silence so we can start making preparations.”

“Oh, awesome,” Misha exclaims, clapping his hands together. “It’s always hilarious to watch you try and shut up for an entire day.”

“Screw you. I can totally stay quiet for one day,” Jared retorts, raising his nose haughtily in the air. Everyone else at the table snorts and Jared rolls his eyes. “Whatever. I *can*.”

“I still say we should make buttons that say *STFU for Awareness!* on them,” Chad says excitedly. “Black Helvetica on pink. They’d be a total fucking hit.”

“And they’d get confiscated just like your *Jared/Chad in 08, bitches!* campaign buttons did,” Jared replies, flicking a tater tot at Chad.

“Jesus! The next person that throws something at me is getting that something shoved up their fucking ass,” Chad screeches, and then snorts. “But you two would probably enjoy it.”

“Can we not talk about ass play while I’m eating?” Sophia adds. “At least give Jensen a chance to settle in before you get vulgar.”

“Oh BTW, Jensen,” Chad says, leaning across the table. Jensen raises a startled eyebrow and leans back slightly. “I’m fucking vulgar. Just an FYI.”

“Quit speaking in acronyms, Chad,” Jared tells him. “I swear to god.”

“DIAF,” Chad replies simply. Jared chucks another tater tot at him. “Oh, that’s *it*.” Chad

stands up and everyone except Jensen throws something at him. Chad sighs and plops back down. “FML.”

Jensen has no idea what Chad is saying, but everyone else seems to have no trouble understanding him.

“What’s Day of Silence?” Jensen asks curiously, picking at the crust of his pizza. Everyone looks over at him and Jensen ducks his head.

“They didn’t have a GSA at your old school?” Sandy asks. Jensen thinks of what Jared told him the acronym stands for, *gay-straight alliance*, and his lips curve up into a bitter smirk.

“No,” he replies quietly, staring down at the table and curling in on himself slightly. “Nothing like it.”

Jared’s foot knocks against his under the table and Jensen glances over at him. Jared smiles reassuringly and hooks his foot around Jensen’s ankle. The touch makes Jensen feverish and he shivers against the desire to pull away and push closer at the same time. He stays sitting perfectly still – a compromise.

“Well, GLSEN stands for gay, lesbian, and straight education network and as the acting president of our GSA, I work closely with them,” Jared starts. He seems to be aware that the subject matter is making Jensen uncomfortable. Jensen knows he could change the subject and Jared wouldn’t be offended.

But as uncomfortable as he may be, he still wants to learn the things he was never allowed to be taught. He’s already sitting with the kids that support and defend what he was raised to stand against. He’s sitting with a boy, pressed warm and intimate against his side. He’s already breaking all the rules. He might as well go all the way.

He presses his foot against Jared’s and nods for him to continue.

“Day of Silence is an annual GLSEN sponsored event. It’s a day of action to bring attention to the silencing of LGBT students and their allies,” Jared says, giving Jensen a meaningful look that makes his cheeks heat up. “We take a day-long vow of silence to symbolize those who stay quiet because of who they are. Those who think they *have* to stay quiet.”

People like *me*, Jensen thinks. There is a nationwide event to support people just like him, people who are too afraid of what they are to even speak. And then there are people like Jared and his friends to fight for them. His throat is dry and he swallows, unable to tear his gaze away from Jared. He can’t even find words now.

“Oh,” he finally gets out. Jared gives him a small smile.

“Whatever,” Chad says, making Jared look away from Jensen. “I’m totally getting the *STFU for Awareness!* buttons made.”

“Fine, but it’s on your dime,” Misha tells him, waving a plastic fork menacingly. “We don’t have enough in our fund to spend on something that’s just going to end up decorating the bottom of all the teacher’s trash cans.”

“You mean alongside your dignity?” Chad asks innocently. Misha hits him with another tot. “You know Misha, you should really think about cutting back on carbs.” He throws the tot back at Misha and it pegs him in the chest, leaving a little greasy mark on his shirt. Misha just sighs.

“Or you two should just find an empty classroom and get it the fuck over with,” Sophia says, smirking and raising an eyebrow. Chad and Misha just share a startled look and shut up. “Hate to eat and run, but I have to drop off a book at the library before class.” She turns her attention towards Sandy and leans in close. “See you after school, baby?”

“Yep,” Sandy replies. Sophia grins before leaning in to kiss her on the mouth. Jensen stiffens, eyes darting around the cafeteria quickly. No one seems to be paying the girls any attention. Jensen cautiously glances back towards the kissing girls with his back ramrod straight and shoulders tense.

He’s never seen two people of the same sex kissing before, and now that he knows no one in here seems to care he allows himself to look.

He thinks of what his parents would say, how they would call his new friends disgusting sinners and talk about how they’re going to burn in hell.

But Jensen doesn’t see that. He just sees two people in love and he can’t understand what is supposed to be so *wrong* about it.

Jared’s long fingers circle Jensen’s wrist. His thumb presses into Jensen’s palm and rubs back and forth. Jensen looks down at their hands, noticing the way his fingers twitch towards Jared’s without his permission. Jared is staring ahead and no one would even know he was paying attention to Jensen if it weren’t for the way he was cradling Jensen’s wrist so delicately under the table.

Jensen looks at Sandy and Sophia again, watching as they pull apart. Sandy tucks a lock of hair behind Sophia’s ear and Jensen can damn near see the hearts in her eyes.

He glances over at Jared and lets his eyes drift down to his lips. They’re pink and soft-looking, curling up at the edges in a near permanent smile.

Jensen looks at them, licks his own lips, and thinks about – well.

He just *thinks*.



Jensen excuses himself from the lunch table a little early, claiming he has to drop off a paper at the office before heading to his class at the opposite end of campus. Jared can't think of an excuse that would allow him to go with Jensen; his own class is in the opposite direction.

So instead he tries very hard not to watch Jensen leave and doesn't even care that he fails miserably. When he turns back to face his friends they're all looking at him with sympathetic, concerned expressions.

"What?" Jared asks. His smile fades a little.

"Nothing," Sandy says quickly, sharing a look with Sophia. "He's adorable."

"It's just," Misha starts. He sighs a little. "He's so *scared*. He doesn't look like he's going to come out any time soon."

"No, I know," Jared is quick to say. "We're just going to be friends."

He's met with four matching blank stares. He can feel his cheeks heat up and he ducks his head so they can't see the way their doubt makes him ache. He needs them to understand and have hope that this can all end well.

"Right, Jared," Sophia says. "You're already totally gone for this boy. I've never seen you all smitten like this."

"Fine," Jared admits in a somewhat snippy voice. His shoulders slump in defeat. "I like him. A lot."

"I just don't see this ending well," Chad supplies as he wipes tater tot grease from his lips. "There's a lot of shit in the way."

"Thank you all for the vote of confidence." Jared's voice is sardonic and a little defeated. His friends all sigh and lean in.

"We just don't want to see you get hurt," Misha says earnestly. Jared flicks his bangs out of his eyes. "You *or* Jensen."

"Yeah, Jared." Sandy leans across the table to touch his hand. "We like Jensen. He's

sweet.”

“Good,” Jared says defiantly. “Because he’s going to be around a lot.”

“Jared – “ Misha starts, but he’s cut off by their friend Adam dropping down next to Jared and putting his arm around him.

“What’s up, moody blues?” Adam asks. He leans forward to snag a tater tot from Chad’s tray as he flicks his jet black hair out of his eyes. “Why’s everyone so *somber*?”

“What’s up, Glambo?” Chad asks amusedly, allowing everyone to dodge the question. Adam is a good friend but he doesn’t need to be a part of this particular conversation.

“Jared,” Adam says urgently. He grabs Jared’s shoulders and forces him to turn and look at him. “Who was that delectable morsel that was just sitting here? Talk about *beauty*. He’s new, right?”

Jared swallows hard. Adam is, well, pretty much the definition of flamboyant. He came out with a vengeance their sophomore year, much to the shock of absolutely no one. Jared loves Adam, truly he does, but he takes a look at the chipped black polish on his fingernails and the black kohl smeared around his eyes and swallows hard.

“That’s Jensen,” Jared tells him. “But Adam, he’s sort of – “

“He’s *super* closeted,” Chad interjects, and Jared glares at him. Adam makes a sad clucking sort of noise and pets Jared’s head.

“Honey,” he begins, “the boy looks like he’d burst into tears if I walked up to him. He’s just not ready for me.”

“The world isn’t ready for you, babe,” Misha tells him. Adam sticks his tongue out at him and holds up his middle finger.

“*Anyway*,” Adam continues, still holding Jared tight. “Don’t you worry, baby. There’s a love story brewing here, I just know it.”

Jared can’t help it – he grins. Adam’s constant optimism is something he really needs right now.

“My work here is done,” Adam declares, leaning in to kiss Jared’s temple. “I need to go find my wifey before class. She has my favorite lip gloss.”

“Say hi to Danny for me!” Jared calls out as Adam scampers off. Jared chuckles and shakes his head before turning back to his friends. “See?”

“Well, if the fairy god-homo says it’s going to be fine, who are we to argue?” Chad asks, batting his eyelashes innocently.

Jared hits him in the forehead with the very last tater tot.



Jensen begins to settle into a routine. Jared’s friends welcome him into the fold with open arms and more than that, Jensen is glad. He likes these people. He likes Chad’s vulgarity, Sandy’s sweetness, Sophia’s feistiness, and Misha’s incredible intelligence. So yeah, he likes them.

But not as much as he likes Jared.

After a casual conversation brings out that they live in the same neighborhood they start walking home together on the days Jared doesn’t have some after school function (which regrettably isn’t often). Some days Jensen even waits for Jared in the library, doing homework or reading a new book until Jared swings by to get him.

It beats going home to his mother.

Every morning starts the same. They sit together in English class, desks moved closer together. They smile at each other with their cheeks flushed pink from the cold and maybe something else, and Jared gives him a Hershey’s Hug. It never changes and it’s a routine Jensen has come to love. He doesn’t know what he’d do without his morning chocolate fix.

His eighteenth birthday comes and goes with little fanfare. His parents take him out for an awkward dinner more out of obligation than desire and Jensen casually mentions it to Jared in class the next morning. By lunch that day Jared manages to conjure up a cupcake and everyone at the table sings happy birthday to him. Jensen blushes at the attention, but all their voices are so terribly off key that Jensen can’t help but laugh as he bites into the chocolate treat.

It’s nice, this friendship he and Jared have developed. But Jensen isn’t foolish. He knows that what they have could be so much more. It’s been weeks of casual touches, heated glances, and flirty remarks. At least Jensen thinks Jared is flirting. He doesn’t have much experience in the area. Or any, really.

Problem is, Jared makes him think too hard.

He thinks about Jared all the time. He thinks about Jared in class and when he’s studying. Thinks about him at night and wakes up with sticky boxers and presses his palms to his eyes, flushed with arousal and shame.

He's always warring with himself, constantly deliberating. It's like he's at a fork in the road and now he has to try to determine which way to go.

Jared is waiting for him; that much Jensen knows. Jared looks at him like Jensen holds his heart in his hands. One misstep and he could break it. The responsibility is nearly too much to handle.

He doesn't want to mess up, but he doesn't really know what to do. He wants to take that step; he thinks about it all the time. But he's still terrified and he doesn't have the faintest idea as to how to go about it.

After a few weeks he feels ready to crack, like a string drawn taut and ready to snap. He feels right on the precipice, on the edge of something life-altering.

So, of course, that's when it all comes crashing down.

"Josh is coming!" Jensen's mother shrieks. He nearly drops the dish he's trying to wash, hands all wet and slick with soap.

"What?" Jensen asks as he sets the plate down in the sink. "What do you mean?"

"Your *brother*," Donna says like he's slow, setting the cordless phone back down in its cradle. "He finally got some time off. You know how busy he is at the office. Anyway, he's coming to pick us up and take us to his place in the city for the weekend."

"I can't go," Jensen says impulsively. His eyes widen and he rolls his lips into his mouth.

"What do you mean you can't go?" She snaps, glaring at Jensen. He takes a step back and clenches his fists behind his back. "What's so important that you can't spend some time with your brother? We haven't seen him in *months*."

Truth is, Jensen can't think of anything he'd enjoy less than sitting on the sidelines while his parents fawn over his amazing, wonderful, successful big brother and his gorgeous wife. He just doesn't want to go. A few weeks ago he would have shut up and packed his bags, no matter how he felt about it.

But not now.

"I have a paper due," Jensen says. It's one of the only times Jensen has ever lied to his mother. To her face, at least. "It's important, and I need to spend the weekend working on it."

She looks at him with her face pinched with exasperation and disappointment. Jensen holds his breath.

“Fine,” she says as she waves her hand in the air. “Stay here, if you absolutely have to. Do you think you could find time in your busy schedule to have *dinner* with us at least? Think you can manage that?”

“Yes,” Jensen grits out, fingernails digging crescents into his palm. She just turns away from him and heads down the hallway. Jensen grips the edge of the counter and lets his head fall forward as he takes in a deep breath.

He finishes the dishes and then goes up to his room to hide and mentally prepare.

This is going to be hell.

Onto *Part 3*.

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/249714.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/249714.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 3)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:54:00 : 40-50 minutes

[Back to Part 2.](#)



Jared is right in the middle of a pretty deep REM cycle when his cell phone rings on the nightstand, loud and obnoxious. He jerks awake, fumbling for the phone and nearly falling off of the bed. He finally grabs it and answers without looking at the display. His phone ringing in the middle of the night is not all that uncommon.

“Hello?” He answers. His voice is rough with sleep. He hears a humorless chuckle on the other end and it registers as vaguely familiar.

“Hey.”

Jared sits straight up in bed, blinking a few times and looking at the clock. It’s after one in the morning and Jensen has never called him before. They text pretty regularly, but they’ve never talked on the phone. Somehow he doesn’t think Jensen is calling him this late just to chat.

“Jen? Are you okay?” He forces himself to sound calm even though he’s close to panicking. “What’s wrong?”

“*Knew it. Even your voice is pretty,*” he slurs. Jared frowns thoughtfully as Jensen hiccups and lets out a shuddering breath.

“Have you – are you *drunk?*” Jared asks while pushing his hair back from his face. Jensen laughs darkly. “What’s going on?”

“*We had a visitor today. My big brother Josh,*” Jensen says bitterly. His voice is tinged with sarcasm and thinly veiled disgust. “*He’s so wonderful, Jared. Best son any parents could ever ask for, you know that? No one else could ever compare.*”

“Jensen, come on,” Jared tries as he swings his legs over the side of his bed. He pinches the bridge of his nose, heart clenching at the defeated tone of Jensen’s voice.

“*He brought me a survival kit. You know what it was? Booze and a Penthouse. How’s that*

for a role model, huh?" Jensen pauses and sucks in a shaky breath like he's been crying. "Even if I wasn't a faggot I still could never measure up to Josh."

"Jensen!" Jared warns, wincing at the word and blinking at the sudden sting in his eyes. It's completely devastating that the first time Jensen ever actually acknowledges his sexuality it's with *that* word. "I don't ever want to hear you say that again, you hear me? Now be quiet before someone hears you."

"They're gone," Jensen replies sadly. "Went to stay with Josh and his pretty little wife all weekend."

"You're alone?" Jared asks. His throat goes bone-dry at the thought. He rolls out of bed and staggers across the room to step into his shoes, pulling a jacket on over his ratty pajamas.

"And you know what the saddest thing is? I looked at it, Jared. I fucking looked at that magazine and tried to see what they want me to see. I just don't get it. That's not what I want," Jensen says, voice going from angry to devastated. "I just want you, Jared."

Jared freezes halfway down the staircase and blinks away the sudden moisture in his eyes.

"Jensen, god," he breathes. The heartbreak is so evident in Jensen's voice. He barely spares the time to scribble a note for his mom before heading out of the front door. The air is freezing cold and he gasps at the sudden sensation of it on his face.

"You – you're so good, Jared," Jensen says in a shaky voice. "You're beautiful and for some reason you want me. Me! Why is it so wrong that I want you, too? Why can't I have you?"

"Calm down, Jensen, okay?" Jared says as he breaks into a jog. It's only about four blocks to Jensen's house but it could be miles as far as Jared is concerned. "I'll be right there."

"I just don't understand how someone like you could be bad," Jensen says, his voice thick with tears. "They're wrong. You're not bad, okay? And – I'm not, either."

"Neither one of us are, okay?" Jared replies. He sighs in relief as Jensen's house comes into view. "Can you please open the front door for me?"

Jensen lets out a little confused noise and Jared turns up the walkway just in time to see the front door start to open. He hangs up his phone and sticks it in his pocket as he jumps up onto the porch. Jensen looks up at him, eyes red-rimmed and wet. He looks so broken that Jared wraps his arms around him without hesitation.

It's the first time he's touched Jensen like this; the first time he's had him in his arms.

Jensen drops his cell phone and clutches at Jared's shoulder, burying his face in Jared's

neck. He lets out a tiny, broken sob and tears leak out of Jared's eyes as well. He cups the back of Jensen's head and keeps one arm around his waist, shuffling them into the house before he reaches back to shut the door.

"I'm sorry," Jensen snuffles as he slicks Jared's neck with his tears. Jared just holds him tighter and threads his fingers through the soft, short hairs at the base of Jensen's neck.

"Hey," he whispers in Jensen's ear. "You don't ever have to be sorry with me, remember?"

"I just – I can't *do* this anymore," Jensen cries, and Jared shushes him.

"You need to get some sleep," Jared tells him before pulling back to take Jensen's hand. Jensen looks down at their interlocked fingers and then back up at his face, giving him a tiny, watery smile. "There we go. Gorgeous."

He brings his free hand up to wipe away the tears from Jensen's cheeks before leading them to the stairs. They trudge up them silently and Jensen keeps a death grip on his hand the entire time.

Jensen leads them into a room with plain white walls and ordinary bedding. There is no imagination in this room. No pictures on the wall. Nothing strewn across the floor. Jared would feel so stifled if he had to live in here.

Jared pulls the covers back from the bed and kicks off his shoes before climbing in. He pulls Jensen down with him, curling his arms around him and tucking Jensen's head under his chin. Jensen stiffens but Jared just shushes him as he cradles the back of his head in one giant hand.

Jensen lets out a shuddering breath and relaxes, sagging against Jared. His wet eyelashes brush Jared's neck as he squeezes his eyes shut and Jared feels a tear slip down his own cheek.

Jensen doesn't deserve this. He's one of the greatest people Jared has ever had the pleasure of meeting and he shouldn't have to deal with this mass of confusion and pain. He should be happy.

Jared cards his fingers through Jensen's hair and rubs his back, letting Jensen cry silently into his neck. Jensen shifts and his bottom lip catches on Jared's neck, soft and full.

"I like you," Jensen whispers. His voice is tiny and breathless in Jared's ear. "I like you so much it scares me."

Jared doesn't know what to say. Of course he feels the same. He likes Jensen so strongly. It's an attraction and infatuation so quick and sudden it takes Jared's breath away. He's

wanted to hear those words from Jensen for so long, but it shouldn't be so painful.

"I like you too, Jensen," Jared whispers, rolling his lips into his mouth and biting down. The urge to kiss Jensen's forehead is almost impossible to resist. Jensen lets out a tiny sob and Jared squeezes his eyes shut, holding Jensen tighter. His face is burning hot against Jared's neck and he can smell the alcohol on his breath. "Just go to sleep and we can talk in the morning, okay?"

"Why is it so bad to want you?" Jensen asks, completely ignoring Jared's suggestion. "You're so beautiful, Jared. You care so much. And sometimes – "

He cuts himself off and Jared thinks maybe he'll finally shut up but instead Jensen shifts his weight. He cranes his head back and presses a sloppy kiss to Jared's jaw. He freezes and his eyes snap open as Jensen clumsily leans over him.

"God, sometimes I just *want*," Jensen mumbles as he leans in.

His intent is obvious. Jared turns his head at the last minute and Jensen catches his cheek instead of his mouth, full lips pressing against his skin. Jensen lets out a soft little noise, something pained. He pulls away from Jared, sitting up and cutting off all contact. "I'm – I'm sorry. I thought – oh god, I'm so stupid."

"No," Jared says insistently. He sits up and shifts around until he's positioned in front of Jensen. He has his eyes squeezed shut and his face is red and glistening with tears. "Jensen, look at me."

When he doesn't Jared cups his cheek in one tender hand, thumb sweeping under one eye softly until damp lashes flutter open. He looks ashamed and Jared scoots closer.

"Jensen, you have no idea how badly I want to kiss you," he says. His hand slides down so his thumb can just barely trace that plump bottom lip. "I've thought about it so many times. But Jen, it can't be like this."

Jensen just stares at him, eyes wide and feverish. Jared licks his lips and places a shaky hand on Jensen's knee. He leans in closer, so close their foreheads nearly touch.

"I want you to kiss me when you're smiling," Jared says shakily. He sucks in a shaky breath and looks into Jensen's haunted green eyes. "I want you to kiss me when I make you laugh. It should be something amazing, something that comes from some fun, spontaneous moment and I want it to be because you're happy, not because you're confused and upset, okay?"

"I don't know if I'll be able to," Jensen admits in a choked voice. Jared reaches up to put his

hands on Jensen's cheeks, pressing their foreheads together. His vision blurs slightly from the close proximity but he doesn't dare close his eyes and he's relieved to see that Jensen doesn't either.

"I will wait for you," Jared replies, voice rough and thick with emotion. Jensen lets out a tiny sob and reaches up to wrap his fingers around Jared's wrists. "I will wait as long as it takes, because I – well, I really care about you, Jen. I've never felt for anyone the way I feel for you."

"Neither have I," Jensen admits. Jared rubs their noses together, something soft and silly.

He lets out a sigh and strokes his thumb across Jensen's cheek.

"I'm sorry I showed up and started screwing up your life, Jen," Jared says, and he means that. He can't help but thinking that if he hadn't run up to Jensen that day in the cafeteria like some overeager puppy, Jensen would be fine right now. Still hiding himself, still unhappy, but maybe he wouldn't be crying – all torn up and twisted and wrecked.

"Don't ever apologize for that," Jensen says, suddenly stern. He squeezes Jared's wrists tightly and stares right into Jared's eyes. "You're the best thing that's ever happened to me, and I – I think you're saving me, Jared. You can't leave now."

"I won't," Jared says adamantly. "I'm here. I'm not leaving until you tell me to. Until you don't need me anymore."

"Well," Jensen sniffs, "I hope you're prepared to stick around."

Jared laughs then, small and shaky, and this time he just can't help but to press a tiny kiss to Jensen's forehead.

Jensen sighs, and it's almost a happy sound.



When Jensen wakes up the next morning it takes him a minute to understand exactly what is going on.

Someone clearly stomped on his skull. After stuffing his mouth with ash, obviously. And maybe kicking him in the stomach.

So this is a hangover.

That doesn't really explain the hot, heavy weight pressed up against his back. Jensen opens his eyes slowly and yawns so hugely his jaw cracks. Whatever it is, it's warm and

snuggly and protects him from the early morning chill seeping through the windows. He presses back against that heat and sighs deeply.

Jensen blinks and looks down. His eyes widen when he spots the tan, strong hand resting on his belly. His lungs sort of stop working and he turns his head slightly until he can feel Jared's silky hair against his cheek.

"Oh *god*," Jensen moans, scrambling off of the bed. He gets dizzy and staggers over to his bathroom door to clutch the frame for support. He slaps his hand over his eyes and sags against the wall. "Oh god!"

"Mm," Jared sighs. He squirms against the bed and stretches out his arms and legs. His tee shirt rides up and Jensen can see the tan expanse of his back, skin so soft and warm looking.

A *boy* slept in his bed. He slept with a boy in his *parent's* house. He isn't sure how to process that.

Jared rolls onto his side and opens his eyes, sleepy gaze landing on Jensen. He shrinks back against the wall and his hands slide into his hair. Jared sits up, bites down on his lip and holds up a hand.

"Don't freak out," Jared says obstinately as he swings his legs over the side of the bed. "You're not going to freak out, right?"

"Um," Jensen says. He sort of blinks a few times to stall. "Can I get back to you on that?"

"No." Jared gets off of the bed and comes to stand in front of Jensen. He tentatively reaches out to touch Jensen's cheek, the soft pad of his thumb swiping underneath his puffy eye. "You remember everything from last night, right?"

Jensen nods and his cheeks flush with embarrassment. Jared just smiles and tugs playfully on Jensen's earlobe.

"Good. So we're on the same page," Jared says, cupping Jensen's cheek again before dropping his hands. He puts them on his hips and looks around Jensen's sparse bedroom thoughtfully before finally shaking his head. "Yeah, this isn't gonna work for me. Wash your face, brush your teeth, and meet me downstairs."

"Huh?" Jensen replies. His skin still tingles from Jared's gentle touch. "Why?"

"We're going to my house," Jared tells him. Jensen raises an eyebrow. "Because no offense, dude? But your house is sort of like, immensely stifling. And I want to cure your wicked hangover."

“How’d you know I have a hangover?” Jensen asks as he rubs his temples. Jared just smirks and lets out a low chuckle.

“I’m best friends with Chad,” he says. “I know a hangover when I see one. Now seriously, I want you downstairs in ten minutes.”

“Um, okay.” Jensen nods slightly and turns towards his bathroom. Jared smiles and heads for the door.

“And don’t change out of your pajamas!” Jared calls over his shoulder. “We’re not doing shit all day and I want you comfy!”

Jensen snorts and shuts his bathroom door after flipping on the light. He grips the edge of the counter and stares at himself in the mirror. He looks pretty horrible – pale skin, bloodshot eyes, and cracked lips.

He washes his face and brushes his teeth, hissing when he takes a swig of mouthwash and it stings his lips. He relieves his bladder, washes his hands, puts on his glasses, and takes a deep breath before heading downstairs.

Jared’s back is to him when he reaches the dining room. He’s got one arm crossed against his chest and the other is holding a glass of water. He’s staring at the painting of the Last Supper hanging over the dining room table.

His mother is just classy like that.

“Oh, hey,” Jared says, turning around and holding out the glass. “Drink this. And take these.”

He drops two Tylenol into Jensen’s hand. He assumes Jared found them in the cabinet next to the refrigerator. He takes the pills and chugs the water even though it hurts his stomach. When he’s done he sets the glass on the counter and not in the sink like he’s supposed to.

“Ready to get out of here?” Jared asks, and Jensen nods so hard it hurts his head.

“Yes,” he breathes. He’s not even surprised by how much he means it.

They walk to Jared’s house in relative silence, Jensen all wrapped up in the sweatshirt Jared gave him. It’s freezing but Jared looks perfectly content in his light jacket and flip flops, hands stuffed in the pockets of his flannel pants.

The pants are actually pink with cupcakes on them, and Jensen doesn’t know how he didn’t notice that last night. It sort of terrifies him and makes him want to laugh at the same time.

It's still that quiet time of the morning. There's still dew on the plants and the birds are still chirping. Dedicated joggers are out with their dogs and their expensive shoes. They've all got headphones on and none of them pay any attention to the two teenagers walking down the street, even if one of them is wearing hot pink flannel pants covered in cupcakes topped with cherries.

Jared's house is a quaint one story tucked at the back of a cul-de-sac. It has a sagging porch and there are brown spots littering the front yard.

Jared unlocks the door and ushers Jensen in. He walks inside slowly and looks around with slight trepidation. He's never been to Jared's house before. The furniture looks old and used; sofa slumped slightly in the middle.

There are dishes in the sink and Jensen is nearly knocked over by two giant dogs. Once the initial shock wears off, he bends over to greet them just as enthusiastically as they greeted him.

"Hey guys!" Jensen chirps. He laughs when the bigger dog licks his face and knocks his glasses askew. He looks up to see Jared watching him fondly, hair falling in his face.

"What?" Jensen asks as his fingers dig into the dog's fur. The slightly smaller one nudges his thigh and he pets her as well.

"They like you," Jared says softly, reaching up to tuck his hair behind one ear. "Knew they would. They're excellent judges of character."

"What are their names?" Jensen asks. He stands upright again as the dogs appear to lose interest in the new arrival and wander back towards their beds.

"The big one is Harley," Jared tells him, "and Sadie is my baby girl." Jensen nods and fixes his glasses before looking around the room again.

"I like your house," he says. He glances over at Jared to see him appraising his home with critical eyes, seemingly cataloguing every imperfection. He finally shrugs.

"Meh, it's a dump," Jared says as he scratches the back of his head. "But it's home."

"No, it's –" Jensen trails off as he looks around the living room again. There's color on the walls, pictures of people smiling and laughing. There are stacks of DVDs everywhere and a dirty cereal bowl and spoon on the coffee table, surrounded by magazines and books. "It's great."

"Thanks," Jared says. "Go plop on the couch while I make you some breakfast."

“Jared, you don’t have to –“

“Go,” Jared says again, pointing towards the couch and trying to appear menacing. Jensen laughs softly and heads into the living room. He sits on the couch and glances at the blank screen of the television. There’s a sudden squeak to his left and it makes him jump. He looks over to see Sadie slobbering happily on a rubber ball and he smiles. “Remote’s on the table, Jen!”

Jensen looks down at the remote and snatches it, powering on the television and sinking back against the cushions. He flips through the channels and then turns on the guide. His eyes widen when he sees the time.

“I’m supposed to be at church right now,” Jensen says, mostly to himself.

“Oh yeah?” Jared asks. He flops down onto the couch next to Jensen. The sudden movement startles him and he jumps slightly. For someone so big and loud, Jared sure moves quietly.

“Yeah,” he says as he fumbles with the tie of his pajama pants. It feels sort of weird not being at church on a Sunday morning, but at the same time it’s a massive relief. It’s not exactly his favorite part of the week. “I take it you don’t go to church?”

“Nah,” Jared says flippantly. “Last time I tried, my skin started burning as soon as I walked through the door.” Jensen snorts at the slightly inappropriate joke. Then he thinks of what his mother’s face would look like and wants to laugh even harder.

“No,” Jared says quietly, brows furrowing as he looks down at his lap. “We used to go when I was a kid. But after my dad died my mom sort of stopped going. I guess it didn’t mean the same to her, you know? She lost her faith, I think.”

“Oh, Jared.” Jensen reaches out to put his hand on Jared’s knee without really thinking about it. “I’m sorry. I didn’t – how old were you?”

“Five,” Jared says, squirming a little. “I don’t really – how do you like your eggs?”

“Huh?” Jensen is a little stunned by the sudden change of subject. Jared jumps up, stretching his arms out and scratching at his belly.

“Eggs,” Jared repeats as he points towards the kitchen. Jensen blinks and sits back against the couch.

“Oh. Scrambled, I guess,” Jensen says, and Jared nods as he takes off for the kitchen. Jensen shakes his head and watches Sadie tear into her ball.

“Sadie, give it a rest!” Jared calls from the kitchen. All’s quiet for a moment, and then another loud squeak penetrates the silence. “Sadie!”

Sadie spits out the ball and it rolls across the floor. She huffs and flops back down on her cushion. Jensen laughs.

Jared comes out of the kitchen a few minutes later carrying two mismatching plates, one in each hand. He has a carton of orange juice tucked under one arm and two plastic party cups in his teeth.

“I would have come to help you, Jared!” Jensen gets up and takes the plates from Jared’s hands. He sets them on the coffee table and Jared sets down the orange juice and cups.

“Voila!” Jared shouts, waving a hand over the food with a flourish. “We have Eggos, scrambled eggs with cheese – you like cheese, right? – and fresh strawberries. Bitch, tell me I’m awesome!”

“You’re awesome.” Jensen laughs and Jared winks at him. He pours out two glasses of juice and flops down on the couch.

“I know. You don’t have to tell me.”

“You just – “ Jensen protests, rolling his eyes when Jared just winks again.

“Eat your breakfast,” Jared says as he snatches the remote. “I’m gonna put in a movie.” Jared rifles through a stack of DVDs on the end table and finally decides on one, holding it up for Jensen to see. “I’m assuming you’ve never seen *Empire Records*.”

“You’d be right,” Jensen replies. Jared makes a face before stepping up on the coffee table to jump over it and land in front of the television.

“Well, that shit ends here.” Jared puts the DVD in and jumps back over the table. Jensen doesn’t know why he doesn’t just walk around. That would probably be too easy. “Eat. No one likes soggy Eggos.”

Jensen grabs his plate and sets it in his lap, squashed into one side of the couch. Jared takes his plate and sits on the other side. That leaves an entire cushion separating them.

Jensen can’t help but to think that it’s just too much space.



It doesn’t take them long to plow through their food, and by the time they’re done Jensen looks a little better. His skin has some color to it and his eyes look a little brighter.

“Feel better?” Jared asks once Jensen chugs the last of his juice and sets the cup on the coffee table. Jensen looks over at him and smiles, lips all sticky and shiny.

Jared can't even describe how happy he is to have Jensen here with him, nestled into the cushions of his lumpy couch. He'd been terrified when he woke up that morning to the sight of Jensen quietly freaking out in the corner of his room and he's pleased at how well Jensen is handling the situation.

Jensen is *here*, eating breakfast with Jared in his pajamas on a Sunday morning, all wrapped up in Jared's jacket.

That alone is more than he ever dreamed of.

Jensen seems to be enjoying the movie, even laughing at various parts of it. Jared didn't pick *Empire Records* at random. He chose it because it deals with sensitive issues – sex, drugs, and suicide to name a few – but deep down it's a movie about kids with problems that just want to be happy with who they are.

It's a lesson Jensen could stand to learn.

Jared gets engrossed in the movie, and he's surprised to feel the cushions shift as Jensen scoots infinitesimally closer to him. His breath catches in his throat and he tries not to move.

If Jensen wants any more physical contact he's going to have to instigate it. That's been Jared's rule from the beginning. He breaks it sometimes by putting his hand low on Jensen's back when he's leading him somewhere or curling his fingers around Jensen's wrist when he gets nervous. He broke it last night because of extenuating circumstances. Jensen was falling apart, and Jared needed to hold him together. Desperate times call for desperate measures and all that.

There is no way that Jared can deny the effect having Jensen in his arms had on him. It made him dizzy and it made him ache. He craves it so bad he can taste it, but Jensen has to be the one to take that next step.

He has to know Jensen wants this as badly as he does, if that's even possible.

Jared watches Jensen out of the corner of his eye. It doesn't escape his attention that Jensen turns his head forward every time Jared looks to the side. Jensen bites down on his bottom lip and curls his fingers into a fist. He looks at his own hand and then over at Jared again, green eyes locking on Jared's hand resting lax against his thigh.

Jared wants to either laugh or cry; he isn't really sure which.

Jared faces forward and acts like he's completely unaware of Jensen's actions. It's cute how subtle he thinks he's being.

Jensen glances up at Jared's face and then down at his hand again. He slides his own hand across the cushion but stops halfway before pulling it back and furrowing his brow.

Jared brings his hand up to his mouth to cover a fake yawn before letting it fall to the cushion again, landing palm up in the middle of it. Jensen looks over at it, eyes flickering from Jared's face to his hand again, and Jared bites down on a smirk.

Jensen flexes his fingers a few times before sliding his hand out to meet Jared's. His fingertips skitter across his open palm and sends shivers down Jared's spine. He remains perfectly still as Jensen tentatively traces the lines of his palm, fingertip stroking across the small sliver of a scar he got from falling out of a tree when he was nine. Jensen plucks at his rubber bracelets and traces the veins in his wrist.

Jared finally spreads his fingers, still facing the television. His eyeballs sort of hurt from looking to the side for so long, but it's worth it when Jensen finally slips his fingers between Jared's. There's only a moment of hesitation before he squeezes slightly and brings their palms together.

Jensen lets out a deep breath and Jared ducks his head with a smile. He clutches Jensen's hand and rubs his thumb back and forth across the back of it.

It's sort of amazing how good holding hands with someone can feel. Jared just wants to sit there forever and let the warmth from his hand seep into Jensen's cool palm.

Jared doesn't say anything. He doesn't even really look at Jensen because he wants to keep this casual. Holding hands shouldn't be a big deal.

But it is. For Jensen, it's a giant fucking *leap*. Jared couldn't wipe the grin off of his face if you paid him.



Jensen's heart is pounding against his ribcage but he did it. He's holding Jared's hand. Jared's touch affects him the same as it always has – winds him up and calms him down at the same time, scares him and soothes him all at once. It's a strange juxtaposition that does funny things to Jensen's heart and his head.

Jensen scoots ever so closer during the rest of the movie, shifting until there's just enough space for their entwined hands to rest in the seam of their neighboring couch cushions.

The movie ends, the credits start to roll, and Jensen realizes he has no idea what happened in the second half. He was too busy concentrating on the feel of Jared's hand in his and the fluttering butterflies in his stomach to pay attention.

Jared leans forward to grab the remote and their grip on each other breaks apart. Jensen curls his fingers into a fist and feels his cheeks heat up. Jared presses himself back against the back of the couch, nestled in the corner like he doesn't plan on moving for awhile. He kicks his bare feet up on the coffee table and stretches his arm out along the back of the sofa. He gives Jensen a quick glance and then looks back at the TV, flipping idly through the channels.

Jensen looks up and down the expanse of Jared's side. He looks so warm and soft somehow, even with all that muscle and bone. Jensen's heart thumps against his ribcage so hard it's a wonder Jared can't hear it.

There's a choice to be made here. It scares Jensen how easily he reaches a decision.

Before he can think better of it Jensen curls his legs under himself and slides in to fit against Jared's side. He swallows hard and tucks his shoulder under Jared's arm, resting his head on Jared's shoulder and curling in slightly to put his hand on his belly.

"Mm," Jared sighs. He removes his arm from the back of the couch and curls it around Jensen's shoulders. His fingertips dip under the baggy sweatshirt to rest against his bare collarbone and Jensen shivers. "You good?"

Jensen lets out a deep breath and practically melts against Jared's side. They fit together seamlessly, all their dips and curves piecing together. Jared's fingers trail softly back and forth across his collarbone and his stomach is flat and hard under Jensen's fingers. Jensen's eyes droop and he sighs. It feels like he's finally relaxing for the first time in years.

"Yeah," Jensen breathes. Jared lets go of the remote to tangle his fingers with Jensen's on his stomach. Jensen smiles and his lips brush the collar of Jared's tee shirt. "I'm really good."

Jensen can think of a thousand reasons why he shouldn't be here. But then Jared slides his fingertips up the side up Jensen's neck and around the shell of his ear before burying his fingers in Jensen's hair, and for once it's not hard to push those things to the back of his mind.

Jared tries to explain the show playing on the television to him, something about a spy that got fired, but Jensen isn't really paying attention. Jared's hand keeps moving – petting at his hair, squeezing the back of his neck, and rubbing circles up and down his back. The tips of his fingers catch the hem of Jensen's shirt and brush against his bare skin before sliding

back up to his hair.

Jensen sighs happily, close to purring as his eyes slip shut. Jensen shoves his free hand in the small gap between Jared's back and the couch, settling in and squeezing Jared's hand again before falling asleep.



Jared dozes in and out well into the afternoon while Jensen sleeps on unperturbed.

He's completely knocked out, nearly unconscious against Jared's chest. He sleeps like someone who rarely gets the chance to. It's almost like he's making up for lost time. Jared doesn't disturb him because he knows Jensen needs the rest.

When his back starts to hurt he carefully shifts them into a more prone position so he can lie down as well. He keeps one leg pressed against the back of the couch and the other dangling off of the edge. Jensen just snuffles a little, tucking one of his legs between Jared's and curling his fingers in the front of Jared's shirt without waking up.

Jared bites down on a grin and wraps one arm snug around Jensen's torso. The front door opens and Jared holds out a hand and shushes the dogs sternly. They whine a little and wag their tails but they stay put, ears perked up.

His mom comes in, yawning blearily and hanging her purse up on the hook by the door. She worked the opening shift at the grocery store and apparently it's already over. Jared hadn't realized it had gotten to be the middle of the afternoon.

"Hey," she says. She freezes when she turns to see them on the couch. Jared holds a finger to his lips and she nods, silently tiptoeing around the back of the couch until she's standing over Jared's head.

Jensen, Jared mouths silently. Sherri just rolls her eyes and mouths back *no, really?* Sarcasm even in silence. Then Jared remembers his panicked note, a quickly scribbled *Jen needs me. Have my phone.* before running out the door the previous night.

"Is he okay?" She whispers, and Jared gently cradles the back of his head. He ponders the question for a moment and looks back up at her.

"He will be," he answers as quietly as he can. Sherri smiles and tucks a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Can I meet him?" She asks as she looks curiously at the boy all wrapped up in her son's arms. Jared bites his lip and slides his hand down Jensen's back slowly. Sadie ends up

making the decision for him when she finally lets out a sharp yip when she doesn't get the attention she feels she deserves.

Jensen shifts and then stiffens, looking up at Jared with wide eyes. He uncurls his hand from Jared's shirt and places it flat against his chest. Then his eyes finally drift over to Sherri and he scrambles into a sitting position. He looks from Jared to his mother and back with a terrified expression.

So much for being relaxed.

"Hi Jensen," she says warmly, smiling widely at him. "Wow, you're as gorgeous as Jared said you were. Didn't think that'd be possible, the way he goes on."

Jensen's cheeks flush bright red and he blinks. Jared huffs a sigh and sits up, glaring slightly at his mother.

"Oh wow," Jared breathes. "Embarrassment right off the bat. Thanks bunches."

"It's my job, kid," Sherri says, playfully tapping him on the back of the head. "Should be used to it by now."

"You'd think," Jared mumbles. "Jensen, this is my mom, Sherri. Mom, this is Jensen."

"It's so nice to finally meet you," Sherri says with a friendly smile, voice full of warmth. Jensen blinks again. He looks sleepy and confused and scared. Sherri's smile falters when Jensen doesn't reply and she looks at Jared askance before pointing her gaze at Jensen again. He finally snaps out of it, clearing his throat and smiling, shaky but polite.

"Hello," he says softly. He raises his head to shyly meet her gaze. "It's good to meet you, Mrs. Padalecki."

"Oh, no." She laughs and shakes her head. "None of that. It's Sherri, kid. Anything else makes me feel old. And I'm not old, am I?" She nudges Jared's shoulder and he smirks as he rolls his eyes.

"No ma'am." She smacks him again. Jared sighs exasperatedly.

"Smartass," she says fondly, and Jared laughs.

Jensen watches their exchange with wide eyes, like he had no idea mothers and sons actually joked around with each other. He keeps looking at Jared like he's waiting for him to get punished and Jared's smile fades a little.

"Are you staying for dinner, Jensen?" Sherri asks, clapping her hands together. "We have

some... leftover Chinese? Or, ooh! We could order a pizza!”

“I find it hilarious you work at a grocery store and there are never any groceries in the house,” Jared tells her. She puts her hand over his mouth and digs her fingertips into his cheeks. Jared goes fishface and flails, smacking her arm away from his face.

“I’d really like to,” Jensen says. He bites his bottom lip and gives them a sad smile. “But I should probably go home. But thank you, Mrs – Sherri.”

“Are you sure, sweetheart?” Sherri asks. Jensen looks up at the pet name, eyes going glassy. “We’d love to have you.”

“N-no, I should really go,” he gets out. Sherri nods and Jensen looks over at Jared, opening his mouth and then snapping it shut again. Jared gives his mom a meaningful look and she jumps a little, like she’s just realizing she might be intruding.

“Okay, Jensen,” she says. “It was really nice to meet you. Don’t be a stranger, okay? Our door is always open for you. Now I’m gonna go clean up.” She leans over the back of the sofa and kisses the top of Jared’s head. He scrunches up his nose and then she leans over and presses a quick kiss to the top of Jensen’s head as well. He looks surprised, blinking and looking up at her with an awed expression. “Be good, kids.”

She whistles as she leaves the room and disappears down the hall. Jared waits until he hears her door shut, loudly because the woman is anything less than subtle, and he looks back over at Jensen. He’s biting down on his lip so hard that Jared winces in sympathy.

“She’s...” Jensen says, trailing off and looking towards the hall. Jared raises an eyebrow.

“Weird?” Jared suggests. “Or quirky. She gets quirky a lot. It can’t be funny, no matter how much she thinks she is.”

“Amazing,” Jensen says, looking at Jared again. “You should be thankful.”

“I am,” Jared replies seriously. Jensen’s tone wipes the smile from his face. “I was joking. My mom – well, there’s no one better than her, you know?”

A bitter smirk mars Jensen’s face for a moment before he rolls his lips into his mouth, swallowing hard as he finally stands up. Jared gets up too, shaking out his still-slightly-numb left leg. Jensen runs his fingers through his hair and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. He looks around the room like he’s trying to memorize it, like he might not ever see it again.

“I’ll walk you home,” Jared offers. Jensen shakes his head.

“No, that’s okay,” he replies, shrugging one shoulder. “I don’t know if they’re back yet.”

“Alright.” Jared relents. He doesn’t want to push the issue. He walks Jensen to the door and reaches out to snag his wrist between his thumb and forefinger. “Hey, you know you’re welcome over here any time, right?”

“Thanks,” Jensen says, nodding a little before looking up to meet Jared’s eyes. Jared can’t look away, not even if he wanted to. “For, you know – everything.”

Jared contemplates brushing it off or shrugging his shoulders and saying it’s no big deal. Except that it is. So instead he curls his hand more firmly around Jensen’s wrist, thumb swiping across his palm. Jensen squeezes the digit and Jared smiles.

“You’re welcome,” Jared replies. “See you tomorrow?”

Jensen nods and Jared takes a chance, lifting the arm Jensen isn’t touching in a slight invitation. Jensen smiles and his eyes go a little glassy as he steps into Jared’s embrace. He doesn’t hug back, just squeezes Jared’s thumb in a death grip and buries his face in Jared’s neck. Jared swallows thickly as he wraps an arm around Jensen’s shoulders and hugs him tight against his chest for a long moment.

The end of Jared’s nose skims the shell of Jensen’s ear and he presses a tiny, barely there kiss to the freckled tip of it. He feels Jensen shudder and figures it’s time to pull away.

They share another long look, and then Jensen turns to leave. He shuts the door behind him and Jared presses his forehead against it, fighting the sudden urge to cry.

It feels like sending Jensen off to battle, sending him somewhere Jared can’t do anything to protect him.

Jared stands there for a long time with his forehead pressed against the cool wood of his front door. Harley comes over to him and whines as he presses his cold, wet nose into Jared’s palm.

A gentle hand presses between his shoulder blades and Jared opens his eyes. He turns around and looks at his mom with a pained expression. Her eyes crinkle just slightly at the corners as she watches him, and Jared buries his face in her shoulder.

“He’ll find his way,” she says, wrapping her arms around him and rubbing his back. He has to stoop to let her hug him like this and for a moment he fiercely misses being a little boy.

“He’ll be okay.”

“How do you know?” Jared asks miserably. His mom presses a kiss to the side of his head.

“He has you.”



Jensen gets a little sadder with every step he takes that brings him closer to home, because Jared’s house feels more like home than his house ever has.

And that’s depressing. A little scary too.

Like he’s been feeling so often lately, he isn’t sure what to make of everything that’s happened in the last twenty-four hours. All he knows is that being in Jared’s arms felt right, better than anything has ever felt before.

Too bad it’s apparently all wrong.

Jensen shakes his head and pinches the bridge of his nose, huffing out an angry sigh. He rounds the corner onto his street and stumbles to a halt when he sees the lights on through the window. Jensen is suddenly nervous, like they’ll be able to look at him and just *know* what he’s been up to, like his overwhelming affection and desire for this *boy* will be written in neon letters all over his blushing face.

He’s afraid they’ll look at him and see the hearts in his eyes.

Jensen walks into the house slowly with his head hanging low and his shoulders drooping like a heavy weight has just been laid across his back. His parents are in the living room, still dressed in their church clothes while Jensen is in his ratty sweats that he’s been wearing for going on two days.

“Jensen,” his father says, looking sternly at him. Golf is playing on the television and a bible is open on the pristine coffee table. Jensen tears his eyes away from it, equal parts ashamed and annoyed. “Where have you been? We’ve been calling you.”

“Oh,” Jensen says. He pats the pockets of his jacket and then his pants and comes up empty. His eyes widen and he glances under the table in the foyer, where his phone skittered to when he dropped it the night before. The battery must have died. He leaves it there. “I went to the library to read up on my paper. I must have forgotten my phone.”

“You went to the library looking like *that*?” His mother sneers as she looks him up and down. “We don’t pay for your phone so you can leave it when you go out, you know.”

“I know,” Jensen says with eyes trained on his shoes. “I’m sorry.”

They quiet down after that, losing interest in him now that they’ve exhausted their reasons

to be mad at him. Jensen takes the opportunity to flee and scurries up the stairs two at a time.

He shuts his bedroom door and heads into the bathroom. It takes only a second for his chest to get tight, breath hitching as he undresses and climbs into the shower. He makes the water as hot as he can stand it and lets it burn his skin as he grips the sides of his head.

He's just – he's *feeling* too much. It's devastatingly overwhelming and he doesn't know how to handle it. He tries to pin down exactly what it is that he's feeling, but it's impossible. It's like trying to catch smoke.

First, there's happiness. Jared is amazing, and the way Jensen's heart expands and constricts when he's in the same room as him is like nothing he's ever felt before. The pure elation he feels when Jared touches him, when the pads of his fingers and the thin skin of his lips brush hesitantly across his skin, is something he never thought he *could* feel.

There's still that little voice in his head that sounds suspiciously like his mother's, screaming that what he's doing is disgusting. It's a sin, wanting to be with Jared like that, letting Jared touch him. He should be ashamed of himself. He should feel guilty for going against everything his parents have ever taught him.

And he's sad that he has to be at war with himself and doubt something that makes him happy for the first time in his life just because of something he isn't even sure he believes in.

Then there's the anger. *Why should* he be ashamed of what he feels for Jared? Why should he disavow something so all encompassing and intense that it takes his breath away day after day? His heart pounds when he sees Jared's face and his knees go weak when Jared smiles. Jared makes him feel like he's worth something, like maybe he's special, and that's *wrong?*

So he's happy, but he's ashamed of it. He's sad that he's ashamed, and angry that he's sad.

That's when Jensen starts to cry.

Harsh, hiccupping sobs escape his lips with a sudden force that shocks him, and he leans back against the wall of the shower and buries his face in his hands. It's too much. He can't deal with all of this. He can't handle so many conflicting emotions warring inside of him.

It's tearing him apart.

Sure, Jensen's been sad for a long time. This thing with Jared has been eating him up

inside and he's been keeping secrets for years, but he's never let himself cry. Not like this.

But he can't take it anymore. He cries until he exhausts himself, until he feels raw and hollowed out and the water is running cold against his skin.

Being happy shouldn't be so hard. Finding the missing piece of your heart shouldn't make it feel like it's breaking.

The soft touch of reverent hands on trembling skin shouldn't feel like drowning.

But it does.

Onto [Part 4](#).

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/249588.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/249588.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 4)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:54:00 : 52-66 minutes

Back to [Part 3](#).



Jared is a little nervous when he walks into first period on Monday morning.

He isn't sure what Jensen's reaction to their weekend together will be now that it's over and they're back to the daily grind. Jensen is floundering and it's difficult to predict what he'll do next.

Jared takes his usual seat in the back and slings his bag over the empty desk next to him. Jensen trudges in moments later and even from across the room Jared can see how tired he looks. After all the sleep he got the day before, that doesn't bode well.

Jensen drops down into his desk when Jared pulls his bag off of it and he sighs, resting his chin in his hand and looking over at Jared. He offers up a tiny smile, green eyes apprehensive as he looks Jared over.

"Hey," Jared says, smiling at him and giving him a dorky little wave. Jensen gives him a flicker of another smile and then the bell rings. Mrs. Chandler starts writing something on the board and Jensen's hand drifts towards the corner of his desk. It's a Pavlovian response Jared is pretty sure he isn't even aware of.

Jared's stomach flutters as he leans over to reach into the front pocket of his bag, fingers closing around the candy hidden there. He takes a deep breath before sitting up again and setting the candy on the corner of Jensen's desk, same as every morning.

Jensen's fingers close around it instinctively, eyes on the whiteboard as he brings his hands together to unwrap it. Jared swallows and fears his gesture will go unnoticed. But then Jensen looks down and furrows his brow when he notices the plain silver wrapper.

Every single morning since they started sharing this class over a month ago Jared has given Jensen a Hershey's Hug. It was a gesture of friendship, a happy routine for Jensen to settle into.

But now, for the first time, it's a Hershey's Kiss that rests in Jensen's open palm.

Jensen looks down at the candy and then over at Jared, eyes widening and cheeks flushing pink. Jared just smiles hopefully and gives a slight nod, gesturing for Jensen to go ahead and eat it.

Jensen bites down on his lip and stares at the Kiss in his hand as his eyes glisten slightly. Jared knows Jensen understands what he's trying to say. Since the very beginning Jared has offered to be Jensen's friend. But now – now he's offering to be more. He's offering to be whatever Jensen wants, and all he has to do is reach out and take it.

Halfway through class, Jensen slowly unwraps the chocolate and puts it in his mouth. He spends the rest of the period idly flattening the piece of foil with his fingernail, brows furrowed thoughtfully. When the bell rings Jensen looks over at Jared for a moment before slipping the foil in his pocket and heading out the door.

Jared doesn't know what to make of it.

He has trouble paying attention in his next couple classes. He manages to catch a basketball to the face in Gym due to his spacing out, and then eats nearly his entire bag of Kisses in Government. He subsequently has a stomachache all the way through Spanish, and then it's time for lunch.

He tries to remain optimistic as he walks towards Jensen's Trig class. It's on the way to the cafeteria and they've been meeting there since they started having lunch regularly. Class seems to have been let out late, because students start bursting out the door just as Jared is walking up. Danneel is leading the way and she flips her hair over her shoulder and tosses Jared a silly wink when she sees him. Jared breaks out of his funk long enough to blow her a kiss, their same old routine. He's known her since first grade, and she was just as awesome and crazy then as she is now.

Jensen is one of the last few stragglers to leave the classroom. He has his head bowed and his hands stuffed in his pockets.

"Hey," Jared says as he walks up to him. "Ready for lunch?"

"Uh," Jensen says, clearing his throat and looking slightly to the left. "I'm not really hungry? I was going to, um, go to the library and work on a project."

Jared smiles wanly. This he was expecting. He gestures a little further up the hall, coaxing Jensen out of earshot of students milling around the classroom door. Jared leans in slightly, close enough that only Jensen can hear him but far enough away that they don't look like anything more than two friends talking.

"Jen." Jared meets Jensen's nervous gaze before continuing. "What happened over the

weekend was a big deal, okay? I completely understand if you need some time alone to process or whatever. Just tell me that. You know you can always be honest with me, right? I'm not going to get mad if you tell me what you're thinking, no matter what the thought might be."

Jensen stares at him for a long time, mouth slightly agape and eyes wide open.

"How do you always *do* that?" He finally asks, and Jared blinks. "How do you always know exactly what I'm thinking?"

"Because," Jared says with a casual shrug. "You're not the first one to think it. You're not alone in this." When Jensen just looks at him apprehensively, Jared gives him a reassuring smile and continues. "Jen, it's fine. Go to the library if you want. I have a stomachache, so I'm not hungry, and it's sort of warm outside so I'm probably just going to go outside and find a sunny spot to bask in."

"Why does your stomach hurt?" Jensen asks. His concern for Jared seems to outweigh his apprehensiveness and Jared smiles as he pats his belly.

"I may have eaten like, half a pound of candy," Jared says sheepishly, and Jensen smirks. "That's not important. Are you going to the library?"

"Well, I'm not *now*," Jensen says with a roll of his eyes. "If I stupidly try to avoid you because I'm scared when you *know* I'm stupidly trying to avoid you, I'd feel like an asshole; on top of it being completely pointless."

The response is so unexpected and honest that Jared cracks up and has to lean against the lockers for support. Jensen blushes and smiles sheepishly, shrugging his shoulders.

"Now, I believe you mentioned basking in the sun?" Jensen catches Jared's eye and Jared smirks fondly. "I think I can handle basking."

Jared grins and flicks his hair out of his face before leading Jensen toward the back of campus. He happens to know that the baseball field is being used for practice, but the girl's softball field at the back of campus is totally empty.

Jared wordlessly heads out to the middle of the outfield where the sun is warmest and brightest and flops down onto his back. He makes a big show of his basking by spreading out all his limbs and tipping his face up towards the sun.

Jensen snorts and sits down next to him, resting his elbows on his bent knees. They're all alone out here and Jared reaches up to grab the back of Jensen's shirt and pull. Jensen flops down next to him and looks over at Jared, squinting against the sun. Jared smiles,

closes his eyes, and relaxes into the short cut grass.

Minutes later he feels Jensen's hand slide over the top of his. He squeezes for a moment before he curls his pinkie finger around Jared's.

It makes him feel warmer than the sun.



The week gets better after that.

Jensen feels a lot better after his little mental breakdown. Everything was bottled up to the point of festering and now that he's let it all out he feels like he can breathe again.

He had formulated a plan; he was going to take some time to himself now that could think a little more clearly and really examine the myriad of emotions rushing through him at breakneck speed. He decided to avoid Jared for a little while because he was afraid seeing him would make him forget all about his plan.

That's pretty much exactly what happened. But rather than winding him up again, Jared is a relaxing presence at his side. Laying silent next to Jared in the grass gave him time to really try and get his thoughts in order.

So for now, Jensen is trying something new. He is going to try doing things that make *him* happy. It's a crazy concept, but he's going to give it a shot. (He's also trying out sarcasm. So far it's a good fit.)

Every morning Jared gives him a Hershey's Kiss and every morning Jensen eats it without a word. He flattens the wrappers into perfect foil squares with his nail and puts them in his binder. Those tiny pieces of foil mean something big. And sure, it scares the shit out of him. But more importantly, it makes him smile.

He's thinking about it, but he isn't quite ready. Not yet.

On Wednesday Jared has some sort of student council related emergency to take care of during lunch. Instead of hiding in the library, Jensen takes a deep breath and drops down at the table with Chad, Sandy, Sophia, and Misha sans Jared at his side.

Turns out he doesn't actually *need* Jared to sit there. They all like Jensen well enough on his own and Jensen breathes a little easier.

He even throws a tater tot at Chad.

On Thursday Jared offers to help paint backdrops for the spring musical, and Jensen

decides to volunteer his assistance as well. Sandy paints a rainbow on Jared's forehead and a red heart on Jensen's cheek, and when Chad trips over a paint roller (strategically placed there by Misha) and falls off of the stage Jensen laughs harder than he ever has in his entire life.

He's trying something new at home too – ignoring his parents whenever they speak.

They make their digs, their little comments and snide remarks and Jensen does his best to let them roll off like water on a duck's back. He's tried this numerous times in the past and has always failed. This time he's pretty sure the difference is that he actually has something *good* going for him. He has a life – new friends, a new school, and well – he has Jared.

It's easier to ignore his mother's comments when he has something to look forward to.

It's Friday and Jensen has five little squares in his binder. It's the last period of the day and Jensen is actually looking forward to the bell ringing. He's supposed to be going to the movies with Jared and the rest of the group. He's never really had an official outing like that. He could be upset about that, eighteen years old and no experience just hanging out, but he's not. Going to the movies with Jared and his friends seems like a good place to start.

Ten minutes into his Computer Studies class their teacher seems to give up for the day. He declares it a free period and retreats to his desk. Jensen hears someone mentioning heading over to the Photo lab and he perks up.

Jared has Photo last period.

Jensen deliberates for a moment, rolling his lips into his mouth and scrunching up his nose. He finally decides that hey, he's supposed to be doing things that he wants to do, and right now he wants to see Jared. He gets a pass to Photo with the few other students and heads out the door with a yellow hall pass in hand.

Photo is *the* class to take, according to Jared and half of the student body. Mr. Wagner is apparently the coolest teacher ever put on this earth. He doesn't really care what anyone does, or who mills in and out of the classroom as long as he isn't teaching a lesson.

Sure enough, when Jensen and the other two students walk into the giant lab everyone is just sitting around talking. Mr. Wagner is nowhere to be found. Jensen is sad he never got to take Photo.

He finally spots Jared across the room. He's sitting on a stool and talking animatedly to a tiny blonde girl with pretty blue eyes. Jensen shyly approaches, clearing his throat and tapping Jared on the shoulder. Jared spins around and his already present grin grows wider at the sight of him.

“Hey!” He bounces a little on his stool. “What are you doing here?”

“Rosoff called a free period,” Jensen explains.

“Have you met Kristen?” Jared asks. He gestures to the small girl on the stool next to his. Jensen nods at her and slips his hands into the back pockets of his jeans.

“Hey Jensen!” She chirps brightly. Jensen somehow isn’t surprised that she already knows his name. Jensen pulls up another stool and climbs up on it as he pulls his bottom lip into his mouth.

“So did you guys finally decide on a theme for prom or what?” Jared asks Kristen. “Is it still like, tropical or whatever?”

“Ugh, I swear this committee is made up of the planet’s biggest bitches,” Kristen responds as she tucks her hair behind her ear. “Luau is out. It’s apparently lame.”

Jared suddenly gets this gleeful look on his face and his eyes go wide as he grins mischievously.

“But what am I supposed to do with my tiki warrior outfit?!” Jared yells. Kristen slaps her hands to her face as she laughs and peeks out at Jared from between her fingers.

“*High School Musical*, Jared, really?” She asks with a shake of her head. “You are like, the gayest of the gay. You are truly the Head Homo. I bow at your bejeweled feet.”

Jensen stiffens at that, muscles going tense. It’s still sort of a shock to the system to hear Jared’s sexuality talked about so openly with no trace of revulsion. He should be used to it by now. Four out of the five people he hangs out with are gay. It’s been explained to him that while Chad is technically more flamboyant than Misha, or even Jared for that matter, he is still somehow straight. This fact apparently baffles everyone.

“You instantly knew what it was from,” Jared says, distracting Jensen from his thoughts. “So you’re just as lame.”

“It’s okay for me to like *High School Musical*,” Kristen responds, lifting her chin. “I have a vagina.”

“That’s your excuse for everything!” Jared yells.

“It’s *never* okay to like *High School Musical*,” another guy says as he walks by, not even bothering to stop.

“Oh yeah, Dohring? Well it’s not okay for me to like your *mom* so much either!” Kristen yells

after him. "But I just can't help myself!"

"Nice!" Jared shouts, and they give each other a high five. Jensen just raises an eyebrow. Mackenzie owns the *High School Musical* DVDs, and well, to hear that Jared watches them isn't much of a shock. "So, has Jason let you into his pants yet, or what?"

"No," Kristen pouts. "Oh, but I will find the golden key to that fucking chastity belt of his, just you wait."

"He's probably still not over that time you kicked his ass and made him eat sand in fourth grade," Jared tells her. He suddenly sits up straighter, looking over Kristen's head and across the room. "Ooh, darkroom's free. DIBS!"

Jared hops off of the stool and gathers a tray full of items from the counter. Kristen waves at them and takes off after Jason. She jumps up on his back and she's such a tiny thing that he doesn't even sag under her weight.

"Wanna help me develop some pictures?" Jared asks, lightly kicking the bottom of Jensen's stool. He nods and hops down to follow Jared towards the back of the lab. The darkroom is tucked back in an inset alcove and cut off from the rest of the classroom. Jared opens the door and ushers Jensen inside before following him in and shutting the door.

The room is tiny; barely bigger than a walk-in closet. Jensen had no idea how small the space would be, and by the time he turns around he's face to face with Jared. It's cramped, warm, and intimate – and then Jared turns off the light.

Jensen lets out a little gasp as the room goes pitch black. Jared seeks out his wrist in the dark and curls his fingers around it as he flips another switch. Soft red light fills the room and it makes Jared's skin glow a gorgeous shade of amber.

"You ever done this before?" Jared asks. His voice is quiet like he's trying to match the size of the room. Jensen swallows hard and pulls his wrist out of Jared's grasp. His heart is thumping in his chest and his throat goes dry.

"Huh?" He squeaks out, walking backwards until his back bumps into a counter and there are a few feet between them. Jensen blinks as his eyes adjust to the dim red light.

"Used a darkroom," Jared clarifies. Jensen lets out a breath and shakes his head.

"No," he adds quietly, just in case Jared can't see him clearly.

"It's fun," Jared tells him, stepping over to the counter and laying out his supplies. "I think it's relaxing. Come here and watch."

Jensen sucks his bottom lip into his mouth, his trademark nervous gesture, and steps over to Jared's side. He watches as Jared fills a few trays with different liquids and his eyes flicker between Jared's face and his giant hands.

He looks serene but focused as he begins. He explains bits and pieces of the process to Jensen, but his words sort of go in one ear and out the other. It's hard to pay attention when he's so close to Jared like this.

"I just found this film last week when I was cleaning my room," Jared tells him. "I don't even remember what project the pictures were supposed to be for, but I thought maybe they could go in my end of the year portfolio if they came out alright. We'll see."

Jared dips a sheet of photo paper in a tray of developer and motions Jensen closer. "Look," he says, and Jensen watches as a black and white image of Sandy develops. She's wearing a pair of glasses Jensen has never seen before and blowing a kiss at the camera.

"It's good," Jensen says softly, and Jared smiles at him. The crisp tang of the chemicals stings Jensen's nose but he's still close enough to smell Jared's cologne. It's subtle and spicy and Jensen breathes in deep. Jensen's pulse is skyrocketing and he focuses on breathing in and out and trying to keep calm in such close proximity to Jared.

"We had this GSA sleepover type thing at Sandy's house awhile back, probably just a few weeks before you moved here," Jared tells him in a quiet, melodic voice. He rinses the photo of Sandy and clips it on the line off to the side to dry before moving onto the next one. Jensen watches as a group photo develops. There's about twenty or more people crammed into a spacious living room. Sandy, Sophia, Chad, and Misha are all squashed onto the couch with Jared lying across their laps. "Sandy lives with her super cool grandma in this huge house, so we usually have group things there."

It goes on like that for a while. Jared develops a new picture and explains who is in it and what's going on, and Jensen pretends that being locked in this tiny, dark room with Jared isn't equal parts terrifying and exciting.

Jared chuckles when he gets to a close-up picture of Chad looking sideways at a dog nuzzling Chad's cheek with its wet nose.

"So you know how my dogs are total shits, right? Well, they're freaking *saints* when it comes to Sandy's dog. He's a German Shepherd and his name is Cal – short for Calamity. Seriously," Jared tells him, and Jensen chuckles. "So anyway, this dog is running amuck all night – knocking shit over, humping people. The works. And at one point during the night a bunch of us were in the backyard – and don't even ask me why because I have no clue – and Cal comes tearing outside and runs straight for Chad. That's like, ninety pounds of pure

muscle just *slamming* into that scrawny douchebag like a linebacker. He let out this girly scream and flew *off of his feet* and right into the pool.”

“Oh man.” Jensen laughs as he pictures the scenario in his head.

“So, he pulls himself out of the pool and he looks like a drowned rat,” Jared continues as he develops another picture of a soaking wet Chad flipping off the camera. “And it’s like forty degrees outside and he’s shaking so bad he’s damn near vibrating. Sandy’s grandma heard the commotion and came downstairs and started like, fretting over Chad. She made him get in the shower and dude, I’m pretty sure she was in there with him. Not like, in the shower, but the bathroom. Anyway, she tells him she’s gonna bring him something to wear, and – oh god.”

Jared slaps his hand down on the table and shakes his head as he starts a new picture. Jensen gets the feeling he knows what it’s going to consist of.

“She takes his wet clothes and leaves the new ones in there, so he has no choice, right?” Jared continues, leaning over the developing tray. “So we’re all waiting, and he’s in this bathroom forever. We thought he’d died of hypothermia or some shit. But he finally comes out wearing these pink flannel pajamas covered in little candy canes and mugs of hot chocolate, and like – “ He pauses to wipe at his eyes and catch his breath. Jensen starts laughing too. He wasn’t even there, but Jared’s laughter is such an infectious sound. “And like, there were little pink bows all over them and everything. And Chad’s like, totally nonchalant – like if he acted like he didn’t give a shit, we wouldn’t say anything.”

“I’m guessing you said something,” Jensen says, holding his hand over his stomach as he laughs. Jared just laughs harder and pushes the developing tray slightly towards Jensen. The picture is of Chad posing in said pajamas pulling a model face, with one hand on his hip and the other on the back of his head. He added cat’s eye glasses, a shower cap, and fuzzy slippers to the ensemble. Even without color it’s one of the funniest things Jensen has ever seen. He laughs so hard that he has to slap his hand over his mouth, and Jared nearly doubles over as he rinses the picture and hangs it up to dry. He’s sucking in huge gulps of air, struggling to breathe because he’s laughing *that* hard.

“Oh, we all said something,” Jared wheezes. “But he totally played it up and acted like Sandy’s grandma all night long. He would not break character. It was *amazing*. But you know what the best part was?”

“What?” Jensen gasps and wipes at his eyes.

“He totally kept those pajamas,” Jared tells him, and Jensen snorts loudly. “And he told me they’re like, the most comfortable thing he owns and he wears them to bed on cold nights.”

“Oh god,” Jensen moans, snickering loudly as Jared tosses his head back with a booming laugh. When they finally calm down, Jared wipes the tears from his eyes and pushes the tray aside, all through with the roll of film.

Jensen is breathing hard and his ribs are sore from laughing. He looks over at Jared and a sudden thought occurs to him. He’s happy, he’s having fun, and Jared made him laugh. His eyes travel to Jared’s mouth and his pulse speeds up again, heart hammering rapidly against his chest.

“Next time you should totally – “

Jensen leans in quickly and kisses Jared, cutting him off mid sentence. Jensen doesn’t close his eyes, choosing instead to keep them wide open and locked on Jared’s blurry face. His lips are pressed in a crooked line across the corner of Jared’s mouth, soft and hesitant.

He’s sure he’s doing it all wrong, but this clumsy kiss is better than anything he’s ever experienced in his entire life.

Jensen finally pulls back a little, mouth going slightly slack as he pants. He swallows hard as Jared turns to face him and steps in closer. Jared’s eyes are wide and full of wonder and the corner of his mouth, the spot Jensen just *kissed*, twitches up into a smile. Jared puts his hand on Jensen’s cheek, eyes going wet and soft as he leans in.

Jensen meets him halfway, reaching out to grab Jared’s free hand and slotting their fingers together as their lips touch. Jared’s lips are warm and soft when they press firmly against his own. Jensen sags against Jared when his knees go weak and he wraps an arm around Jared’s neck to pull him in even closer.

Jared slides his hand down Jensen’s cheek and the curve of his jaw, fingertips trailing lightly down the side of his neck before he curls his arm around Jensen’s waist and pulls him in tightly. Jensen lets his eyes slip shut as Jared angles his head slightly and kisses Jensen even more firmly.

This should be the scariest moment of Jensen’s entire life, and it was at first, but now he just feels... peaceful. It feels like they should have been doing this all along. His heart is pounding but in a *good* way and he’s dizzy in a way he’s never felt before. It’s like he was meant to press his lips against Jared’s like this, to kiss him like nothing else will ever matter.

Maybe nothing else ever will.

Jared pulls back a little and whispers Jensen’s name reverently, and Jensen is close enough to feel the soft gust of breath on his lips. He kisses the bridge of Jensen’s nose and then the spot between his eyes as Jensen buries his fingers in the thick tangle of Jared’s

hair.

Jared slips his hand under the back of Jensen's shirt. His palm presses flat against the small of Jensen's back and it makes him shiver from head to toe. He grins and Jared kisses the stretch of his lips while his other hand shakes free from Jensen's grasp to rest on his cheek. His thumb swipes across Jensen's chin before pulling down slightly. Jensen's lips part on a breathy sigh and Jared places a soft kiss on his bottom lip before kissing them again.

Jensen doesn't really know what he's doing so he just follows Jared's lead. Jared opens his mouth slightly and sweeps his tongue across the seam of Jensen's lips. Jensen squeezes his eyes shut tighter and his fingers tug slightly at Jared's hair as he hesitantly opens his mouth for Jared's questing tongue. The kiss goes a little deeper for just a moment, tongues brushing and teeth nipping before Jared pulls back completely.

Jensen opens his eyes to see Jared's grin, bright against the dim light of the tiny room. Jensen can hardly breathe. It's like his entire life is changing before his eyes. It's like *he's* changing.

Jared is cupping his cheek and looking at him like he's everything he's ever wanted, like he's the answer to all of his prayers, and Jensen feels like he's about to burst.

Jared leans in to press a kiss to the corner of Jensen's eye and that's when he realizes he's nearly crying. Moisture gathers in his eyes and makes his vision blur. Jensen just wraps both arms around Jared in a tight hug and buries his face in the soft curve of Jared's neck.

Jensen wants to stay in this moment forever. He wants to never leave this tiny darkroom or Jared's arms, never wants to lose the tingly feeling of just-kissed lips. But he knows that isn't possible.

What he *does* know is that after what just happened everything is going to change. Try as he might, he just can't bring himself to care about that.

He's looking forward to it.



Jared still has Jensen in his arms, hands rubbing soothing circles along his back, when the bell rings. The sound of it filtering into the tiny room makes them jump slightly and Jared pulls away from Jensen regretfully, hands trailing down Jensen's arms before letting go.

Jensen looks up at him in the dim, romantic light. His eyes are shining with unshed tears and Jared just wants to – he doesn't even know – run up to the nearest rooftop and scream

like the world's biggest cliché. This is the greatest moment of his life, the most *important*, so he shouldn't ruin it by saying something retarded.

So he just slowly brings his hand up to Jensen's chin and curls his fingers underneath it as he presses his thumb under Jensen's bottom lip. They're pink and puffy, swollen with their first ever kiss and Jared's heart flutters. Jensen is staring at him. His chest is heaving with each breath and Jared leans in to press another soft, chaste kiss to his mouth.

Jensen makes a soft sound, something low and pleased, and Jared smiles. There's a sudden pounding at the door and Jared and Jensen spring apart. The door doesn't open and Jared knows it won't as long as the safelight is on. That red light bulb on the outside of the door is as effective as a padlock to Photo students.

"Guys!" Kristen yells through the door. "School is *ooooo*ver. Wags says he's gonna lock you in if you don't evacuate the premises immediately!"

"Coming!" Jared yells before chuckling softly. He gathers the mostly dry pictures and rolls them into a canister to keep them safe from the light. He marks his name on it and shoves it into a cubbyhole in the wall before flipping on the light. Gone is the soft amber glow, replaced with harsh fluorescents. They both blink against the sudden change and Jensen fixes his glasses like he just noticed they were knocked askew by their kissing.

He gives Jared a shy but happy smile and it makes Jared feel giddy.

They walk off campus in comfortable silence. Jared is sort of worried over what Jensen's reaction will be once the initial shock wears off, but he seems to be doing okay for now. Jared hopes it stays that way. Jared doesn't think he'll be able to handle it if Jensen decides that their kiss was a mistake.

He knows they'll have to talk about it eventually but he's fine with delaying the inevitable for now, so long as Jensen keeps smiling like that.

"You're still coming tonight, right?" Jared asks. He stuffs his hands in his pockets when he gets the urge to tangle their fingers together. It's much too soon for thoughts of holding hands in public.

"Hm?" Jensen turns his head to look at Jared. A pretty blush stains his cheeks and he ducks his head with a soft smile. "Oh, the movies. Yes, I'm still going."

"Good," Jared replies. He takes a deep breath before continuing. "Well, since it's one of my rare Fridays off from saving the world, one school committee meeting at a time, I was wondering if maybe you wanted to come over and hang out until we have to meet up with the guys?"

Jensen raises an eyebrow at him and Jared nearly slaps a hand to his face.

“Not for like – any particular *reason* or anything,” Jared blurts out. Jensen chuckles slightly and gives Jared a fond smile. “Is that a yes?”

“Sure,” Jensen chuckles. “I’ll come over.”

His mom is still at work when they get to Jared’s. Jensen spends a good few minutes rolling around on the floor with Harley and Sadie while Jared heats up a Hot Pocket as a snack. They meet up on the couch with their shoes kicked off and their feet up on the coffee table. Jared turns on the television and he’s pleased to see that there are only a few inches of space between them.

“Great, now you smell like dog,” Jared says, making an exaggerated face. Jensen looks over at him indignantly and kicks his foot.

“Yeah, well,” Jensen replies. “You smell like a Hot Pocket, which I’m pretty sure doesn’t even qualify as real food.”

“It fills my belly,” Jared says as he puffs out his stomach and pats it. “That’s all I need.”

Jensen smiles and then bites his lip. He shifts closer to Jared and leans in like he’s going to spill a secret. Jared’s heart stops as Jensen tentatively rests his chin on Jared’s shoulder, lips close to his jaw.

“Jared, I – “ He begins before clearing his throat and going a little quieter. “I’m really scared.” Jared swallows hard and opens his mouth to speak but Jensen cuts him off. “But – I’m also, well, *happy*. You – “

He huffs and lets out a little noise of frustration when he can’t get out the words he wants to. He sighs again and rests his head on Jared’s shoulder. His hand rests low on Jared’s stomach and he relaxes against him. Jared lets out a breath and wraps his arm around Jensen to pull him in closer. Jensen makes a content sound and cuddles against his side as his hand rubs back and forth across Jared’s stomach.

They spend the next few hours cuddling on the couch and letting their hands timidly explore the most innocuous parts of each other’s bodies. It’s peaceful and quiet. There’s one dog on both sides of them and their large furry bodies press them even closer together. Jensen is loose-limbed and sleepy, eyes drooping like he doesn’t have a care in the world.

Maybe he doesn’t – not for right now. But this peaceful easy feeling can’t last forever. He knows the shit will eventually hit the fan. There’s no way it can’t. Jared looks down at Jensen, fingertips skittering across his temple before burying themselves in his hair.

Jared presses a soft kiss to the top of Jensen's head and smiles at the answering feel of Jensen's hand sweeping across his stomach. Whatever happens, he'll be by Jensen's side.

But for now? He's just going to enjoy what they've got.



They meet up with the rest of the group outside the movie theater about half an hour before showtime. Chad and Misha are sitting on a bench and Sandy and Sophia are sitting on their laps, presumably in an effort to stay warm.

Jensen is wearing another one of Jared's jackets. His hands are buried deep in the pockets and he's still shivering as Jared bounces along next to him in nothing but a thermal and a tee shirt.

The girls squeal and hop off of the guys' laps when they spot them. As soon as Jensen steps up on the curb they pounce on him and he tenses only slightly as their grip tightens.

"Jenny! You came!" Sandy shouts. Jensen glares playfully at Jared when he snorts at the nickname. Sandy and Sophia each kiss his cheek and then wipe off the sticky gloss they left behind. Jensen can't help but to laugh and hug them back.

"Hey, I came too," Chad says as he and Misha walk over to them. The girls pull back and they all stand in a lopsided circle. "I even came early."

"Don't you –" Sophia is cut off when Chad slaps his hand over her mouth. She raises an amused eyebrow and Chad shakes his head.

"Don't," he tells her. "It doesn't need to be said."

"Can we get inside before my dick shrivels down to the size of Chad's sense of self-worth?" Misha asks, and Chad socks him in the shoulder. Misha just throws his head back and yells at the sky. "What the *fuck*, California? It's almost spring break. Warm the fuck up!"

They get their tickets without much incident. Jared pays for them both, but Jensen insists on paying for the snacks so they break about even. The movie they chose is near the end of its run so the theater is pretty much empty. Sandy and Sophia join hands and head towards the back row and Jared and Jensen follow close behind. Jensen hears Chad let out an overdramatic sigh as they all sit down – Sandy and Sophia, Jared and Jensen, and then Chad and Misha.

"Looks like it's you and me, snowflake," Chad says exasperatedly and reaches out to snag Misha's hand. Misha looks down at their entwined fingers and then back at Chad, raising an

eyebrow in question. "Well, everyone else is coupled up!"

"Your alleged heterosexuality is astounding," Misha says, but he doesn't let go of Chad's hand. Jensen glances from them over to Sandy and Sophia, noticing the way their hands are entwined as well. Jared's hand is slung casually over their mutual armrest and Jensen wants to hold it, but he's never touched Jared that way in public before. He doesn't know if he can, even though all their friends obviously know something is going on.

Jensen sighs and flops back into his seat when the previews start, slurping on his soda and curling his hand into a fist.

The movie is some sort of action flick with very little in the way of actual plot. Jensen finds it boring immediately and it only takes half an hour for Jared to start squirming. Jensen is honestly surprised he lasted that long.

Jared shifts and suddenly something soft and squishy hits Jensen's cheek. He blinks and looks down to see a gummi bear resting in the folds of his shirt. He looks over at Jared indignantly before picking up the candy and throwing it at his face. Jared catches it in his mouth and Jensen slaps a hand over his own mouth to stifle a laugh.

A few moments later Jared starts nudging his foot, toe tapping insistently at his ankle. Jensen takes a few kernels of popcorn from his bag and tosses them at Jared's face, and he retaliates by throwing an entire handful at Jensen. Some of the kernels get stuck in the spikes of his hair and he shakes his head, sending them flying. Jared reaches over to pinch his side, tickling him and making him squirm. He wriggles away and grabs at Jared's arm and a small chuckle slips through his tightly clenched lips.

"Hey, do you have any fucking idea what's going on in this movie?" Chad stage whispers to Misha. "I can't hear it over the sound of Jared and Jensen's gay love."

Jensen stiffens and his smile fades at Chad's words. His brief moment of panic doesn't last long, however. It ends when Jared leans over Jensen to dump his remaining popcorn over Chad's head and he lets out an indignant squawk so loud it reverberates throughout the theater.

Jensen laughs and Jared gives him a pleased smile. They both slouch down in their chairs and Jensen finds Jared's hand underneath the armrest. He slots their fingers together and squeezes. He doesn't even mind the fact that Jared's hand is all greasy with popcorn butter.

After the movie they all pile into Misha's SUV to go get some ice cream. All six of them squash into a semi-circle booth with Jared and Jensen jammed in the middle. He and Jared share a banana split and Chad steals their cherry, much to Jared's dismay.

They're loud and obnoxious but the waitress just smiles indulgently and even brings Jared a little cup of cherries when he won't stop badgering Chad for eating theirs.

Jensen can't stop laughing the entire time. They're all so *funny*, and somehow Jensen doesn't feel like an outsider when he's with them. He feels like one of the group and it makes him even happier.

After the ice cream Misha just sort of drives them around aimlessly. Chad sits in the passenger seat with Sandy and Sophia in the middle and Jensen and Jared occupying the very back. When Misha starts navigating his way back towards the theater to drop them off at their cars, Jensen shrugs out of Jared's jacket and hands it over. Jared looks over at him with a smile tugging at his lips as they both rest their heads on the back of the seat.

Jared covers their heads with the sweatshirt, shrouding them in darkness and cutting them off from everyone else in the car. He keeps his arm raised to hold the fabric above their heads. Jensen blinks against the darkness and smiles when Jared's face comes into view. It reminds him of the darkroom. He's full and sleepy from the ice cream; drowsy and relaxed from being in the dark car.

"Hi," Jared says softly as his hand reaches out to rest on Jensen's knee. "Did you have fun tonight?"

"Yeah," Jensen says. Before he can even really think about it he's leaning in to press their mouths together, soft and sweet. Jared lets out a low hum and presses closer, one arm holding their makeshift fort up and his other hand moving from Jensen's knee to his cheek, thumb stroking back and forth as they kiss.

Jensen instinctively opens his mouth and lets Jared lick his way inside. A lazy spark ignites in his belly as their tongues move together. Jensen curls his hands in Jared's shirt and holds him in place just in case he tries to move away. The kiss is soft and languid, mouths moving slowly as their eyes droop shut.

Jared vaguely tastes of the sticky sweet cherries he ate so many of and Jensen licks the flavor away until there's only Jared on his tongue. Jensen can't get over how *good* this feels, to kiss and be kissed like this. He's sleepy and warm and alive, and he feels whole and perfect like this. He never wants it to stop.

Moments later the car jerks to a halt and Jared pulls away, sucking a little on Jensen's bottom lip before letting it go. The jacket is yanked from their heads and Jensen looks up to see the girls grinning at them from over the seat and making cute little *aww* noises. Jensen flushes red, a little embarrassed at having been caught. But that's all – he's not scared or ashamed. Being with Jared feels far too amazing to let the bad stuff get to him.

“Make out in your own car,” Misha says with a smirk, looking at them through the rearview mirror. Chad nods in agreement.

“But girls?” He says with a lewd grin. “You two feel free.”

“In your wildest dreams, Chad,” Sophia says, and Sandy giggles. Jared and Jensen climb out of Misha’s car and get into Jared’s. It’s old and beat up, and Jensen honestly hadn’t even known he owned it until that afternoon. Jared had told him he preferred walking whenever he could and didn’t use it too often.

It’s freezing inside Jared’s car and Jensen instantly misses the sleepy, protective bubble of Misha’s giant vehicle. Jared starts the engine and they drive home in comfortable silence with Jensen dozing slightly in the passenger seat.

Jared parks a few houses down from Jensen’s and that’s when the nervousness sets in. Today has been so perfect and now it has to end? His heart beats rapidly and he shoots Jared a desperate look.

“It’ll be okay,” Jared says like he can read Jensen’s thoughts. “It’s late and you’re tired. Just go to bed and call me tomorrow if you want. I have some errands to run but my phone will be on me all day, okay?”

Jensen nods shakily, reaching up to grab at the door handle. He looks over at Jared and bites down on his lip as his mood tailspins. Jared leans in but stops short, eyes darting in the direction of Jensen’s house before he pulls back. He grabs Jensen’s hand and squeezes it tightly instead.

“I’m always around the corner,” Jared tells him, looking right into Jensen’s eyes. Jensen nods and his cheeks flush with embarrassment. He was doing so *well* but here he is, tearing up like a scared little boy yet again. Jared bites his lip and strokes his thumb over Jensen’s knuckles. His brows furrow as he looks down at their joined hands. “Here.”

Jared pulls his hand away and plucks at his rubber bracelets. There’s two black ones and one pink one and Jared rolls one of the black ones off of his hand, rubber stretching as far as it will go. Jensen furrows his brow as Jared holds the bracelet out with two hands and gestures towards Jensen with a smile.

“Jared?” Jensen lifts his hand hesitantly. Jared smiles and rolls the bracelet over Jensen’s fingers, tucking his thumb in and rolling it down onto his wrist. Jared pats the bracelet once it’s in place before grinning widely and linking their hands again, bracelets side by side. Jensen blinks rapidly and looks down at their joined hands. His heart is pounding and he’s so *touched*. Jared is the sweetest person to ever live and Jensen has no idea what he did to deserve him.

“There,” Jared says. His lips quirk up in a shy smile. “Now I’m always right here.” He plucks at the bracelet on Jensen’s wrist, eyes going soft. “Remember that.”

“Okay,” Jensen says, nodding rapidly. He opens and closes his mouth as he tries to find the words to convey what he’s feeling. It’s damn near impossible. “Today – everything about today was amazing. And I – I really want to kiss you right now, but – “

“Don’t worry about it,” Jared tells him while stroking his fingertips across the thin skin on the inside of Jensen’s wrist. He smiles and Jensen feels himself falling. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Okay, I – thanks, Jared,” Jensen tells him. He squeezes Jared’s hand again before letting go. “Good night.”

“Night, Jen,” Jared says warmly, and Jensen gives him one last smile before exiting the car. He feels weighted down with each step he takes away from Jared. It makes him uneasy, makes him remember that just because everything *feels* right when he’s with Jared doesn’t mean it *is*.

Jensen trudges up onto his porch, sending one last glance at Jared’s car before stepping inside the house. He closes the door quietly and tiptoes towards the stairs but of course, his good luck had to run out sometime.

“Jensen Ross!” His mother calls from the living room. He tenses up before slowly spinning on his heels to face her. She’s on the sofa in her bathrobe, and she looks livid. “It’s nearly *midnight*. Where in God’s name have you been?”

Jensen stares at her, taking in her slightly weathered face and bottle-blond hair. She has her nose up in the air, constantly judging, and Jensen is done cowering before her. He looks down at his bracelet, the piece of Jared that will never leave him, and for once he bravely lifts his chin to meet her gaze.

“I was out with friends,” Jensen tells her as he rolls his shoulders back defiantly. She looks confused for a moment, like she never even considered the possibility.

“You can’t just *not* come home from school and not tell us where you’re going!” She shrieks. Jensen resists the urge to roll his eyes.

“You told me when we moved here that you *wanted* me to go out and meet people, didn’t you?” Jensen asks, crossing his arms over his chest and raising an eyebrow. For the first time in his life he feels like an actual teenager. His mother just gapes at him before finally giving a jerky nod. She opens her mouth to speak but Jensen cuts her off. “Well, that’s what normal kids do, Mom. They stay out until midnight and they don’t call their parents. You

can't have it both ways.”

“What in Heaven’s name has gotten into you?” She asks, and Jensen smirks at the irony of it. He shrugs and yawns exaggeratedly, stretching his arms over his head.

“Absolutely nothing,” he responds as he heads for the stairs. “I’m going to bed. Night!”

He doesn’t even bother to look back to see her reaction before heading up the stairs. Once he shuts himself in his room he throws himself on his bed and grins to himself. He feels liberated and maybe a little in control for once. He stares at the thin, black ring of rubber around his pale wrist and he knows it’s because he has Jared with him now.

Jensen sleeps peacefully that night.



The next week goes by surprisingly fast considering it’s the last week before spring break. Jared figures it has a lot of do with how busy he is. He has one final meeting regarding Day of Silence with GLSEN Jane, and then he meets with the poster committee to come up with something simple yet effective to spread the word.

It seems like every single committee or club he’s somehow involved in wants to have a meeting before spring break. Apparently one week away from the school is going to change life as they know it. Not for the first time, Jared feels spread a little thin as he tries to make it to each and every meeting along with trying to finish all his homework and stopping to talk to every single person that pulls him aside to ask for advice.

One topic in particular seems to be pretty popular, and Jared makes a mental note to tweak the GSA agenda a little bit. He wishes they could make it through a whole quarter without needing to do a safe sex recap, if only so he doesn’t have to hear Chad snicker through the whole thing.

The weather finally starts to agree with them. It finally starts to feel like late spring in California and it’s awesome. Jared is just happy to bust out the cargo shorts and flip-flops again.

The downside to the busy week is that he doesn’t really get any alone time with Jensen. He still sees him every morning in class and gives him his Hershey’s Kiss, and they eat lunch as a group on the one day Jared doesn’t have something to do in that hour, but that’s pretty much it.

Jensen assures him that everything went fine after Jared dropped him off on Friday. He tells Jared that he understands that he’s busy, and that he’s fine, really. And he seems happy

enough.

But Jared wants to get him alone. He wants to know if Jensen will kiss him again or if that one night was some sort of amazing fluke. No matter what he's trying to concentrate on, their kisses are at the back of his mind, burned forever into his memory.

Finally Saturday afternoon rolls around and Jared is free to be a normal teenager for the next eight school-free days. Sandy invited them all over to her house for a mini pool party and Jared is more than a little excited. He parks his car a few houses down from Jensen's, just in case, and texts him to let him know he's arrived.

Jensen comes walking up the street a few minutes later in a pair of black board shorts, a thin white tee, and flip flops. He has a blue towel slung over one shoulder and his glasses are off. He looks so relaxed and beautiful that Jared's breath catches in his throat.

"Hi," Jensen says once he gets in the car. Jared actually has to try a few times before he can get a response out. Jared's bracelet is still on Jensen's wrist, looking like it's been there forever.

"Where are your glasses?" Jared asks as he pulls away from the curb. Jensen holds up a case and shrugs.

"I can see without them, just not really well," Jensen tells him. "And I can't wear them in the pool so I've had them off all day to get used to it."

"Oh," Jared says, looking over at him again. "I – well, I missed you."

"Yeah." Jensen looks over at him and smiles softly. "I missed you too."

They're the last to arrive at the house. Sandy, Sophia, Chad, and Misha are already splashing around the pool. They all call out to them when Jared leads Jensen around to the backyard and Jared wastes no time in setting all his things on his shoes on a picnic table, stripping off his shirt, and diving in.

The water is cold at first, knocking the air out of his lungs. He splutters as he resurfaces and his grin fades when he sees Jensen standing on the very edge of the pool and biting his bottom lip nervously. Jared swims up to the edge and reaches out to grasp Jensen's ankles. He looks up at him as his thumb brushes the sharp knob of bone.

"What's up?" He asks. After a moment Jensen just shakes his head. He takes a deep breath and steps back, pulling his shirt over his head and dropping it on top of his towel and shoes. He's slender and pale, lightly-muscled and lithe, and Jared can't stop staring. Jensen suddenly breaks into a run and jumps over Jared's head to cannonball into the

chilly water.

Everyone cheers and Jared whips around. He chuckles when Jensen smirks at him. Jared lunges for him and Jensen swims across the pool, throwing his head back with a laugh.

They play in the water for hours; until they're all pruney and their eyes sting with chlorine. Every single time Jared brushes by Jensen in the cool water it somehow feels like molten lava.

If Jensen was beautiful before, there isn't even a word for what he looks like now. He's happy and laughing and he's absolutely *gorgeous*, green eyes bright and skin turning slightly pink from the sun.

Jared just can't get over it.

When the sun starts to set Jared hefts himself out of the pool. He has to pull his shorts up slightly when the weight of the water tries to drag them down.

"I'm gonna get something to drink," he announces. He grabs his towel and does a quick, half-assed job of drying himself off. Jensen swims over to the edge and pulls himself out as well, sinewy muscles bunching under his wet skin.

"I'll come with," Jensen says, and Jared nods dumbly. They walk into the kitchen together and Jensen jumps when Cal suddenly barks from the other side of the doggy-gate keeping him trapped in the back of the house.

They each get a soda from the fridge but they're too cold to drink much of them. Jensen sets his on the counter and crosses his arms over his chest as he shivers. Jared can see the goose bumps covering his skin and water dripping down the sides of his face. Jared looks to the left and into the open door of the laundry room, noticing the stack of towels on the dryer.

"Come here," Jared says, grabbing Jensen's wrist and leading him into the laundry room. He doesn't turn on the light. The bright glow coming from the kitchen seems to be enough. "You're gonna freeze to death, ice-pop."

Jensen chuckles. His teeth chatter slightly as Jared grabs a large, fluffy white towel and shakes it out. He drapes it over the top of Jensen's head and dries his hair, scrubbing vigorously before pulling it away. Jensen is looking up at him with wide, trusting eyes, lips slack as Jared dries him off. Jared moves the towel across Jensen's neck and chest, sliding it down his arms before bringing it around his back to grip either side and use it to pull Jensen in closer.

Jared knows he's staring at Jensen's mouth but he can't help it. Jensen places his open palms on Jared's bare chest and he gasps, lips parting as Jensen surges up to kiss him.

Jared stumbles back against the wall and his feet slip slightly in the small puddle they've created as Jensen keeps their mouths pressed together. Jensen slides his hands from Jared's chest around to his back. His fingertips dig in as their chests come into contact and they gasp into each other's mouths at that touch of cold, bare skin.

Jared drops the towel and puts his palms on either side of Jensen's neck. He lets out a soft groan when Jensen licks into his mouth and sucks experimentally at his tongue. Jared hasn't kissed a lot of people, but he's pretty sure Jensen was born for this.

Jensen's nipples drag across Jared's bare skin, small and tight, and Jared lets his hands slide down Jensen's back to trail his fingertips hungrily over damp, silky skin. Jared pulls his mouth away from Jensen's and drags his lips across Jensen's jaw, fixing his mouth to the sweet curve of his neck and pressing wet, suckling kisses along his skin. His thumbs find the groove of Jensen's hipbones and slide through them before his hands come to rest at the swell of Jensen's ass, fingertips pressing at the waistband of his shorts.

Jared pulls Jensen's earlobe into his mouth and sucks gently on it as he pulls Jensen tighter against him. He feels a familiar spark in his belly, dick stirring in his shorts as he presses his mouth to Jensen's again. Jensen lets out a soft whimper and clutches at Jared's shoulders.

It's an encouraging sound but it has the opposite effect on Jared. It brings him back to the present and makes him realize what they're doing. His dick is hot and heavy in his shorts, pressed up against Jensen's thigh. He puts his hands on Jensen's hips and squeezes as he pushes him backwards and breaks their kiss.

Jensen stumbles a little and opens his eyes, panting heavily as he stares at Jared. His lips are swollen and he has little pink marks on his neck that Jared prays won't turn into bruises. Jared closes his eyes and thumps his head against the wall. It's upsetting that he let this go so far. They were caught up in the heat of the moment, but Jared should have stopped it sooner.

Jensen clears his throat and glances sideways as he reaches up to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand. Jared straightens up and rolls his lips into his mouth as he looks around awkwardly. When he finally dares to straighten his gaze Jensen is wearing a grateful expression, lips curving into a bashful little smirk.

Jared knows that if he let it, this would have gone further before Jensen was ready and it could have screwed everything up. Jared has to keep a level head. He can't let hormones

and soft skin and willing mouths make him forget how important it is that they go slow.

“Sorry,” Jared breathes. He tentatively reaches out to touch Jensen’s cheek. “You good?”

“Fine,” Jensen replies, pressing his cheek into Jared’s hand like an eager cat. “Just – a little intense.”

“Yeah,” Jared whispers. They jump and Jared drops his hand when they hear their names being called. They walk out of the laundry room and towards the living room.

“*There you are,*” Sandy says with a smirk. She and Sophia have changed into pajamas and Sophia is sitting behind Sandy on the couch, brushing out her long, wet hair. Chad and Misha are sitting on the floor with their damp butts on dry towels. “It got cold, so we’re done with the pool. We’re gonna puppy pile on the floor and watch a movie. You boys in?”

Jared looks over at Jensen with a raised eyebrow and Jensen nods. Jared grabs his and Jensen’s towels and shirts from where they were brought in with everybody’s stuff. He puts on his shirt and wraps his towel around his waist to protect the carpet from his damp swim trunks and Jensen does the same. Jared is a little sad to lose sight of all that skin, even if it will help him resist temptation.

Jared and Chad move the coffee table out of the way as Sandy and Sophia spread a few blankets out on the floor. A puppy pile pretty much is the best way to describe the position they end up in. Jared sits up against the back of the couch and Jensen sits between his splayed legs, back resting against his stomach. Chad props his head up on Jared’s hip and Sandy uses Jensen’s thigh as a pillow as Sophia curls around her. Misha has his head on Chad’s stomach and his arm is slung over Jared’s calf.

This is how they always lay. They’re perfectly content to be sprawled all over each other. Jensen squirms a little at first. He’s obviously uncomfortable with all the physical attention. It’s not long before he relaxes, reaching down to grab Jared’s arm and drape it over his chest. Jared dares to slip his hand under Jensen’s shirt to trace random patterns on his belly.

It doesn’t take long for Jensen to fall asleep with his head turned into Jared’s chest and fingers curled in his shirt. Sandy is smiling at them like they’re the cutest thing she’s ever seen and Chad snores fitfully, one arm wrapped around Misha’s chest.

Jared knows he’ll eventually have to wake Jensen up and take him home. He has church in the morning. Jared can’t imagine what goes on in Jensen’s head during that time. It must be so difficult pretending to be someone you’re not.

But for right now Jared just lets him sleep and lazily traces lopsided hearts on his sleep-

warm skin.

Onto Part 5.

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/249199.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/249199.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 5)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:53:00 : 41-52 minutes

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The downside of spring break is that Jensen has to spend more time at home.

On Tuesday his mother invites a bunch of old women over for brunch. They're downstairs eating finger sandwiches and talking about Jesus.

Jensen sneaks out the back door.

He doesn't like being away from Jared. It gives him too much time to think and he doesn't always like what he has to think about. It's too easy to forget about everything when he's around Jared, and that's an escape he's quickly starting to rely on.

It's still sort of early when Jensen hops up on Jared's porch. He checks his phone to see that it's barely eleven. Jensen bites his lip as he knocks. He's never just dropped by unannounced before. The dogs start barking shrilly and Jensen jumps.

"Get *back*, goddamn it!" He hears Sherri scream. Jensen takes a step back. The door opens a crack and Sherri sticks her head out. "Oh hey, Jensen!"

"Hi, Sherri," Jensen says shyly. Sadie squirms out of the cracked door and Jensen catches her by the collar as she tries to run away.

"Come in before I commit animal cruelty," Sherri tells him, holding Harley at bay with her foot as Jensen slips into the house with Sadie. "They only listen to Jared. Well, sometimes."

"Is Jared here?" Jensen asks as he leans over to scratch the dogs behind the ears. Sherri looks at her watch and sighs, tucking her hair behind her ears. She looks so young; so *normal* and loving. Jensen barely knows her but he already adores her.

"He's off saving orphans from burning buildings or some variation thereof," Sherri tells him. "You know him – Jared Padalecki, Gay Crusader. All he needs is a damn cape."

"They could shine a rainbow light in the sky?" Jensen asks timidly. He grabs at Sadie's

paws when she jumps up on him. Sherri smirks and looks at Jensen fondly.

“They could! But no, kiddo,” Sherri says seriously. “He isn’t here right now. He’s, well – dealing with something. But you can wait if you want. I’m just starting a batch of cupcakes if you want to help?”

“I don’t know how to bake,” Jensen admits, scratching the back of his head. Sherri just rolls her eyes and gestures towards the kitchen before turning around to head towards it. Jensen doesn’t know what to do other than follow her.

Being in Jared’s hot kitchen with his frazzled mother beats being at home avoiding his own mother any day.

“So what’s going on with Jared?” Jensen asks. He pulls himself up onto the counter when Sherri pats it. “You look worried.”

Sherri sighs and wipes her hands on her apron before turning around to lean against the counter. Jensen lifts an eyebrow, suddenly afraid she’s going to give him some bad news.

“Do you know Tessa?” Sherri asks. Jensen racks his brain for a moment. Tessa is a small dark-haired girl. She’s a member of GSA and Jared has known her since middle school.

“I’ve met her,” Jensen says, and Sherri nods. “What’s going on?”

“Tessa has this boyfriend that’s a real piece of work,” Sherri tells him. “She called Jared in the middle of the night asking him to come pick her up from his house because they were fighting. And he just hasn’t come home yet.”

“What?” Jensen shrieks. His heart rate accelerates and Sherri holds up her hands.

“He texted me a few hours ago,” she says. “He’s fine. He’s just not home yet.”

“Okay.” Jensen lets out a breath. “But next time? You might wanna *lead* with ‘he’s fine’.”

“Sorry,” Sherri chuckles, pushing her hair back again. “It’s just – sometimes I wish he’d stop worrying about everyone else’s problems and just be a teenager.”

“He helps a lot of people,” Jensen says quietly. “He’s helping me.”

“Baby, I know,” Sherri replies. “I’m just worrying about my kid. I’m a mom. It’s what we do. Now come here and mix up my frosting.” Jensen hops off the counter and stands at Sherri’s side. She sets a giant bowl of white frosting in front of him and squeezes a few drops of red food coloring into it. “Mix.”

“Pink.” Jensen chuckles. “I am so surprised.”

“Act like you don’t want some pink cupcakes.” She bumps her hip against his and winks. Jensen picks up the spatula and begins mixing the frosting.

“Try as I might,” Jensen replies. “I just can’t deny that I want these pink cupcakes in my belly.”

“Knew it,” she replies. She shifts her weight and blows her bangs out of her face. “Hey, uh, what’s your favorite color?”

“Um.” Jensen pauses his stirring to think about the random question. He figures ‘the color of your son’s eyes when he smiles’ would be a corny, lame, and entirely inappropriate answer. Doesn’t make it any less true. “Ocean blue, I guess. Why?”

“No reason.” She smiles sweetly at him. “Just curious about you. Mine’s red.”

“Oh,” Jensen says. Sherri winks at him. He’s a little lost but he just shrugs it off and attributes it to her quirkiness.

They work in comfortable silence. Jensen mixes the pink frosting and Sherri mixes the chocolate batter. She clears her throat after awhile and bumps Jensen’s hip again.

“So how are things going at home?” She asks delicately. Jensen tenses, furrows his brow and beats the frosting harder. “You don’t have to tell me.”

“No, it’s just – well, I hate it,” Jensen says bluntly, eyes trained on the sugary pink confection in the bowl. “But that’s nothing new.”

“Oh, kid.” Sherri wraps her arm around Jensen’s shoulders and presses a kiss to his temple. “I know it’s rough, but you gotta live your life, you know? You have to be happy.”

“I’m starting to realize that,” Jensen says as his eyes start prickling slightly. “Jared makes me happy. He’s amazing, Sherri.”

“He is,” Sherri agrees. “But it ain’t all genes. You turned out pretty fantastic, too. It’s the choices we make that shape who we become. You just have to make the ones that feel right to you and whatever happens, happens.”

“Yeah,” Jensen agrees quietly and Sherri pokes him on the nose, leaving a smear of chocolate behind. Jensen scrunches up his nose and smiles at her. He knows where Jared got his heart.

Jensen holds the pan steady while Sherri pours the batter into all the cups. She puts the pan in the oven and sets the timer before wiping her hands on her apron again. She opens the cupboard and starts rifling through it.

“You get to pick the topping,” Sherri says as she gets up on her toes to dig. “We have about fifteen different types of rainbow sprinkles because Jared likes to make a statement. Chocolate sprinkles? God, there’s so much *shit* in here.”

Jensen laughs and the dogs suddenly start up. Sherri closes the cupboard and Jensen perks up. The front door opens and closes and they hear Jared tiredly shushing the dogs. Jensen blushes suddenly. What will Jared think of him spending all day with his mother?

The thought dies quickly when Jared rounds the corner. He tosses his keys on the dining room table and turns towards them. Sherri gasps and Jensen’s eyes widen.

“Oh, Jen.” Jared gives him a sleepy smile. “Hey.”

“Jared!” Sherri yells as she rushes over to him. “What the fuck happened to your *face*?”

She cups his cheek in her hand gently. Her thumb swipes across the bruise underneath his eye and makes him hiss. Jared grabs her hand and lowers it as he leans in to press a kiss to the top of her head.

“It’s nothing, Mom,” he says softly. “Troy apparently didn’t appreciate me getting in the middle of their business. But it’s fine. I drove Tess out to her mom’s in Napa. That’s why I was gone so long. Sorry.”

Jensen doesn’t know how to comprehend seeing Jared hurt. It makes him shake and tears him up inside. He takes a shaky step forward. He wants to make sure Jared is okay but he doesn’t want to intrude. He feels a stinging behind his eyes but it’s stupid because Jared’s fine. He’s walking and talking and standing right in front of him and he’s *fine*.

Jared hugs his mother and Jensen sees the scrapes on Jared’s knuckles. He’s tough. He can defend himself. That doesn’t mean he should have to. Jensen bites down hard on his lip.

“You need to knock it off with this shit,” Sherri says, looking up at Jared sternly. She’s not very scary. At her full height she still only comes up to Jared’s collarbone and she’s wiping chocolate sticky bangs out of her face. “Quit trying to fix everyone.”

“I’m sorry, okay?” Jared asks loudly. He nearly sways on his feet. It’s obvious that he hasn’t slept at all. “She called *me*. What was I supposed to do, leave her there?”

“You’re supposed to quit playing everyone’s goddamn hero when you’ve got your own life to live!” Sherri yells, and Jared flinches. Jensen shrinks back into the kitchen. His back hits the refrigerator and sends magnets clattering to the floor.

Jared and Sherri both jump and turn to face him. They look properly chagrined and Jensen

hangs his head. He has a brief moment of insanity where he wonders if he's just another charity case, if Jared is just playing hero to another helpless kid. But then Jared is touching his shoulder, thumb skirting the side of his neck, and Jensen feels guilty for even having the thought.

"Are you okay?" Jensen asks, looking up at the red-purple bruise marring Jared's perfect face and making his eye swell. Jensen glances at Sherri over Jared's shoulder, wondering if it's okay to be so close to Jared like this in front of her.

"I'm *fine*, ice-pop," Jared says, but Jensen isn't trembling because he's cold. "I'm a little tired."

"You should go lay down," Jensen tells him, reaching out to tug on the hem of his shirt.

"I'm totally – " He pauses to let out a giant yawn. " – fine. I smell cupcakes."

"Jared," Jensen says again. He lightly touches the bruise on Jared's face. He hisses slightly and looks at Jensen with bloodshot eyes. "Sleep."

"But – "

"Jared!" Sherri says as she goes into the kitchen to grab the bowl of frosting. "Let your boyfriend take care of you for awhile, okay? The cupcakes will be here when you wake up."

Jared's eyes widen and Jensen jumps a little, cheeks flushing with heat as he shoots Sherri a startled look. Jared rolls his lips into his mouth and sends his mother a glare over his shoulder. He wraps his fingers around Jensen's wrist and leads him down the hall.

Jensen has never been in Jared's bedroom before. The sheets are red and black and the bed is unmade. There are clothes and books and movies strewn all over the place and a laptop set haphazardly on the edge of a desk wedged in the corner. The walls are covered in pictures and a TV is on mute on top of his dresser. It looks like a teenager lives in here. A messy, electricity-wasting teenager.

"So, *that* happened," Jared sighs as he shuts the door, turning around and running his fingers through his hair. He looks up at Jensen sheepishly. His cheeks are pink.

"You told your mom I was your boyfriend?" Jensen asks, tripping slightly over the word. Jared sighs and leans back against the door.

"I didn't tell her that," he says. He meets Jensen's shy gaze with sleepy eyes. "I told her... things. She made an assumption."

Jensen looks at Jared closely and feels the familiar flutter in his belly he gets whenever

they're alone together. Jared looks nervous but hopeful, and Jensen thinks about what Sherri said about making your own choices and being happy.

"I could be your boyfriend," Jensen says, pulse fluttering as he gets the words out. He swallows hard and then smiles. He's happy with his decision.

"I – you. What?" Jared splutters and blinks a few times. "Jen – really?"

"Well – yeah," Jensen breathes, running his fingers through his hair. He hasn't gotten it cut since he met Jared and it's not so neat and tidy anymore. "I mean, I'm not ready to take an ad out in the paper or anything. But you and me? That's – yeah, Jared. I mean, it makes sense."

Jared stumbles across the room to stand in front of Jensen with a dopey grin on his face. Jensen's eyes are drawn to the blossoming bruise and the slight puffiness of that eye. Jared looks exhausted but content and Jensen nudges him in the direction of his messy bed.

"Now will you *please* lay down?" Jensen asks. He chuckles as Jared collapses onto his bed. He rolls onto his back and looks up at Jensen with fond eyes. He scoots over to the wall, leaving half of his bed empty.

"I know I'm being a horrible host." Jared yawns and stretches his limbs out. "But I promise I'll make it up to you if you take a nap with me."

"I could go for a nap," Jensen says as his eyes travel over the long expanse of Jared's body. He bites his lip. This isn't accidentally falling asleep in Jared's lap while watching a movie. This is intentional. Jensen lets out a breath and kicks off his shoes before climbing into bed with his – oh god, his *boyfriend*.

Jensen rolls onto his side and props his head up on his elbow as he pulls the covers up over them. Jared's eyes slip shut with a soft hum and Jensen carefully touches the corner of Jared's bruised eye, fingertips ghosting across heated skin.

"Does this hurt?" He asks. Jared's brows rise slightly but he doesn't open his eyes. Jensen has never seen him look so tired.

"A little," Jared mumbles. Jensen leans in to press a feather-light kiss to the mark with his hand on Jared's opposite cheek. "Mm, much better."

When Jensen finally pulls back, Jared's eyes are open and he's staring at Jensen intently.

"What?" He asks. Jared's lips quirk up into a lopsided smile.

“Trying to get you to kiss me using telepathy,” Jared sighs, shrugging one shoulder and settling deeper into his bed. “Guess I need to work on that.”

Jensen smirks and lets the tip of his pointer finger trail across Jared’s soft lips. Jared purses them out slightly against Jensen’s finger.

“You know,” Jensen says as his fingers trace Jared’s jaw. “You don’t always have to wait for me to kiss you. I mean, thank you for doing that at first, but – Jared, kissing you feels good. And when it’s just me and you like this, you don’t always have to make me come to you.”

“I just don’t want to scare you,” Jared says honestly, looking up at Jensen sleepily. “I don’t want to pressure you. I want you to always be comfortable around me.”

“Jared, you’ve never once made me feel pressured,” Jensen tells him. He lets his hand slide down the side of Jared’s neck and across his chest. “I’m not talking about – I don’t mean anything *e/se*. Just – if you want to kiss me and it feels right, do it.”

Jared barely lets him get the sentence out before he’s lifting his head and pressing their lips together gently. Jensen smiles into the kiss and leans over Jared to ease the strain on his neck. Their tongues tangle lazily for a moment before he pulls away, pressing their foreheads together.

“Sleep,” Jensen tells him. He curls up against his side and rests his head on Jared’s shoulder. He pulls the covers up to their chins and slips his hand under Jared’s shirt to rest on his belly. “I’ll be here when you wake up.”

“Promise?” Jared mumbles sleepily, pulling up the back of Jensen’s shirt to get his hand on bare skin. His touch makes Jensen shiver. It makes him warm all over.

“Duh,” Jensen says as his eyes slip shut. “There’s cupcakes in the oven.”



Jared is covered in sweat, calves burning with a sweet ache as he runs laps around the park. Each loop is marked off as a quarter mile and when he does twelve of them he jogs over to the basketball court.

He checks his watch and rolls his eyes. He turns the volume up on his iPod as he grabs his basketball and starts shooting baskets, relishing in the burn of his muscles.

After awhile Chad wanders up and Jared stares incredulously as he takes his ear buds out and loops the cord over his shoulders.

"You're late," Jared says as he looks his best friend up and down. He's wearing a tee shirt and basketball shorts but also flip-flops, and he's holding a soda in a blue koozie that reads *Don't be sexist. Broads hate that.* in bright pink font. "How are you going to play in those shoes?"

"Dude, honestly?" Chad pushes his aviators up to rest on the top of his highlighted head. "You're freakishly tall and even more freakishly good at this game. You're just gonna run circles around me and dunk on me every five seconds and I don't wanna deal with it. So I'm giving up. Bowing out gracefully, you might say."

"You are such a failure," Jared sighs. He shoots a basket and gets nothing but net.

"And you're gay," Chad retorts. "Your people aren't even supposed to be good at sports."

"And straight boys aren't supposed to get pedicures every other week," Jared replies as he runs over to get the ball.

"We're just breaking stereotypes left and right." Chad takes a sip from the crazy straw sticking out of his soda can. "And hey, just because I'm straight does *not* mean I should have to deal with toe funk."

"I concede to your point," Jared replies, tossing the ball in the air again. It hits the backboard and bounces off. Chad scampers off to get it, shoes slapping against the asphalt.

"Speaking of buttsex," Chad says as he passes Jared the ball. Jared dribbles it from hand to hand and raises an eyebrow.

"We weren't." Jared runs a circle around Chad just because he can and shoots another basket. He makes it this time.

"Buttsex is always on topic," Chad responds. The sunlight makes him squint and he puts his sunglasses back over his eyes. "How's the gayby?"

"I really wish you'd stop calling Jensen a gayby." Jared sighs and wipes the sweat from his forehead with his arm. Chad looks affronted and holds his arms out to the side.

"Jared. He likes boys and is shiny and new to all that is homo," Chad tells him before taking another sip from his straw. "The term was *coined* for boys like Jensen. He is a fresh-faced, bright-eyed baby gay. Thus, he is a gayby."

"Whatever," Jared replies. "Jensen is *super*, thanks for asking."

"Good." Chad snatches the ball from Jared with his free hand and dribbles it. "He seems to

be adjusting pretty well. ‘Cause, I gotta say – I did not see this going this well when it all started.”

“But you *did* say that,” Jared retorts as he snatches the ball back. “Loudly, if I can recall.”

“And I was *obviously* wrong.” Chad follows Jared around as he idly dribbles the ball. “I thought he was going to freak out and head for the hills, but he didn’t. He’s like, completely gone for you. I mean, you know that, right? He’s still super shy and quiet, but that much is obvious.”

Jared blushes and bites down on his smile. He tosses the ball and it sails effortlessly through the hoop.

“You make him happy. I mean, that boy was *sad* when he got here,” Chad continues, and Jared turns to face him. “And I’m not saying he’s suddenly all happy-happy joy-joy, but he’s doing good, you know?”

“Yeah,” Jared replies, scooping up the ball and bouncing it again. His heart is pounding at the mere thought of Jensen’s laugh. “He is.”

“Not to mention what he’s doing for you,” Chad says, and Jared looks over at him. “I know everyone thinks the sun comes out when you smile and rainbows shoot out of your ass and shit, but you weren’t *that* happy. I don’t think you were sad by any stretch, either. You were just – you were content. But not happy – not like you are now that you have Jensen.”

Jared blinks and stares at his best friend with one eyebrow arched. Chad isn’t wrong – he actually hit the nail on the head. Jared is happy now. Happier than he’s ever been.

“Since when are you all deep and observant and shit?” Jared asks and Chad shrugs as he gives him a trademark smirk.

“I have a lot of time on my hands,” Chad says simply. “When you’re out here in the heat scurrying around and asserting your sweaty manliness, I’m somewhere thinking and *not* smelling like the inside of a dirty asshole.”

Jared snorts and then throws the ball at Chad’s outstretched hand. It connects and sends his soda can, koozie, and straw combo flying. It all hits the ground and goes rolling across the asphalt, soda spilling and straw skittering away. Chad turns and looks at Jared incredulously, mouth agape.

“Okay, that? Fucked up,” Chad says, but Jared is too busy belly laughing at the expression on his face to respond. “If you broke my crazy straw I am kicking your fucking ass.”

Jared has to bend over and put his hands on his knees, he’s laughing so hard. Chad lets

out an angry growl, and when the basketball connects with Jared's hip he just laughs that much harder.



Saturday night after dinner Jensen bounces down the stairs with his hands in his pockets, intent on heading over to Jared's for one last late night before school starts up again. He's not planning on telling anyone where he's going or when he'll be back.

"Jensen." He freezes on the bottom step at the sound of his father's voice, shoulders tightening until they nearly touch his ears. He swallows hard and turns around to see his father sitting in his recliner with a newspaper open on his lap and glasses perched on the bridge of his nose. "I need to talk to you."

Jensen's stomach drops and his pulse pounds in his ears. His hands start to shake as he slowly walks over towards his father. He stops a few feet away and he pushes the ottoman out with his foot, gesturing for Jensen to sit on it. He does, head bowed and hands clenched into tight fists.

"Your mother wanted me to talk to you about the way you've been acting lately," Alan says sternly, and Jensen swallows hard. "You've developed quite an attitude problem. Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"No, sir," Jensen says timidly, refusing to meet his father's eyes. He sighs and Jensen squeezes his eyes shut.

"I think I know what's going on with you," Alan says. Jensen's head snaps up. He's about ready to cry and he's shaking because how could he know? "You've met someone."

"I – I don't – um," Jensen stammers, cheeks flushing as he bites down on his bottom lip. Alan chuckles and Jensen's head jerks up in surprise.

"Hey, I was young once," Alan says. "I know what it feels like when you fall ass over elbows for a pretty girl."

Jensen resists the urge to let out a bitter laugh as a familiar stab of pain hits his belly. Of course. A pretty *girl*. If only they knew.

Jensen just looks up at his father and tries not to cry.

"I'm glad you're fitting in here, Jensen," he says again, leaning forward. "But let's get one thing straight. This new attitude of yours isn't going to fly anymore. There are rules we expect you to follow. You're no longer going to just waltz in and out of this house whenever

you please. You will tell us when you are going somewhere and when you'll be home, and you will *not* continue to sass your mother and me like you've been doing. You will show us respect. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir," Jensen says. He swallows hard and furrows his brow. "Understood."

"And another thing." Jensen suppresses a sigh. "You treat this girl of yours with respect. Don't go letting your hormones get you into any untoward situations, you get me? You know what's proper and what isn't."

"Yes sir," Jensen says again. He wishes the floor would open and swallow him whole. "May I be excused?"

"Yes," Alan replies, waving him off with his newspaper. "Get out of here. Go to your girl's house. Just remember – things are going to change around here or you won't be going anywhere."

Jensen nods and gets up. Angry tears sting his eyes. He heads out the front door and resists the urge to slam it, hands shaking as he walks briskly up the street.

He'd wanted so badly to tell his father the truth, to get in his face and tell them that he has a *boyfriend* and that's why he's been so happy lately. But of course, he's a coward so he just sat there and let his father make his assumptions while guilt coiled in his belly because he knows Jared deserves better than that.

He steps up onto Jared's porch and knocks on the door. Breathing gets a little easier when he hears the dogs bark.

"DESIGNATION?" He hears Jared yell. He knits his brow.

"Uh, Jensen?" He ventures. The dogs start barking even louder.

"ACCESS GRANTED!" Jensen rolls his eyes as he opens the door. The dogs jump him and he gives them their mandatory ear scratches. "Ooh, you're just in time!"

"*My name is Michael Westen. I used to be a spy.*" Jensen smirks at the now-familiar line coming from the television. Jared and Sherri are on the couch watching *Burn Notice*, which is the show Jensen fell asleep to on that first day and has since learned is Jared's favorite.

"Hey, Bean!" Sherri calls. Jensen gives her a little wave and blushes at the nickname. He's never had a nickname before. Now he seems to have several.

Jensen is glad Sherri is here. He was feeling rebellious and reckless and if she hadn't been around Jensen might have tried to push Jared into his bedroom to do something he would

have regretted.

“Hey,” Jensen says quietly, scrubbing his hand over his face as he comes to stand in front of the couch. Jared looks up at him and his expression goes from playful to concerned in no time flat.

“What’s wrong, freckle-nose?” Jared reaches up to grab Jensen’s hand and pull him down onto the couch. He falls forward onto his knees on the cushion between Jared and Sherri and shifts around until he’s on his butt, smushed up against Jared’s side. Jared wraps his arms around Jensen’s shoulders and Sherri pats his ankle where his feet are tucked underneath him. He’s past the point of caring about Sherri being around when Jared touches him. As long as they keep it G rated, he no longer gets nervous.

“My dad had a talk with me about my *attitude problem*,” Jensen says, doing finger quotes around the phrase. “I need to work on it.”

“Well, you *are* kind of an asshole,” Jared says easily, fingertips stroking Jensen’s collarbone through his shirt.

“Not to mention hideously unattractive,” Sherri says blandly, and then reaches out to tickle the bottom of Jensen’s foot. Jensen bites down on the urge to laugh and pokes Jared in the stomach. Jared catches his hand and laces their fingers together.

“Is everything okay?” He mumbles against the top of Jensen’s head. He huffs out a sigh and nods, resting his head on Jared’s shoulder.

“Yeah. It just sucks that they waited until now to actually give a crap about what I do,” Jensen whines. He presses his mouth against Jared’s shoulder and feels his cheeks heat up. “They think I have a girlfriend.”

“You pig!” Jared says loudly and pushes at Jensen’s shoulder. “Is she prettier than me?”

“No one is prettier than you,” Jensen says automatically, half joking and half dead-serious.

“You know that’s right,” Jared snuggles back against the cushions and holds Jensen tighter. “It’s okay, Jen. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Jensen nods and closes his eyes when Jared presses a reassuring kiss to his temple. He rests his head on Jared’s shoulder and watches TV with his boyfriend and his mom. He tries to push his conversation with his father to the back of his mind and wishes he could be as unflappable as Jared.

“No, but *seriously*,” Jared says a little while later, apropos of absolutely nothing. “How fucking *cool* would it be to be a freelance spy? Running around saving lives and blowing

shit up with your hot little sidekick. Just like, being continually awesome all the *time!*”

He gives Jensen a squeeze at ‘hot little sidekick’, and Jensen cranes his head back to look at Sherri.

“What’s wrong with him?” He asks. Sherri rolls her eyes exasperatedly and gestures towards the coffee table. There’s a nearly empty two-liter of Pepsi and a half eaten plate of brownies on it, and Jensen nods in understanding. Sugar rush. He leans forward to grab a brownie and Jared’s fingers tickle the exposed strip of skin just above the waistband of his jeans. Jensen shudders and leans back, sighing at the feel of Jared’s strong, warm arm around his shoulders.

Jared talks pretty consistently through the next couple episodes of their impromptu marathon, providing constant commentary. Jensen is amused, lazing against Jared’s chest with one arm slung across his belly.

The sugar crash is almost instantaneous. One minute he’s rambling and the next he’s slumped over, eyelids drooping sleepily before finally closing all the way.

“Aaaand there he goes,” Sherri says fondly. “Out for the count. I literally do not know how I never threw him against the wall as a child.”

“He was pretty loud and rambunctious, huh?” Jensen asks. To his surprise Sherri smiles sadly.

“Yeah. He was really quiet for awhile after his dad died,” she says, thumbing at a ring on her finger. It looks like a wedding ring and Jensen frowns. “It was rough, but he eventually bounced back. Now I don’t mind the sugar rushes too bad.”

“Can I ask what happened?” Jensen asks timidly as he sits up and lifts Jared’s arm from his shoulders. “He doesn’t like to talk about it. Then again, you probably don’t either. I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s okay,” Sherri replies, tucking her hair behind her ear. “It was a car accident. Jared was five. Gerry was, uh. He left work early to pick Jared up from school and take him to a baseball game and got in an accident on the way. He and Tig loved baseball.”

“Tig?” Jensen asks. Sherri chuckles a little.

“I used to call him Tigger when he was little. Still do sometimes,” Sherri replies, looking over at him. Her eyes are wet and Jensen feels bad for bringing it up at all. “Because he was always bouncing around, you know? Oh god, don’t tell him I told you that.”

“I won’t,” Jensen chuckles. He struggles to move past the painful topic. “I never had a nickname as a kid.”

"That's just weird," Sherri says, looking over at him. "It couldn't last forever, Bean."

"I'd still like to know how you came up with that," Jensen chuckles. She shrugs and smiles a little.

"Jensen, Jen, Jenny, Jellybean, Bean," she says sheepishly, and Jensen laughs. "It's a weird thought process."

"Well, I like it," Jensen admits. "And I bet Jared loves it when you call him Tig."

"Maybe," she replies. She looks over at Jared with such a fond smile that it makes Jensen's heart ache for what he never had. "Come on, Bean. It's late. I'll drive you home."

"Huh?" Jensen says, shaking his head to clear his dismal thoughts. "Oh, no. It's okay, Sherri. It's not far. I can walk."

"I know you can. Doesn't mean you should." She pats his thigh as she gets up and stretches. Jensen nods and gets up as well. Sherri leans over Jared's sleeping form and reaches out to shake his knee. "Time for bed, Tig."

Sherri winks at Jensen and he bites down on a laugh. Jared squirms and pulls his feet up on the couch, spreading out across it.

"Tig! Go to bed!" Jared lets out a low groan and snuggles against the back of the couch with his eyes closed tight.

"Five minutes, Mommy. Comfy," he mumbles, and Jensen can't help the chuckle that spills out of his lips. Jared is *adorable*.

"Good night, Jared," he says amusedly. Jared suddenly freezes. One eye opens to land on Jensen.

"Oh. Jensen," he says as his cheeks flush pink. "I was... unaware that you were still here."

"Don't worry about it, Tig," Jensen teases, and Jared sighs. "Your mom is taking me home. You go to bed."

Jensen walks over to the couch and leans over Jared to press a soft kiss to his forehead. Jared smiles and touches Jensen's wrist. His fingertips catch on Jensen's jelly bracelet.

"Night," Jared mumbles. Jensen smiles and straightens up, blushing slightly when Sherri slips her arm through his to walk towards the door, car keys twirling around her finger as she whistles.

It's cold outside and all Jensen wants to do is go back through the front door and cuddle

with Jared on his lumpy sofa.

He wants to be a part of *this* family.



The mood around campus when school starts up again is decidedly cheerful. Sure, everyone had a fantastic spring break (but no one beats Jared out in that category; his was the *best*) and it's a little hard to get back into the swing of things, but now they're in the home stretch. Two more months until freedom – until glorious summer.

But of course, Jared is graduating this year. He hasn't quite processed that yet.

On Tuesday Jared, Chad, and Misha use their lunch break to run to the grocery store to pick up the necessary supplies for the afternoon's GSA meeting while Jensen eats with the girls. They grab a basket and load it up, spending the majority of their time in one particular aisle.

Jared goes up to the register and sets the basket on the conveyor belt. An elderly woman behind them spots it and her eyes widen. Chad giggles madly and even Misha cracks up. Jared swats them both on the back of the head.

"Grow up. It's not like we haven't done this before," Jared says as he shares a look with Misha. "It's not funny." The cashier glances at their basket and does a literal double take. Jared bites his lip. "Fine. It's a little funny."

"It looks like we're having a party," Misha says. He glances over at the candy rack and throws a few bags of M&M's on top of their questionable purchases.

"The world's *greatest* party," Chad adds, tossing on some peanut butter cups. Jared rolls his eyes and smiles politely at the cashier. She's an older woman and Jared sort of knows her by association, due to the fact that his mom manages the place.

"Uh, hi Jared," she says with a tight smile as she starts to ring them up. "Will this – um, be all for you?"

"Yeah." Jared scratches the back of his neck nervously. It's a move he picked up from Jensen. "It's for a school project."

She drops the item she's currently scanning and Chad and Misha crack up, falling against each other behind Jared. He sighs, looks up towards the ceiling, and slowly dies of awkwardness.

Once he pays for his purchases he grabs the bag and flees with Chad and Misha on his heels. Sherri is walking in the front door as they're walking out. She has her purse slung over one shoulder and her sunglasses perched on top of her head.

"Oh hey, guys!" She calls, and Jared breathes out harshly through his nose. "What are you doing?"

"Hey Mom!" Chad greets her. Misha scrunches his nose as she ruffles his hair.

She looks down at the bags in Jared's hand. The brightly colored packages press against the translucent plastic.

"They're for GSA!" Jared blurts, and she raises an eyebrow.

"Just... go," she says, smirking and shaking her head. Jared nods and flees out into the sunshine.

After the last period bell rings, Jared starts making his way towards the Tech building. His phone buzzes in his pocket and he extracts it to read a text from Jensen, letting him know he'll be in the library and to come get him when he's done. Jared smiles.

He's never asked Jensen to come to a GSA meeting. Not since that first disastrous time. Jensen knows when and where they take place and when he's ready, he'll come. Jared knows that, and he's very patient.

By a few minutes after three everyone is pretty much assembled. Jared hops off the desk he was sitting on and takes a deep breath before calling the meeting to order.

He walks around an empty table they set up to stand behind it, leaning forward and placing his palms flat on it. Chad, Misha, Sandy, and Sophia all stand behind him.

"Okay, guys," Jared begins. "What we're going to talk about today is sort of a touchy subject. It might make some of you a little squirmy, and some of you a little giggly. Just remember – we're all adults here. Well, almost. We're gonna talk –"

"Let's talk about sex!" Chad shouts, and dumps their grocery store bags out onto the empty table. Boxes of condoms, bottles of lube, dental dams, and pretty much everything else you can find on Aisle 8 – Family Planning all come tumbling out. All that, and bananas.

There's a rumble of murmurs through the crowd, a few laughs, and the distinctive sound of Mr. Barnes, their advisor, audibly facepalming in the corner. He's awesome, as far as advisors go. He doesn't really get involved, but he's always a little antsy on Sex Ed day. Probably because of Chad.

Okay, *mostly* because of Chad.

“Thank you, Chad,” Jared says scathingly. He pushes Chad away from the table and waits for everyone to quiet down. “More specifically, we’re going to talk about *safe* sex. Now, I know everyone has sat through this already in Health, but not everyone feels comfortable talking about that with their teachers and people they don’t know.”

“So, that’s why we’re going over it again,” Misha adds, and Jared nods. “We’re all friends here.”

“That’s right,” Jared continues. “And don’t think of this like a lecture. This is more like an open forum. Feel free to add any thoughts or questions to what we present. You know that no one’s going to judge you here. Alright, I think we’re ready to start, as soon as Chad stops giggling.” Sophia smacks the back of his head, and Chad’s smile drops. “Thanks, Sophie.”

“Anytime,” she says, and Chad scowls at her.

They start going through the basics – just a recap of everything they already teach in Health. After awhile, it’s time for Jared’s least favorite part – the condom demonstration. He turns towards the table to grab a banana and a little foil package. There’s some scuffling near the door but Jared doesn’t bother looking. People pop in and out all the time and this topic just isn’t one everyone is comfortable hearing.

“Probably the most important rule about safe sex is to always wear a condom,” Jared says, emphasizing each word by jabbing the banana in the air. “It’s vital with vaginal and anal sex. Basically, if it’s going in you or you’re putting it in someone? It’s gotta have one of these on it.”

Jared rips the condom open and pulls it out of the package. His nose wrinkles at the slimy feel of it. Of course he would grab one of the lubed ones. He holds up the banana and rolls the condom on carefully.

“There’s plenty of different types of condoms. We have tons up here for you to take,” Jared says as his fingers smooth the condom over the fruit and he gets all sticky with lube. “You and your partner can experiment and figure out which is best for you.”

“Now that sounds like a homework project I can get behind,” Chad calls out, and then snorts. “See what I did there? Oh man. Double entendres are awesome.”

Misha laughs and high-fives Chad. Jared rolls his eyes and wipes his fingers on the seat of his pants. There’s a sound coming from the door and Sandy jabs Jared in the back.

He looks over to see Jensen staring at him with wide eyes, back pressed against the door. As soon as they make eye contact Jensen shakes his head and pushes the door open, leaving the room and taking off down the hall.

“Are you freaking *serious*?” Jared calls as his heart drops into his stomach. “He chooses *today*? He couldn’t wait a week until we’re planning the fucking year-end *bake sale*?”

He turns to Misha with a panicked expression, and Misha pats his shoulder as he steps forward. He gestures towards the door and nods.

“Go,” he says. Jared nods gratefully. “We’ve got it covered.”

Jared takes off running. His heart hammers in his chest. Jensen *just* got comfortable with where they are now – cuddling and kissing without it being a big deal. Jared is afraid this has opened a whole new can of worms, that it’s a giant step back for Jensen.

He curses his luck and Jensen’s timing as he runs out of the Tech building to find him.



Jensen drops down into a sitting position on the empty path behind the building, the same place Jared took him to for lunch that first week, and buries his face in his hands. He can feel his cheeks burning and his hands tremble slightly.

He’s been getting better, but now he’s reminded just how out of his element he really is.

“Jensen.” Jared looks both relieved and hesitant as he approaches. He sits down across from Jensen on the concrete, mirroring his cross-legged position. “Wow, so, I’m usually really good at dealing with awkward situations but this one takes the cake. I don’t really know what to say.”

“Sorry,” Jensen blurts. He looks up and feels his cheeks flush anew when he meets Jared’s eyes. “I just – GSA means so much to you and I wanted to see you in action. I just didn’t know you’d be talking about... that stuff. It sort of freaked me out, I guess.”

“Hey, you don’t have to be sorry,” Jared replies. “I understand that you’re going through a massive transition and you’re taking it one step at a time. I know that what we have can be overwhelming and a little scary. You weren’t expecting to hear it and it freaked you out a little. It’s no big deal.”

“I guess,” Jensen says. He shrugs, still feeling a little embarrassed. Jared runs his fingers through his hair and bites his lip.

“I know I sounded really blasé about it,” Jared says. Jensen nods. The easy, almost detached way Jared talked about sex had unnerved him a little. “But I’ve given that talk a bunch of times. I can be really blatant when it comes to sex, but I’m blatant about pretty much everything.”

“I know.” Jensen picks at his bracelet. He opens his mouth but snaps it shut again, teeth worrying at his bottom lip.

“You – you can talk to me about it, if you want,” Jared offers. Jensen looks up at him, startled. “I mean, if you’re curious. It’s not like I have a lot of experience, but you know I’ll always be honest with you.”

Jensen stares at his bracelet and picks at his fingernails. Truth is, he *is* curious. He has been for a while now. Now that he’s over the initial shock, Jared’s touch affects him in other ways. Simple things like the way Jared’s fingers trail along his collarbone or the feeling of Jared’s lips on his neck have been making him flush with desire. Jared has been keeping him up at night.

He’s not ready to fulfill this need Jared gives him yet, but it probably wouldn’t hurt to talk about it.

“So,” Jensen starts, swallowing hard and staring at his fingernails. “Have you ever, well – you know.”

“Once,” Jared says calmly, and Jensen nods. The information doesn’t surprise him, but it doesn’t make him happy either. He’s never really thought about Jared’s relationships before they met. Even though he knew it to be true, it still makes him sort of sad to hear that he wasn’t Jared’s first everything like Jared was his.

“So you had a boyfriend, then,” Jensen says delicately as his fingers pinch and pull at his bracelet. He can never seem to stop touching it.

“No,” Jared replies. “I mean, I’ve dated but you’re the first person I’ve considered a boyfriend.”

“Then who...” Jensen trails off, brow furrowing slightly.

“It was a friend.” Jared sighs and runs his fingers through his hair again. “It was, um – it was actually Misha.”

“Wait. You – and Misha?” Jensen asks. The news sort of shocks him. He’s never gotten the feeling that Jared and Misha had ever been more than good friends. “I didn’t know you guys were – like that.”

“We weren’t,” Jared tells him. He looks around and then scoots a little closer, so close their knees are brushing, and then he leans in slightly. “We were fifteen and we thought it would be a good idea to get it over with, you know? Avoid the hype. We never had any feelings for each other or anything. He’s one of my best friends, and we trusted each other. That seemed like enough at the time. But no, we were never together or anything like that.”

Jensen bites his lip and looks up at Jared’s earnest face. He can’t imagine the amount of trust it would take to let someone get that close to you, to let them *inside* you. Jensen knows the basics, like what goes where and everything. But that’s about it. He has no idea what it all entails. But that’s a conversation for another day. He doesn’t think he could get the words out right now. But there is something he needs to know.

“Do you regret it?” Jensen asks, and he manages to look Jared in the eye as he does. Jared bites his bottom lip and looks up at Jensen from under his bangs.

“It’s complicated,” Jared begins. “I know now that it wasn’t the greatest idea in the world, but I never regretted it. Not until recently. I mean, it was fun. I got off. But it wasn’t anything *special*. It didn’t really mean anything, and it could have meant so much, had I waited.”

“Waited for what?” Jensen asks softly. Jared smiles and wraps his fingers around Jensen’s wrist, tucking his thumb under his bracelet.

“You,” Jared says simply, and Jensen blinks. The backs of his eyes sting and he blinks rapidly as he leans in a little closer. He doesn’t understand how anyone can be so *perfect*.

“Jared, I – “ He trails off, not knowing what to say. He looks down and Jared taps the bottom of his chin, making him look back up into Jared’s multi-colored eyes.

“Jen, listen to me,” he says, and Jensen does. He’s always hanging on Jared’s every word. “Just because we’re talking about this does not mean we have to act on anything, okay? I’m loving where we’re at. I am ridiculously happy just to sit in the same room with you. So, promise me you won’t do anything until you’re absolutely sure you’re ready, okay?”

“I promise,” Jensen tells him. He swallows hard and touches Jared’s elbow, cupping it in his free hand. “But you have to promise me something, too.”

“What is it?” Jared’s eyes are serious, ready to promise Jensen the moon if he dare ask.

“Promise me that when I tell you that I’m ready,” Jensen starts, holding Jared’s gaze, “you’ll believe me.”

“Promise,” Jared says softly. He leans in to press a kiss to Jensen’s forehead. Jensen does the same to him, sealing their vow.

Onto *Part 6*.

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/249027.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/249027.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 6)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:53:00 : 53-68 minutes

[Back to Part 5.](#)



“This is slave labor,” Jared says with a smirk. He’s sitting up on the counter and swinging his feet back and forth. “Borderline kidnapping. A blatant exploitation of my unconditional love for you.”

“Jared,” Sherri says exasperatedly, cutting him a look. “You *offered* to come help bag groceries. Now get the hell off of the counter.”

“But what fun would it be if I didn’t bitch the whole time?” Jared asks sweetly. He hops off of the counter and leans against the end of the check stand.

“I don’t know if it’d be fun.” She redoes her ponytail and yawns. “But it’d be *peaceful*.”

A young mom and her toddler come up to the register and Jared makes funny faces at the kid while he bags their groceries. She giggles and tugs on her curly blonde pigtails.

“Bye, princess!” He calls once they’re all done at the check stand. The little girl gives him a high-five and her mom smiles warmly at Jared. He beams back at her and tucks his thumbs in the straps of his green grocer’s apron.

“So tell me why you’re working a double and cashiering, Miss Manager,” Jared says as he leans heavily against the counter again. “And more importantly, why I’m here bagging groceries instead of your paid employees.”

“Because there’s apparently something going around and half the night crew called in sick.” Sherri hides another yawn behind her hand. “And we’re stupidly understaffed.”

“You know I’m just giving you shit,” Jared says seriously. “I’m always around to – oh fuck my life.”

Jared’s eyes widen as he spots Jensen and the prim, uptight looking woman that must be his mother approaching his mother’s check stand. There’s a younger girl with strawberry blonde hair trailing behind them that has to be Mackenzie. Of all the cash registers in all the

grocery stores in all the world, they choose this one. Jensen has his head down, feet shuffling as they draw closer.

“What is it?” Sherri asks, and Jared nudges her shoulder. She spots them and stands up a little straighter.

“Just my closeted boyfriend and his evangelic, homophobic mother heading straight for us,” Jared says uneasily, running his fingers through his hair.

“Oh. Has she met you?”

Jared shoots her an incredulous look and rolls his eyes.

“Sure,” he replies sarcastically. “Just the other night I was invited over for pot roast and ice cream sundaes, and then we all sang Kumbaya around the campfire in their backyard. *No*, she hasn’t met me.”

“You’re an asshole,” Sherri says simply.

“*You’re* an asshole,” he replies. “Oh shit, here they come. This is going to be so awkward. Be cool.”

“Good evening,” Sherri says once they walk up to the register. “Did you find everything okay?”

Jensen looks up and his eyes widen when he spots them. He looks back and forth, eyes darting over to his mother and back as his cheeks turn red. Jared gives him a reassuring smile.

“Jensen,” Donna says irritably. “Are you going to help or just stand there?”

Jensen jumps a little, tearing his eyes away from Jared as he unloads the shopping cart onto the conveyor belt. Mackenzie is reading the covers of all the tabloids. Donna snaps her fingers in her daughter’s general direction.

“Mackenzie,” she barks. “Will you stop reading that trash and help your brother? Apparently it’s too complicated a task for him to handle all by himself.”

Mackenzie rolls her eyes as soon as Donna turns her head and half-heartedly helps to unload the cart. Jensen drops a can of corn on the ground and squeezes his eyes shut before bending down to grab it.

“Watch what you’re doing, Jensen!” Donna chides. Jared can damn near see Jensen trembling from where he’s standing. He never thought Jensen was exaggerating about his

family, but to see it first hand is heartbreaking. He wants to pull Jensen into his arms, but he can't even acknowledge that they know each other, let alone their relationship. "I swear you make it a *point* to be embarrassing."

Jensen swallows hard and looks away from Jared and Sherri like he's ashamed.

"That's okay," Sherri cuts in, laughing awkwardly. She tries to catch Jensen's eye but he steadfastly looks away. "Dented cans are half-price. Go ahead and drop a few more if you want."

"That won't be necessary. I'm sure I can manage to pay full price on a sixty cent can of corn." Donna says as she takes her checkbook out of her purse. Sherri shoots Jared a look and rings the rest of their groceries up silently. Jared bags them as neatly as he can and stacks all the bags in the cart. "Jensen, will you stop *fidgiting*?"

"Your total is \$89.57," Sherri says quickly, like she's trying to save Jensen. Donna scribbles out a check and hands it over.

"Do you need any help out with your bags?" Jared asks politely as he pushes the cart over to them. Jensen takes it and he jerks a little when their fingers brush. He refuses to look at Jared but he can still see the pain in Jensen's eyes.

"I'm sure we can handle it," Donna says snidely, slinging her purse over her shoulder. Jared nods and watches as Jensen silently pushes the cart towards the exit, shoulders hunched over like all he wants to do is curl into a little ball.

"Have a nice night," Sherri says, and Donna doesn't return the sentiment before following her silent children out of the store.

"What a *bitch*," Sherri sneers as soon as the doors shut behind them. Her eyes go soft and sympathetic. "Poor Bean."

"I don't know what to do." Jared feels tears sting the corners of his eyes. "I don't know how to make it better."

"You can't, Tig," Sherri says sadly. "You can't change his family."

She loops her arm around his torso and gets up on her toes to press a kiss to his temple. Jared clenches and unclenches his fists, fighting against the urge to run after Jensen and give him a hug.

They help a few more customers and Jared has to run and get a new loaf of whole grain bread after he distractedly drops a two-liter of soda on top of one. When the line slows, he leans against the counter again and stares at his shoes. His cell phone vibrates in his

pocket and he extracts it to see one new text from Jensen. It simply reads *I am so sorry.*

Jared bites his lip and blinks rapidly as he replies. *Don't worry about it. You do what you have to. I'll call you when I get home. <3*

Jared lets out a harsh breath and runs his fingers through his hair. They catch on the tangles and he winces. His mom taps him on the shoulder and he looks up to see her handing him a package of sour ropes. He takes them and opens them with a pout, shoving two into his mouth and barely chewing.

As soon as Jared realized he was gay he told himself that he would never hide who he was. He would never be ashamed. He's always stuck by it, even when he got teased for being the only out and proud eighth grader at their junior high.

But then again, he has a mother that is warm, accepting, and loving. She knows how precious life is, how very short it can be, and that it doesn't do any good to waste it on pretending to be something you're not.

But then he met Jensen. And he's not hiding *himself* at all. He hasn't changed anything about the way he acts. But he did think that when he got a boyfriend that he'd be able to shower him with affection. He figured they'd walk down the halls holding hands, that they'd kiss each other whenever they wanted.

He didn't think that he would ever be with a boy and have to keep it a secret. He didn't think it'd be so complicated.

But Jensen is worth keeping, however Jared can get him. They just can't be themselves out in the open. Not here, anyway.

"Hey," Jared says suddenly. He extracts another sour rope from the package as he gets an idea. "Let me borrow your car on Saturday."

"Why?" Sherri blows her bangs out of her face. "What's wrong with your car?"

"Uh, it's a piece of shit and I'm afraid to take it out of city limits?" Jared replies. He throws a sour rope at her and she catches it, shoving it in her mouth.

"Fine, but it better have a full tank of gas when I get it back," she says, and Jared nods.

He has an idea. And face it, his ideas are *always* awesome.



Jensen is lying in bed staring at the shadows on the ceiling when his phone vibrates on the

nightstand, startling him from his thoughts.

It's Jared's name on the display and he thumbs it open eagerly. Guilt has been eating at him ever since he left the grocery store, but he hadn't known what else to do.

"Hey," Jensen says quietly. "Look, I'm so sorry. I didn't know what else –"

"Jen, calm down," Jared cuts in. He sounds sleepy. *"I'm not mad at you or anything. It's not like you ignored me on purpose. Stop worrying about it."*

"Okay." Jensen takes a deep breath and relaxes back against his bed. Jared is right. There's nothing he can do about it now. "Why were you working at the store?"

"A bunch of people called in sick," Jared yawns. *"Mom called me in to help."*

"Oh." Jensen bites his lip. "Tell her she can call me too, if she ever needs help."

"Will do." Jared yawns again and Jensen can vividly conjure up the image of what he looks like all sleepy and snug in his sheets.

"Are you in bed?" Jensen asks, and Jared lets out an affirmative hum. "Why don't you go to sleep?"

"Rather talk to you." His voice is sleepy and rough, syllables dripping off his tongue like thick honey. *"You in bed?"*

"Yeah," Jensen says. He's surprised to find his own voice a little rough as well, dropped an octave lower. He stretches out, one hand resting low on his stomach as the other holds the phone to his ear.

"Mm, wish you were here with me," Jared breathes, and Jensen swallows hard. *"Want you in my arms. Wanna kiss you."*

"I – I wanna be there too," Jensen says softly as he closes his eyes. It's not hard to picture himself in Jared's bed with him, and he actually has to resist the urge to crawl out of the window and make it happen. "Wish I was."

"Speaking of," Jared rumbles. Jensen feels heat blossom low in his belly, warm and newly familiar. *"We're going out on Saturday. Picking you up at eleven. Claiming you all day."*

"Where are we going?" Jensen asks curiously. Jared lets out a rough chuckle that does nothing to quell the fire igniting in his veins.

"It's a surprise. All you need to know is that I'm going to kiss you a lot," Jared promises, and Jensen shuts his eyes tight as his dick stirs. Jared makes him so crazy, makes him stiff and

hard in his shorts and Jensen doesn't know how to deal with it. "*Gonna kiss that spot on your neck that makes you shake.*"

"Promise?" Jensen asks roughly, feeling bold. His hand travels down his stomach, fingers playing at the waistband of his boxers.

"*Promise,*" Jared says. "*Now I'm gonna go to sleep before I say something stupid.*"

"No," Jensen pleads. "Say something stupid."

"*Night, Jensen,*" Jared says after a long pause. Jensen resists the urge to let out a whimper of protest.

"Night," Jensen sighs, flipping his phone shut when the call disconnects. He sets the phone on the nightstand and scrubs his hand over his face. His boxers are tented and his dick is throbbing.

He keeps one hand over his eyes as he slides the other hand into his boxers and wraps it around his erection. It's not the first time he's touched himself and thought of Jared, but it's the first time he's done it intentionally.

It's the first time he's ever let himself wonder what it would feel like to let Jared touch him. Not just casual brushes of his hands across his skin, but to touch him like *this*.

Jensen bites his lip and keeps his hand over his eyes as he arches up into his tight grasp. He thinks of Jared's strong hands, of his pink lips and his tan skin. He thinks about the taut stretch of that skin over his stomach and the paler line of it where his pants slip down. He thinks about Jared's warm eyes and his soft hair. He thinks about Jared's slick lips on his skin, pressing in and sucking softly; thinks about his fingers digging into Jensen's freckled shoulders.

He thinks about *Jared*.

It's over quickly. He bites down on his palm as he shoots, coating his stomach with sticky fluid. He breathes heavily into the dark room and pulls his shirt over his head. He wipes off and crumples it into a ball before shoving it under his bed.

He presses his palms into his eye sockets as he comes down, chest heaving up and down in the moonlight.

He's so fucked up and gone over this boy, and there's no going back.



Jared pulls his mom's sedan up to the curb with a screech at three minutes to eleven on Saturday morning. He's already dialing Jensen's number before he even comes to a full stop.

"*Coming!*" Jensen shouts. He hangs up before Jared can even get a word out. He chuckles and slumps down in the seat, sipping on his iced coffee as he waits. Jensen comes jogging up the street and nearly passes the car in his hurry.

He does a quick double take, obviously not expecting Sherri's car, and runs around it to climb into the passenger seat. Jared hands him a coffee and Jensen stares down at it with his brows furrowed.

"Hey," Jared laughs, reaching over to squeeze Jensen's knee. "It's coffee. You gonna stare at it or drink it?"

"I don't drink coffee," Jensen says. He pulls the wrapper off of the straw and brings it to his lips. He takes an experimental sip and licks his lips, making an approving noise before taking another drink. "Okay, *now* I drink coffee."

"Oh god," Jared groans. "You're going to be bouncing off of the walls."

Jensen doesn't reply. He's too busy holding his cup in both hands and slurping. Jared pulls away from the curb and navigates out of town. As soon as they hit a red light Jared leans over and cups Jensen's chin, pulling his mouth away from the straw to give him a quick kiss.

"Oh hi." Jensen blinks and looks around as he comes out of his coffee trance. "Where are we going?"

"Out of town," Jared says simply. He grabs his sunglasses from the console and slips them on as he merges onto the freeway.

"No seriously," Jensen says as he looks around again. "Where are we going?"

"*No seriously,*" Jared mimics, grinning over at his boyfriend. "I'm not telling."

"Are we meeting up with the guys?" Jensen asks curiously, sipping at his drink again. Jared shakes his head.

"See, there's this thing couples do sometimes," Jared tells him. "I don't know if you've ever heard of it. It's called going on a date. I thought we could give it a try."

"You're taking me on a date?" Jensen turns in his seat a little. "Where is this date taking place?"

"I will kick you out of this car, Jensen," Jared warns. "Don't tempt me."

"I have a fear of the unknown!" Jensen squeaks. He slumps down in his seat and clutches his coffee to his chest.

"You *love* the unknown," Jared says with a smirk. He turns up the radio and presses down on the gas, sending them speeding down the freeway as Jensen laughs in the passenger seat.

To his credit, Jensen lasts almost a whole hour before asking again.

"Okay no, *seriously*," Jensen says once his coffee is all gone. "Where are you taking me? You could have warned me we were going on a *road trip*."

"It's not a road trip if we're coming back the same day," is all Jared says, chuckling when Jensen lets out a low growl. Jared reaches out to trace the curve of Jensen's ear with his thumb, fingertips trailing along his jaw and down the side of his neck before falling away. Jensen looks over at him and lets out a soft sigh. He slumps down in his seat again and lets his hands fall into his lap.

"I have to pee!" Jensen exclaims an hour later, ten minutes after he starts squirming thanks to his shiny new caffeine-slash-sugar rush. Jared chuckles and takes the next exit, pulling into a gas station just off the freeway. Jensen goes to exit the car but Jared hits the lock button just as he's reaching for the handle. "Jared!"

"I'm gonna require payment before I let you go," Jared says with a little smirk. "Gotta kiss me first."

Jensen throws himself over the console and presses his lips firmly against Jared's, biting down on his bottom lip and tugging.

"Wow," Jared breathes when Jensen pulls away. Their faces are an inch apart and Jensen pats at Jared's chest and whines a little. "What?"

"I *really* have to pee," Jensen admits, kissing Jared a little softer. Jared chuckles against his plush lips and unlocks the door. Jensen gives him one last peck before fleeing towards the restrooms.

Jared fills up the gas tank while he waits even though he doesn't really need to yet. Gas is cheap here and this day is already going to make a dent in his meager checking account. He's still doing the math in his head when Jensen comes out of the gas station with a white plastic bag in one hand and cup of coffee in the other.

"Fuck. I've created a monster," Jared says to himself, rolling his eyes. Jensen walks by and

Jared snatches the cup from his hand. Jensen lets out a squeak of protest. "You don't need anymore coffee. It'll give you a stomachache, and that would completely fuck up my plans for the day."

"Then how come *you* can drink it?" Jensen asks when Jared takes a sip from the cup.

"Because I've had years to perfect my iron stomach." Jared makes a face and smacks his lips at the coffee. "Besides, gas station coffee is the devil's brew. If you're good I'll take you to a Starbucks later."

"Fine." Jensen walks around to climb in the passenger seat as Jared drops the coffee in the trash and gets in the driver's seat. "I bought you sour ropes, but now I think I'm just going to eat them myself."

"Aw, see," Jared replies, biting back a smile. "I was just trying to look out for your well-being and now you're being malicious."

Jensen makes a big show of opening the package of sour ropes and slowly extracting one, dangling it over his open mouth before dropping it in and chewing noisily. Jared rolls his eyes amusedly and guides them back onto the freeway.

A few minutes later Jensen sets the half-eaten package of candy on Jared's lap and taps his shoulder. Jared looks over to see Jensen sticking out his tongue. It's dark blue with all the mixed dyes from the candy. He laughs and washes it down with a swig of Dr. Pepper.

"A boy after my own heart," Jared says, and Jensen smiles at him. He doesn't bother telling Jensen that he's already won it.

Jared likes to think he already knows.

It's only another twenty minutes or so before Jared is navigating off of the freeway again. Jensen twists in his seat and presses his forehead against the glass, knees jiggling up and down. Jared's going to have to pound some serious sugar if he wants to catch up to his hyperactive boyfriend anytime soon.

Not that he's complaining or anything.

Jared figures their destination is pretty obvious once they near the fairgrounds. The tops of the rides loom high in the sky, silhouetted by the bright sun. Jared can't really gage Jensen's reaction without looking at him, and he has to concentrate on parking in the lumpy field across the street.

When they exit the car the smell of *fair* hits Jared's nose. It's freshly cut grass, corn dogs, cotton candy, farm animals, and summer all rolled up into one distinctive smell that

promises hours of fun. That coupled with the noises – giddy shrieks, bells, whistles, and music – makes excitement pump through Jared’s veins.

“You – you brought me to the carnival?” Jensen says as he comes around to stand at Jared’s side. He’s staring up at the ferris wheel with wonder in his eyes and his mouth slightly agape.

“Yep!” Jared replies gleefully, throwing his arm around Jensen’s shoulder and pulling him in close. “And you know what the best part is?”

“What?” Jensen asks softly, still staring up at the rides as he unconsciously tangles his fingers in the back of Jared’s shirt.

“No one knows us here,” Jared whispers, his nose skimming Jensen’s temple as he speaks softly into his ear. “We can be whoever we want – act like whatever we want, and we won’t ever see these people again. We won’t have to answer to anyone.”

“You mean –” Jensen cuts himself off and pulls away. Jared shrugs and holds out his hand with a hopeful smile. Jensen looks down at it and then back up at Jared’s face. “You drove two and a half hours so you could hold my hand in public?”

“Uh.” Jared awkwardly lets his hand fall to his side as he clears his throat. His cheeks flush pink and he drags his toe across the dirt. “I drove for the carnival. The handholding thing is a bonus. But you don’t have to.”

Jensen smiles softly and then bites his lip as he looks around at all the people milling around the parking lot. He closes his eyes for a second and then meets Jared’s gaze, stepping forward and taking Jared’s hand. He threads their fingers together and smiles nervously, standing close to Jared with their joined hands hanging between their hips.

“Lead the way.” Jared grins as he pulls him towards the ticket booth. Jensen seems a little nervous. His palm is sweating and his eyes dart around. He’s slightly tense like he’s waiting to be yelled at.

Jared’s grin fades a little. He wants this day to be nothing but fun for Jensen. In no way should he feel uncomfortable at any point. Jared suppresses a sigh and lets go of Jensen’s hand once they reach the ticket counter to dig his wallet out of his back pocket. He pays for two tickets and two unlimited ride passes and they both hold their arms out for the attendant to put on their wristbands.

They enter the fair with Jared a few paces ahead of Jensen. He’s trying to give him room to breathe, but Jensen surprises him by catching up to him and taking his hand again.

“I know what you’re doing. Stop it,” Jensen chides as he swipes his thumb over the back of Jared’s hand. “I’m fine. Also, don’t even *think* you’re getting away with paying for everything tonight.”

“But – “

“Shh!” Jensen butts in, and Jared pouts. “Now, the only fair I’ve ever been to is a church fair and they pretty much suck compared to this. So, you’re gonna have to lead the way.”

“Well,” Jared starts, squeezing Jensen’s hand and getting up on his toes to look around. “I usually like to start with a snack.”

“Of *course* you do.”

“Shh!” Jared drags Jensen over to the food area. The already warm air is hotter there, thick with the scent of grease and fried dough. Jared takes in a deep breath. “What do you want? They have deep fried – well, deep fried everything really.”

Jensen wrinkles his nose and gets up on his toes, shielding his eyes from the sun as he looks around. His eyes land on a particular booth and his whole face lights up.

“Sno-cones!” He cries. Jared laughs as Jensen drags him over. He orders excitedly – ‘half red and half blue, please’ and bounces when he exchanges his money for his icy treat. He takes a bite of it and shivers, grinning up at Jared with blue teeth. “What do you want?”

“Something deep fried and terrible for me,” Jared replies. He scans the booths until he finds the one he wants and drags Jensen over.

“Deep fried Snickers bar?” Jensen asks with disgust evident in his voice. “Enjoy your coronary.”

“Oh, I *will*,” Jared says, letting go of Jensen’s hand to grab his wallet. Jensen smacks his hand away and hands over some money to the vendor, eyeing Jared threateningly. “Fine!”

Jared downs his deep fried candy bar and looks around, eyes widening when he spots another sign that’s very relevant to his interests. He wipes the powdered sugar from his mouth and tosses his stick and greasy, chocolate-covered paper wrapper in the trashcan.

“Holy shit. Are you kidding me? Deep fried s’mores on a stick?” Jared screeches. He even bounces a little. “My life is complete.”

“Oh no.” Jensen catches Jared by the elbow as he tries to run off. “You’re not eating that.”

“Why not?” Jared pouts and flicks his bangs out of his face. Jensen raises an eyebrow and

smirks.

“If I can’t have gas station coffee, you can’t have that heart stopper,” Jensen tells him and he slides his hand down Jared’s forearm to take his hand again. “I’m just looking out for your well being.”

“Throwing my own words back in my face?” Jared beams at him and leans over to snag a bite of his sno-cone. “You’re coming along nicely.”

They stroll around the fairgrounds hand in hand to get a lay of the land as Jensen finishes his sno-cone. They end up in line for the Zipper after he throws his cup away. He shivers violently next to Jared, rolling his blue lips into his mouth. Jared glances over at him and raises an eyebrow.

“Little chilly, ice-pop?” Jared queries, and Jensen glares at him. He reaches over with the hand that was holding the sno-cone and puts it on Jared’s cheek. Jared jumps at the frigid touch and grabs Jensen’s hand. He slides it under his tee and places it flat against his warm skin. The cold touch makes him shiver a little but Jensen smiles gratefully. “Your lips are all blue.”

“Raspberry syrup,” Jensen chatters. Jared looks around and keeps both his hands over Jensen’s, trapping it against his stomach as he leans in. He moves slowly to give Jensen plenty of time to stop him. His eyes widen slightly but he makes no move to pull away.

Jared reaches up to touch his cheek and his thumb brushes the corner of Jensen’s cold mouth. Jared closes his eyes as butterflies flutter in his stomach. Their lips touch softly in the middle of a crowd of people and Jensen actually leans into it, cold fingers curling around Jared’s hip underneath his tee shirt.

Jared kisses him until his blue lips are warm – until the teenage girls behind them clear their throats and giggle because the gap in the line has gotten so big. Jared pulls away and grins at the girls, winking when Jensen laughs and buries his face in Jared’s neck.

Jared loops his arm around Jensen’s shoulders and Jensen’s arm instinctively goes around his waist. They close the gap in the line and Jensen rests his head on Jared’s shoulder, warmed up lips brushing the curve of his jaw.

They spend around two hours going on all the rides, but after Jared nearly hacks up his deep fried candy on the Gravitron they decide to take a break to play some carnival games. Jared proudly displays his complete lack of coordination, wasting dollar after dollar until he finally wins a goldfish. He stares at the little bag with the tiny fish in it with a raised brow for awhile before finally turning to Jensen.

“Why did I play for a goldfish?” Jared asks, and Jensen shrugs. “I don’t even *want* a goldfish.”

“I don’t know,” Jensen says. Jared huffs and looks around the area. He spots a little girl tossing her ping-pong balls towards the little fishbowls with a determined expression. Jared walks over and holds up his fish, gesturing over her head to her parents with the bag. They nod and Jared grins as he squats down next to her.

“You’re really good at this game,” he says. She looks over at him with a tiny pout.

“I’m *trying* to be.” She eyes Jared’s fish with obvious envy. Jared bites down a grin and holds out the bag.

“Well, you totally won me over,” Jared tells her. “And I *guess* you can have my fish if you promise to take good care of it.”

“I will!” She shrieks. Jared laughs as he hands over the bag. “Thanks!”

“You’re welcome,” he tells her, and she bounces over to her parents. They give Jared grateful smiles and herd her off to her next game. Jared smiles warmly, watching after them for a moment before he pats his knees and stands up.

Jensen is staring at him when he turns around and Jared’s smile fades.

“What?” He asks. “Something on my face?”

“No.” Jensen shakes his head a little. “Just – that was really nice.”

“Oh, I guess. She’s happy and I don’t have a fish to deal with,” Jared replies, shrugging his shoulders awkwardly. “It’s getting dark. Time for cotton candy?”

“First I have to kick your ass at a game,” Jensen says, rubbing his hands together and looking around speculatively. “Ah. There. I can totally knock those milk jugs over and win you that fluffy little bear.”

“Can’t,” Jared says smugly. “Bet you a dollar.”

“You’re on,” Jensen replies, jogging over to the booth and slapping down two dollars. The attendant gives him three baseballs and Jensen grabs one. He tosses it and it goes wide. Jared laughs and Jensen glares at him. The second ball gets a little closer but still misses.

“Admit defeat, Ackles!” Jared crows. “That dollar is *mine*. I wonder how I’m going to spend it. Hmm.” He makes a show up putting his finger to his pursed lips, forehead crinkled in concentration.

“Don’t get your heart set on that four-piece McNuggets just yet,” Jensen tells him. He picks up the last ball and turns to the side, narrowing his eyes and lining up the pitch. He lifts his knee up and everything before launching the ball as hard as he can. It hits the bottles dead center and they all go tumbling down.

Jensen launches his fists in the air and Jared blinks as the attendant pulls a fuzzy brown teddy bear off of the prize shelf. He hands it to Jensen who hands it over to Jared with a smarmy grin. Jared takes it and hugs it to his chest, tucking it under one arm before clasping his hands and bringing them up to his chin.

“Oh, look at that!” Jared says, perfecting a southern belle accent. “My big, strong man!”

Jared grabs Jensen by the front of his tee shirt and pulls him in. The teddy bear gets smashed between their chests as their lips meet. Jensen laughs against Jared’s mouth before pushing him back by the shoulder and looking at him fondly.

“Now, quick!” Jared says as he tucks the bear into the waistband of his jeans. “To the cotton candy!”

Jensen makes Jared upgrade to the large cotton candy as opposed to paying Jensen his dollar. The pink candy floss is bigger than Jared’s head and he shoves his face into the warm fluff as they leave the line, ripping off a huge bite.

The line for the ferris wheel is a little long. Everyone is sort of gravitating towards it now that night has completely fallen and the carnival is all lit up. Jensen presses up against Jared’s side in the line but Jared isn’t sure if it’s because he wants to be close or because of the slight chill in the air. Either way, Jared isn’t complaining. Jared wraps his arm casually around Jensen’s shoulders and lets his thumb slip under the sleeve of his tee shirt as they shuffle forward.

He keeps tearing off little bits of fluff and feeding one to Jensen and then himself. Jensen seems relaxed now, content to lean heavily against Jared out in the open. Now it’s Jared that’s glancing around and keeping an eye out. He knows all it would take is one snide comment to ruin this evening, and Jared thanks his lucky stars that it seems to be a tolerant day at the fair.

They settle into their ferris wheel car all smashed together with Jared’s teddy bear nestled between them. Jared puts his arm over Jensen’s shoulder and pulls him in close as the attendant secures them in. The car pulls forward and Jensen settles against Jared’s side.

“If you rock this thing, I’ll kick your ass,” Jensen warns as he slides his hand under Jared’s shirt to rest against his stomach. He seems to enjoy that spot. Jared sighs happily as Jensen’s fingers lazily trace the slight definition of his abs.

“I won’t rock it,” Jared promises. His fingers dip under the collar of Jensen’s shirt to stroke along his collarbone. He likes that spot almost as much as Jensen likes touching his stomach. There’s a freckle there that’s just a little bigger than the others and Jared likes to get his mouth on it whenever he can. They’re quiet for the first few rotations of the ride, too busy taking in their surroundings and each other to speak. “We’re almost officially a cliché.”

“How?” Jensen turns his head to look at Jared.

“Well, we’re capping off a romantic evening at the fair by riding the ferris wheel together,” Jared tells him as his fingertips stroke up and down the side of Jensen’s neck.

“Okay,” Jensen replies, cheeks flushing a little. “How is that *almost* a cliché?”

“It’s not officially a cliché unless you kiss me at the top.” Jared smirks and Jensen bites his lip. The ride goes around for another rotation and then screeches to a halt with Jared and Jensen’s car stopped at the highest point. “Okay. That was an eerie coinci – “

Jared’s words are lost against Jensen’s lips as he’s pulled in for a kiss. Jared parts his lips against Jensen’s and his heart pounds in his chest as they lick into each other’s mouths.

“Now there just needs to be fireworks,” Jared mumbles against Jensen’s slick lips. He lifts his hand and shoots his fingers out, shaking his hand slightly. Jensen huffs and Jared grins. He lets out a little chuckle before putting his hand on Jensen’s cheek and kissing him again.

They get so lost in the kiss that it wouldn’t matter if fireworks were exploding right over their heads or not.

It’s not like they would notice them anyway.



The drive home seems to fly by whereas the drive there seemed to crawl. Maybe the difference is that now their destination isn’t a mystery and he’s not bouncing in his seat from too much caffeine.

This time he’s lazing in the passenger seat with his fingers loosely tangled with Jared’s on the center console. His eyelids are drooping but he’s not really tired; just happy and relaxed.

Jared exits the freeway and as they get closer to their neighborhood Jensen begins to fret. The day has been tremendously perfect and he doesn’t want it to end.

“Do you want to come over for a little bit, or do you have to go home?” Jared asks, like he’s

reading Jensen's thoughts and voicing his dilemma. Jensen bits his lip and looks at the glowing clock on the dashboard. It's nearly midnight. Jensen knows he should go home. He told his father he'd be home really late, but he's pretty sure their definitions of really late don't match up.

Oh well. He's pretty sure they don't care enough to wait up for him anyway. Sometimes he thinks the phrase 'out of sight, out of mind' was coined for the way his parents feel about him.

"I'll come over." Jensen is completely unwilling for the night to end. Jared nods and Jensen lets out a breath.

Jared's house is dark when he pulls the car into the driveway, and the dogs start barking as soon as they step onto the porch. Jared shushes them as he unlocks the door and Jensen catches Sadie by the collar when she attempts to escape. Again.

"You don't know how good you got it, girl," he tells her as he drags her back inside and shuts the door. She lets out a yip and licks across Jensen's face. He scrunches his nose and wipes the dog drool off of his skin with the back of his hand. Jared flips on the light and whistles at the back door. Both dogs go running and Jared lets them outside.

"You can stay out there awhile," Jared tells them as he shuts the door. "Little assholes."

"Where's your mom?" Jensen asks when he notices how quiet and dark the house is. Jared stretches his arms over his head and runs his fingers through his hair.

"Margarita night at her friend Shelly's," Jared replies. "As far as I know she's crashing in the guest room over there."

"Oh." Jensen fidgets awkwardly and Jared gestures over his shoulder towards the hall. He disappears into his bedroom and Jensen has no choice but to follow. It looks a little cleaner than it did the last time he saw it, and Jared turns on the TV as he shuts the door behind him. He turns off the light, leaving the room lit only by the eerie blue glow of the television.

"This okay?" Jared asks, like he's just realizing the situation might appear a little awkward. "I'm sort of tired. Thought maybe we could just catch the end of *SNL*."

"No, it's fine," Jensen replies, propping himself up against the wall as he toes off his shoes. Jared does the same and lies down on his bed, scooting over to the wall and leaving the other half empty. Jensen crawls in next to him but he doesn't face the television. He opts to look at Jared's profile – sleepy and beautiful in the dim, flickering light.

"Did you have fun today?" Jared turns on his side to gather Jensen in his arms. Their faces

are so close, and Jensen feels a shiver run down his spine as Jared slips his hands under the back of his shirt to rest on bare skin.

“Yeah,” Jensen breathes. “Thanks, Jared. It was amazing. I – I never thought I could have that.” He buries his face in Jared’s neck, breathes in, and presses himself closer to Jared. He swallows against the sudden swell of emotion rising up in him; the same sensation he always gets when he’s wrapped up in Jared like this. “I never thought I could have you.”

Jared’s hand pauses slightly in its path up Jensen’s back, but it quickly regains momentum. It travels up under the neck of his shirt. His fingers tangle in Jensen’s hair as his shirt rides up and exposes his skin to the cool air.

“I didn’t think I could ever have you either,” Jared confesses. He pulls back a little to look into Jensen’s eyes. “But we have each other now. You’ll always have me.”

Jensen blinks and his heart begins to thunder against his ribcage. The only reaction that comes to mind is to press their lips together, so that’s what he does. This kiss is different than the others, more desperate and needy. He clutches Jared to him, fingertips digging into the hard muscle and soft skin of Jared’s back.

Jared rolls Jensen onto his back, settles himself on top of him and kisses him harder, tongues tangling and licking. Jensen sucks Jared’s bottom lip into his mouth and bites down a little before releasing it. Jared trails his swollen lips along Jensen’s stubbled jaw and down to his neck, swirling his tongue around and sucking kisses along his skin. He’s being careful not to leave any marks, using more tongue than teeth. Jensen whimpers and his hips jerk of their own accord.

Jared tugs the collar of Jensen’s shirt down to kiss and suck at the line of his collarbone, teeth barely scraping against skin. Jensen lets out a soft moan and Jared shakes in his arms. They kiss again, wetter and messier than ever before. His dick is hard as a rock in his jeans and he instinctively rolls his hips against Jared’s, groaning at the sudden friction as Jared presses down to meet him. Jared moves his mouth to the other side of Jensen’s neck and his talented lips do things that make him shake with desire.

Jensen squeezes his eyes shut, suddenly overwhelmed by it all. It’s so *good*, all this pleasure coursing through him. It all comes down to the desperate ache in his groin that makes him shake and whine underneath Jared’s strong body.

“Jared, I want – oh, I *need*,” Jared makes a soft humming sound and bites softly at Jensen’s collarbone. “Please, Jared. Touch me.”

Jared freezes and his head jerks up so he can look Jensen in the eye. He’s panting and his hair is sticking up in all directions as he stares at Jensen with wide eyes. It’s hard for

Jensen to tear his eyes away from Jared's mouth, all red and swollen, but he manages to meet his gaze.

"Jensen, I –" Jared starts, cupping Jensen's cheek and swiping his thumb over Jensen's puffy lips. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah," Jensen breathes, resisting the urge to roll his hips up again. "Thought about it. I – want it."

Jared licks his lips and nods shakily. Time seems to slow down as he puts his hand on Jensen's shirt and pulls it up to expose his flat belly and chest, heaving up and down with each desperate breath. Jared's hand is shaking as he slides it down Jensen's stomach to the waistband of his jeans, and Jensen's glad to know he isn't the only one that's scared. It's comforting to know he affects Jared just as much as Jared affects him.

Jared tries to slide his hand into Jensen's jeans but they're too tight. Jensen squirms and Jared puts his hand over his face, chuckling nervously as he props himself up over Jensen. This time he undoes the button on his pants and slowly pulls down the zipper. Jensen doesn't look down, instead choosing to focus on Jared's face. He's so terrified but he *wants* this, no question. Jared cups his erection through his underwear and Jensen gasps, fingers tangling in the rumpled sheets.

"You have to tell me if you want me to stop," Jared says shakily. Jensen reaches up to put his hand on Jared's chest and digs his fingertips in.

"Don't." Jensen looks up at Jared with pleading eyes. "Don't stop."

Jared nods and leans down to press a soft, comforting kiss to Jensen's mouth as his hand dips into his underwear. His long fingers curl firmly around Jensen's dick and he whimpers, crying out into Jared's mouth as he arches his back.

Jared lifts himself up again and his own erection presses into Jensen's hip. He moves his hand in slow, firm strokes along Jensen's dick and Jensen curls his fingers around Jared's wrist as it moves up and down.

"Feel good?" There is a small smile playing at Jared's lips as he watches Jensen's face. He nods and lets out a choked moan as the pleasure grows. Good is a massive understatement. Jared's hands on him like this feels *incredible*, better than anything he ever could have imagined.

Jared looks away from Jensen's face and down, letting his gaze travel to where he's touching Jensen. He wants to look too but he can't tear his eyes away from Jared's face. He looks enthralled, hungry even. Jared dips his head a little but then jerks back up and

bites his bottom lip. He lets go of Jensen's dick and he lets out a whimper as the amazing friction stops. Jared touches the sticky head, fingers gathering the fluid leaking from the tip. He brings his fingers to his mouth and licks them clean, getting the taste of Jensen on his tongue. Jensen moans softly and squeezes his eyes shut as pleasure crackles up his spine.

"Tastes good," Jared says. Jensen throws his arm over his eyes as Jared starts stroking him again. "Hey, look at me."

Jensen pulls his arm back and his eyelids flutter open to see Jared watching him. Jensen tenses and his balls tighten as his shoulders curl inward. He cries out and reaches up to clutch at Jared's shoulders.

"Let go, Jensen," Jared breathes. His voice is hot against the side of Jensen's neck. "I've got you."

Jensen looks up into Jared's gorgeous eyes, sees the trust and adoration and desire in them, and lets go. It's like the rubber band being stretched low in his belly was just released, pleasure and heat exploding outwards until he feels it in his fingers and toes. He cries out and buries his face in the sweaty curve of Jared's neck, clutching Jared's wrist as he gently strokes him through the aftershocks. He can feel his come on his belly, more than there's ever been before, and he whimpers when Jared's touch becomes too much on his oversensitive skin.

Jared pulls his hand away and wipes it on the sheet before wrapping his arm around Jensen's shoulders and guiding him back down to the bed. Jensen doesn't even remember attempting to sit up.

"You're gorgeous," Jared murmurs, and softly kisses Jensen's panting mouth. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Jensen rasps. He finally begins to relax against the bed when his hips stop jerking. He's still trembling all over, but it's nice. "That felt good."

Jared smiles and lies down on his side, stretched out along the length of Jensen's body. He runs his fingers down Jensen's flank and across his hip and it's white hot points of pressure against Jensen's sensitive skin. His finger travels through the mess of come on his belly and Jensen's eyes widen as he brings it to his mouth to taste it. Jensen feels his cheeks flush red-hot at the sight.

"Does – is that good?" He asks curiously. Jared looks at him, pulls his finger free and trails it through the sticky fluid again.

"Not bad." He licks his bottom lip. "You're sweeter than me."

Jensen furrows his brow slightly and looks at Jared askance when he brings his finger up to Jensen's mouth. He closes his eyes and parts his lips, closing them around Jared's finger when it slips inside. He sucks the taste of himself from Jared's skin. It's bitter and a little sweet, but Jared's right – it's not bad.

He opens his eyes to see Jared biting his lip and watching him with hooded eyes. He tentatively sucks on the tip of his finger and then bites down gently before releasing it. Jared leans in to kiss him and Jensen can feel the outline of Jared's dick pressing against his hip.

Jensen kisses Jared back and lets a breath out through his nose. He wants to make Jared feel as good as he did.

Jensen places a shaky hand on Jared's stomach and slips it down until the tips of his fingers dip under the waistband of his jeans. Jared breaks the kiss and gently takes Jensen's wrist, stilling it.

"You don't have to," Jared mumbles against Jensen's lips, and Jensen swallows hard. He tugs his wrist free and reaches up to undo Jared's pants.

"I know I don't." Jensen tries to keep his voice steady. He wants to do this, but he can't help being nervous. "I *want* to."

He keeps their foreheads pressed together and their gazes locked. Jared's breath is hot against his lips as he dips his hand into Jared's underwear and wraps it around his dick. It's *big*, hot and heavy in Jensen's hand. It's probably not that much bigger than his own, but the angle is all weird and he just feels huge and slippery-slick with the fluid leaking steadily from the tip.

He also feels really, really good in Jensen's grip.

"Oh god," Jared breathes, and clutches at Jensen's bicep. "Shit, Jensen. I'm not even gonna – "

Jensen lowers his gaze to see the way his hand looks moving up and down, the red tip of Jared's dick slipping in and out of the tight curl of his fingers. The image makes Jensen gasp and he presses his mouth under the curve of Jared's jaw, licking and sucking and scraping his teeth. He's leaving the marks Jared couldn't, leaving little bruises that Jared can wear proudly enough for the both of them.

Jared is loud – whimpering and moaning and making all these little noises that make Jensen's dick twitch with renewed interest.

“So good,” Jared pants against Jensen’s cheek. “Gonna come, Jen.”

“Do it,” Jensen breathes. He pulls back to watch Jared’s face as his orgasm hits. His face scrunches up and his eyes open so wide it’s almost comical; but he still looks beautiful, lips swollen and skin glistening with sweat. His come slicks Jensen’s hand and it’s hot and sticky as it runs down his wrist. He loosens his grip and slows his strokes, just like Jared did for him, moving his hand lazily up and down until Jared grips his wrist and stops him.

Jared flops onto his back and Jensen rolls onto his side, mirroring their previous positions. Jensen pulls his hand out of Jared’s pants and looks down at the pearly strings of come coating his fingers. He brings his hand to his face and licks a bit of it from his palm, testing it on his tongue.

“You’re right,” Jensen comments. “I am a little sweeter. You taste good, though.”

“Oh *god*,” Jared groans, covering his face with his hands and chuckling. “You’re gonna fucking kill me.”

Jensen grins and leans over Jared to grab a dirty shirt off of the floor. He wipes off his hand and then his stomach before dropping the shirt again. He lies on his back and fixes his pants as Jared does the same. They roll towards each other and meet in a sweet kiss, fingers curling into each other’s hair.

“Mm, you good?” Jared asks as he bumps their noses together playfully. Jensen nods and kisses the bow of Jared’s upper lip. “*Yeah*, you are.”

Jensen snorts and buries his face in Jared’s neck, suddenly feeling giddy. Jared laughs and rubs Jensen’s back as he kisses him languidly.

“Wish you could stay here,” Jared says. That’s when Jensen’s eyes catch on the clock on Jared’s nightstand and make note of the time. He clutches Jared tighter, like he’s afraid he’ll suddenly disappear.

“Five more minutes,” Jensen mumbles against Jared’s forehead. Jared smirks against Jensen’s jaw and rolls them so Jensen is lying on top of him.

“I can do five more minutes,” Jared breathes, and Jensen dips down to press their lips together again.



Jared sleeps in on Sunday mornings. It’s tradition. His mom lets the dogs out for him and he drools into his pillow to his heart’s content.

That is, unless his cell phone goes off.

He cracks an eye open and sighs as his hand shoots out to grab his phone. He opens it and blinks blearily at the display while he waits for it to come into focus. It's a new text from Jensen and Jared furrows his brow as he reads it.

I'm at church. Been thinking. Can I come over after?

"Because that doesn't sound ominous or anything," Jared mumbles to himself. His stomach drops slightly as he replies *yeah, sure* with a shaky thumb.

Jared isn't sure why he's so nervous about the text. He and Jensen have been doing well, considering the circumstances, but the previous night might have changed things. Jensen seemed fine when Jared dropped him off, but a lot can change overnight.

Jared gets out of bed, too antsy to go back to sleep. Taking a shower and brushing his teeth doesn't help quell his sudden nerves, and he drops his Eggo on the floor. He grips the counter, shuts his eyes, and takes a deep breath as Harley eats the abandoned waffle.

There's a knock on the door followed by the obnoxious barking of his dogs. He wipes his hands on his thighs and runs his fingers through his damp hair as he sends the dogs to their beds and goes to answer it.

Jensen is on the other side in a pair of pressed khakis and a light blue button down, hair neatly gelled and glasses perched on his nose. He looks adorable and Jared's heart clenches.

"Hey," Jensen says as he steps inside. Jared tries to reply but it sort of comes out as a nervous squeak, and he squeezes his eyes shut as he closes the door. "So, I –"

"If this is about last night, we can go back," Jared blurts out. His eyes widen and he slaps his palm over his mouth. Jensen furrows his brow and tilts his head to the side. "I mean, we can slow down."

"What are you talking about?" Jensen asks curiously. "Last night was amazing. I – well, really enjoyed last night."

A familiar blush stains his cheeks and Jared lets out a cleansing sigh. He rolls his shoulders back and heads straight for the kitchen to shove a frozen waffle into the toaster now that he's suddenly regained his appetite.

"Your text scared me," Jared confesses as Jensen follows him into the kitchen.

"Oh, sorry. It wasn't meant to," Jensen tells him, reaching out to touch Jared's wrist. "I'm not

freaking out over what we did.”

“Good. Because I probably wouldn’t mind doing it again sometime,” Jared replies. He smirks and licks some butter from his thumb as he sets it and the syrup on the counter.

“I probably wouldn’t mind it either,” Jensen mumbles, looking up at Jared from under his lashes. Jared sort of wants to drag him in his room right now, but he refrains.

“So, uh.” he furrows his brow and stares down at the counter. “You said you’d been thinking. What about?”

“Just – I was sitting in church thinking about how my life is changing,” Jensen says as he runs his fingers through his hair. Jared grabs his waffle and smears it with butter and syrup before folding it in half like a taco. “I mean, for the better. But it’s changing fast.”

“It is.” Jared shoves half of the waffle in his mouth and Jensen raises an eyebrow as he chews the monstrous bite. He swallows and washes it down with some juice. “Do you wanna talk about it?”

Jensen shrugs and Jared nods casually. It’s important that he not make a big deal out of this. Jensen bites his lip nervously and Jared tilts his head to the side. His expression softens and he sets his juice down before stepping forward to cup Jensen’s chin in his fingers.

“You can talk to me about anything,” Jared says seriously, lifting Jensen’s chin. “You know that.”

“Okay,” Jensen replies, eyes shining as he meets Jared’s gaze. “Thanks for getting my chin sticky, by the way.”

Jared rolls his eyes and leans in to lick the syrup from Jensen’s skin, getting it nice and clean before pulling away. Jensen smiles fondly and leans in to kiss Jared’s mouth, reaching up to poke at his neck.

“Um, do these hurt?” Jensen asks. Jared furrows his brow. “I didn’t mean to bruise you.”

“Huh?” Jared runs over to the mirror by the door. Somehow he missed the hickeys littering his skin when he was brushing his teeth. He runs his fingers over the purple marks and grins widely. “Sweet!”

Sadie barks at the back door and scratches at the glass with her paw. Jared rolls his eyes and gestures for Jensen to follow him. Jensen nods and walks over with him, standing off to the side as Jared opens the door and the dogs go tearing outside. It’s nice outside, sunny with a slight breeze, and Jared walks out into the grass.

The dogs take off to their side of the yard and Jared and Jensen head over towards the tree, plopping down in the grass as soon as they hit the shade. Jensen takes off his shiny leather dress shoes and socks and sets them aside before undoing the cuffs of his dress shirt. He looks more relaxed by the moment and Jared smiles. He can't help but to lean in and cup Jensen's cheek, kissing his lips tenderly.

"So what were you thinking about?" Jared asks softly. He kisses him again before sitting back in the grass. Jensen smiles and fiddles with his bracelet.

"That, actually," Jensen says, squinting slightly against the sun as he looks up to meet Jared's gaze. "You."

"Good things, I hope." Jared chuckles nervously and swallows hard. Jensen looks at him for a long moment, utterly silent and still, and Jared fidgets.

"Yeah," Jensen finally breathes, looking down at his hands and furrowing his brow. "Like I said – things are changing. I've been thinking about that, and about the past. Just – ever since I was younger, what I believed in my heart hasn't matched up with what I was told to believe. And I thought there was something wrong with me because of that."

Jared wants to close the few inches of space between them and drag Jensen into his arms, but this is important. He needs to let him get it out.

"But there isn't," Jensen tells him. He bites his lip and sighs before continuing. "But before – I didn't have anything worth fighting for. So I just let myself be unhappy, pretending to be something I wasn't because that's what was expected of me. I had everything to lose and nothing to gain."

Jared swallows hard and digs his hands into the grass. He hates to think of all the pain Jensen has silently suffered through for years. He thinks of the sad, agonizingly shy boy he met nearly three months ago and realizes just how much Jensen has flourished since then. It's sort of amazing when he stops to think about it.

"But then we moved. And I thought it would just be more of the same, you know?" Jensen's voice is shaking slightly with emotion, cheeks flushing pink, and Jared listens like his life depends on it. "But then there was this *guy*. He was loud and beautiful and sort of crazy, and when I met him he had mashed potatoes in his hair."

Jared lets out a tiny gasp and Jensen smiles bashfully before his face goes serious again.

"And he honestly terrified me. He made me feel things I was convinced I'd never feel, things I had been telling myself were wrong for so long that I'd sort of started to believe it," Jensen gets out in a rush. Then he breathes in deep and releases it slowly as he hooks his thumb

under his bracelet. “But the more time I spent with this guy, the less sad I was. I smiled, I laughed, and I had fun. It was like, I don’t know – my heart felt light for the first time. He helped me realize that my life is mine to live and not anyone else’s. So I decided to take a chance, and I kissed him.”

Jared swallows thickly and blinks against the sting in his eyes. His heart is pounding and the sounds of his dogs barking barely registers. He breathes deep and smells grass and sunshine along with the faint smell of decaying wood from their tree. There’s this entire world spinning around him, but all that matters at this moment is Jensen.

“Jared, when I kissed you? God, it was incredible. That’s when I knew that I had to do whatever makes me happy,” Jensen tells him, letting out a choked laugh. “And that’s really what this comes down to – what this is all about. I have to make my own choices.”

Jared can’t wipe the grin off of his face. Jensen *gets* it. He understands.

“I see the way you look at me sometimes,” Jensen says a little more quietly. He ducks his head and Jared furrows his brow. “Like you’re afraid I’m going to disappear. And I can’t blame you.” Jensen lifts his head to shyly meet Jared’s gaze. “That’s why I wanted to tell you all of this. I want to be with you, Jared. I’m *going* to be with you. It might be scary at times, and maybe a little overwhelming at others, but what we have makes me *happy*. I wanted you to know that I’m committed to this – to you. You don’t have to look at me like I’m going to disappear because I’m not going to.”

“God, Jensen – “ Jared blinks against the unshed tears swelling in his eyes.

He surges forward and wraps his arms around Jensen’s neck, pressing their mouths together passionately. Jensen laughs against Jared’s grin as he topples backwards into the grass. Jared lands on top of Jensen with an *oomph* and props himself up on his elbows over him. Jensen wraps his arms around Jared’s torso and lets his hands skim up the back of his shirt.

“I’m proud of you,” Jared says softly, the tip of his nose brushing Jensen’s.

“I’m proud of myself,” Jensen confesses before pressing a soft kiss to Jared’s jaw. “That was sort of an intense talk, huh? It felt good to say it out loud, though.”

“Good,” Jared replies happily. “And I mean, I was listening but honestly all I got out of that is that you think I’m beautiful.”

He grins widely, letting his tongue peek through his slightly uneven teeth to let Jensen know he’s kidding. It helps to lighten the mood, shifting it from intense to playful.

“Like you didn’t know that already.” Jensen smirks and lets his head fall back to the ground.

“You’re sort of beautiful too,” Jared tells him. Jensen smiles, green eyes bright and pink lips stretched over perfect teeth. Jared still isn’t over the freckles on his nose. “Okay, stupidly beautiful. Like, make me fall off of lunch tables and land in meatloaf beautiful.”

“That’s what you get for making a spectacle of yourself,” Jensen chides playfully. Jared raises an eyebrow and tickles Jensen’s sides with mischief in his eyes. Jensen narrows his eyes but then starts laughing and pushing at Jared’s shoulders.

The dogs come over to inspect the commotion; jumping on top of Jared and making his elbows slip out from under him. Jared and Jensen’s foreheads knock together and they groan and laugh at the same time.

Sadie and Harley lick all over their faces and Jensen can’t stop laughing. Jared just takes his licks to the cheek and stares fondly at Jensen.

This day is shaping up to be pretty good.

Onto [Part 7](#).

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/248608.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/248608.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 7)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:53:00 : 39-49 minutes

[Back to Part 6.](#)



Jensen is leaving his math class when Misha suddenly comes up behind him and slings an arm over his shoulders. Jensen sags under the sudden weight and turns his head to give his friend an amused eyebrow lift.

“Hey!” Misha says as he walks them down the hall. Jensen isn’t sure why he even bothers to pretend to be straight at school when he has the gay kids hanging off of him all the time. “Jared’s gonna be a little late. He had to drop something off at the office.”

“Okay,” Jensen replies. Misha finally removes his arm and shoves his hands in his pockets.

“So, uh,” he begins awkwardly, and Jensen glances over at him. “Jared told me that he told you about us.”

Jensen stumbles to a halt and looks around before coming to stand in front of Misha. He doesn’t really want to have this particular awkward conversation surrounded by people. He wasn’t really planning on having it ever.

“He did,” Jensen says quietly, and Misha nods.

“I just wanted to make sure you were cool with it?” Misha’s blue eyes widen slightly. “Okay, well not *cool* with it – you know what I mean. It was a long time ago and we were stupid hormonal kids. There weren’t like, *feelings* involved or anything.”

“It was two years ago,” Jensen replies with a shrug. “It’s in the past – before I came along. It doesn’t matter.”

“Right, okay. Awesome.” Misha grins and Jensen smirks at him. He thought it would be weird to be around Misha knowing what he does now, but it isn’t. It’s obvious that he and Jared are just good friends. “Now that that’s out of the way. Is it too early to joke about having a threesome?”

Jensen jumps a little and stares at Misha with wide eyes. His expression quickly turns into a

glare when he sees the dopey grin on Misha's face. He shoves his shoulder roughly and heads towards the cafeteria again. He's had months to get used to his friends' raunchy and often inappropriate humor, but sometimes it still takes him by surprise.

"Okay, *fine*," Misha sighs dramatically. "Too early. I get it." Jensen and Misha lean up against the wall outside of the cafeteria to wait for the rest of their group. "I will just redouble my efforts to convert Chad fully to the dark side. It shouldn't take much."

"Chad being straight doesn't really make sense," Jensen admits, smirking and looking over at Misha.

"Right?" Misha replies with a chuckle. As if on cue, Chad comes meandering up to them in a soft purple polo shirt with the collar popped, a pair of white cargo shorts, and flip flops.

"S'up, bitches?" He asks innocently, and Misha and Jensen crack up. "What?"

"No, Chad, *seriously*," Misha wheezes, gripping Jensen's shoulder for support. "*How* are you not gay?"

"Come again?" Chad asks. Misha reaches out to flick the collar of his shirt. "What, a straight dude can't rock a lavender shirt?"

"He can," Jared cuts in as he appears around the corner. "If he calls it purple."

"Well, fuck you all and the cocks you rode in on," Chad sneers. He looks over at Jensen. "Except you, Jensen. You're cool as shit. But your boyfriend can choke on a *dick*. ... Not yours. Or – fuck this, I'm out."

He storms through the cafeteria doors and Jensen stares after him with wide eyes as Jared and Misha collapse in a fit of giggles.

"Oh, he's *precious*," Misha snorts. Jensen turns his head when he feels a soft nudge against his shoulder. Jared is smiling fondly at him and Jensen feels his own expression soften in response.

"¡Oye, chico!" Sophia calls as she and Sandy approach "¿Quieres ganarte un poco de dinero?"

"Did your girlfriend just call me a little boy hooker?" Misha asks Sandy, and she rolls her eyes.

"It was implied," Sandy says, and Sophia winks. "We just left Spanish."

"Oh," Misha replies before turning to face Sophia. "Your mom."

“*Tu madre!*” Sophia shouts, and Jensen snorts.

“I will kill you,” Misha says calmly. “*Muerte violenta.*”

“Can we possibly get some food?” Jared asks with an amused smile on his lips. “*Tengo hambre. Jensen, y tu?*”

“I... am not taking Spanish,” Jensen admits sheepishly, and the rest of the group chuckles.

“*Fracaso,*” Misha tells him, winking as he enters the cafeteria. They find Chad chatting up a few freshmen girls. Jared grabs him by the ear and drags him away.

“What the fuck?” Chad shrieks, batting Jared’s hand away. Jared raises an eyebrow.

“Reassert your masculinity on something that isn’t jailbait,” Jared tells him. “You can start by not dressing like Ryan Evans.”

“The guy from High School Musical?” Chad inquires, tilting his head to the side.

“Oh my god, *Chad,*” Misha cries as they get into the food line. “You know *who* Ryan Evans is. You are the *gayest* straight boy in the world!”

People start looking over at the source of all the commotion. Jensen blushes and ducks his head as he grabs an apple. Not only are his friends the most out and proud gay kids in school, but they’re also the *loudest*.

“And like you’re not trying to be the butchest thing on two legs?” Chad asks, looking him up and down. “Kurt Cobain called. He wants his wardrobe back.”

“Did you – “ Misha turns to Jared with a shocked look on his face. “He just did the someone called and wants their something back joke. He took it there, Jared.”

Jensen just shakes his head with an amused smirk as he pays for his food. The weather is nice and the boys can’t shut up so they decide to eat their lunch in their designated “outside spot”, which is really just the small grassy area between the gym and the theater.

They all flop down on the ground with their trays, grass stains be damned. Everyone is kind of quiet as they eat, busy enjoying the peace and sunshine. But of course, it’s Chad that breaks it.

“Oh, BTW, I went and picked these up last night,” Chad says as he digs around in his backpack. He pulls out a zip-lock bag full of something shiny and pink. He extracts one and flicks it at Jensen. He picks it up out of the grass and looks at it. “Got them done just in time. The rest are in my car.”

“You had the buttons made,” Jared deadpans, snatching it from Jensen to look at it. They’re just as Chad described – hot pink with *STFU for Awareness!* in black font. “You are so lame.”

“Your face is lame.” Chad pushes his tray into the middle of the circle and lays down, using Misha’s leg as a pillow. “So we’re good to go for tomorrow, right? Am I done with my vice-presidential duties until then?”

“I think so,” Jared replies as he fastens the button to his backpack. “We already did the shopping and everything for the rally. I’ll need help setting that up tomorrow after school. And I’m going to go to the office to make a reminder announcement before school ends today. We’re all meeting at the flagpole tomorrow at seven to pass out the speaking cards and everything.”

“So *early*,” Misha moans. He flinches when Jared flicks a pin at him. “I’ll be there, damn.”

“There’s so many people planning on participating this year,” Sandy chirps, bouncing excitedly. “Our last one’s gonna be a good one.”

“Don’t do that.” Misha covers his face with his hands and shakes his head. “Don’t talk about school ending. I don’t want to think about like, growing up and shit. I wanna think about how Chad and Jared are going to last the entire day without speaking.”

Jensen chews his food thoughtfully while he listens to everyone talk about Day of Silence. It’s tomorrow, and everyone is really excited about it. Jared hasn’t asked him to participate, which is good because Jensen really doesn’t want to let him down.

Jensen *wants* to show his support. He just – can’t. Not yet.

“Hey, I’ve never slipped,” Jared says proudly. “It’s always Chad that can’t keep his damn mouth shut.”

“Um, fuck you,” Chad replies, pulling his sunglasses out of his bag and slipping them on his face. The warning bell rings and everyone sighs as they get up and gather all their trash to stuff it in the can near the gym entrance.

“Okay, guys,” Jared says, addressing everyone but Jensen. “Tomorrow. *Seven*. Flagpole by the front office.”

“Yes sir!” They chirp in unison, saluting him before going their separate ways. Jared smirks and his expression softens when he turns to Jensen.

“Bye,” Jared says softly. “I’ll call you later.”

“Later,” Jensen confirms with a nod. He can tell how badly Jared wants to kiss him, how much he wants to pull him into a hug. Instead he just tugs once on Jensen’s bracelet before turning to walk away.

Jensen looks after him and sighs.



“Jared, I will smack you in your face,” Sherri warns as she pulls a pillow over her face. “Shut up.”

“But mom, we’re out of dog food. And I don’t think we should get that same kind again,” Jared sits on the back of the couch and rests his foot on his mom’s thigh. “I mean, I know it was on sale but it totally made Harley fart. Are we gonna go to Wal-Mart tomorrow? We should. I think I’m out of deodorant and we need more toothpaste and – “

“Jared!” Sherri bellows. Jared lets out a whimper. She snatches Jared’s phone off of the table and flips it open, pressing a button before bringing it to her ear. Jared raises an eyebrow.

“What are you doing?” Jared asks. He shakes her hip with his socked foot. “Who are you calling? Give me my phone!”

“Jensen?” Sherri asks. Jared scrambles off of the couch. “Yeah, I’m gonna need you to talk to Jared before I wring his freaking neck. Here.”

“Mom! That was so embarrassing, what you just did!” Jared snatches the phone and glares at her before storming into his room. “Hello?”

“Uh, hey,” Jensen says cautiously. “*What’s going on?*”

“She’s pissed at me because according to her I always get super chatty the night before Day of Silence,” Jared says, rolling his eyes. “I have no idea what she’s talking about. Anyway. What did you have for dinner? My mom made this casserole thing that I thought was going to be gross but it actually turned out really good. And then I gave the dogs some because they were begging and then Sadie threw it up. So, that sucked. But we had cheesecake for dessert. Bonus points.”

“*Jared,*” Jensen laughs. “*I think she has a point.*”

“Really?” Jared chuckles and switches his phone to the other ear. “Well, shit. So how are you? Tell me. I’ll be quiet.”

“Well, just another boring night in the Ackles household,” Jensen says quietly. “My mom is acting even more holier than thou than usual. I don’t know what that’s about. I just finished my homework and I was about to go to bed. That’s... about it.”

“Titillating,” Jared laughs, stretching and kicking off his jeans. He sets the phone down to pull off his shirt and grabs it again quickly. “I should probably go to sleep here soon too. Gotta get up super early, and I think I talked myself into exhaustion.”

“About that,” Jensen says hesitantly just as Jared face plants into his pillow. He quickly rolls over onto his back and stares at the ceiling. “I know we haven’t really talked about it, but – I mean, you’re okay with the fact that I’m not participating, right?”

Jared bites his lip and sits up to run his fingers through his hair. He stares at his blank television screen and tries to come up with the right words to say.

“Jensen.” He makes sure to pitch his voice low and soothing. “Look, you know that someday I’d like everyone to know about us. But I know that isn’t possible right now, and I understand that. I’m just happy to be with you, Jen, any way I can get you.”

“Okay,” Jensen replies in a shaky little voice. Jared pinches the bridge of his nose. *“Jared, you know I – I mean –”*

“I know, Jensen,” Jared says softly. “You don’t have anything to worry about, okay?”

“Okay.” Jensen lets out a deep breath. He sounds exhausted, weighed down. *“I think I’m going to go to sleep.”*

“Sure thing, Jen,” Jared tells him as he pulls his covers up to search for his remote. “I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?”

“Tomorrow,” Jensen echoes. “Night, Jared.”

“Night.” Jared hangs up the phone and sighs, scrubbing his hand over his face. He plugs in his phone and makes sure the alarm is set before turning his TV on low and settling into bed. “NIGHT, MOM!”

“Shut the fuck UP!” She screams back, and Jared chuckles as his eyes slip shut.

He needs his sleep. Tomorrow is going to be a long day.



Jensen is sort of blown away by the amount of people participating in Day of Silence.

Just on the way from the front of campus to his English classroom he sees throngs of people dressed in black. Almost all of them have Chad's pins adorning their shirts next to a rainbow colored ribbon.

Jensen knew from Jared that their school had an unusually large and active GSA, but he completely underestimated the amount of people that would be taking part in this event. Much more than just the amount of the GSA. It's sort of incredible.

The classroom is unusually quiet as Jensen takes his usual seat in the back. Jared skids in just before the bell and the sight of him makes Jensen choke on a sharp intake of air. He's dressed in a tight black button down with the sleeves rolled up just past his elbows and a pair of black slacks. He's wearing his black Converse with the rainbow shoelaces and his smile is a little less radiant than usual.

Jensen figures that it's because as excited as Jared was for this event, the theme isn't exactly a happy one.

Jared swings into his seat and pulls a pad of sticky notes out of his pocket. He scribbles something down on one of them and rips it off the pad, leaning over to stick it on Jensen's cheek. He raises an eyebrow and pulls it off, turning it around to look at it.

It reads *Hey!* in Jared's messy scrawl, and Jensen smiles. He turns his head to reply but Jared is digging around in his bag. He sits up and sets a Hershey's Kiss on Jensen's desk. Jensen takes the chocolate and bites his lip as Jared sets his speaking card down.

Class seems to crawl by unusually slow. Mrs. Chandler gives a halfhearted lesson about their current reading assignment and Jensen struggles to pay attention. He's too busy staring at Jared, too weighed down by his thoughts.

"Jensen?" She asks, and he looks over at her. He has no idea what she's said in the last five minutes and he swallows hard. "What can you tell me about what *Of Mice and Men* has to teach us about the nature of human existence?"

Jensen blinks. There are so many things he could say about the topic, a whole handful of answers he could give, but when he opens his mouth no sound comes out.

Thing is, he's *tired*.

He's tired of being torn in two different directions. He's sick of hiding and pretending to be something he's not. He's done with being unhappy when he should have all the happiness in the world.

It's time to make a decision. It's time to take a stand for something for once in his damn life.

He needs to reach out and fully grab what he wants. Finally.

His hand is trembling as he reaches over to take the speaking card from Jared's desk. His boyfriend looks over at him with a confused expression and his eyes widen as Jensen lifts it in the air. His heart is beating wildly, blood pulsing through his veins.

He tenses like he's waiting for some sort of blow, but absolutely nothing happens.

"Sure thing, Jensen," Mrs. Chandler says warmly. A few people turn to look at him for a moment before facing front again, but that's it. "I'll get you on Monday. Would anyone else like to take the question?"

Jensen sets the card down and leans forward to rest his forehead on the cool surface of the desk. Jared tugs on his shirtsleeve and Jensen turns his head, cheek pressed against the wood as he looks over. Jared's eyes are wide and his cheeks are pink. He looks confused and hopeful, and Jensen smiles a little. He feels good, all things considering.

Jared opens his mouth and snaps it shut, looking a little frustrated as he leans over his sticky pad again. He tears off another piece and smacks it down onto Jensen's desk. He sits up to read it.

What the hell are you doing?

Jensen looks over at Jared for a long time, feeling calm and happy just at the sight of him. He takes his candy and unwraps it, popping it into his mouth as he picks up his pen to write a reply.

What I want to do.

Jensen knows there will be consequences of this decision. But right now? He can't bring himself to care.



Jared is in high spirits when he meets the group in front of the cafeteria at lunch. Jensen nudges his shoulder when he arrives and gives him a private smile. Jensen is the only one not wearing black, and he looks a little out of place in his jeans and dark blue polo shirt.

Everyone is still as Jensen steps up to Chad. He pokes at the pink button pinned to Chad's shirt and then points to his own chest. The blush on his cheeks as he tries to get his point across using only charades is completely adorable.

Chad looks confused and everyone else looks surprised, but when Jensen glances over at

Jared, he gives him a proud smile. Jensen grins and tugs on Chad's pin again.

"What? Are you serious?" Chad asks, and everyone throws their hands up in the air. "Shit! God – " Chad slaps his hand over his mouth and Jensen bites down on a laugh, holding out his palm expectantly.

Chad swings his bag around to the front and digs into it to extract a pink button and a small strip of rainbow fabric twisted and pinned into a ribbon. Jensen takes the items with a nod and comes to stand in front of Jared. He drops the pins in Jared's hand and tilts his chin up slightly.

Jared's fingers are shaking slightly as he fastens the pins to Jensen's shirt, fingers brushing bare skin. There are people looking at them as they pass, but Jensen doesn't seem to notice. His eyes are locked firmly on Jared's and his gaze doesn't waver.

People have been asking Jared about him and Jensen for weeks, and he's always dodged the question. But now, as he rests his palm flat over Jensen's heart for a moment, he thinks he won't have to.

They get their food in collective silence and head out to their outside spot without a word. They all flop down onto the grass and use each other's body parts as pillows as usual. The only difference is that this time Jensen joins them. He rests his head on Jared's stomach and his foot on Misha's thigh. He seems at ease, completely happy with his decision for the time being.

Jared basks in the sunshine and plays idly with Jensen's hair. This day is always one of pride and accomplishment but right now, in this moment, he's never been more proud in his life.



Jensen lasts the entire day without speaking, which in itself isn't much of an accomplishment considering he rarely speaks when he isn't around Jared anyway. But still, it's the *reason* he chose to keep his mouth shut that speaks volumes.

It's not often that Jensen meets up with Jared after school. Jared usually has some sort of activity and Jensen will either go home or wait in the library. The Breaking the Silence rally is scheduled to start at 3:30, and everyone was going to head there after the last bell to help set up. Jensen originally didn't include himself in on those plans, but now he figures he might as well go all the way.

On his way to the gym he spots Jared, Chad, and Sandy rushing in the opposite direction.

They seem preoccupied, expressions pinched as they quickly make their way towards the front of campus.

Jensen pauses as an unsettling feeling forms in the pit of his stomach. He decides to follow them. There is a surprising amount of noise filtering from the parking lot, and Jensen watches as students in head to toe black rush across the courtyard and disappear between the front office and the cafeteria towards the source of all the commotion.

He loses sight of Jared in the thrall and his breathing speeds up as he races forward. He keeps his head down as he makes his way through the small crowd to find Jared at the front. He's standing tall with his feet planted and his fists clenched, looking angry and defiant as he stares straight ahead.

Jensen looks up to find himself on the frontlines of a battle he had chosen sides in but wasn't yet prepared to fight.

On the other side of the street, just on the edge of campus, protestors are gathered. There aren't that many, far fewer than the amount of students gathered on the opposite side, but it's enough to make an impression. They're all carrying picket signs and wearing tee shirts with anti-gay messages on them, and Jensen's heart stops beating as he focuses on the protestor standing front and center.

Jensen's eyes lock on his mother at the same moment she recognizes him. They stare at each other, horrified and devastated. There's a man standing next to her with a loudspeaker. He's preaching into it about how homosexuality is a sin, how they're all going to Hell.

Jensen's first instinct is to flee, but his feet are frozen to the ground. The world is falling down around him and Jensen can't take his eyes off of his mother.

She's never looked more ugly, more horrible and cruel. He's never wanted to distance himself from her more than he does in that moment.

Jared lets out a gasp next to him, looking from Jensen's trembling form to the group of protestors and back like he just recognized who he's standing up against. Jensen shoots him a desperate look before turning his gaze back on his mother. She stares back with a callous hatred that he has never seen before and he shudders under the weight of it.

All around him people are linking hands, threading fingers with their allies and standing united against their common enemy. He looks around at the sea of brave, determined faces. He sees a few pairs of eyes swimming with tears, struggling with hardship, but they never waver. He wants to be as strong as these people. He wants to fight with them.

He tears his eyes away from the train wreck in front of him, the loud swarming mass of hate, to look at Jared. He's so beautiful, so proud and strong in the face of so much adversity. He never stops fighting for what he wants. He never gives up. Jensen is in awe of how much he can bend and not break, of all the weight he can carry on his shoulders.

Jensen is standing in the middle of a literal incarnation of the war he's been battling inside his head for months, wavering between good and evil, and he has to decide which side is which. He looks around at his peers, at their linked hands and defiant expressions before looking back at the protestors with their hands clasped tightly around their picket signs, hateful scowls marring their faces.

He thinks about how the people behind him have made him feel over the past few months and compares it to how the people in front of him have made him feel for a lifetime, and it's like the choice is already made.

It's not hard to take a step backward and be welcomed into the fold. Sandy takes his hand and he holds it tight as he looks over at Jared. Their eyes meet and with just one glance Jensen knows this is worth fighting for. He takes Jared's wrist and wraps his fingers around it, thumb tucked underneath his jelly bracelets.

It's a mirror image of the simple touch Jared uses to let Jensen know that he's there for him, that he'll never stop fighting and he'll never let go. Jensen can only hope it translates, that it'll mean the same the other way around.

He can tell by the look on Jared's face that it does.

His mother has started screaming louder and waving her sign higher, but her burning eyes never leave Jensen's distraught face. Finally she lowers her sign with her gaze blazing threateningly on Jensen as she retreats.

Taking a stand here might have been a simple choice, but now he has his own battle to fight. He doesn't think it'll be this easy.

He pulls his hand away from Sandy's and looks over at Jared. He lets go of Jared's wrist but he catches his hand, eyes boring deep into his.

"I have to," Jensen whispers. Jared's eyes are wet and shiny as he nods slowly. He pulls on Jensen's bracelet once before letting go altogether. Jensen takes all the strength he can from the look in Jared's eyes. He tries to be proud and strong and brave, and he steps away from the group.

He takes off into a jog and he can't help but to feel like the world is spinning.

This is everything he was afraid of. This is everything he's been waiting for.

This is it.



Jared swallows hard and pulls the phone away from his ear, flipping it shut and bringing it to his mouth. Sandy comes over to sit next to him and rests her hand on his knee.

"Still nothing?" She asks. Jared shakes his head and gives her a sad smile.

"His phone is off." Jared shoves his fingers into his hair as he leans back against the wall.

"I hope he's okay," Sophia says as she drops down next to her girlfriend. Chad and Misha share a concerned look and sit down on two backwards chairs, resting their chins on their hands.

"He's stronger than he thinks he is," Jared mumbles as he stares down at his silent phone. His chest is tight with worry and fear, but he knows Jensen can handle this.

All Jared can do is wait, and be ready when Jensen needs him.



Jensen stalls as much as he can; wandering through the park with his hands shoved in his pockets as he mentally prepares himself.

Finally he has to admit that he knows his parents all too well. No miracle will occur tonight.

He walks through the front door of his house with his chin held high, but he knows this particular story won't have a happy ending.

His parents are sitting in the living room, stony and quiet. His mother has a glass of wine in her delicate hand and his father's hands are clenched into fists on his lap.

"Jensen," his father growls out. He swallows hard. "Explain yourself. *Now.*"

Jensen wants to demand that they explain *themselves*. He wants to know how they can survive with so much hate in their hearts. Doesn't it eat them up inside?

It's sort of funny when Jensen thinks about it. He's spent years being terrified of this exact moment. It's kept him up at night, made him cry and made him feel worthless and weak. And now that it's here, he's not scared. He's actually strangely calm, a strong resolve tinged with an edge of residual nervousness.

He just wants the moment to end.

"I don't know what you want me to say," Jensen says. He blinks and looks over at his mother. "You know what you saw."

"I saw you with those – those *people*," his mother spits. "There were whispers at the church of you running with a bad crowd, but I didn't dare believe it. I thought we had taught you the difference between right and wrong."

"I have a perfect understanding of the difference between right and wrong," Jensen says sternly. He thinks of Jared and Sherri and all the good they put out into the world, about how hard they work and how they ask for nothing in return. "But I didn't learn it from *you*."

"You watch your mouth, young man," his father demands in his irritating southern drawl. His mother looks at him again, wet eyes blazing.

"I saw you," she says, with disgust dripping from every syllable. "I saw you with that *boy*."

"That *boy* is very important to me," Jensen gets out. He's proud of the way he keeps his voice from trembling. His father suddenly slams his fist down on the arm of his chair and stands up, tossing his newspaper to the floor. Jensen tenses slightly and his mother jumps up as well, nervous eyes darting between her husband and her son.

"That's *it*, Jensen!" He shouts. Jensen swallows hard as he stares at him with wide eyes. "I won't stand for this. You are *never* to see that filthy pervert again, you hear me?"

"You can pray for forgiveness," his mother says steadfastly, and Jensen struggles to breathe. "You can repent for your sins."

"That's – that's just not going to happen," Jensen says breathlessly while shaking his head. The mere thought of never seeing Jared again is too painful, too ridiculous to even comprehend.

"Jensen, there's no room for discussion," his father says, and his eyes are wide with fury. His voice is so loud and Jensen struggles not to cower before him. But he is not bending on this. There is no way he's cutting out the best thing in his life to make someone else happy. "This is how it's going to be."

"No, it's not," Jensen says defiantly. His hands shake as he takes a brave step forward. His father's eyes widen like he's surprised that his weak, cowardly son seems to be standing up for himself. "I want to be with him."

"No," his father replies loudly just as his mother places a prim, shocked hand over her mouth. "Why would you *want* something like that?"

“Because I’m gay!” Jensen shouts. The word reverberates around the room like a gunshot. His parents flinch and Jensen blinks. For all he’s gone through, that’s the first time he’s actually said it out loud. It feels good, a little like release. It feels like honesty. It feels right.

“No,” his father repeats loudly. “I don’t even want to hear you – “

“I’m *gay*,” Jensen says again, a little louder. He lets out a harsh breath and says it again, quieter and a little awed, mostly to himself. “I’m gay.”

Jensen is nearly knocked off of his feet when his father’s fist connects with his jaw in a powerful and unexpected punch. He feels his lip tear against his teeth and he takes a staggering step back as pain blossoms from his jaw and outward, intense and white hot.

“I said I didn’t want to hear that come out of your mouth again,” his father says, but he’s blinking down at his hand like he’s a little shocked. His mother gasps and it takes a moment for the sudden shock to wear off. Jensen shakes his head to clear the dizziness and reaches up to touch the corner of his mouth. His fingers come away wet and sticky with blood.

Jensen has never been hit before, and to have it come with such force from his own father just cements what he was already coming to understand. He doesn’t want to be around these people.

It’s sort of a sad realization to come to, but he doesn’t feel like a part of this family anymore. He doesn’t know if he ever did.

“You can’t beat it out of me,” Jensen says. There are tears in his eyes but he blames it on the split lip and sore jaw. “This is who I am. I’m gay. I didn’t choose it, and no matter how hard I try, I can’t change it. But now I don’t even want to anymore. I *like* who I am. I like how *that boy* makes me feel.”

“I don’t want to hear this,” his father says, waving a dismissive hand. Jensen takes a step forward and gives his father a blood-tinged, slightly hysterical smile.

“I’m *happy*,” Jensen says strongly. “And for once in my life neither of you can take it away from me.”

Jensen shuts his eyes tight as his father fists both hands in his shirt and slams him against the wall. He forces his eyes open even as the wind is knocked out of him and he struggles to meet his father’s hateful glare.

“You have five minutes to get the hell out of this house,” he spits out. Jensen blinks owlshly and trembles in his father’s tight grasp. “You’re not a part of this family anymore.”

“Alan,” his mother gasps out, and his father finally releases his grip. Jensen sags against the wall and blinks against the sting in his eyes. He looks over at his mother but she says nothing more. She just stares at Jensen with a strange mixture of contempt and regret.

Jensen nods and turns to head up the stairs on unstable feet. His breath is hitching in his chest but he can't fall apart, not yet. He comes up to his bedroom door and rests his forehead against it, taking a moment to compose himself.

A soft touch on his shoulder makes him jump and he turns to see his little sister with tears in her eyes. Mackenzie – he'd almost forgotten. He stands up straight and waits for her to condemn him as well.

He tries to hide his surprise when she reaches up to press a warm, wet cloth to his split lip. She sniffs a little and Jensen stares at her.

“He's what has been making you happy,” she says, and Jensen nods a little. Mackenzie smiles sadly and pulls the cloth away, folding it over to hide the blood. “What's his name?”

“Jared,” Jensen whispers roughly. He swallows hard as Mackenzie nods. Two tears roll down her cheeks and Jensen wants to sob. He had no idea she cared so much about him. He had no idea he cared so much about *her*. She's his baby sister, and he's leaving her.

“You should be with him,” she tells him. “Nothing that makes you smile like you have been can be bad.”

Jensen nods and opens the door to his room to stumble inside. Mackenzie helps him stuff his clothes into a duffle bag. He doesn't take much else – the laptop and other electronics he saved up for and bought himself along with his CDs and school stuff. The bag is full and heavy by the time they're done, and he huffs a breath and runs his fingers through his hair before readjusting his glasses.

Mackenzie writes something down on a piece of paper and hands it over sheepishly. It's a phone number. Jensen blinks and stares at her.

“What's this?”

“It's my phone number,” she replies. “I, uh – saved up and bought one of those pay as you go phones. They don't know about it. Please stay in touch with me?”

“I will,” Jensen promises and sticks the scrap of paper in his pocket. There's an awkward moment before they're both moving forward and wrapping their arms around each other. Jensen squeezes his eyes shut as he feels a tear roll down his cheek. He can't remember the last time they hugged like this, and it's a shame it's finally happening because he has to

say goodbye.

Mackenzie lingers in his room as he hefts the bag over his shoulder, wincing as he carries it down the stairs. His father is back in his armchair and reading the paper like nothing ever happened. His mother is on the sofa with her face in her hands. Jensen pulls his keys out of his pocket and stares at the shiny silver house key all alone on a little silver ring. He takes a deep breath, places the key quietly on the small table by the door, and leaves without so much as a backwards glance.

It's nothing but sheer force of will that gets him to Jared's house. He's exhausted from carrying all of his belongings and his chest aches from trying to hold himself together. He finally heaves himself up onto the sagging porch and drops the bag with a grunt as he rings the doorbell.

The dogs start up and Sherri yells at them. It's so comforting Jensen almost smiles. She pulls the door open and tucks her messy hair behind her ears in a familiar gesture. It's just past dusk and she flicks on the porch light. Jensen blinks against the sudden brightness.

"Jensen? What happened?" She looks from Jensen's forlorn expression and his tender jaw to the overstuffed bag on her porch.

"I – They kicked me out. " He struggles to get the words out, chest hitching with each breath. "I didn't know where else to go."

"Oh, *Bean*." She surges forward to wrap an arm around him, grabbing his bag with one hand and dragging it over the threshold as she pulls him inside. "He hit you?"

Jensen doesn't answer, too busy blinking back tears. The dogs come over to sniff at him but they seem to sense the gravity of the situation because they simply whine and retreat to their corner.

She pulls him into the kitchen and puts some ice in a zip-lock bag before wrapping it in a dish towel. She presses it against the corner of his mouth and he hisses slightly. She makes an apologetic noise and cups the back of his head.

"Jared?" He mumbles out pathetically, voice muffled against the towel. She bites her lip and drags her nails across his scalp soothingly.

"He's still at the rally," she says softly. "Baby, he's so worried about you. I'll call him, but first I want to show you something, okay?"

Jensen furrows his brow as she sets the ice down on the counter and steers him down the hall. Sherri's room is at the very end and on the right is Jared's bedroom. The door across

from it is the storage-slash-guest room. Jensen has never been inside.

This is the door she brings him to. Jensen's forehead crinkles in confusion as she opens the door and leads him inside. She flips on the light and clears her throat as she comes in to stand next to him.

It's a nice room. The walls are a soft tan and the bedding is ocean blue with chocolate accents. Matching curtains fall over the window, and there's a small wooden dresser and matching desk on the opposite wall.

"Do you like it?" Sherri asks tentatively. "All I really had to go on was your favorite color."

It hits Jensen then, and he nearly staggers against the force of it. He blinks rapidly as his eyes land on a framed photo of him and Jared hanging on the wall. He remembers Sherri taking it; just a random candid of them lying together on the floor, dozing in and out with Jared's arm slung over his hips and a dog on either side of them.

"Sherri, is this – did you – oh *god*." He looks over at her and feels such a rush of warmth and affection for this incredible woman in front of him that he doesn't know how to contain it. She shrugs like it was no big deal, like she doesn't mean the world to him.

"I have to admit, Jensen, that I saw this coming a long time ago," Sherri says as she looks around the room. "And well, I want you to stay here. And it's not because of pity, and it's not out of charity. It's because you're a part of this family now, and the house feels a little empty without you."

"I don't know what to say," Jensen replies shakily. "No one has ever done anything like this for me. I just –"

A tear slips down his cheek and she rushes forward to envelop him in a crushing hug. He wraps his arms around her and rests his chin on her shoulder, taking a deep breath and wondering what he did to deserve these amazing people in his life.



Jared gets the call from his mom that Jensen is at their house and that he's safe. He's a little hurt and a lot upset, but he's okay. She tells him that Jensen needs him.

He leaves his friends to take care of the rally and gets Misha to give him a ride home, not willing to waste time getting there on foot. The car barely comes to a stop before he's scrambling out of it, running up the walkway and jumping onto the porch.

He nearly trips over something on his way through the living room and looks back to see a

large duffle bag. His heart sinks a little, but it's not unexpected. The living room is empty so Jared skids around the hall. The only open door is the spare room, but Jared doesn't take the time to question it as he goes through it.

He notices the new paint and furniture along with the framed picture on the wall, and he vows to get his mom an extra special Mother's Day present.

She's sitting on the bed with Jensen and rubbing his back in soothing circles. He looks up as Jared approaches, and the pain in Jensen's wet eyes nearly breaks him.

The split lip and blossoming bruise on Jensen's face makes him shake with rage, but anger isn't the emotion he needs right now. He takes a deep breath and sits down on the other side of Jensen, wrapping one arm around him and pressing a kiss to his temple. His mom does the same and squeezes Jensen tightly before letting go.

She gets up and Jared gives her a fiercely grateful look as she leaves the room. She hits the light switch on the way out, leaving the room lit only by the soft light of the moon filtering in through the window.

"It's over," Jensen whispers. He sounds tired and defeated. "They know everything, and they – they don't want me anymore."

"I want you," Jared says automatically, the words spilling out in a tumbled rush against Jensen's skin. "We want you. You have a home here."

Jensen nods and Jared kisses his cheek as his hand strokes up and down Jensen's back. He toes off his shoes and leans down to tug off Jensen's.

"It *hurts*," Jensen admits in a choked voice. Jared bites his lip and his eyes sting as he stretches out on the bed. He rolls onto his side and pulls Jensen down with him, his back fitting against Jared's chest. Jared wraps both arms around his torso, hooks his chin over Jensen's shoulder, and tucks his knees into the back of Jensen's.

"I know it does," Jared whispers as he holds him even tighter. He can feel Jensen shaking in his arms, shoulders quaking and breath hitching. "It's okay, Jen. I've got you. You can let go."

Jensen reaches up to wrap his fingers around Jared's forearms, nails digging in slightly. He's silent for a few minutes before he starts to cry. Softly at first, but it's not long before he's sobbing, pained sounds being wrenched from him as he shakes in Jared's grasp.

Jared just holds him through it. It hurts to see but he knows Jensen needs it. He's kept too much pent up for too long, and now it's all come to a head. He needs to let it out.

It seems to go on forever, Jensen sobbing and clutching at Jared desperately, pressing back against him like he's his only anchor to the here and now. Jared never lets go. He just keeps his forehead pressed against the back of Jensen's neck while tears slip silently from his own eyes.

Jensen's pain is tangible in the air, something real and devastating, and it's impossible not to feel it. He would do anything to take it away, but he knows all he can do right now is hold Jensen together when all he wants to do is fall apart.

The sobs finally start to subside and Jensen heaves one last sigh before calming down a little. Jared tugs lightly at his shoulder and Jensen rolls over to face him. His eyes are red and swollen, sore looking, and Jared presses a soft kiss to his brow.

Jensen looks exhausted, fed up and worn out, and Jared can't blame him. He wrangles the covers out from underneath their bodies and pulls it over them before gathering Jensen's lax, sleepy body up in his arms. His hand slips under the back of his shirt to rest against bare skin and Jensen sighs, tucking his head under Jared's chin and resting his hands against Jared's chest.

"Get some sleep, Jen." Jared suggests gently, rubbing his back up and down. Jensen blinks and Jared can feel the tickle of his eyelashes against his skin.

"Don't leave, okay?" Jensen asks in a tiny, desperate voice as he tangles his fingers in Jared's shirt. Jared swallows hard and holds Jensen even tighter. He slips one of his thighs between Jensen's legs and kisses the top of his head.

"Not going anywhere," Jared whispers, pressing another kiss to his hair. "I promise."

Jensen nods and sags against Jared, lashes fluttering against his skin. Everything is calm for a few moments, and he thinks Jensen might have fallen asleep.

"I don't regret it," Jensen whispers suddenly as he tugs lightly at Jared's shirt. Jared's eyes brim with tears again and he draws a lopsided heart on Jensen's back with the tip of his finger. "I don't regret *you*."

Jensen doesn't say another word as he falls into a deep sleep all wrapped up in Jared's arms.

Onto Part 8.

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/248556.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/248556.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 8)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:52:00 : 45-57 minutes

[Back to Part 7.](#)



Jensen wakes up exhausted.

He's sprawled out on his stomach with his head half buried under a fluffy pillow. His shirt is rucked up all the way under his armpits from all his tossing and turning, and there's a sour taste in his mouth. His eyes are swollen and sore and he squeezes them shut again. He feels clammy and gross, too hot in his clothes and blankets.

There's a soft touch on the bare skin of his back and Jensen sighs. Last night comes flooding back to him and he swallows, unwilling to move. Jared's fingers are tracing indistinguishable patterns on his back, moving in swirls and circles and zigzags in a touch as light as a butterfly's wings. It's comforting.

"Hey," Jensen rasps out. His voice is deep and rough. Jared's hand stills before his fingers spread outward and his palm presses against his skin.

"You're alive," Jared replies airily. "I was beginning to worry."

"Times' it?" Jensen mumbles as he rolls onto his back and rubs his aching eyes. Jared is shirtless and upon further inspection also pantsless, clad only in a pair of boxer briefs. Jensen takes a moment to appreciate the sight of all that tan skin, but he's in no state to act on it.

"One," Jared replies. He's sitting up against the wall, and Jensen blinks.

"In the afternoon?" He asks, and Jared nods. "I slept for sixteen hours?"

"You needed it," Jared says simply. Jensen stares up at him.

"You didn't leave the entire time, did you?" Jared shrugs and wrinkles his nose a little.

"I got up to go to the bathroom, but I even shook you a little first to make sure you were *out* out," he tells him. "We've *got* to get you a TV in here. And I hope you don't mind the lack of

clothes. It was sort of stifling.”

“Jared, I – “ He cuts himself off and turns his face into the pillow to mask his embarrassment. He still feels so fragile and weird – scared and nervous and sad and relieved and grateful all at once.

“Hey.” Jared’s voice is pitched low and comforting instead of playful. He lies down next to Jensen again and pulls softly at his shoulder until Jensen turns to face him. He feels boneless and sleepy, which is ridiculous considering how long he just slept.

Jared’s hands go for the hem of Jensen’s shirt, tugging it up a little and giving him a questioning look. Jensen furrows his brow but nods and lifts his arms up as Jared tugs off his shirt. Next he pushes the covers down and undoes the button of Jensen’s jeans, pushing them down slightly. Jensen’s pulse skyrockets suddenly.

“What’re you – “

“Don’t worry,” Jared says calmly. He reaches behind Jensen to pull his jeans over the curve of his ass and down. “It’s hot in here. That’s all.”

Jensen nods and kicks his pants off, leaving him in as little as Jared. It’s thrilling and a little unsettling, but at the same time it’s comforting. Jared’s eyes sweep across his body as his hand slides across his bare chest until he finds his pulse. Jared leans down to press his lips to the spot as his hand slides across Jensen’s stomach. He trails soft kisses up Jensen’s neck to his mouth and presses their lips together softly.

There’s nothing sexual about what Jared is doing but it makes Jensen shake in entirely different ways.

He returns Jared’s kiss and lets their lips linger against each other’s for a few moments before Jared pulls away. He lies on his side and stretches one arm out against the bed as he uses the other to pull Jensen in. A soft gasp escapes Jensen’s lips as their bare chests press together, bare legs tangling. Jared keeps his arm locked around Jensen’s shoulders and Jensen lets his arm slip around Jared’s slim waist to feel all that warm, bare skin under his fingertips.

Jensen gets what Jared is doing. He feels so close to Jared like this, barely anything separating them. He feels safe and warm, well cared for. His eyes droop again.

“You can go back to sleep,” Jared whispers into his ear before pressing a soft kiss to the tip of it.

“I already slept so much,” Jensen gets out around a yawn. He sags against Jared’s body,

feeling more relaxed by the second.

“Right.” Jared’s lips ghost across Jensen’s sore jaw. “So what’s a few more hours?”

“You don’t have to stay,” Jensen offers, but he doesn’t know how he would react if Jared pulled away from him now.

“Yeah, but I like watching you sleep,” Jared replies. Jensen can feel him smile against his cheek. “It doesn’t make me feel weird or creepy at all.”

“Stalker,” Jensen mumbles, and he falls asleep before Jared is even done laughing.



When Jensen wakes up again a few hours later, Jared finally makes him get out of bed. He leads him into the bathroom and tosses some of his own pajamas on the counter because he really doesn’t want to have to deal with Jensen’s duffle bag right now. He pulls on a pair of ratty sweats and leaves Jensen to shower before jogging out towards the kitchen because dear god, he needs *food*.

Jensen wanders out a little while later with his towel dried hair sticking up in all directions and his glasses perched on his nose. He walks into the kitchen with one eyebrow raised.

“What are you doing?” He asks. Jared hisses as he gets a little too close to the waffle maker. He didn’t put a shirt on and the *World’s Best Mom* apron he’s wearing does little to protect his skin.

“I’m making banana nut waffles!” Jared declares jovially, and Jensen tilts his head to the side.

“Does Eggo make banana nut waffles?” Jensen inquires. Jared shoots him a mock glare.

“Mom made the batter and left it in the fridge. I’m perfectly capable of pouring it into a waffle maker.” Harley wanders into the kitchen and sticks his head in the trashcan, digging around for a bit before extracting a charcoal black waffle. Jared shouts and throws a spoon at him and he drops it before retreating. Jensen looks back at Jared with an amused smirk. “After a few practice rounds. Shut up! I don’t see you making breakfast!”

“Because it’s four in the afternoon,” Jensen supplies, and Jared stares at him blankly. He points towards the living room with a wooden mixing spoon.

“Out of my kitchen,” he says threateningly. Jensen holds his hands up as he retreats.

When Jared heads into the living room with two full plates of fattening breakfast food

Jensen is sitting on the couch and staring blankly ahead. Jared sets the plates down on the table and nudges Jensen's foot.

"Hm?" Jensen says distractedly, shaking his head a little and looking up at Jared. "Oh, it looks great."

"Jen," Jared says softly. He sits down next to Jensen and takes his hand. He threads their fingers together and squeezes. "How are you doing?"

"I – I'm okay." Jensen looks down at their joined hands and then over at Jared. "Just processing, I guess."

"Yeah." Jared leans in and kisses the bridge of Jensen's nose. "Process with some waffles in you. I know you haven't eaten since lunch yesterday."

Jensen nods and they break apart to eat their food. Jared puts something mindless on the television and when they're done they leave their sticky plates on the coffee table. Jared slumps against the couch and pats his bare belly.

"Are you ever going to put on a shirt?" Jensen asks. He sounds only mildly curious.

"Hey, you live here now," Jared says, trying to keep his voice casual. "Shirts are reserved for guests only."

"I see," Jensen says, biting his bottom lip a little. "I guess I could learn to deal with that."

"Does my brute manliness offend you or something?" Jared asks playfully as he flexes his sinewy muscles. Jensen cracks a small smile and lets his eyes drift across Jared's torso.

"No." Jensen lets out a soft chuckle and rubs the back of his neck. "It's just – I really like your whole, like, stomach and chest area. I'm trying to mope over here and you're making it difficult."

"Moping is prohibited," Jared stays sternly. "Ogling your boyfriend's stomach, however, is strongly encouraged." Jared leans over and lifts up Jensen's shirt to expose his stomach. "I don't know, I think yours is cuter than mine. It has little freckles."

"Shut up," Jensen mumbles, and his cheeks turn pink as he tries to push his shirt down. "Yours is better."

"Freckles," Jared repeats as he traces his thumb over Jensen's hipbones. They're so fucking sexy. Everything about Jensen is sexy and the fact that he's completely unaware of it is even hotter.

“Agree to disagree,” Jensen says. Jared leans down to blow a raspberry against Jensen’s bare stomach. He looks up to see Jensen staring at him, eyes wide before his lips curve into a smirk. Anger flashes through Jared again when his eyes are drawn to the impressive bruise on Jensen’s jaw, but he swallows it back. “You are such a *dork*.”

“It’s part of my undeniable charm,” Jared says, flopping down and resting his head in Jensen’s lap. Jensen digs his fingers into Jared’s hair, letting the silky strands slip through his fingers over and over until Jared is damn near purring. His other hand rests between Jared’s shoulders, hot like a brand against his bare skin.

They lie like that for awhile, decompressing and watching crappy TV. It’s nearly dark when Sherri comes in, rousing the dogs and disrupting the peace and quiet.

“Look at all this masculinity and testosterone in my living room,” Sherri says in lieu of a greeting. Jared rolls onto his back and props his head up against Jensen’s thigh. The action causes Jensen’s hand to slip across his chest and Jared playfully holds it against his stomach. “Perfect for carrying in groceries.”

“You bought groceries?” Jared asks. He tips his head back to look at Jensen and sings his next words. “Somebody’s trying to *impress* yooooou.”

“Shut up, Jared!” She throws her keys at him. They hit his thigh, precariously close to his junk, and he curls inward. “I am a *provider*.”

“Fine, fine, you’re a provider!” Jared shouts as he pulls himself into a sitting position. “Don’t throw metal objects at my crotch region!”

Jared grabs the keys and gets up, playfully bumping his mom’s shoulder on his way out of the door. Jensen hops up to follow him and it takes each of them two trips to get everything inside. Jensen immediately starts helping Sherri unload all of the bags.

“Oh, I see how it’s gonna be,” Jared says. Jensen pauses in shelving boxes of cereal to look over at him questioningly. “You’re gonna be all awesome and helpful and try to show me up.”

“Guess you better up your game, kid,” Sherri tells him with a smirk. “Vacuum’s in the hall closet.”

“Ha haaaaaaa. Bite me,” Jared drawls out as he comes around the counter. “What’s for dinner?”

“Burgers, fries, and a salad,” Sherri says. She holds up a hand when Jared opens his mouth. “You’re eating the salad.”

“Fine! Vegetable nazi,” Jared mutters. “Are the fries *crinkle* cut?”

“Yes,” she replies. “Think you can manage to fry them up without burning down the house?”

“Yes,” Jared pulls the apron on again. “I will fry the *shit* out of them.”

“How can I help?” Jensen asks. He looks around the kitchen and rocks up on his toes. Sherri looks around and claps her hands together before leading Jensen over to an empty spot of counter.

“You can make the salad?” Sherri suggests. “Jared isn’t allowed to play with knives.”

“Oh my god, Jared sucks in the kitchen! That’s so original!” Jared snarks as he drags the deep fryer out of a cupboard and sets it up. “Get some new material.”

“I can make the salad,” Jensen says once he’s done chuckling at Jared’s antics. Sherri grins and sets all the veggies on the counter.

“Okay children.” She flips on the boom box on top of the fridge. Funk music pours out of it and Jared rolls his eyes. “Let’s do this.”



School on Monday is a little, well, different.

They were late because they hadn’t accounted for doubling up on bathroom times, and they trudge into English with matching tardy slips.

Jensen is a little self-conscious of the bruise on his face. His split lip is healing pretty well, but he keeps cracking it open when he smiles. The bruise is a mottled purple, spreading out from the corner of his mouth to the curve of his jaw. It’s highly visible and Jensen prays no one asks him what happened. With the rush of everything changing, he never found the time to come up with a good excuse.

Jared digs around in his bag once they sit down, extracting a Kiss and setting it on Jensen’s desk. He picks it up and looks over at Jared with a confused expression.

“What?” Jared asks quietly. “Just because we live together now means I have to stop wooing you?”

“Wooing?” Jensen asks skeptically. Jared sticks his tongue out at him before opening his well-worn copy of *Of Mice and Men*.

Jensen smirks and looks down at the chocolate. Living with Jared and Sherri has been sort

of surreal. Granted, it's only been two days, but it's a lot to take in. Sherri had sat them down and told them that she wasn't instilling many rules, but that they had separate bedrooms for a reason. She also told them to be safe and also *quiet* and Jared looked at her like she was stupid. Jensen doesn't really know what else happened because he spent the next five minutes stuck in an epic facepalm.

Truth be told, Jensen spent a lot of the weekend sleeping in his new bed. Jared seems to think that just trying to process everything wore him out, which was part of it, but really it was because Jensen can *relax* at Jared's house. He was just catching up on months worth of sleep lost worrying over what could happen.

Now that it's all over, it's hard for Jensen to try to pin down an emotion. He doesn't pay attention in any of his classes that morning – just spaces out and thinks. He's still sad about his parents and probably will always be, but it's sort of a dull ache. It's ironic how *okay* he is after something he spent years fearing finally happened.

But he is okay – good, even.

Halfway through math class he realizes that the only thing he was ever really afraid of was his parents. Now that that's been taken away, there isn't really anything left to be afraid of. Nervous and hesitant maybe, but not *afraid*. He doesn't have to pretend he's not crazy about Jared at school anymore – there's no reason to hide.

Jensen can't wait for the bell to ring.

When it finally does, he tears out of his class and down the hall to meet everyone at their normal spot outside the cafeteria. Jared is leaning against the wall and Jensen heads straight for him. Sandy and Sophia cut him off and wrap him up in a hug. Jensen wraps his arms around their waists and raises an eyebrow at Jared when they press sticky kisses to his cheeks. Jared bites his lip guiltily, and it's obvious he told them what happened. Jensen doesn't mind. It's not like he's ashamed.

"Thanks girls," he says. He scrunches his nose up when they reach up to wipe the gloss from his skin. Once they release him, Jensen takes a deep breath and steps forward. He reaches out to grab Jared's wrist and pulls him into a hug.

"Whoa, hey." Jared laughs and wraps his arms around Jensen's waist. "What's this for?"

"I just want to," Jensen breathes. He presses a quick kiss to Jared's neck before pulling away. Jared stares at him with a soft liquid gaze, lips curving upwards into a pleased smile. Jensen slides his hand down Jared's arm to thread their fingers together and squeezes tightly. Sandy squeals a little and Jensen blushes as he leans against Jared's side.

People are glancing in their direction but Jensen just doesn't *care*. He likes the rush he's feeling – he *wants* everyone to see how lucky he is, how proud he is.

"I want pizza," Jensen says. He's determined not to make this into a scene. This is how it should be, him holding hands with his boyfriend during their lunch period. It's so stunningly simple and Jensen kicks himself for ever thinking this was something he could never have.

"Sure, Jen," Jared says softly. He looks calm but his eyes are wild and his grin is stretched wide. He's practically vibrating with happiness and Jensen chuckles when he leans in to press a kiss to his temple. Chad and Misha let out an exaggerated *aww* and Sophia pushes them into each other.

Jensen grins and leans against his boyfriend, hands entwined for everyone to see.

His entire world has changed, but when he looks over at Jared he gets the feeling everything is going to be just fine.

Maybe even as close to perfect as it can get.



That evening Jared walks slowly up the hallway and leans against the doorjamb of Jensen's bedroom.

He still can't really believe it. Jensen *lives* with them – right across the hall. It's fucking surreal.

But the circumstances that led to this momentous event aren't exactly great. It's an unfortunate fact Jared is reminded of when he sees Jensen sitting on the edge of his new bed with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands.

"Hey," Jared says softly as he knocks on the open door. Jensen looks up and Jared's heart clenches. His eyes are red.

"Hey." Jensen looks around the room like he's a little lost. His eyes land on the giant overflowing duffle bag in the corner. "I was, uh – attempting to unpack."

Jared nods in understanding. There must be a certain finality in unpacking your bags, a reminder that all this is really happening.

"I can help," Jared offers. Jensen smiles gratefully and Jared strolls into the room. The duffle bag is unzipped and wrinkled and crumpled clothes explode out of it. "First things first – we do laundry."

Jared goes across the hall into his room and dumps his hamper on the floor. He takes it over to Jensen's room and starts shoving all of his clothes inside. He picks it up and heads for the laundry room. Jensen gets up to follow him.

It's going to take a few loads to wash all of Jensen's clothes, so as the water fills on the first load Jared gently pushes Jensen up against the wall. He presses their mouths together tenderly with one arm slung loosely around his waist. Jensen sags against him and curls his fingers in the front of Jared's shirt.

"Tomorrow we'll go shopping," Jared mumbles against Jensen's plush mouth. "Get all your toiletries and stuff. That peppermint shampoo you like. And razors," he adds when his lips brush Jensen's raspy jaw. "Get you all settled in, okay?"

"Yeah." Jensen nods. He pulls Jared a little tighter against him, like he's afraid Jared will let go of him. "Sorry, I don't mean to be all – I love it here, Jared. It's just – sudden. It's a lot to deal with."

"You don't have to apologize." It seems like Jared is always trying to drill that into Jensen's skull. "You're not doing anything wrong."

Jensen nods and his hand skims up the side of Jared's neck to tangle in his hair. Their eyes meet and they stay that way for awhile, tangled up together as the laundry room fills with the sweet scent of soap. Finally Jensen breaks their gaze to push up on his toes and kiss Jared, soft and sweet.

It takes awhile to get Jensen completely unpacked. His clothes are folded neatly in the dresser and his books, CDs, and DVDs are stacked on top of it. They find a spot for each and every one of Jensen's meager belongings. By the time they're done, the room actually looks like a place a teenager would live – more so than Jensen's old room ever did.

It's still fairly early but Jensen looks tired. His eyes are drooping and his feet shuffle along the floor. They change into their pajamas and Jared starts some music on the boom box he found in the garage before crawling into Jensen's bed with him.

Jensen curls up against Jared like it's his favorite thing in the world, barely keeping his eyes open long enough to kiss Jared goodnight.



Jensen easily settles into his new routine over the next couple of weeks. It's almost like a new life, but not really.

He still feels like the same person, but it's like the bad parts of his life were cut out of him.

There was a wound left behind and he's still a little sore and tender, but he's healing.

He's never laughed harder than he has since he moved in with Jared and Sherri. They're the funniest people he's ever met and they leave him breathless night after night. He's also never slept better. He and Jared stick to their own bedrooms for the most part, but there are some nights they sneak across the hall to crawl into each other's beds. They usually just kiss and cuddle, but there have been a few nights where they jerk each other off, hands shoved in each other's underwear while they muffle their whimpers of pleasure with deep kisses.

He's getting more comfortable with touching Jared, and even more comfortable with letting Jared touch him. And well, nothing helps him sleep better than an orgasm from his gorgeous live-in boyfriend.

He goes through with the slightly painful task of removing his parents' names from his school records. He changes his address and phone numbers and tells the receptionist not to call his parents for anything because he no longer resides with them. He replaces their names on his emergency contact card with Jared and Sherri's, and he takes a deep breath as he leaves the office.

It feels like another patch on the wound his parents left.

When the school day ends on a hot and sunny Tuesday, Jensen is barreled into as soon as he steps out of the door of his last period classroom. Warm, heavy weight drapes across his back and strong arms wrap around his waist.

"What's up, gorgeous?" Jared asks before kissing the tip of Jensen's ear. Jensen smiles and reaches up to grip Jared's forearms, awkwardly stumbling down the hall towards the Tech building all wrapped up in Jared's arms.

"You should lay off the cupcakes," Jensen teases, pretending to sag under Jared's weight. He lets out an offended squawk and digs his fingers into Jensen's ribs. He bites down on the urge to laugh. "Tickling, really?"

"God, so *feisty*." Jared chuckles and then bites playfully at the side of Jensen's neck. Jensen squirms and turns his head to the side instinctively. Jared's lips follow and press against the small hollow behind his ear and he shivers. "Are you coming to the meeting again?"

Jensen smiles. He's gone to the last three GSA meetings, every one since he was kicked out. The first one was slightly awkward, as the topic was how to handle homophobia in a direct response to Day of Silence and the ensuing protest. Jensen had sat in the back and squirmed a lot. Since then he's gotten better, moving towards the front and even

participating a little.

“What are you gonna give me?” Jensen asks as he turns around in Jared’s arms. Jared’s eyes are dark, full of wicked promises. He shudders just at the thought of Jared’s hands on him and wonders when he’ll be bold enough to allow Jared to go further than fumbling handjobs through their clothing. The thought is becoming less nerve-wracking and more intriguing by the day.

“And they say public displays of affection are overrated,” comes a voice from behind Jensen. He tenses slightly, an unfortunate habit he can’t yet shake, and looks up at Jared.

“Hey Danny,” Jared says, and Jensen looks over his shoulder at her. Danneel is insanely gorgeous and a little crazy. She’s an out and proud bisexual and longstanding member of the GSA. Jared starts a little and squeezes Jensen once before letting go. “Shit, I’m supposed to go help Misha set up the snack table.”

“There’s a snack table today?” Adam asks as he walks over to them. “I swear, Padalecki. You are trying to *ruin* my figure.”

“He’s not shoving the cookies down your throat, babe,” Danneel says, and Adam glares at her. Adam is flamboyant enough to make even Chad look like the butchest guy alive. He wears skin tight clothes and his jet black hair is cut into some sort of trendy asymmetrical style. His eyebrows are waxed and he often wears eyeliner. Jensen was sort of horribly awkward around him the first time they met, but the shock has worn off by now.

“Ugh, you whore,” Adam says to Danneel. “As my wife you’re supposed to *support* me.”

“I really gotta run, guys,” Jared says with a chuckle. “Jen, are you coming or will I see you in there?”

Jensen opens his mouth to answer but snaps it shut when Danneel wraps her arm around his waist. Jensen tenses a little, same as he always does when he’s touched by someone that isn’t Jared, Sherri, or one of his close friends. But he’s rapidly growing accustomed to just how touchy-feely this group of people he’s now a part of is. The moment of panic quickly subsides and he lets out a breath, even going as far to drape his arm loosely over Danneel’s shoulders.

“We’ll take care of your boy, Jared,” she says, and Jared raises an eyebrow. He looks over to Jensen to make sure he’s okay and Jensen just nods in return. “Oh, come on. You’ll be fine without each other for ten minutes. Stop making the gooey doe eyes at each other and go set up our snacks!”

Jared rolls his eyes and steps forward, kissing the tip of Jensen’s nose and flicking the end

of Danneel's. She gives him a swift kick in the ass as he turns around and Jared cackles as he enters the Tech building.

"So Jensen, honey. *Baby*," Adam says. He comes around to the other side of Jensen and slips his arm around his waist. "Now that you're all out and proud, you *have* to let us take you shopping."

"Have to," Danneel echoes. "It's crucial."

"Why?" Jensen asks. He furrows his brow when Adam tugs at the hem of his plain blue tee.

"Your wardrobe is so... nondescript," Adam says as he reaches up to pull off his glasses. Jensen blinks against the sudden change in his vision and waits for the world to come back into slightly blurry focus. "You're far too gorgeous to hide."

"I'm not hiding," Jensen mumbles, feeling his cheeks heat up. He takes his glasses back from Adam and puts them back on. "There's nothing wrong with nondescript."

"Fine," Danneel replies airily. "But you're still going shopping with us."

"At least your boy knows how to dress himself. Sort of," Adam says, scrunching up his nose like he's thinking. "Actually, no. You better bring him too."

"Sounds... awesome," Jensen chuckles. "But we better get inside."

"Ah yes!" Adam shouts. He and Danneel link arms with Jensen and skip him into the building. Jensen can do little more than laugh and try to keep up. They drop into seats down front and Jared looks over at him and gives him a thumbs up and then a thumbs down, eyes playful and questioning. Jensen puts his hand out flat and wobbles it back and forth.

Adam and Danneel let out matching fake offended gasps and Jared's laughter is loud enough to echo around the room.



Jared is moments from sleep, all nestled in his bed, when there's a knock on his slightly open door. It opens slowly and Jared smiles at the now familiar sight of Jensen silhouetted in the doorway.

Jared gestures him in with a head nod and feels a now even more familiar flash of heat in his belly at the sight of Jensen in black boxer briefs and a threadbare gray tee shirt.

Jensen slowly walks over to the bed after he closes the door, barely illuminated in the

darkness. He stands in front of it with his body pitched forward like he's waiting for permission.

"I, uh – I can't sleep," he says, and Jared moves over to make room for him. Jensen climbs onto the bed, molds himself against Jared's side, and tucks his head shyly under Jared's chin. Jared can feel the hot length of Jensen's dick through his boxers and he smiles sleepily.

Jared thinks of how Jensen was this afternoon, so feisty and flirty, heat in his eyes when Jared held him close. He presses his lips to Jensen's temple and decides to take a chance. His heart starts thumping a little harder but he's too tired to actually be worried that it'll go badly. He doesn't think it will.

"Mm, you're hard," Jared whispers roughly, and he swears he can feel Jensen's cheek heat up with blood. "That why you can't sleep?"

Jensen nods and his mouth opens against Jared's neck in a wet kiss. He sucks softly at the spot as his hips push against Jared's thigh almost absently.

"You want me to help?" Jared breathes a little deeper just at the thought of getting his hands on Jensen again. This whole situation feels sleepy and unreal, almost like a dream.

"Yeah," Jensen whispers. He bites down on Jared's neck just hard enough to prove that there's no way he's imagining this. Jared turns his head to meet Jensen's mouth and licks his way inside. Jared's hand slides down Jensen's stomach to slip into his briefs in slow, easy movements. He's surprised to feel Jensen's fingers around his wrist, stilling him. This isn't anything new. "No, Jared, I – I want more. It shouldn't be like this every time."

"Okay, Jen," Jared whispers. He bites his lip and presses a soft kiss to Jensen's mouth. "Yeah, we can do that."

His hands go to the hem of Jensen's shirt and tug, and he breaks the kiss only to throw the offending garment on the ground. He pushes Jensen gently onto his back before sitting up and hooking his thumbs in the waistband of Jensen's briefs.

"Can I see you this time?" He asks softly in a tone that says it's perfectly okay if Jensen declines. "I wanna see all of you."

Jensen swallows hard, eyes glinting in the moonlight as he nods. Jared starts to pull his underwear down but Jensen grabs his wrist.

"Only if I get to see all of you too," Jensen pants out as he lets go. Jared nods and pulls Jensen's shorts down his legs, dropping them on the floor. He doesn't look at Jensen until

he gets up on his knees to take off his own underwear. Once they're both naked, Jared lets his eyes travel hungrily up the length of Jensen's body.

"You're so beautiful, Jen," Jared says reverently. His hand trails down Jensen's flank and over the curve of his hip and down his thigh, all that uninterrupted skin warm under his palm. Jensen makes a soft noise, something needy and barely audible.

Jensen's dick is thick and hard, curving up towards his navel. There's a patch of dark golden curls at the base and it's all so *pretty*. Jared wants that dick so bad, but he's not free to touch – not yet.

He straddles Jensen's hips and tilts his ass up in the air as he leans down to suck at Jensen's collarbone. Jensen grips the backs of his thighs, fingernails digging in as Jared bites down softly. His hands travel up Jared's thighs and over the swell of his ass before settling on his hips, and Jared nearly moans at the touch.

He surges up to kiss Jensen's mouth with one hand placed tenderly on his cheek as he presses their foreheads together.

"I wanna make you feel so good," Jared breathes, and Jensen arches up slightly. "But promise you'll stop me if I do something you don't want me to."

Jensen nods, kissing Jared again and squeezing his hips. Jared closes his eyes and swallows hard – he has no idea what to do first. He sits up and looks over Jensen's body, lips curving up into a smirk when he picks his target.

He reaches over Jensen to grab a pillow and then lifts Jensen's head to place it underneath, propping him up slightly.

"I want you to watch me," Jared breathes. His dick twitches slightly when Jensen licks his lips and nods. "I want you to see what I'm doing to you."

He slides his hands across Jensen's chest and fits his long fingers in the dips between his ribs. His finger travels across Jensen's chest to one pink nipple and traces a small circle around it. Jensen watches Jared's hand with rapt attention, swollen lips parted slightly as his breath comes quicker.

Jared rubs his finger across his nipple and feels it peak at the attention. He pinches it just barely between his thumb and forefinger and Jensen gasps audibly.

Jared grins and lowers his head to open his mouth around that nipple, lavishing it with flicks of his tongue before sucking softly. Jensen gasps again and Jared just barely lets his teeth scrape across it to make Jensen moan. Jared spends a little more time sucking on it, too

caught up in the breathy noises Jensen is making to stop.

When he finally pulls away the tiny nub has gone from soft pink to dark red, and Jared knows it'll be sore tomorrow. He bites his lip and repeats the entire process on the other nipple.

"Oh god," Jensen breathes. His hands slide up Jared's sides to curl around his shoulders.

"I wanna kiss you everywhere," Jared admits breathlessly against Jensen's skin. "Wanna take my time and make sure I don't miss a single spot."

"*Please*," Jensen gasps out. Jared grins as he trails sloppy kisses across Jensen's torso, pausing to tongue just a bit at Jensen's nipples once more. He kisses down Jensen's arm, sucking a small bruise into the bend of his elbow and then his wrist before kissing the tip of each finger. He licks them and gets them wet before sucking his middle finger into his mouth. "Oh – *oh*."

Jared takes Jensen's hand and places it against his chest, damp fingertips brushing Jared's oversensitive nipple.

"Don't ever think you can't touch me." Jared lets his hand fall free and smiles when Jensen doesn't move his. "Don't think I don't want your hands on me all the time."

Jensen meets Jared's eyes and squeezes his nipple. Jared moans softly and his hips jerk when Jensen squeezes harder at the reaction.

"Can I – " Jensen tries to sit up, mouth falling open, but Jared pushes him back down gently.

"Later," Jared promises. "Use your hands on me, and I'll use my mouth on you."

Jensen shudders and pinches Jared's nipple again, pulling on it softly when he realizes how worked up Jared gets. Jared hasn't found the spot on Jensen's body that has the same reaction yet, but he's got all night.

He kisses his way down Jensen's stomach and scoots backwards to make more room the farther he goes. He fixes his mouth to Jensen's hipbones and sucks bruises into them as Jensen pants and whines above him. His mouth trails lower, tongue laving across the spot where smooth skin meets coarse hair. Jensen's dick bumps under his jaw, leaving slick little trails on his skin and making Jared so fucking *hungry*.

He brings his hand up and wraps it gently around Jensen's cock. It's so thick, bigger than Misha's – and Jared's mouth waters. He wants to suck it so bad; he's been thinking about it ever since he first laid eyes on it. He spreads Jensen's thighs and lies down, breathing in

deep and licking his lips.

He settles in, making himself comfortable and breathing hot against the head of Jensen's dick.

"Can I use my mouth on you, Jen?" Jared asks softly. His eyes flick upwards to look at Jensen's face. His gaze is locked on Jared's mouth and he looks awed – and so fucking turned on.

"Y-yeah," he gasps out, and Jared nearly weeps in relief. He wraps his hand firmly around the base of Jensen's dick and brings it towards his watering mouth.

"Watch me," Jared commands, making sure Jensen's listening before lapping softly at the leaking tip of Jensen's dick. It's like his tongue is an electric shock for all that Jensen jerks up. Jared chuckles and lays his other arm across Jensen's hips to hold him down. "I'm new at this, so no bucking."

Jensen whines and Jared takes pity on him, sucking the head of Jensen's dick into his mouth. Jensen moans and then slaps a hand over his mouth because the last thing they need is to make a lot of noise.

Jared whimpers as bitter flavor bursts across his tongue. He gets too eager, sucking too hard and taking too much in at once. The head of Jensen's dick hits the back of his throat and he makes a soft choking noise. He pulls off and sucks in a deep breath, cheeks flushing as he glances up at Jensen. He puts his free hand on Jared's cheek and slides it up into his hair.

Jared sucks Jensen back into his mouth, hollowing out his cheeks as he bobs up and down. Jensen arches his back and lets his knees fall open, resting his feet on the small of Jared's back. He pushes up against Jared's arm but he holds him still, tonguing at the slit before dropping down again. It's messy and wet, spit slipping down Jensen's shaft and coating Jared's hand.

Jared drops that hand to cup Jensen's balls and roll them gently in his fingers. They're so full and tight, and Jared knows he's close. He lets his fingers drift lower to brush against Jensen's tightly furled hole. He jerks and Jared's hand immediately wraps back around his dick and squeezes to distract him from his wandering fingers.

Jared pulls off and takes a deep breath. His lips feel swollen and tingly and he licks them experimentally. He digs his tongue into Jensen's slit and closes his lips around the tiny hole to suck out the taste of him.

"Ah! Jared, Jared – " He continues to chant Jared's name, tugging at his hair as he tries to

arch up again. "*Jared.*"

"Come on," Jared pleads, stroking Jensen's cock as he mouths at the head. "I want it."

Jensen cries out, and the sound is devastatingly muffled behind his hand. He tenses up as his orgasm hits and floods Jared's mouth with bitter come. Jared moans and swallows it all, sucking softly at the head as Jensen continues to spurt. He never wants to stop sucking, never wants to let Jensen slip from his mouth.

But after awhile Jensen becomes too sensitive, whining and pulling at Jared's hair again. Jared slowly pulls up, pressing a sticky kiss to the head before letting go of the shaft and looking up. There are tears in Jensen's eyes and Jared's heart stops. Maybe he misread Jensen's whines and hair tugging as encouragement when they were really pleas for him to stop.

"Jensen," Jared mumbles lovingly, sliding up Jensen's body and gathering him up in his arms.

"Oh god." Jensen squeezes his eyes shut as he trembles underneath Jared. "That was *awesome.*"

Jared chuckles in relief and leans in, stopping at the last moment because he just swallowed a mouthful of come and he doesn't know if Jensen would want to kiss him. Jensen makes the decision for him by grabbing Jared's face and kissing him hard, slipping his tongue inside and licking the taste of himself from Jared's mouth.

Jared moans into the kiss, gripping Jensen's thighs and wrapping his legs tighter around his waist. He starts to thrust against Jensen, cock slipping through the groove of Jensen's hip.

"Mm, feels good," Jensen mumbles against Jared's overused lips. "Love this."

Jared grins against Jensen's jaw and kisses there before bringing their mouths together again. It doesn't take long for Jared to cry out, tense up, and bite down on Jensen's jaw as his orgasm hits. He shoots all over Jensen's stomach, thick come smearing between their bellies.

He collapses on top of Jensen and pants harshly against his neck. Jensen pets his back, hands slipping through sweat.

"Oh god, Jen." He swallows hard and curls a hand around Jensen's hip. "Oh fuck."

They lie there like that for a long time, naked and pressed together as Jensen's hands trace random patterns along Jared's back. Jared stays on top of Jensen, head pillowed on Jensen's chest with Jensen's arms around him, a mirror image of their usual position.

Jared swallows hard and lifts his head to look at his boyfriend. Jensen's eyes are closed and there is a pleased smile gracing his swollen mouth. He looks relaxed, peaceful and content and not at all afraid.

Jared is suddenly overcome with emotion, with the desire to spill his guts to this beautiful boy in the hushed darkness of his bedroom. He wants to tell Jensen how happy he makes him – how colors seem brighter when he's around and how his heart feels like it's going to burst out of his chest when he laughs. Jensen has gone and turned him into a walking cliché, mind turned into saccharine mush and he doesn't even care.

He wants to tell Jensen that he's in love with him.

The words push against his lips, insistent on getting out, but Jared bites them back. This isn't the time. He doesn't want what he has to say to be directly tied to what they just did.

Instead he just stares down at Jensen and tries to say it with his eyes and the curve of his smile. That'll have to do for now.

"What is it?" Jensen asks in a hushed whisper when he opens his eyes to see Jared staring at him. Jared bites his lip and plants his elbows on the bed just above Jensen's shoulders, fingers digging into Jensen's hair. It's getting long enough that the strands slip slightly through Jared's fingers.

"I – just," Jared struggles to find the words. "You're happy, right?"

"What? Jared," Jensen says softly, reaching up to cup Jared's face and look into his eyes. "Of course I'm happy. I'm very happy."

"Good," Jared breathes. He leans down and presses their mouths together again; letting the kiss express everything he can't say out loud.

Not yet, anyway.



Sunday has rapidly become Jensen's favorite day of the week, whereas a little over a month ago it was his most loathed.

Now instead of getting up early and suffering through church with his judgmental parents, he can sleep until noon and flop on the couch in his pajamas. Watching cartoons and eating dry cereal right out of the box beats listening to a radical pastor drone on and on about Leviticus any day.

That's what he is doing as of the current moment. It's two in the afternoon on a Sunday and he's sitting on the couch in nothing but a pair of Jared's ratty sweatpants, watching shitty cartoons as he mainlines Honey Bunches of Oats right from the box.

Jensen has a new life, and that new life is *good*.

Jared comes in from walking the dogs, panting and a little sweaty as he leads them out into the backyard to work off their leftover energy. He flops down onto the couch and rests his head on Jensen's lap. He presses a quick kiss to the bare skin underneath Jensen's navel and it makes his belly jump in a lazy, sort of slow-burning way.

"Hey honey bunches," Jared coos. Jensen smirks and rolls his eyes.

"Hi Jared," he replies, and Jared scoffs. "What?"

"I was talking to the cereal." Jared snatches the box from Jensen's hand and shakes it. Jensen takes it back and shoves his hand inside. "Greedy."

Jared grabs Jensen's other hand, the one that's currently not sticky with cereal, and slides it under his shirt to rest on his belly. Jensen bites his lip as his fingers slip along the slight dips of his muscles, barely damp with sweat.

His fingers glide across a peaked nipple just as Jared turns his head to look at the television, brushing the soft swell of Jensen's dick. It's been days since they got each other off, since Jensen instantly became addicted to the feeling of Jared's mouth all over his body. He's thinking about trying to see if he can arrange a repeat of that event, maybe even return the favor, when Jared speaks.

"So there's this thing coming up," Jared says. His voice is casual and a little too calm. It makes Jensen rest his hand flat against Jared's belly and pay close attention. "It's a dance. Some may even call it a prom." Jensen raises an eyebrow and Jared clears his throat as he looks away from the TV and up at Jensen's face. "It's this thing where you're supposed to get all dolled up in uncomfortable clothes and flail spastically, or okay, *dance* with the people you've spent the last four years with. Supposedly it's fun, but more importantly I hear the food is good."

Jensen's heart starts beating wildly in his chest and he licks his lips nervously. Is Jared seriously going to –?

"I might be willing to let you come with me," Jared says, swallowing hard and meeting Jensen's eyes, "as my date. Maybe."

"You're asking me to be your date to the dance?" Jensen asks incredulously, shaking a little

with sudden nerves. “Jared, we can’t go to *prom* together.”

“Well, it’s more of a group thing – “ Jared cuts himself off, clearing his throat and turning his head to the side. “No, you’re right. It’s stupid.”

Jensen pulls his hand out of the cereal box and pinches the bridge of his nose. He didn’t mean to dismiss the idea so quickly, but it shocked him a little. By now pretty much everyone at school knows that Jensen is gay and that Jared is his boyfriend, so that’s not the issue. He just had the image of prom in his brain – boys in tuxes and girls in pink taffeta gowns, and it just didn’t translate into something they could have.

But now he can see that Jared is disappointed. He’s watching cartoons a little too closely to be casual and there’s a slight frown tugging down the corners of his mouth. Jensen knows this is important to him, and he knows Jared wouldn’t force him into any situation he wasn’t comfortable with.

It’s not often Jared outright asks for something, so Jensen thinks he could try to do this for him. Who knows, now that he thinks about it, it might even be fun. Maybe.

“So, this prom,” Jensen starts, drumming his fingertips on Jared’s belly. “I’d get to see you in a tuxedo?”

“I actually had this really pretty pink dress picked out already,” Jared says blandly, not even looking away from the television. Jensen rolls his eyes and pinches the tight skin stretched across Jared’s hipbone. “Ow! Yes, you’d see me in a tux.”

“And we’d dance?” Jensen asks. Jared looks up at him cautiously and nods.

“That’s the general idea,” Jared replies. “I mean, we’re going as a group so we’d all dance with each other. But yeah, I’d like you to save a dance for me.”

“And the food is going to be good, you say?” Jensen bites back a smile as Jared grins up at him, eyes wide and bright. Jared nods and Jensen makes a big show of sighing. “Okay, I’ll go to prom with you.”

“Really?” Jared grins brightly up at Jensen, and then places the back of his hand on his forehead and slips into full southern belle mode, accent and all. “Oh my, the handsomest boy in school is taking little old *me* to the big dance!”

“Sure am,” Jensen replies playfully, letting his Texan drawl slip out in full force. His voice had a tiny bit of a southern twang to it when he first moved out to California, but by now it’s mostly gone. Now he puts on an exaggerated drawl to match Jared’s. “We’ll have a grand ol’ time, darlin’.”

“Don’t do that,” Jared says in his normal voice edged with a bit of a predatory growl. “Don’t talk like that unless you want me to pounce on you.”

“Is that so?” Jensen asks amusedly, still in his loose lipped lilt. Jared digs his elbows into the couch cushions, the back of his arms snug against Jensen’s thigh as he sits up slightly, eyes going dark. “Whatcha gonna do, *Jay-red*?”

“I don’t know,” Jared replies breathily. “Come in my pants?”

“I can probably help out with that,” Jensen replies loosely. His eyes rake over the length of Jared stretched across his lap, his back heavy and warm against Jensen’s thighs. He swallows hard as he slides his hand into Jared’s shorts to wrap loosely around his stirring dick. Jared lets out a soft whimper and bites his lip, eyes locked on Jensen’s face. He hardens quickly in Jensen’s grip and he rubs his thumb in circles around the head, pressing in against the slit like he learned drives Jared crazy.

“Jensen,” Jared pants as he lets his legs fall open wider. “Oh god. I love that when you – ah shit – get right down to it, you’re just another horny teenage boy.”

“Hey, kiss me,” Jensen drawls, leaning down slightly. Jared surges up and fuses their mouths together, tongue slipping between Jensen’s lips eagerly. The angle hurts Jensen’s back and makes him realize how much he wants Jared naked in his bed, just like the other night. But this time he wants their roles reversed; he wants to be the one to have Jared all spread out underneath him and at his mercy. He pulls away from the kiss, slick lips brushing Jared’s as he speaks. The drawl isn’t hard to maintain now. He’s distracted enough that he can’t really concentrate on rudimentary things such as speaking clearly. “I wanna take you to bed, Jared. Wanna do what we did the other night.”

“Yeah,” Jared breathes. He drops down so his head is resting on Jensen’s lap again. “I can definitely do that. I would *love* to do that.”

Jared turns his head and mouths at the hot line of Jensen’s dick through his threadbare sweats. Jensen hisses and slows his strokes on Jared’s cock as he reaches up with his other hand to turn Jared’s head away.

“No,” he breathes. His fingers smear sticky wetness down Jared’s shaft. “It’s my turn.”

“You – are you sure?” Jared asks breathlessly even as his hips jerk up into Jensen’s loose grasp. Even out of his mind with pleasure, he still puts Jensen’s needs first. Jensen smiles and traces Jared’s full bottom lip with his fingertip.

“I’m sure,” Jensen says, pulling his hand out of Jared’s shorts and pushing at his torso gently. “Just – be patient, okay?”

Jared nods and rolls off of Jensen's lap, standing up and gripping Jensen's sticky hand to pull him off of the sofa. They swap playful kisses as they maneuver their way towards Jared's room, tumbling inside and shutting the door.

If someone would have found Jensen six months ago and told him that by the end of his senior year he'd be tangled up naked with his boyfriend on a Sunday afternoon, kissing and licking down a flat and toned chest and stomach and working his way towards giving his first blowjob, he would have thought they were crazy. He would have locked himself away somewhere and had a quiet little panic attack over the fear of such of a thing happening working against the dread of it never happening at all.

But here he is, clothes in a messy pile on the floor as he mouths at the knob of his boyfriend's hipbone and sucks bruises into tan skin. There are strong, masculine hands gripping his shoulders, low grunts and harsh breaths ringing in his ears, and he knows this is where he belongs.

And when he finally leans down to lick across the head of Jared's dick, he smiles at the taste of Jared on his tongue and at how completely *not* afraid of this he is.

It's okay for him to want this, to *have* this. And now that he's got it? He's never letting go.

Onto *Part 9*.

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/248164.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/248164.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (part 9)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:51:00 : 45-57 minutes

[Back to Part 8.](#)



It's almost bedtime but Jared isn't really sleepy. He and Jensen were watching TV but he retreated into the bathroom for a shower and left Jared bored and alone.

Jared walks down the hallway and picks at a piece of string cheese he pilfered from the fridge. He goes to turn into his room but stops by his mom's door. It's slightly ajar, and he raps on it with the back of his hand before popping his head inside.

"Hey buttmunch," he says, puffing his cheeks out and crossing his eyes. Sherri laughs from her spot in the middle of her bed as she runs a brush through her hair.

"Hey kid." She gestures him in with a nod of her head. "Friends is about to start."

"Oh wow." Jared pops the rest of his cheese in his mouth and drops down onto his mom's bed. "Haven't done that in awhile."

Almost every night Jared used to lay in his mom's bed with her and watch old Friends reruns. They'd wind down and catch each other up on their day. Jared told his mother he was gay over the sound of Chandler and Joey fighting over a chick and a duck.

She didn't even really say anything, just pulled him in close and rested her chin on his head as she rubbed his back.

"Where's Bean?" Sherri asks, whapping Jared's knee with the brush before tossing it on her nightstand.

"In the shower," Jared replies. Sadie and Harley are passed out on the floor in the corner, and Jared scoots back to lean against the headboard. Sherri sits cross-legged next to him, flipping her damp hair over one shoulder and picking at her nails. She looks so *young*. Sometimes Jared forgets she was barely older than he is now when he was born.

"He seems to be doing good here," she says casually. "He looks happy."

“Yeah,” Jared replies on an exhalation of breath, smiling to himself. “I don’t think I ever told you how grateful I am for what you did.”

“You have,” Sherri says with a wry smirk. “About a thousand times.”

“Oh. Well, I *am* grateful,” Jared tells her sincerely. The words still don’t seem like enough.

“You’re welcome.” The familiar Friends theme song starts up and Jared hums along. “But don’t think I don’t hear your little feet tiptoeing across the hall all the time.” Jared whips his head around to look at her so fast that his neck cracks slightly. “Don’t worry. That’s all I hear, thankfully.”

“Sorry. It’s just – it’s hard to be away from him,” Jared confesses. He smiles sheepishly and runs his fingers through his hair. “Especially when I know he’s right there across the hall.”

“I get it,” his mom says warmly, patting his knee. “I just don’t want you two getting in over your heads. Sex is a big deal – “

“God, Mom,” Jared cuts in. He’s never had a problem talking to his mom about touchy subjects like sex, but now it feels different. It’s like he knows how much Jensen would blush if he were in the room and it makes him think twice. “We haven’t – we’re not there yet. Probably won’t be for awhile.”

“Oh.” Sherri furrows her brow. “I thought – “

“We’ve done stuff,” Jared mutters, staring at a suddenly fascinating spot on the wall. “Just not *that*. To be honest, most of the time when we sneak into each other’s rooms it’s just to sleep next to each other.”

“That’s nauseatingly adorable,” Sherri replies with a soft chuckle as she glances at the television screen. “That’s good though. It’ll happen when it’s supposed to.”

“Can we talk about something else?” Jared pleads, knocking his head against the wall once.

“Prom is coming up pretty fast,” she says suddenly. Jared looks over at her with an eyebrow raised skeptically.

“Losing your virginity on prom night is the biggest cliché in the world,” he tells her. “I thought you were a little more creative than that.”

“I was actually trying to change the subject,” Sherri says as she leans back against the headboard next to him. “But either way, you’re not a virgin.”

“Don’t remind me,” Jared groans grumpily, slumping down a little. “I’m just – I regret that so much now. I wish I was. I wish I would have waited for him.”

“Hey,” his mom says, reaching over to poke his cheek. “You didn’t know he was out there waiting for you. And it’s in the past. No use beating yourself up now.”

“Yeah,” Jared sighs. They watch the show in silence for a little while, and when a commercial starts Sherri clears her throat.

“So, uh, there was something I wanted to talk to you about,” Sherri says quickly. Jared blinks and looks over at her, raising an eyebrow. She sounds oddly serious and a niggling fear settles itself in Jared’s belly. “When this whole thing with you and Jensen started, I started going to PFLAG meetings again. Just to ask for advice.”

“You did?” Jared blinks in surprise. His mother joined the Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays support group, PFLAG for short, within weeks of him coming out and she was very active in it. That is, until she was promoted to general manager of the store and the hectic, ever-changing hours made it hard for her to attend the meetings. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“You were already worrying yourself sick over the situation,” she tells him seriously. “I didn’t want to make it worse. And I never should have stopped going in the first place. Just because you were doing well doesn’t mean there weren’t people I could have been helping.”

“Mom, you help people all the time,” Jared reminds her. “Where do you think I got it from?”

“Anyway,” she says, biting her lip. She looks nervous and Jared leans in. “I –uh, I met someone?”

Jared blinks.

“His name is Alex, and his brother is gay,” she begins. “That’s why he goes to the meetings. And um, he’s a few years older than me. He’s attractive, and smart. And really funny. He asked me to have dinner with him on Saturday. And I said yes.”

Jared blinks again.

“And I wanted to let you know,” she continues. “And get your opinion. I know I haven’t really dated since your father died. And I’ll never stop loving him. I’ll never get over him, not really. Since then it’s just been you and me, and I liked it that way. But Tig, it’s been twelve years and – well, I’m lonely. You’re heading off to college soon and I’m still in my thirties. I just – I think it’s time I put myself back out there.”

Jared opens his mouth and snaps it shut.

“Tig, *please* say something,” she pleads, and Jared looks over at her. Truth is, he isn’t sure what *to* say. It’s not like he wants his mother to be alone forever, but at the same time he never really thought about her actually *dating* anyone. But he knows what the right thing to say here is, and once the initial shock wears off, he’s fine.

“No, sorry,” he says. “You just surprised me. That’s great, Mom.”

“Really?” She looks so relieved and a little hopeful. Jared smiles and reaches out to touch her arm.

“Yeah,” he assures her. “I want you to be happy. Dad would want you to be happy.”

“I think he would.” She looks down at the tan line on her left finger. She’s been wearing her wedding ring off and on since the day her husband died. Jared swallows hard. Sometimes he forgets how much pain his mother has dealt with over the years. Jared hugs her suddenly, burying his face in her damp hair and smelling sweet vanilla. She lets out a choked laugh and hugs him back.

“Just make sure he knows that I have friends. A lot of them,” Jared tells her. “Big, mean ones that like to beat people up if they go around hurting awesome moms.”

“I’ll tell him, Tig,” she laughs, and Jared nods as he pulls away. He settles back against the headboard and looks over at her. She’s smiling, looking relieved.

“There’s no reason you shouldn’t be dating, Mom,” he tells her. “I mean, you’re beautiful. Still *moderately* young, I guess.”

“You little shit,” she shrieks. She leans over him with her arms extended and her fingers curled into claws. Jared’s eyes widen.

“Mom, don’t,” Jared warns, scrambling back against the headboard. She dives in and starts tickling his sides relentlessly. Jared howls with uncontrollable laughter. “STOP! Mom, I am a grown ass man! I’m too old for this shit! Mom, I will pee. Do you want me to pee all over your bed? I’ll do it!”

“Uh, am I interrupting something?” Jensen says suddenly. Sherri pulls back and Jared catches his breath, face red and eyes watering. Jensen is in the doorway of his room, looking sideways into Sherri’s with an eyebrow raised.

“Uh, tickle party,” Sherri admits. “We’re feeling nostalgic.”

“Oh,” Jensen replies. He rubs his towel through his shaggy hair and wrinkles his nose. “I

can't decide if that's adorable or creepy."

"Oh, I'll show you adorable and creepy," Jared cackles, surging off of the bed and running for Jensen. His eyes widen and he tries to duck into his room, but Jared catches him around the waist. He drags him into Sherri's room and tosses him on the bed. "Tickle Bean!"

"You're such a homo," Sherri tells him. "Sometimes I feel bad for never even giving you the chance to be straight."

"I don't!" Jared announces as he hops on top of Jensen and tickles his sides. Jensen squirms and giggles a little, pushing ineffectually at Jared.

"Okay, *now* it's creepy," Sherri admits as the bed bounces from the force of Jared tickling Jensen on it. Jared stops and flops down on Jensen with a sigh. Jensen lets out an *oomph* as the air gets knocked out of him and his arms instinctually go around Jared's waist.

Another episode of Friends starts and they settle on the bed – Jensen then Jared and then Sherri. Jared and Sherri speak along with the funny lines and they make Jensen laugh without tickling him at all.

It's a good night.



Jensen knew prom was a big deal to most seniors. It's a milestone – a rite of passage, whatever. He never really gave it much thought because he never imagined actually going to his own prom.

He never imagined how much work went into getting ready for a simple dance. Especially when all your friends are either gay, girls, or gay girls. He thought maybe that last one would cancel itself out, but Sandy and Sophia are apparently what Jared calls lipstick lesbians and that means they are just like all the rest of the girls he doesn't understand when it comes to fashion and make-up.

Jensen spends his afternoon trapped in one of those shopping montages from pretty much every romantic comedy or 80's movie ever.

They caravan to the mall early on a bright and sunny Sunday afternoon. Jared, Jensen, Chad, Sandy, and Sophia all pile in Misha's car and Adam and Danneel meet them in the parking lot. Adam is wearing a gauzy tight pink v-neck tee and matching pink Ray-Bans. His jeans are skin tight and he has what appears to be a rubber band around the top of his head, keeping his perfectly coiffed hair in place.

“Thank you, Adam,” Misha says as they approach, “for being a walking stereotype.”

“You’re welcome, *darling*,” Adam replies, blowing him a kiss. He turns to Chad and nods.

“Hey Chad. Still claiming straight?”

“Hey Adam,” Chad replies sweetly. “Fuck you.”

Adam laughs, pulls Chad in for hug, and smashes his lips against Chad’s cheek. Chad merely sighs and takes it. It took awhile for Jensen to understand the way that these friendships, and apparently most friendships, work. You insult the crap out of each other all day long, but if anyone else tries the same thing, they’re fucking dead. It’s sort of funny.

The boys get shuffled off to find tuxes while the girls go look for the perfect dresses. Adam keeps Jared and Jensen separated the entire time like they’re shopping for wedding gowns or something. Jensen doesn’t really know how this all works, so he just puts on whatever Adam brings him.

He (technically Adam) finally settles on a traditional black tuxedo with a vest instead of a cummerbund. The vest is a sort of a shimmery lavender color that, according to Adam, he pulls off splendidly.

“You and Jared will look so perfect,” he gushes, hands clasped under his chin. Jensen turns to the full length mirror. He smooths his hands down the front of the tux and quirks an eyebrow at his own reflection. Adam comes over to him and wraps an arm around his waist as he leans in to kiss his cheek. He leaves a smear of lip balm behind. “God, you are gorgeous. Lucky, *lucky* boys, the both of you.”

“Hey, homolicious!” Jared calls as he pounds on the dressing room door. “Can I have my boyfriend now?”

“In thirteen to seventeen minutes,” Adam calls back as he looks Jensen over with a flirty smirk. “Ten if he uses that little drawl of his. Mm.”

The doorknob rattles and Jensen hears what sounds suspiciously like a growl.

“Out so I can change,” Jensen tells Adam. He pouts and looks up at Jensen through his mascara-tinted eyelashes. Jensen chuckles. “Go!”

Adam huffs and then winks at Jensen before slipping out of the dressing room. He takes off the tuxedo quickly but carefully, folding it up and setting it on a chair after pulling on his old clothes. He leaves the dressing room and Adam ducks in to grab the clothes to take them up front with his and Jared’s.

Jared pulls Jensen into a hug, kissing him and biting softly at his bottom lip. Jensen blushes

as a surge of sudden heat rushes through him and he pulls away.

“Where’s Chad and Misha?” Jensen pats Jared’s chest before taking a step back. Jared wrinkles his nose.

“They’re off getting mandatory haircuts,” Jared says, running his fingers through his own hair. “And we’re next.”

“Haircuts?” Jensen echoes. Jared shrugs.

“Lesbo’s orders.”

Jensen hasn’t got his hair cut since he left Texas, and it’s grown a lot in four months. It’s shaggy and unkempt looking, but Jensen likes it. It’s different. The stylist doesn’t change much once he’s in the chair; he just cuts his hair into a trendy sort of style – shorter in the back and on the sides and still a little long and shaggy on top.

“Honey, you can totally *rock* the bedhead look,” the guy says as he waves his scissors around in the air. Jensen raises an eyebrow as the guy scrunches his hair in both hands, looking at it appraisingly in the mirror with one perfectly groomed eyebrow arched high.

Jensen has pretty much gotten the exact same haircut since he was five. He had a standing appointment every six weeks with Barber Bob back in Richardson. He never missed it, and he never changed it. So this is new for him.

He even lets the guy put some barely visible honey blonde highlights in his hair after he gushed over how it would bring out the gold in his pretty eyes. Jensen caved. Jared loves the flecks of color in his eyes.

When he’s all cut, colored, and blow-dried, the stylist rubs some wax between his fingers and gives Jensen sort of a messy faux-hawk. He claps his hands together with a grand *ad a!* and shoos Jensen out of his chair.

Jensen reaches up to touch the soft spikes of his new haircut and worries his bottom lip between his teeth. It’s... different. In a good way, though. Maybe.

Everyone is already in the waiting area when he emerges. Apparently he took the longest. They all look over at him and he clears his throat, blushing at the sudden attention.

“Holy shit,” Danneel says breathlessly. Jared looks up from the issue of *Cosmo* he’s reading and drops it on the floor. He stands up slowly, eyes trained on Jensen’s face as he speaks.

“You look – “

“Like a big fat homo!” Adam cheers suddenly. He flings himself towards Jensen and wraps his arms around him, pressing his face into Jensen’s hair and breathing in.

Adam is fucking psycho.

Jensen tenses a little, eyes widening at his words. Jared seems to notice and looks at Jensen with soft, pleading eyes, like he’s praying Jensen takes it for the joke (and compliment) that it was intended to be. Jensen lets out a breath and pats Adam’s back gently. “I’m so *proud*,” he snuffles.

Jared steps up behind Adam to grab the back of his shirt and pull him backwards and away from Jensen. He’s glad to see that Jared’s hair didn’t change much – it’s still wild and messy, but now it looks like it was out of intent rather than laziness. It’s straighter than normal and falls in his eyes in the most adorable way.

Jensen is glad he didn’t get a lot taken off. Jensen likes to bury his fingers in Jared’s hair and tug when he’s – well, he just likes Jared’s hair a lot.

“Do you, uh, like it?” Jensen asks, lamely gesturing towards his head. Jared grins and nods, leaning in to kiss the corner of Jensen’s mouth.

“So fucking gorgeous,” he mumbles, and Jensen shivers.

“Okay!” Sandy shouts. “Time for Sephora!”

All the boys groan. Well, with the exception of Adam, who squeals and claps his hands together.

By the time they get back to Misha’s car the girls have so many bags that it’s a wonder they all have room to sit. It’s a good thing the boys all made arrangements to pick their tuxes up the day before the dance, otherwise someone might have had to hoof it home.

“Red Robin?” Misha asks suddenly. They’re only a few blocks away from Jared’s house – from home. It’s still a little strange to think of it that way. “Burgers and fries? I’m fucking *starving*.”

Jared and Jensen look at each other, noses scrunching up slightly as they shake their heads.

“Nah,” Jared says. “My mom should be home soon.”

“Fucking invite her!” Chad calls out from the passenger seat. He could probably put calling shotgun on his resume as a special skill. He’s that good at it. “We love us some Mama P.”

“Maybe another time,” Jensen says, and he sees Misha shrug.

“Count us out, too,” Sophia says. She’s braiding Sandy’s hair while she dozes. “We’ve got that Spanish project to finish.”

“Looks like it’s just you and me, baby,” Chad says in a sugary sweet voice. He reaches out to touch Misha’s hand where it rests on the gearshift. “My sweet little sugar plum.”

“Chad, seriously,” Misha says as he pulls up in front of their house. “When are you going to suck my dick?”

“Pay for my burger and I’ll think about it,” Chad says blandly, not even missing a beat. “But if you want a money shot I better at least get some dessert, bitch.”

“Oh god,” Jensen chuckles, covering his face with his hands and shaking his head. Jared and the girls crack up and Jared leans over the back of the seat to give them both kisses on the cheek before they exit.

Jensen and Jared hop out of Misha’s car and he’s still chuckling when Jared shuts the door. Jensen takes a step forward and nearly tumbles when Jared pounces on him, arms wrapping around his chest as he bites playfully at the back of his neck.

Jensen laughs hard and his hands come up to rest on Jared’s arms as they awkwardly stumble up the walkway. Jared freezes suddenly and his arms slip away until his hands are resting lightly on Jensen’s hips.

“Can I help you?” Jared asks politely, but Jensen can sense the hesitancy in his voice. He looks up to see someone standing on the porch and his heart drops into his stomach. He fights against the urge to pull away from Jared and move even closer all at once. He finally takes one step forward and the action causes Jared’s hands to fall from his hips.

“It’s my brother,” Jensen says shakily. Jared immediately takes a step forward and places himself at Jensen’s side, one hand low on Jensen’s back. Jensen reaches up to ruffle his hair, messing up the ridiculous faux-hawk the stylist had given him.

“Hey Jensen.” Josh clears his throat nervously. Jensen doesn’t look up to meet Josh’s eyes, too afraid of what he’ll see. “I, uh – I wanted to talk to you. Privately.”

Jared scoffs and his fingers twist themselves into the folds of Jensen’s tee shirt. Jensen finally looks up at his brother. There’s no look of contempt on his face; he doesn’t look disgusted or angry. He just looks a little lost, out of his element. It’s an unfamiliar look on Josh, but then again, pretty much everything about his big brother is unfamiliar by now.

“It’s okay, Jared,” Jensen assures him, looking over at him and touching his wrist. “I’m fine.

I'll meet you inside."

"You sure?" Jared leans in so close his lips nearly brush Jensen's ear. Jensen nods and gives him a little smile as he tugs on Jared's bracelet. Jared lets a breath out through his nose and kisses his cheek. Jensen looks over at Josh in time to see him avert his eyes.

Jared walks past Josh without so much as a glance in his direction. He opens the front door and Sadie comes barreling out. Jensen catches her by the collar and Jared gives him a look before going inside and shutting the door, leaving Sadie wiggling happily at Jensen's feet.

A guard dog. Jared is ridiculous.

Jensen heaves a sigh and sits down on the top step of the porch, making Sadie sit at his feet while he rubs her ears.

"So that's Jared, huh?" Josh asks as he sits down next to Jensen. He looks over at his brother with a raised eyebrow and he shrugs. He holds his hand out for Sadie to sniff and she licks it. Such a ferocious guard dog. "Mackenzie told me where to find you."

"Oh," Jensen replies stiffly. They sit there for a long time, and Jensen can barely stand the awkwardness. He thinks of how he never sees his brother, how he's lived just over an hour away from him for the last four months (god, has it really only been four months?) and the only encounter he ever had with Josh was when he gave him a bag of booze and porn in passing.

There may as well have been a stranger sitting next to him.

"What do you want, Josh?" Jensen finally asks. Sadie whines and eyes Josh suspiciously like she knows he's the one causing her new human such anxiety.

"I wanted to apologize," Josh finally says, and Jensen blinks. That was not what he was expecting. He looks over at Josh to see him staring down at his wedding ring, spinning it slowly around his finger. Sometimes he forgets how grown up his brother is now.

"For what?" Sadie flops down onto the grass, apparently finding their stilted conversation not worth her interest.

"For being a shitty big brother," Josh replies bluntly, and Jensen's mouth falls open slightly. Josh looks over at him and shrugs helplessly. "I know what Mom and Dad are like. They've always been like that. And as soon as I graduated high school, I took off. I got out of there as fast as I could and I never looked back."

Jensen doesn't know what to say. He picks absently at his bracelet while Josh rubs at his

chin.

“I left you guys there to deal with it all,” Josh continues. “And Jensen, you were just a kid. I saw how bad they ragged on you and I just *left*, worried about all my own shit and forgot I had a kid brother and a baby sister that looked up to me.”

Jensen was twelve when Josh left for college. He remembers how much it hurt that the big brother that taught him how to ride a bike and catch a ball was just *gone* all of a sudden, like he vanished into thin air.

“I always suspected you were a little different,” Josh says quietly, and Jensen’s gaze snaps over to him. Josh huffs and scuffs the toe of his sneaker against the ground. It’s sort of odd to see him dressed so casually. He usually only sees his brother on special occasions, dressed to the nines and ready to impress. “Not in a bad way, and I don’t just mean – you know.”

“Thanks for making yourself clear,” Jensen says derisively, and Josh sighs.

“I meant that you’ve always been a thinker, and I knew how much trouble that could get you in with our parents.” Josh looks up and stares out at nothing, squinting against the sun.

“Then when I found out you were gay, which was only a week or so ago, it made *me* think. I couldn’t even imagine what you must have felt like, how scared you must have been. And I realized that maybe if I hadn’t been such an asshole, you would have had someone to talk to.”

Jensen feels a familiar prickling behind his eyes and looks out into the sun, biting his lip to keep from getting upset. He doesn’t like to think about how isolated he felt before Jared – how he longed for someone to tell him that there was nothing wrong with him, that’d he be alright.

“So, you don’t care that I’m – that I’m gay?” Jensen asks hesitantly, eyes drifting to the side to look at his brother’s face. Josh reaches out to put his hand on Jensen’s shoulder, a firm but caring touch, and he shakes his head.

“I honestly don’t, Jensen,” he says, patting Jensen’s shoulder and letting his hand drop to the porch. “I don’t really *get* it, but I don’t have to. I mean, I figure if it’s not me you’re having sex with, I shouldn’t give a shit. One of my best friends from college is gay. We still keep in touch and I was at the wedding when he married his partner last year.”

“Really?” Jensen asks incredulously, and Josh smiles at him. He never would have guessed that his brother would be so tolerant. Then again, he’s just basing that on the way they were raised. By his standards, Jensen should also be a homophobe. He shakes his head at the irony and smiles at his brother. “That’s pretty cool.”

“Dude, come on. I live in San Francisco. If I didn’t like the gays I would have gone crazy by now,” Josh jokes. He clears his throat as his expression goes serious again. “I know I act like the picture perfect son when I’m around Mom and Dad, but I just want them off my case. Truth is, I’m my own person. And now, so are you.”

“It’s a nice feeling, isn’t it?” Jensen asks. Josh grins over at him as he knocks their shoulders together.

“I just wanted to come out here and see you,” Josh says earnestly. “I needed you to know that I don’t care who you’re with. You’re my brother and I love you. I just want you to be happy.”

“Thanks Josh,” Jensen says with a soft smile. “I – that really means a lot.”

“I need you in my life, dude,” Josh says suddenly. “My kid needs an uncle.”

“Yeah, it’ll be – wait, what?” Jensen says, whipping his head around to look at Josh. He’s grinning ear to ear, eyes bright and happy. “Your *kid*?”

“Lisa’s pregnant,” Josh says. He’s practically bouncing. “Shit, Jensen. I’m gonna be a *dad*.”

“Holy shit! Congrats!” Jensen pats Josh on the back and he nods. “I’m gonna be an uncle, wow. Well, I guess Mom and Dad are happy someone’s gonna carry on the family name.”

“They don’t know yet,” Josh says, and Jensen blinks in surprise. That’s all Josh says on the subject. He leans back on his elbows and laughs when Sadie rolls over onto his foot. “So, you’re happy here.”

It’s not a question. Jensen just nods and smiles serenely. Josh looks over at him.

“Being in love does that to a person, I guess,” Josh says casually, and Jensen feels his cheeks heat up. “I saw the way you guys looked at each other. No denying it.”

“He’s... pretty great,” Jensen says. He pushes at Sadie’s ribs with the toe of his shoe and she kicks her back leg rapidly.

“Can I meet him?” Josh asks. “Like, now that he doesn’t have to be all protective and threatening?”

“Uh, sure,” Jensen says. He pulls himself up onto his feet and yanks open the front door. Jared is already standing there, eyes fixed on the ceiling as he whistles innocently. Jensen raises an eyebrow and Jared smiles sheepishly. “Hey. Wanna meet my brother?”

Jared nods rapidly and follows Jensen out onto the porch with Harley following close

behind. Josh stands up and dusts off the seat of his jeans as Harley sniffs him. He and Jared regard each other for a moment, almost like they're sizing each other up. Jensen rolls his eyes but it feels good to have two people he cares deeply for trying to look after him.

"Jared, this is my brother, Josh." Jensen puts his hand on Jared's arm. "And Josh, this is my – my boyfriend, Jared."

Jensen has never introduced Jared as his boyfriend before. Actually, he's never introduced Jared to anyone before. It's always the other way around. It feels good to say out loud.

Jared puts on his most charming grin and reaches out to shake Josh's hand. Josh takes his hand and shakes it, taking it one step further to lean in and give Jared that awkward half-handshake half-hug hybrid thing straight guys seem to enjoy. Jared raises an eyebrow and gives Josh one quick pat on the back before letting go.

"It's good to meet you, Josh," Jared says sincerely, eyes shining. Jensen can hear what he's really saying underneath the cordial words – thank you for being here for him, thank you for not hating me.

"You too, Jared," Josh says jovially. Despite the awkward handshake, this seems to be going really well. Jensen can't contain his megawatt grin.

They hang out on the porch for awhile, exchanging small talk until the sun starts to dip below the horizon. It's comfortable and easy. Jensen sits on the bottom step between Jared's legs and rests his elbows on Jared's knees as his brother leans against the side of the porch across from them.

"But seriously," Josh says as he buries his fingers in the fur between Harley's ears. "You guys should come visit us. We have a nice place in the city with an extra bedroom. You could even bring some friends. Make a weekend out of it."

"That sounds great, Josh," Jensen says brightly, tipping his head back to look up at Jared. They're sporting matching grins. "We should do that."

"Definitely." Jared leans down to kiss the tip of his nose and Josh lets out a snort.

Sherri's car pulls into the driveway and all three of them look over as she gets out. The dogs run over to bark at her feet and she merely rolls her eyes and ignores them. She's still wearing her uniform, a white button down and black pants under a green apron. She stops when she reaches the porch and her eyes slide over Josh appraisingly.

"And who is this fine, young specimen of a man?" She asks, looking him up and down again. Jensen snorts. She must have had a long day and now she's delirious.

"This is my brother Josh," Jensen says. Sherri blinks and her expression smoothes out.

"Oh," she says flatly. "Hello embarrassment, my old friend. Does this officially make me a cougar? I could totally be a cougar."

"Someone needs a nap," Jared laughs. "This is my mom, Sherri."

"What? No way," Josh says as he gets up to shake her hand. "You do not look old enough to have a teenage son."

"Oh, I could *definitely* be a cougar," she says, and Josh laughs. Jared rolls his eyes as she pulls away from Josh and climbs up on the porch, whistling for the dogs to follow. "Are you staying for dinner, Josh? I'm making – no, fuck that. I'm *ordering* Chinese and you're staying."

Josh raises an eyebrow as she shuts the door behind her, chuckling as he looks over at Jensen.

"I can see why you love it here so much," he says, and Jensen beams at him.

After dinner Jensen walks Josh out to his car so he can head home. Lisa usually craves Starbursts and chocolate milk before bed every night and if he's not home with them on time it's his ass.

"You're lucky you'll never have to deal with a crazy, hormonal pregnant woman," Josh tells him, and Jensen chuckles. Josh's expression goes serious and Jensen looks over at him when Josh's arm goes around his shoulders.

"I really want us to be brothers again, kid," Josh tells him, and Jensen swallows hard. He nods and pats Josh's shoulder. "But you have to learn from my mistakes. Don't repeat them. The little squirt is all alone now. I'm trusting you to be the big brother I never was, okay?"

"Yeah, okay," Jensen says instantly. He thinks of how he felt when Josh took off, how Mackenzie must be feeling right now.

"Call me when you guys want to come down for the weekend," Josh says. "I think it'll be fun."

"Yeah, sure," Jensen replies. Josh nods and turns to get into his car. "Hey Josh?" His brother looks over at him, one eyebrow raised in question. "Thanks."

"You're my family," Josh says simply like that's all that matters, all that *should* matter. With that, he gets into his car and drives away.

The next day Jared and Jensen ditch last period to go make camp in the junior high parking lot. Jared sits on the hood of his crappy car and Jensen chews his bottom lip nervously. What if surprising her like this is a bad idea? He just wants to take her out for ice cream so she can meet Jared and they can talk. Maybe he should have called her first.

But then Mackenzie comes out and sees her big brother and his boyfriend waiting for her. She stumbles to a stop, blinks a few times, and then grins harder than Jensen's ever seen.

Jensen grins back.



Jared's hair isn't cooperating.

Which, Jared's hair never cooperates. But it's prom. It could work with him a little. Jared huffs and smoothes his hair down with his hands again. There's a knock on the door and his mom walks in with various bottles and a flat iron in hand.

"Mom, no," Jared whines, but she just pushes him down on the side of the bed and goes to work. By the time she's done his usually unmanageable mop of hair actually looks, well, good. He tucks a stray lock behind his ear and turns to face her. "Thanks."

"Welcome," she replies. "Now back to Jensen. He's having bowtie issues."

Jared wants to ask her if Jensen seems excited, if he seems like he really wants to go, but she's out of the room before he has a chance to open his mouth. Jared pulls on his tuxedo and takes extra care to make sure his lavender cummerbund is straight before pulling on his jacket. He fiddles with his bowtie before deciding to just leave it undone with the ends hanging over the lapels of his jacket. He reaches for his shiny black dress shoes, but his eyes drift to the left. He smiles as he grabs his worn-in black Converse with the rainbow laces, the same pair he was wearing on the day he met Jensen.

He checks himself one last time in the mirror, making sure he has everything he needs before taking a deep breath and leaving his room.

Jensen is leaving his at the same moment and they crash into each other, chuckling slightly as they clutch each other's arms.

"Wow," Jared breathes. He looks Jensen up and down and his eyes widen slightly. The cut of Jensen's tuxedo is more traditional where Jared's is more contemporary. He contrasts the timeless style of his tux with a slightly messy hairstyle, soft looking strands sticking up in the slightest fauxhawk. The lavender vest he's wearing is the exact shade of Jared's cummerbund, and that makes Jared grin. "You look... wow."

“Thanks.” Jensen blushes as he tugs on the ends of Jared’s tie. “You too.”

“No glasses?” Jared swipes his fingertip gently under Jensen’s eye. They’re a tiny bit pink and watery. Jensen blinks and scrunches up his nose.

“Sherri took me to get contacts.” He blinks a few more times. “Still getting used to them.”

Jared’s toe bumps up against Jensen’s foot and Jensen looks down, raising an eyebrow at Jared’s choice of footwear. He looks back up with his tongue in his cheek as he smiles at Jared, who just shrugs with a smirk.

“Boys!” Sherri calls from the living room. “Your ride will be here soon. I want pictures!”

Jared and Jensen roll their eyes and head down the hallway together to greet Sherri in the living room. The dogs are barking at the back door, but the last thing either of them needs are muddy paw prints on their rented tuxedos.

“Oh my god,” Sherri says, bringing her hand to her mouth. “You boys are so *gorgeous*. I just – stay there!”

She rushes into the kitchen and comes back with two small plastic boxes. She hands them each one and Jared chuckles as he looks inside. In the boxes are two matching boutonnieres; tiny bouquets of baby’s breath and lavender. Jared takes his out and pins it carefully to Jensen’s lapel, taking extra care not to stick him as flashes from his mother’s camera make his vision dance.

“This is so surreal,” Jensen says softly. His fingers are shaky as he pins his own boutonniere to Jared’s jacket. When he finally gets it fastened, Jared lifts Jensen’s chin with his index finger and looks at him questioningly. Jensen swallows hard and curls his fingers around Jared’s wrist. “I just never thought I’d be going to my senior prom with my boyfriend.”

“Believe it, baby.” Jared grins and leans in to press their mouths together just as another flash goes off.

They pose for the traditional pre-prom photography session with broad grins on their happy faces as Sherri snaps picture after picture. The doorbell rings and their friends file inside without bothering to wait for an answer.

Sandy and Sophia look so breathtakingly beautiful that Jared knows if there ever was the slightest chance of him being straight, he’d know it then and there. But once he’s done appraising Sandy and Sophia, his eyes go right back to Jensen.

Chad comes in wearing a traditional black tux with a blue cummerbund and bowtie in a

shade that brings out the color in his eyes. He actually looks really grown-up and handsome. But of course he's going stag, because Chad is Chad and some things never change.

Misha comes in next with his date trailing behind him. He's bringing a boy named Shane that Jared doesn't know very well. He's sort of pretentious and weird. He and Misha probably get along like a house on fire.

Adam and Danneel bring up the rear and they look absolutely *fabulous*. There is just no other word to describe them. Danneel is squeezed into a hot pink dress that leaves little to the imagination and Adam is rocking a tight black tuxedo with a shirt the color of Danneel's dress and a black skinny tie. His black hair is styled in an impressive bouffant and his eyes are lined with kohl. When they both raise their hands to clap them together, Jared notices that their fingernails catch the light, shining with glitter. Jared sort of wants to applaud them.

"Look at you guys!" Sherri exclaims, coming forward to hug them all. "You all look so beautiful. Pictures!"

They spend another fifteen minutes or so posing for pictures – some serious, but mostly ridiculous. Through the front window Jared can see the limo idling on the curb. It was sort of extravagant, but once they all pitched in the cost was actually pretty low.

"Okay, Mom, we gotta go," Jared tells her. She nods and puts her camera away.

"Bye Mommy!" Sandy and Sophia chirp in unison. They each give her a hug before simpering out the door.

"Later, Mama P," Chad tells her, saluting her before exiting as well.

"See ya, Ma," Misha says, kissing her cheek before heading out to the limo, pulling Shane along by the hand. Jensen steps forward excitedly and hugs Sherri quickly.

"Bye, Mom." He grins at her before heading outside to join the group cramming into the limo. Sherri gasps a little, eyes going wet and wide as she looks over at Jared. His breath catches in his throat as he smiles.

He decides not to make a big deal out of it.

"Love you," Jared tells her, kissing her cheek before going out to join his friends. He squeezes into the limo next to Jensen and leans in to grab his chin and press a quick kiss to his lips.

Since the school really isn't that far away and they're sort of early, they have the limo take them around town while they blare loud music and drink sparkling cider out of flutes,

pretending it's champagne.

By the time they finally make it into the gym they're all giggly and happy. The theme Kristen and her committee finally landed on was 'The Last Night on Earth'. The walls have been covered in dark blue butcher paper and white star cut-outs. White and silver stars and streamers hang from the ceiling along with overinflated balloons. Each table is covered with a dark blue tablecloth and a liberal amount of glitter. Adam and Danneel immediately start to play in it.

The decorations are cheesy, the music is too loud, and the food is crap – but hey, it's their prom.

They lay claim to a large table near the back so they can watch over the festivities. The girls leave their purses and drag the boys out onto the dance floor against their will. They dance as a group until they're breathless and sweat dampens Jared's temples.

As soon as a slow song starts, Sandy and Sophia wrap their arms around each other and Chad grabs the nearest blonde underclassmen he can find. Misha and Shane start to awkwardly sway and Danneel kicks her shoes off and hops up on Adam's feet.

A few people give their group a quick askance glance and a few eyebrows quirk up questionably, but no one says anything. Jared is proud of how tolerant his student body is.

Jensen and Jared just sort of stare at each other for a moment before wandering over to the refreshments table.

"Are you having fun?" Jared asks as Jensen fills a cup from the fancy punch fountain situated in the middle of the table. He takes a long drink and refills it before handing it to Jared.

"Yeah," he says over the music. He turns to lean against the table and watch the couples dancing to some cheesy slow song. Jared wants to take his hand and ask him to dance, but he isn't sure how Jensen would react in such a crowded room.

Another fast song starts up and Jensen heads back over to the group. Danneel grabs his hands and starts doing some crazy dance, dragging Jensen along for the ride. He laughs hard and throws his head back. The blue and purple lights look amazing dancing across his skin.

Jared's heart skips a beat or two, and he falls a little further.

He dances with Sandy and Sophia, twirling them in dizzy circles in time with the music. After a bit another ballad starts and everyone pairs off. Jensen is a few feet away, and he

looks over at Jared with his teeth firmly planted in his bottom lip. Jared takes a deep breath and holds a hopeful hand out to his boyfriend.

Jensen steps forward and takes it, wrapping an arm around Jared's waist as they dance.



Jensen has to admit that he's having a lot more fun than he thought he would. He's danced with everyone at least once, including a somewhat hilarious waltz with Adam as Jared watched and laughed hysterically.

But the crowds are starting to get to him. It's a little too hot, a little too stuffy, and a little too *loud*.

He's sequestered himself in a chair at their table, surrounded by purses and high heels. The punch tastes a little funny, like maybe someone tried to spike it but only put in enough alcohol to give it a bitter tang. Jensen wrinkles his nose and sets his cup on the table.

Jared comes up behind him, wrapping his arms around him and resting against his back. Jensen smiles and tilts his head to the side as Jared presses a soft kiss to his neck.

"Hey," Jared says. He lifts up a little and tilts Jensen's head back to look at him. He gives him a quick upside down kiss and nips the tip of his nose. "Wanna get out of here? Go for a walk?"

Jensen nods gratefully and allows Jared to pull him out of his chair. The air outside carries a slight chill but it feels wonderful against Jensen's overheated skin. The farther they get away from the gym, the quieter the music gets. Soon all they hear is the thump of the bass.

They're not supposed to be walking around campus like this, but it seems like Jared always has a way of bending the rules until they work in his favor.

A slight breeze ruffles the leaves of the trees and Jared moves closer, reaching out to snag Jensen's hand and tangle their fingers together. Jensen smiles at the familiar touch and squeezes Jared's hand tightly for a moment.

They walk through the senior lawn and pass posters reminding them to pick up their caps and gowns and sign up for senior graduation activities. Jensen doesn't really like to think about it. It figures that as soon as he finally starts to enjoy going to school, it comes to a swift and sudden end.

But he has come to realize that his happiness is not tied to this school or the memories he made in it. And although he's a major factor in Jensen's happiness, it isn't tethered to Jared

either.

Jensen is the only one that holds the key. It was a long, hard road that led him to that realization, but he's finally made it. As long as he is happy with himself, no one else's opinion matters.

And he is. Happy with himself, that is. It feels good not to hide. He likes who he is and he likes being honest with both himself and everyone else. His life has been sort of like bungee jumping – this intensely terrifying, never ending freefall. Finding Jared had been the snap in the cable, the moment he stopped falling and started shooting upward. And now, finally, his feet are on the ground.

He's a little dizzy, but he's feeling good.

"And here we are." Jared's voice snaps him from his thoughts. He blinks a few times and it sends his new contacts slipping across his eyeballs. He blinks once more, slow and careful, and waits for them to slip back into place.

He looks over to see Jared extracting a set of keys from the pocket of his pants. A small silver one catches the light of the moon as Jared holds it up.

"You're telling me you're one of those students that have an ambiguously acquired set of spare keys to the school?" Jensen arches an eyebrow and Jared gives him that sly little grin – the one where his eyes get bright and the tip of his tongue presses against the back of his teeth.

"They're not to the *whole* school," Jared replies with a smirk as he unlocks the photo lab. He ushers Jensen inside and flips on one set of lights. It's sort of eerie to be in such an expansive, empty classroom after dark – also a little thrilling, like breaking the rules. "And they're not ambiguously acquired," Jared continues as he slips out of his tux jacket and then helps Jensen out of his. "Wags gave me a set last year because I never had time after school to work on my projects, so he let me come in early. He never asked for them back, and I never offered."

"Precarious," Jensen comments. Jared flicks the end of his nose. "Why are we in here?"

"I'm feeling nostalgic," Jared says wistfully. They leave their jackets on a table as he leads Jensen towards the back of the classroom. "And we had some good times in this classroom, if I recall correctly."

Jensen's heart skips a beat as Jared opens the door to the darkroom and ushers him inside. Jared shuts the door and it's pitch black inside, too dark to even see his hand in front of his face.

Jared turns him around in the darkness, presses him up against the counter and leans in to whisper in his ear.

“Scared?” He breathes as one arm curls around Jensen’s waist. Jensen blinks like his eyes will suddenly adjust and lets a breath out through his nose.

“No,” he replies truthfully. His lips brush Jared’s smooth jaw as he wraps his arms around Jared’s waist. He can hear some shuffling around and suddenly the safelight comes on, bathing the tiny room in a soft orange glow.

Jensen remembers how scared he was last time he was in this room, trembling and nervous just from being in a small space with Jared. Now he’s all wrapped up in Jared’s strong arms and he tilts his face up to kiss him without a second thought. Jared responds immediately, tongue parting Jensen’s lips and dipping inside.

Jensen groans softly as Jared grabs him by the hips and lifts him with little effort to place him on the countertop. The angle changes so Jared is now the one with his face tipped upwards as they kiss. Jensen puts his hand on Jared’s cheek and kisses him passionately, feeling his lips tingle with overuse.

Jared reaches up to undo Jensen’s bowtie and the top button of his dress shirt. A soft sigh escapes his lips as he leans in to nuzzle the soft, smooth skin of Jensen’s throat and press soft kisses to his collarbone. Jensen tips his head back and relishes in the sensation of Jared’s lips on his skin.

“A little different than last time,” he mumbles, and Jared chuckles against his skin. Jared stops kissing him and wraps his arms around Jensen’s waist, holding him tight against his body as he breathes softly against Jensen’s shoulder. Jensen cups the back of Jared’s head with one hand, the other resting between his shoulder blades as one leg stays loosely wrapped around his hips.

They’re quiet for a long time, just embracing under the dim red light bulb. Jared opens his mouth against Jensen’s neck but closes it again, swallowing hard as his lips travel to Jensen’s ear. He puts one hand over Jensen’s heart, palm flat against his pulse.

“I’m so in love with you,” Jared admits in a whisper. A shudder runs through Jensen’s entire body at the words and makes him tremble in Jared’s grasp. Jared pulls back slightly and Jensen clutches at the back of his dress shirt to keep him close. But Jared just looks up into Jensen’s wide eyes and reaches up to place his hand on Jensen’s cheek. “I love you, Jen.”

Several emotions run through Jensen’s mind much too fast for him to pin any one of them down, but one thought finally settles itself at the front of Jensen’s mind – yes, yes yes yes.

“I love you,” Jensen tells him. The words ring truer than anything he’s ever said in his entire life. He’s a little surprised at how easily the phrase tumbles from his lips, but then again, not really.

He thinks a little part of himself has loved Jared from the moment they met, since Jared introduced himself with mashed potatoes in his hair and gravy on his shirt. He’s been inexplicably drawn to this boy since day one – something made him keep going back to him when everything else was telling him to run away.

Maybe it was the same thing that’s running wild and rampant through his veins right now.

Jensen spent the first eighteen years of his life thinking he would never know what love felt like, that he’d never get to experience it first hand.

Now he knows exactly what it means to be in love. It’s scary and intense, white-hot and all consuming. It’s powerful and everlasting.

He puts his hand on Jared’s chest and smiles at the way his heart is beating a little faster now than it was before. He looks into Jared’s eyes and presses their lips together, soft and sure.

It’s this, right here.

Onto the epilogues.

[users.livejournal.com /-mournthewicked/248009.html](https://users.livejournal.com/_mournthewicked/248009.html)

fic: as this sunset turns to morning (epilogues)

miss california. (_mournthewicked) wrote, 2009-09-16 12:51:00 : 29-37 minutes

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[first epilogue]



It's been six months since Jensen met Jared, four months since their first kiss, and two months since Jensen moved in with him and Sherri.

The major events in his life seem to be happening in two month intervals. In the middle of September they start college in the city, so that'll be eight months. But the six month mark is sort of lacking so far. Sure, Jared is turning eighteen in a week, but that's a major event in *his* life, not Jensen's.

It looks like if Jensen wants his milestone to come on time, he'll have to make it happen. He can do that, no problem. There's already a plan half-formulated in his mind.

"Busy weekend coming up," Sherri says a few nights later at dinner. They're all in the living room with plates of food, ignoring the dogs' pleading eyes as they watch television. "There's Jared's party on Saturday and then on Sunday my little boy turns eighteen. Shit, *eighteen*. I'm old."

"Yep," Jared says brightly, "To all counts." Sherri hits Jared in the face with a throw pillow and he nearly drops his plate.

"And, uh," Jensen begins. His cheeks turn pink just at the thought of his plan. "I'm planning something for Friday night. For the two of us."

"Aw, Jen." Jared looks over at him with a big grin. "You don't have to do anything special for me. If you have a present you can just give it to me at the party."

"No," Jensen chuckles. "I can't. Friday night, you and me."

"Okay," Jared agrees, nudging Jensen's shoulder with his own before he shovels another Jared-sized bite of food into his mouth. Sherri looks over at Jensen with an arched eyebrow

and a knowing expression and Jensen's cheeks flush anew.

"Just as well," Sherri says. "Friday night is margarita night. I'm staying over at Shelly's." She winks at Jensen when Jared isn't looking and Jensen resists the urge to bury his face in his hands.

"Oh, really?" Jared asks. "I didn't know that was coming up. Have fun."

"Half as much as you do, I hope," Sherri says, and Jensen lets out a squeak. Jared just continues to be oblivious, eyes locked on the television. He accidentally drops a piece of potato salad off of his fork and Harley snaps it out of the air.

Jensen needs advice about this plan, but he usually gets all his advice from Jared. In this particular situation, that isn't an option. His next choice would be the girls, but they're out too. Jensen needs a guy's advice. A gay guy, so Chad is out as well. His next option is Misha, but the awkwardness alone would kill him.

That's how Jensen finds himself going shopping with Adam on a stiflingly hot July afternoon.

"I'm fucking sweating off my eyeliner," Adam complains as they trudge across the crowded mall parking lot. "Is my hair getting puffy? I swear, heat and humidity are *not* friends of glam."

"You look fine," Jensen tells him. "Your hair is as straight as you are not."

"Aw, that's sweet," Adam replies, tucking Jensen against his side. "Now, you said you wanted to talk? C'mon, girl. Spill."

And then Jensen does. Adam is surprisingly sensitive and helpful on the topic. He doesn't really tell him anything about what he's planning that Jensen doesn't already know, but he does calm his nerves and help him mentally prepare.

After they leave the mall, Adam even takes him a different kind of shopping so he doesn't have to do it alone.

Jensen has this idea about his presentation. It's either sweet, dorky, or just dumb. Possibly all three. Either way, Jensen spends a good chunk of his Friday afternoon banning Jared from his room and getting everything ready. He wraps Jared's present, tidies up and changes the sheets on his bed, running his nervous fingers through his hair so many times it's nearly standing up on end.

He goes to take a shower, tossing one last 'enter and die' at Jared before disappearing into the bathroom.

Once he's done he changes into a pair of black boxer-briefs, his nicest jeans, and a green button down Adam swears makes his eyes the most gorgeous thing on the planet. He pops in his contacts and fixes his hair before staring at his reflection in the mirror and letting out a harsh breath. He gets to the living room just in time to see Sherri gathering her things.

"Okay, kids," she says. "I'm out of here. Be good." She gives Jared and Jensen each a kiss on the cheek and leaves with a flourish. Jared turns around, clad in a white tee and raggedy old basketball shorts, and his eyes widen when he sees Jensen.

"Whoa," he breathes. "Hello, gorgeous. Are we going somewhere?"

"No, I'm cooking," Jensen replies. "But if you wanted to go get cleaned up, that'd be fantastic."

"The things we do for love," Jared says airily, winking at Jensen and giving him a quick peck on the cheek before disappearing down the hallway.

Jensen starts making a quick, simple pasta dish that Sherri taught him and he knows Jared loves. He sticks some garlic bread in the oven and throws together a quick salad before setting the rarely used dining room table and lighting one candle in the center of it and dimming the lights.

For once in his life, Jensen is glad Jared takes the longest showers known to man. He's already making their plates when Jared finally emerges. His hair is styled and he's wearing nice jeans and the dark red button down Jensen loves.

"Whoa," he says when he walks into the dimly lit dining room. Jensen sets their plates down and wipes his hands on his thighs.

"Too much?" Jensen asks as he glances between the table and Jared. His boyfriend comes up and kisses his temple before sitting down.

"No," he replies. "It looks fantastic."

Jensen nods and goes back into the kitchen. When he talked to Sherri about his dinner plans, she told him they could each have *one* glass of wine. So Jensen pours some red wine into two pretty wine glasses and brings them out to the table.

"Ooh, fancy," Jared says as Jensen sits down and sets his wine glass in front of him.

"A toast," Jensen says as he holds out his own glass. "To adulthood."

"To our future," Jared replies, and clinks their glasses together.

The wine helps relax Jensen a little, but he's still fidgeting slightly when they finish their meal. Jared sops up the last of the sauce with a piece of bread, so Jensen assumes he did a good job.

"Ready for your present?" Jensen asks as he leans forward to blow out the candle. Jared nods and wipes his mouth with his napkin before jumping up.

"Hell yeah. Is it a pony?" Jensen chuckles as he leads them down the hallway to his room. He takes a deep breath before he pushes the door open and goes in. Jared stumbles to a halt at the sight of the large wrapped box sitting in the middle of the floor. "Holy shit. *Is* it a pony?"

"Just open it." Jensen laughs as he sits on the edge of his bed and smooths his hand across the freshly washed sheets. Jared tears into the paper with a vengeance, revealing nothing but a plain brown moving box. He tears off the tape and flips it open eagerly, sending packing peanuts flying everywhere.

"There's nothing in here," Jared says as he shoves his arms into the peanuts. "Oh, wait." He pulls out another box wrapped in different paper and raises an eyebrow at Jensen, who merely grins. "Creative."

Jared tears the paper off of the smaller box to reveal – more packing peanuts. Jared laughs as he pulls out yet another box. He repeats the process through two more boxes, until he has a small square box wrapped in plain blue paper in his hands.

"I'm losing hope that this is a pony," Jared tells him. He has packing peanuts in his hair and there is shredded wrapping paper everywhere. So much for cleaning his room. Jensen opens his mouth to say something but snaps it shut again, swallowing hard. With every box Jared uncovers, he gets a little more nervous.

Jared opens the last box and shifts the peanuts around until he extracts a tiny white gift bag. He looks up at Jensen and he nods, biting back a nervous smile. Jared sticks his tongue out of the corner of his mouth as he unties the bag and sticks his hand inside.

Jared extracts his hand with a furrowed brow and tosses the bag aside. He turns his hand over and opens it, and his eyes widen when he spots the single condom and small tube of lube resting in his palm.

"Happy Birthday," Jensen tells him, proud of the way his voice doesn't waver. He's nervous as fuck, but he *wants* this.

"Wow, Jensen," Jared says, closing his hands around the objects and looking up at him. "This is – wow. Are you sure?"

“Jared,” Jensen says with a small smile. “It’s not like this is a spur of the moment decision. I mean, I’ve obviously planned this out.” He gestures around at the giant pile of wrapping paper and packing peanuts that was once his bedroom floor. “I even went condom shopping with Adam.”

“Oh, babe,” Jared chuckles. He looks down at his hand and back up again before finally climbing to his feet and coming over to sit next to Jensen on the bed. “You’re really sure.”

“Jared,” Jensen says, taking Jared’s hand. “I trust you. I *love* you. I want to be with you.”

“I love you,” Jared repeats. They both lean in and meet in the middle, lips pressing together reverently. Their hands twist in each other’s clothes, all eagerness and want, and soon they’re both in their underwear. They’re tangled up on the bed and Jensen can barely breathe from all the kissing. Jared finally pulls away and he sucks in a deep breath.

“Okay,” Jared says roughly. He puts the condom on Jensen’s chest and sits up. “You take that, and let me just – “

“No,” Jensen says shallowly. He takes the condom and holds it out. “No, I – I want you to do it.”

“Oh, okay.” Jared blinks and takes the condom back. “I just thought, well – “

Jensen closes his eyes for a moment. He knows that Jared topped in his first and only sexual experience, that’s his preference, and Jensen is touched that he’d give that up for him. But that’s not what Jensen wants – he wants Jared all around him, on top of him, *in* him.

“I want you in me,” Jensen says on a shaky exhale. “It’s – that’s how I pictured it.”

Jared just smiles at him and leans down to kiss him again, one hand placed lovingly on his cheek. Jensen trembles slightly as he kisses back, nerves he just can’t seem to shake no matter how badly he wants this to happen. He hooks his fingers in the waistband of Jared’s underwear and pushes them down, cupping the firm curve of his ass.

Jared kisses his way down Jensen’s chest, pausing to show his nipples a little extra attention before his lips make their way down the center of his stomach. He pulls Jensen’s underwear down slowly, lips following the curve of his hip. Once they’re both naked, Jared grabs a pillow and slips it under Jensen’s hips before leaning over him and kissing him again.

“Tell me if you want me to stop,” Jared says, and Jensen chuckles as he kisses the tip of his nose.

“I won’t want you to,” he assures him, “but okay.”

Jared kisses him again and slides back down Jensen’s body, sucking his cock into his mouth as he parts Jensen’s legs. Jensen lets out a low groan, but the pleasure is gone as quickly as it started as Jared pulls off to press his lips to the crease of Jensen’s inner thigh. Jensen’s breath hitches as Jared pushes his legs open wider and parts his cheeks with his thumbs, exposing him.

Jared has never really touched him here before. There have been quick brushes of his fingers, but he’s never looked at him like this. Now Jared’s fingers are touching his most intimate area, rubbing little circles against the tight muscle. He presses a kiss there and Jensen gasps, flushing red.

“You good?” Jared asks, and his words tickle Jensen’s inner thigh. He nods and clenches his fingers in the sheets when he hears the snap of the lube cap. He lifts his head to watch Jared rub some of the clear fluid between his fingers, and he sits up to meet Jensen’s eye before bringing them back to his hole. He just rubs tight circles against it, not pressing in yet. Jensen lets out a soft little moan, legs falling open wider as he feels the muscle start to relax.

Jared adds more lube and slowly pushes the tip of his finger in. Jensen gasps and keeps his eyes locked on Jared’s face. He pushes the finger in a little further and looks up at him questioningly. Jensen nods and gives him an encouraging smile.

Jared spends a long time preparing him, working him open on his fingers in such a way that Jensen feels no pain. The intrusion feels a little weird at first, a strange pressure that doesn’t really feel good or bad, but soon it starts to feel pretty amazing.

Jensen lets out a needy little whine and then bites his lip, surprised at the sound. Jared spreads his three fingers open and it stings a little, but it’s nothing Jensen can’t handle.

“Ready?” Jared asks breathlessly, and Jensen nods. Jared’s fingers slip from his body and that little whine escapes again. Jensen watches as Jared rolls the condom onto his hard cock, and he swallows nervously. Jared lowers himself down on top of Jensen and his arms immediately go around his boyfriend’s broad shoulders. Jared is trembling slightly and Jensen presses a kiss to his lips.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Jared admits as he smooths Jensen’s hair back from his forehead. “But – “

“It’s going to at first, I know,” Jensen breathes, curling his fingers in Jared’s hair. “I’ll be okay.”

“I love you.” Jared says those three words all the time. Not a day goes by that Jensen doesn’t hear it, but he feels this one more than the others. It makes his heart clench.

“Love you,” Jensen replies, and Jared smashes their mouths together as he pushes in. Jensen gasps into Jared’s mouth, fingers pulling at his hair as the sudden pain makes him arch up. Jared stills, immobile as stone. He doesn’t even try to deter Jensen from yanking on his hair.

Jensen squeezes his eyes shut and blows out a harsh breath as he waits to adjust to the intrusion. It doesn’t feel good right now, all painful pressure, but he knows it will get better. He just lets Jared keep kissing him, questing brushes of his tongue and little nips of his teeth helping to distract him from the burn.

Soon enough, it fades and Jensen clenches experimentally. Jared jerks slightly and Jensen takes pity on him, kissing the tip of his nose as he lifts his feet to wrap his legs around Jared’s hips.

“I’m good,” Jensen whispers, and Jared searches his eyes for any trace of a lie. Jensen just smiles at him. A wide grin splits Jared’s face and he slowly pulls out, only to thrust in again. It still burns, but with each slow thrust the pain ebbs away until pleasure overpowers it – until he barely feels any pain at all.

“Oh – oh, Jared,” Jensen breathes, digging his fingertips into Jared’s skin as he rolls his hips to meet Jared’s thrusts. Their mouths meet again, because if they’re not kissing they’re staring at each other with wide-eyed awe, like neither of them expected how amazing it would feel.

And it’s not even the physical aspect of it. There’s a hint of tears in Jensen’s eyes because his heart is pounding so hard, beating for Jared like it serves no other purpose. He’s safe and cared for and *loved*. Jared is in him and around him and part of him, and being fused together like this without room for so much as air between them – it’s overwhelming.

Jensen can’t stop his mouth from moving. He doesn’t even know what he’s saying, all he knows is that he’s *happy*. He’s so in love it hurts to breathe and he doesn’t ever want it to stop. He wants to be with Jared forever, he wants to never let go.

It’s amazing how something as natural and primal as sweat-damp skin against skin can invoke such intense emotions in him. He didn’t think his heart could hold anymore love, but Jared went and proved him wrong yet again. He can have whatever he wants, love as hard as he wants, and no one can ever stop him.

Jared looks into his eyes and Jensen can see exactly what he’s feeling reflected there. They’re on the exact same page and Jensen cries out when Jared hits something inside of

him that makes stars burst behind his eyes.

Jared's hand wraps around his leaking dick and strokes once, just once, and that's all it takes. Jensen shouts out and arches up, back coming up off of the bed as his orgasm hits. It's white-hot and intense, and he can't seem to stop coming. It streaks his chest and stomach and he digs his fingers into Jared's shoulders so hard he leaves little crescent marks behind.

Before he's done shaking, before he even comes down, Jared bites down hard on his collarbone as he comes and it's like he starts the whole process over again. Jared cries out and digs his nails into Jensen's hips, and the sharp edge of pain brings him back to reality. Jensen collapses against the bed just as Jared drops down on top of him. The lack of air is stifling but Jensen never wants him to move.

They're quiet for a long time, just trying to regain their breath as their hips twitch slightly with delayed aftershocks. Finally Jared lifts his head and presses their mouths together, so soft and sweet that Jensen's pounding heart skips a beat or two.

"I love you," Jensen pants, but the words don't seem like enough. There are no words to describe what he feels for Jared – it's impossible to express. Jared seems to understand this, because he swallows the words eagerly and kisses Jensen in a language entirely their own.

He speaks to Jensen with the soft press of his lips and the gentle touch of his hands, repeating it over and over until Jensen is gasping all over again.

They whisper to each other for hours, and Jensen laughs breathlessly in the pale moonlight.

[second epilogue – 2 ½ years later]



Jared wakes up with the sun in his eyes. He groans and scrunches his face up before rolling over to get away from the light. He meets the long expanse of Jensen's body, warm and naked under the covers. He's sleeping on his back with his arms crossed under his head and his legs slightly spread.

Jared runs his hand along Jensen's bare stomach and hisses slightly when his erection brushes Jensen's hip. A mischievous smirk pulls at his lips and he crawls on top of Jensen's body, leaning in to kiss his parted lips.

“Mmm,” Jensen sighs. He stretches out his arms and wraps them loosely around Jared’s thickly muscled shoulders. “Someone’s up.”

“Hi,” Jared says softly as he reaches down to slide his hands between Jensen’s legs. He cups his thighs and parts them to make more room for his hips. Jensen languidly brings his knees up and lets them fall open as Jared settles between his legs. He licks and sucks at Jensen’s neck and he tilts his head back, moaning softly.

“I don’t suppose I’m getting any more sleep,” Jensen says quietly. He smirks when Jared shakes his head against his chest. “Didn’t think so.”

“Want you,” Jared breathes as he reaches down to touch Jensen’s entrance. It’s still a little wet and swollen from the night before and Jared slides a finger in without resistance. Jensen shudders and digs his fingers into Jared’s shoulders. “Still open and ready for me. Can I have you?”

“Mm, yeah.” Jensen lifts Jared’s chin to kiss him as Jared slowly enters him. Jensen moans brokenly into his mouth and Jared’s fingers dig into his sharp hipbones. “Feels good.”

Just as Jared starts to pull out, there’s a loud pounding on the door. Jensen freezes and clenches down painfully around Jared’s cock as his cheeks fill with blood.

“Hey! Are you boys up?” Sherri calls out. “It’s almost lunchtime.”

“Uh, five minutes!” Jared calls out. Jensen narrows his eyes and slaps his hip painfully. “Ow, fifteen! Fifteen minutes at the very least!”

They can hear her laughter as she walks down the hall, getting quieter until it disappears altogether. Jared looks sheepishly down at Jensen and bites his bottom lip. Jensen chuckles softly and kisses Jared delicately as he wraps his legs loosely around Jared’s waist.

When Jared doesn’t move Jensen just raises an eyebrow and slaps his hip again. “Did you wake me up for nothing?”

“Mm, definitely not.” Jared buries himself deep inside Jensen again. Jensen groans, arching his back and pushing back against Jared. He cups Jensen’s cheek and kisses him deeply as he thrusts into him, swallowing every sound he makes.

He pulls away when Jensen starts mumbling about how much he loves him, because, well – that he wants to hear.



Jensen is currently freezing his ass off in the city park while he walks Harley and Sadie with Jared and Sherri.

He's still not sure how he got roped into this group activity. Home is warm and toasty and has hot chocolate and Christmas specials on TV. The park has none of these things – just frigid air that gets progressively cooler as the sun sinks closer to the horizon.

He zips his jacket up a little more and wraps Sadie's leash once more around his wrist. She may be getting on in years but she still hasn't given up her penchant for running off.

Harley trots dutifully alongside Jared, pausing every so often to sniff at the winter air. The park is expansive, covered in open grassy fields and walking paths bordered with tall, neatly trimmed hedges.

Jensen is surprised at how green everything still is. The grass is lush and thick and nearly all the trees dotting the park are some sort of evergreen. He breathes in deep and smells wet dirt and pine mixed with the subtle, barely there scent of Jared's cologne. Then again, Jensen could probably pick up on that scent in the middle of a crowded room; he's so attuned to it.

"It was nice seeing Josh today," Sherri says, breaking the comfortable silence that had shrouded most of their leisurely walk. "Logan is growing like a weed."

"Right?" Jensen replies, getting the same goofy smile he always does when he thinks of his nephew. "Yeah, it was nice to get the whole family together."

Josh lives in San Francisco, across town from Jared and Jensen's school. But they rarely make the drive into the suburbs, so Sherri doesn't get to see them that often. They're in town for Christmas and he even managed to snag Mackenzie so they could all have lunch together.

He and Jared are thriving in San Francisco. They share a crappy studio apartment over a coffee shop near campus and pay the bills by working random jobs. Jensen pretty much sticks to waiting at high-end restaurants, but of course Jared is a little more eclectic.

He's been a barista, worked at a daycare center, been a janitor at an art museum, dabbled in the fine art of dog grooming, and even spent one random and baffling month hawking souvenirs on Alcatraz Island.

He's finally found his calling. He now works at the same place he's been volunteering since his freshman year – the gay and lesbian youth center. It doesn't pay an insane amount, but that doesn't matter to Jared.

Jensen volunteers there in his free time, and they've been angling to get him a paid spot as well. He's seriously considering it. He thinks maybe he could help other kids that were just like him, tell his story.

"So where's Matt on this fine evening?" Jared's voice distracts Jensen from his thoughts.

"Visiting his parents in Sacramento," Sherri replies. "Which is good. I get my boys all to myself tonight."

"So, it's been almost two years that you've been with this guy," Jared tells her, pulling at Harley's leash when he stops to sniff at a most interesting spot of grass. "When's he gonna make an honest woman out of you?"

Sherri blushes. She actually *blushes*. It's amazing. Jensen chuckles and bites his lip in amusement. It was sort of weird when Sherri started dating again. Jared didn't handle it as well as he thought he would. He was almost always standoffish and disparaging of every guy Sherri met, but then Matt came along. He and Jared just clicked instantly, much to everyone's relief.

"I don't know," Sherri mumbles as she shoves her hands in the pockets of her coat. "We're living together. That's enough for now."

"Living in *sin*," Jensen adds, wiggling his fingers in Sherri's face for dramatic effect. She rolls her eyes and bumps into Jensen with her shoulder. He stumbles, Jared laughs, and Sadie barks.

"Live by example, Mom," Jared says, snagging Jensen by the waist with his free arm and pulling him in close. "I made an honest woman out of Jensen, shit, over a year ago now."

Jensen flicks the end of Jared's nose. Hard. Jared laughs and takes Jensen's hand to thread their fingers together. Jensen admires the plain silver band on Jared's ring finger; an exact replica of the one he is wearing.

They aren't actually married. Not on paper, anyway. They traded their rings while crammed into a bathtub in a hotel room in Lake Tahoe on their second anniversary. That's all they need for now.

Jared and Jensen hold hands as they walk the dogs and Sherri trails behind them. Jensen gets distracted by the feeling of Jared's thumb moving back and forth across the back of his hand and doesn't hold Sadie's leash tight enough when she spots a squirrel or a leaf or shit, *air* and takes off running.

She yanks the leash out of Jensen's hand and turns a corner, disappearing behind the tall

hedge. Jensen shakes his hand free of Jared's and runs after her.

"Sadie girl!" His shoes skid on the damp pavement as he turns the corner. He sees her sniffing at a pair of jogging shoes, and he doesn't look up at the person wearing them until he has her leash in hand. "Sorry, she's just really –"

Jensen cuts himself off, freezing when he looks up to see his mother staring back at him. She's wearing a frumpy tracksuit and her hair is pulled back into the messiest bun Jensen has ever seen her wear.

Donna looks just as surprised to see him standing there as he is to see her. Jensen has managed to go more than two years without laying eyes on his mother or father. He and Jared only live an hour away so it's not like he's never in town – they just don't exactly run in the same circles.

Jensen swallows hard, frozen in place as his heart leaps up into his throat. For a moment he's seventeen again – cowering and afraid.

A whirlwind of questions race through his mind. Does she miss him? Does she regret it? Does she know that she wasn't invited to her only grandson's second birthday party because Logan's gay uncles are his favorite people in the world? When did she take up jogging? When did she get so *old*?

Jensen lets out a shuddering breath as they continue a hideously awkward staring contest. Somewhere on the periphery of his awareness he can hear Jared calling for him. His voice cuts off mid-syllable.

Jared is a strong, silent presence at his side in under a moment. He takes Sadie's leash and doesn't say anything, doesn't touch Jensen – he's just there.

He's *there*, just like he always is. Always has been.

Jensen lifts his chin a little but he's still frozen to the pavement. His mother swallows hard and her thin lips twist into a grimace before parting, mouth opening like she wants to speak.

"Jensen." She says it like she's greeting the mailman – cordial and unfamiliar. Jensen's lips curl up in a wry grin and he shakes his head infinitesimally. He doesn't know what to say. He'd scream at her but she isn't worth the breath in his lungs.

His hand closes into a fist at his side and Jared's fingers curl around his wrist, thumb slipping under his rubber bracelet. It's not the same as the first one Jared gave him – that one broke long ago. Jensen had worn it until it was cracked and brittle and it fell off of his wrist. He barely had time to mourn before Jared was slipping a new one on.

Jensen finds comfort in the simple touch and he opens his hand to let Jared thread their fingers together. His mother's eyes scan over their joined hands and her eyes widen slightly when she sees the ring on Jensen's finger. She looks over to see the matching one on Jared's hand and looks wounded, eyes going wet and anguished.

They're both deer stuck in a headlight, unable to tear their eyes away from one another. But then Jared squeezes Jensen's hand slightly and Jensen turns his head to look at him. Nearly three years and his beauty surprises Jensen over and over again.

Jensen looks at his mother one last time, at the thin line of her lips and her dull, watery eyes. His shoes scrape against the sidewalk as he walks past her with Jared's hand in his as if there was no interruption at all.

As soon as his mother rounds the corner and they are out of sight Jared stops, slipping one hand through the ends of both dog leashes and pulling Jensen into a hug. Jensen rests his chin on Jared's shoulder and takes a deep breath as the dogs nudge his thigh. He blinks when he hears the quiet, muffled sound of his mother's voice just around the corner.

"Thank you," she says thickly. "For taking care of him."

"You don't have to thank me," Sherri replies. Jensen lets out a tiny gasp and Jared holds him tighter. "He's an amazing person, Donna. I just wish you would have given him a chance to show you that."

There's a brief moment of silence and then the soft sound of sneakers against wet pavement as Sherri turns the corner. Jensen looks at her with wide, wet eyes shining with gratitude and adoration. Jared pulls back from the hug and kisses Jensen's forehead, threading their fingers together again as he holds both dog leashes in the other.

Sherri puts an arm around Jensen's shoulders and pulls him in close to kiss his temple.

"You good, Bean?" She asks softly. Jensen gives her a watery smile as he nods.

"Awesome. Now, I was thinking. We can stop by the grocery store later to get the stuff to make that pie you like."

"The apple one with the crumbles on top?" Jensen asks shakily. Sherri chuckles as she nods and kisses Jensen's temple again before letting go.

Sadie lets out a sharp bark, killing the moment and making Jensen chuckle. Sherri pulls a chewed up old rope toy from the pocket of her jacket and waves it in the air. Both dogs go insane, wiggling their butts and barking loudly. Jared lets go of Jensen's hand and unhooks their leashes.

Sherri throws the rope as hard as she can towards the center of the field and the dogs tear after it, quick and muscular, like puppies rather than tired old hounds. Jared gives Jensen a quick grin before running off after them.

“I don’t think he’s ever *really* going to grow up,” Sherri says exasperatedly, and Jensen snorts. “Oh well. Adulthood is overrated anyway.”

Jared engages in an epic game of tug-o-war with Sadie, both of them playfully growling at each other. Jared finally rips the rope from her mouth and thrusts it up in the air, doing a little victory dance in the middle of the grassy field.

“I am the champ – oh *shit*.” Harley lets out an enormous bark before jumping at Jared, hitting his chest and taking him to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Sherri and Jensen both hiss and let out little relieved sighs when Jared just laughs and rolls around in the grass with his dogs.

Sherri heads out to join them, dropping to her knees and laughing as Sadie licks her face. Jensen watches them with such open fondness it’s a wonder his heart doesn’t burst out of his chest.

It took Jensen awhile, but he’s finally realized that you can’t choose the family you’re born into. They may be your blood but that’s no guarantee that they’ll be with you forever.

You *can* choose the family you’re a part of. The people that are there for you, the ones that love you unconditionally and live to make you smile – those are the good ones, the ones to surround yourself with.

Jared calls out Jensen’s name and then howls, causing both dogs to join in. Jensen rolls his eyes and heads out towards the pile of Padaleckis with a spring in his step. Jared surges up and grabs his hands to pull him down to the ground. He laughs as he lands on top of Jared and grins when Jared kisses the tip of his nose.

Harley puts his paws in the center of Jensen’s back, making him groan out loud into Jared’s mouth. Sherri laughs so loud it nearly echoes through the trees.

This is Jensen’s family. This is where he belongs.

[*end.*]

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