

Title: After The Tone

Pairing/Fandom: Jared/Jensen - CW RPS

Rating: NC-17

Disclaimer: [Lies, all lies!!](#)

Word count: ~24,500

Summary: *Years and years on the same show can spoil a guy, so it's no wonder that Jensen finds himself at loose ends after Supernatural's over. With Jared's schedule already filled up and no desire to play the Hollywood game anymore, Jensen takes a role in an Off-Broadway production in New York City, and starts himself on a journey to find out just who he is and exactly what - or who - he wants from life.*

Notes: Minor Jensen/OMC but the overarching pairing is Jared/Jensen.

Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans.

-John Lennon

Looking back, it all seems to happen as if in snap shots; short bursts of memory burned bright as a flash bulb into his mind. Not necessarily non-linear, but seemingly unconnected. Random moments in time that, when added together, equaled the biggest shift in who he was and what he was doing and where he was going.

At the center of everything, as usual, was Jared. Even if neither of them knew it at the beginning.

...

Hey, you've reached Jared's voice mail. If you're my momma or my dad, I promise I'm eating my vegetables and taking care of myself. If you're Chad, don't ask me, just go straight to the doctor and get some penicillin. If you're Jensen, leave a message at the beep.

Beeeeeeeeep.

...

It starts when the show ends finally and he leaves Vancouver for good, after years and years of mucking about in freezing cold night-shoots and squeezing in games of golf with Tommy when they both had a light schedule. He makes the trek back to L.A. permanently, his Studio City house stale and dusty and filled with little more than smog-filtered sunlight.

He sits on his now-ancient leather sofa and stares at the mound of boxes and bags he's brought back with him from the Great White North and grimaces at the thought that almost a decade of his life has been reduced to nothing but wash-worn clothes, a few gaming systems and an entire box full of vintage Playboys (a present from Rosenbaum when he'd left *Smallville* in '08).

He rubs a hand absently across his chest and thinks about Jared. Jared, who is off on location somewhere doing a movie shoot for next summer's 'it' blockbuster film. Big budget, bigger action, and big-name director. He smiles to himself as he shuffles into the kitchen to open his

fridge, staring at the cavernous interior that yields only a block of moldy cheese and a lone tomato - or what he thinks might be a tomato. He frowns and thinks idly of the little Korean grocery store three blocks over before pocketing his keys and heading out.

He's back within an hour, just enough food to see him through the next day or two. He unloads the bags quickly and pops open a beer, the rest of the six-pack going back in his now slightly-less empty fridge.

He orders some pizza after he decides he's too damn lazy to cook at the moment despite his now stocked fridge and kills off two more beers waiting for the delivery guy to show up. By the time he's done working his way through half of the pizza and the rest of the six pack, he's buzzed, watching a Cosby Show marathon on Nick At Night and missing Jared like the right arm he'd come to be over years of living in each other's pockets. He picks up his cell phone and has all but the last two numbers punched in before he clears the display and stumbles his way to bed, head full of cotton and his chest hurting like he was holding his breath, the pressure almost overwhelming in its intensity.

He collapses face first into the mattress and passes out within moments, still completely dressed.

He doesn't talk to Jared much for the next few months, only brief snatches of conversation while Jared's got a break from shooting. His mother pesters him to come home and visit, his agent pesters him to read the scripts she's sending over by the truckload and Steve pesters him to head out on the road with the band for a few gigs.

Instead, he stays holed up inside his house that feels like less of a home than his hotel room in British Columbia and eats too many apples and gets hooked on some reality show about spoiled teenage girls on MTV. He grows a beard and beats his own high score on Madden '10 and it's almost September before he shakes himself, mentally, and realizes he's been hiding.

He starts reading some of the scripts then, hates ninety-nine percent of them and begs his agent to find him something he can really sink his teeth into. He's tired of being the pretty boy, tired of working the heart throb angle, tired of being the teen idol; he wants to be able to fucking *act* for a change. She stammers a little at that but he hangs up before she can object, throws some clothes in a bag and heads out, grill of his truck pointed east, sun in his mirrors.

He spends a week at home in Richardson, sleeping in, tormenting his sister's new boyfriend, eating his mom out of house and home, playing a few rounds of golf with his dad and some old high school buddies and plying his nieces and nephew with sugar and lots of money spent at Toy'R'Us before sending them home.

It feels good, right and he's a bit reluctant to leave after the week he's allowed himself to indulge in this. But Richardson isn't home anymore and Jensen isn't even sure that L.A. is. He heads back to the coast, detours through Flagstaff on the way and stands at the edge of the North Rim and wonders if Dean ever made it here, if he ever stood shoulder to shoulder with Sam and felt small and filled with awe and humbled and full of wonder all at the same instant, like a surge of electricity through your soul.

He buys a post card in a tiny ramshackle road side store, doodles a crude drawing on the back, and gets as far as addressing it to Jared before he shoves it in his glove box, along with a half a box used of condoms that he's certain have expired, a myriad of ketchup packets, soy sauce and god only knows what else.

When he gets back to his place, there's a surprise waiting for him via his agent. It's an offer to do a play in New York, a really good dramatic piece and Jensen can feel the hair on the back of his neck raise as he reads; it's that good. It's off-Broadway and there's no guarantee for how long it will run but he doesn't think, just calls his agent and tells her he'll do it.

It doesn't take much to pack up his house - most of the important stuff he'd never unpacked from Vancouver. It hardly takes any time at all to pack the rest of his clothes, his kitchen and his living room and then hire some movers. He sells his truck to a friend of Steve's and finds the post card he bought and never sent to Jared jammed in the back of the glove box when he's cleaning it out. The corner's bent, writing smudged now, but it makes him smile. He sticks it in the box of things he's keeping along with four pairs of sunglasses, a handful of CDs and a half a pack of Marlboro's and doesn't think about it again for a long time.

Within three weeks, he's living entirely out of boxes and sleeping on the floor for the last few nights before he leaves, his bed and his couch and a few other pieces of furniture on their way cross-country. He thinks he should probably be more scared or anxious about having packed up his entire life, everything he'd known since he was about eighteen and heading to a city he's only ever visited briefly. But he feels exhilarated and like he's on the precipice of something great.

He's looking forward to a cold nip in the air and frost and the seasons changing. Coming from Texas, it's not something he knew to miss until he'd spent an entire year or so working in Vancouver. But he misses it now in L.A., the trees looking much the same as they always do, even though it's the beginning of October. He can't wait to see the leaves changing in Central Park and maybe buy himself a new coat. He scratches idly at his beard, now trimmed, the last morning he spends in his Studio City house and smiles as he stands at his kitchen counter for the last time drinking a cup of coffee from the gas station on the corner and figures he'll keep it for awhile.

...

Hey, man. Haven't heard from you in awhile. Calling to see what's up, how that Michael Bay shoot went. Lots of explosions and shit, I bet. Anyway, I'm in the Big Apple. It's fucking insane man. My apartment is so tiny I don't even know if you'd fit in here with me. It's weird... don't miss L.A. Or not yet. Maybe I will. I do miss that awesome Thai place that we always ate at. Remember? I think... aw, hell, I don't even know. Listen to me, getting all introspective on your voice mail and shit. Gimme a call when you get this, Mister Movie Star. I... I miss ya, man.

Click.

...

He signs a six month lease on a teeny, tiny apartment in Brooklyn, not even thinking about trying for one in Manhattan proper, and hopes that the play lasts long enough for him to make enough money to pay for it. He has three weeks until rehearsals start and he spends them painting his walls (bathroom a pale green, living room a deep red, bedroom a blue, kitchen a stark white), unpacking his stuff, wandering around his new neighborhood and trying to grasp the subway system.

He doesn't do too badly with the first three things; he gets his apartment painted by the Saturday after he arrives at JFK on a non-stop flight from LAX. He's exhausted, covered in paint and thinks he might have permanently damaged his back but the walls look fucking good. He manages to get most of his stuff unpacked the week after that, with the exception of the box of Playboys that he still has no earthly idea *what* to do with, and does a pretty good job of finding a grocery store and an awesome little Italian restaurant within four blocks of his place.

The subway though... That gives him some problems. He manages to end up in Secaucus the first time he takes the train, not even sure how the hell that happened, and Long Island the next. He avoids the subway for a while after that but cabs are too fucking expensive so the morning of his first rehearsal, he sucks it up and heads down into the subway station. His chest is filled with a sense of accomplishment when he steps out onto the street he actually *meant* to and he smiles, digging his hands further into the pockets of his corduroy jacket, making a mental note to head to Macy's or somewhere later and find a decent winter coat.

October is fast giving way to November and it's evident in the air and the angle of the sun, harsh and bright in the early morning as Jensen makes his way to the theater. He tugs the strap of his bag higher on his shoulder, iPod and the sheaf of papers that are his script, highlighted and scribbled on to within an inch of their lives, secure within. He takes a deep breath as he stands in front of the building where he'll be opening a play as the headliner in six weeks and then straightens his shoulders, opens the door and goes in, head held high.

...

Hey. So. I hear through the grape vine you're in Japan doing a shoot for some movie with Bill Murray and Owen Wilson. Don't forget about us little people when you start hobnobbin' with all them Oscar winners, ya hear me, Jared?

I started rehearsals on my play earlier this week. Things seem to be going good. Don't get lost on the subway anymore. And shut up - like your ass would have an easier time figuring that shit out.

So yeah. Not much else goin' on. Still getting' adjusted. Listenin' to my momma bitch at me daily because I won't be makin' it home for Christmas this year. You know, the usual.

Gimme a call, man.

Click.

...

The play opens two weeks before Christmas to rave reviews. One of the many, many reporters who comes to interview him invites him out to brunch the following day after their short interview. Jensen agrees, feeling a little unsure but wanting despite his shy nature to get out there and make new friends, maybe start building a life in this strange city that seems to pulse with life in a way L.A. or Vancouver never did. George, the reporter, works for a small, independent paper based in the Village and reminds Jensen of a kid he knew in high school that was big into the AV Squad. He doesn't tell George that though; not until much, much later and only under the influence of tequila.

He shows up at the place George told him the next day at eleven, the sun watery and the air biting cold as he makes his way inside. He stomps his feet to try and get some feeling back while he undoes the buttons on his brand-new pea coat before he spots George in a booth towards the back, along with two girls. The one is tall, willowy, blonde and absently scribbling on the back of one of the paper placemats. The other is what Jensen thinks his dad would call a firecracker; short dark hair streaked with blue and purple, piercings, a wicked smile and warm eyes. She's leaning on George's shoulder, cupping a steaming mug between hands covered with her sweater sleeves.

George spies Jensen and waves him over, the blonde finally looking up and scooting over to make room for him on her side of the booth. She smiles, her ice blue eyes twinkling at him, then goes back to her place mat before the introductions can be made. Jensen shrugs out of his jacket and takes in the rest of the diner - because restaurant is a little much for this place.

He laughs to himself and eyes George.

"Thought you said this was brunch. I was expecting something a little more fancy than cracked red vinyl and paper placemats."

George laughs a bit sheepishly and his cheeks flush pink under his tortoiseshell glasses.

"Well, we say Sunday brunch but all it usually means is greasy food to counteract all of the drinking and debauchery that usually goes on the night before," George admits, the girl leaning on his shoulder nodding in silent agreement, eyes closed now and upon further inspection, Jensen notices she looks a bit green around the edges. George looks down at her fondly and then back at Jensen, his smile fading.

"Oh, man! How stupid of me. I forgot to introduce you. This lump on my shoulder is Emma, my roommate and that," he points to the blonde still writing and oblivious to the world around her, "is Andi, Emma's childhood best friend who is also a singer slash songwriter. You'll have to excuse her; she's been inspired by something on her way here and had to get it all down before she lost it."

Jensen smiles, noting the easy way George and Emma touch and lean together. He suspects there is a bit more to it than just 'roommates.' He signals at the waitress as he turns his coffee mug over and thinks Dean would like this place. Once his cup is full, he nods his head to his right, at Andi, who is now nibbling on her pen and tapping a gentle rhythm out with her other hand.

"Couple of my friends in L.A. are musicians. Not that odd for me," George smiles at that and Emma opens bleary eyes that suddenly widen as she gets a good look at Jensen. She flushes a bit and then sits up straighter.

"God. I know George told me he invited you but I never made the connection until... Jesus. You're Eric Brady!" she says and then looks embarrassed that she even knows who that is.

Jensen groans comically and snags a laminated menu from the table top.

"Yeah. That was me. Ages and ages ago." He pauses, looks up from deciding between sunny side up or scrambled. "You a fan of the show?"

Emma grimaces and nods. "Sort of. My gram used to watch me after school until my mom got off work at five. Used to watch it ever day of my life, until I was about nineteen and in college. I..." she blushes furiously now. "I have to admit to maybe having a small crush on you back then."

Jensen laughs and feels his own cheeks heat.

"I won't hold that against you if you won't hold my terrible acting back then against me."

Emma hoots with laughter at that and agrees, hears that he's improved, at least that's what George says. Then suddenly, Andi is out of her song writing trance and the waitress is pestering them for their orders and Jensen finds himself really enjoying the afternoon they spend together.

...

Hey, Jared. Just callin' to wish you a Merry Christmas. You're probably down in Texas, knee deep in cousins and presents and your momma's cookies, but... Just wanted to call ya, see what was up. Haven't heard from you in ages.

Play opened coupla weeks ago. Doing real good. Getting plenty of great reviews. So I might actually be employed for awhile. Imagine that!

Met some nice people - eclectic but nice. One of them is a musician - I just can't seem to get away from them, man. Emma's this cute little waitress slash actress. She's about half your size but dude, I bet she could take you down. She's fierce. George is this reporter - he interviewed me right after the show opened, how I met them all. They're havin' me over for Christmas dinner.

I'm on my way out now. But. Just wanted to call. Maybe talk to ya for a few. But. You're obviously busy.

Miss ya. Give the family all my love.

Click.

...

Emma and George and Andi absorb Jensen into their little ragtag family over the next few months, starting with having him over for Christmas, Jensen in awe of Manhattan decked out to resemble a winter wonderland for the occasion. He misses his family, his nieces and nephews and parents and siblings but there's just no way he can take time to fly down to Texas with the play. They say they understand and are proud of him but he still sends mounds and mounds of presents via Fed Ex, Andi laughing at him with her eyes as she helps him lug them to the store.

Time sort of starts going faster and faster after that. Jensen gets into a routine with the play and brunch on weekends and catching the last set of Andi's shows on nights after he's done at the playhouse, the smell of the heavy stage make-up still clinging to his skin. Emma tries to teach him to skate at Rockefeller Center, claiming that since she's a struggling actress cum waitress that it's only fair to perpetuate yet another New York City cliché. Jensen bruises his ass and his ego spectacularly all while Emma catches it on her digital camera.

Before he knows it, the snow is melting, the days are getting longer and his lease is up, April blooming bright and fresh and a bit chilly. George and Emma help him find a cheap place not too far from their apartment and he ropes all three of them, plus a few of Emma's co-workers and his fellow cast mates into helping him move one weekend. His new apartment faces east and gets the morning sun. Jensen loves getting up and just standing at his counter, drinking his coffee and watching the city hum and whirl right outside the thin glass of his window.

Around the same time that he moves, he drops his old agent and finds a new one, based in New York. The play is still going strong, in its fourth month now, and he's starting to like New York and the way he feels here. During one of their first meetings, Sylvia, his new agent, starts making noise about him maybe doing Shakespeare in the Park next year. Jensen sits there a bit dumbfounded, thinking back to that moment in L.A., wanting to be seen for more than just his looks and his resume dotted with roles on teenage dramas and horror flicks and thinks *finally*.

She suggests he should maybe start to take some acting classes in the Village; expounds on how acting is an ever-evolving craft and only actors who wished to remain stagnant refused the offer of new knowledge. Jensen inwardly rolls his eyes at that, figures she's probably just quoting James Lipton or something. But at brunch that Sunday he asks Emma about a few of the classes she attends and by June, he's going a few nights a week to workshops with Emma and a few without her.

He makes the mistake of signing up for an improvisational comedy class around that time and regrets it about fifteen minutes into the first session. Remembers when he'd do press junkets or interviews or even conventions for *Supernatural*, how it all went so much more smoothly when he had Jared to play off of. He realizes he's just not that good at thinking on his feet and quits

after the first week. He knows he has pretty good comedic timing, but rules out being on any improv shows anytime soon.

Soon enough, August rolls around and his play ends its run. He feels a little sad, tears up at the wrap party but feels proud regardless. They had an eight month run; not too shabby. His parents had come to see a few shows back in May and his dad had never looked so proud as when he'd come backstage after the final curtain call, his eyes shining, and Jensen had blushed and hugged him, hard.

His agent gets him a guest role on Law & Order, a five episode arc as a beat cop involved in a death of a suspect in police custody. He does so well in the first two episodes, they ask him back for an extra two for a total of seven and he jumps at the chance. He thinks he's found his niche in the theater, but if NBC wants to help him pay his bills until his next play starts rehearsal, which isn't until after the New Year, that's just fine by him.

...

Hey, jerk. So I hear you were in town for an interview and didn't even bother to call me? I know, I know, it was just a short stop-over until your flight left for London but I don't even rate a phone call? Come on, Padalecki. That's just low.

Anyway, my new play starts rehearsal tomorrow. Give me a call or something. That is, if you still remember my number.

Click.

...

Barefoot in the Park opens on his thirty-fifth birthday with his entire family in the audience, cheering him on. The cast and crew throw a party for him at an Irish pub down the street, his mom and dad dancing cheek to cheek to some old song he can't place after they've had about five or six beers. Each. He insists that he's too old for this shit, loudly, to anyone who will listen and a few who won't. This only makes his leading lady, a pixie-like brunette that is at least ten years his junior chuckle and lean in close, her hot breath tickling along his collarbone.

He just wraps an arm around her, used to people invading his personal space after years and years of getting molested by Jared in both private and public venues. He points at his parents, who are now attempting to do the Macarena with Emma and Andi, and slurs to the girl sitting practically in his lap.

"S my mom's favorite play. She loves Neil Simon. Why I took the part," he gestures wildly with his glass, amber liquid sloshing over the sides and getting her dress damp. He swears, vehemently and she just giggles, eyes dark as she licks her lips, tangling their fingers together.

"Come on, birthday boy. You can help me... dry off," she murmurs and his sluggish brain finally catches up with the situation and Jensen feels suddenly, horribly sober and every one of his thirty

five years. He gently extricates himself from her grasp and kisses her cheek, chastely.

“It’s not that I’m not flattered or that you’re unattractive because, believe me, you are very, *very* attractive, I’m just...” he gets out as her face crumples in defeat. She waves a hand and flops back against the seat next to him.

“No, I get it. Leigh in costumes told me it was useless but,” she pauses and looks up at him from under heavily made up lids, “I had to try.” She looks so very young and Jensen slings an arm companionably around her delicate shoulders.

“It’s okay, no harm, no foul.” Then the rest of her statement sinks in and he turns his head to look at her. “Wait. Why did Leigh tell you it was useless?”

She smiles and pats his leg and then flaps her hand a little. “Oh you know, the whole gay thing. I didn’t believe her but. Well. She was right about the last guy I tried to hook up with. I should just listen to her from now on.”

She continues to babble on, about this cast member or the play, how well she thinks it’ll do, her parents back home in Wisconsin, Emma’s crazy chicken dance but Jensen doesn’t hear her over the low buzzing in his ears.

He sits there, in the dim interior of Murphy's Pub and thinks back to Tania and Joanna and Danneel and suddenly, suddenly, everything makes sense. It’s a quiet moment of revelation, and he snorts as George plunks down another round of shots on the scarred wooden table top. *Hell of a thing to realize in your mid-thirties, Ackles*, he thinks to himself as he knocks back another shot, knowing he’s going to regret all the alcohol come morning and not caring one bit.

The rest of the night passes in a blur of drinking and dancing drunkenly with his sister to some bubble gum pop song he vaguely remembers from his high school years, and then eventually flopping down face first on Emma and George’s couch, while the two of them disappear into her room to fool around.

Despite the earth-shattering realization that he’s more than likely bisexual and well into his mid-thirties, Jensen still thinks it was a pretty decent birthday.

As he starts to pass out, edges of his mind going pleasantly fuzzy and white, he thinks the only thing that could’ve made it better was Jared being there.

It’s his last thought until morning.

...

Hey, Jared. You missed one hell of a party the other night. My mom and dad had a little bit too much to drink, embarrassed Mac by making out in the street on the way back to their hotel - it was great. I’m just glad I wasn’t around to see it.

Play’s doing well. But you’d know that if you’d answer your damn phone every once in awhile,

jackass.

Click

...

March slides into April without much fuss and the city starts to perk up, the drab grays and whites of winter giving way to vibrant pinks and shocking oranges as flowers bloom, as the city and its inhabitants welcome spring with open arms.

Jensen stops in at a local coffee shop one day after an acting class and his order gets mixed up with another customer's. The guy, who turns out to be named Jason, chuckles as he and Jensen switch cups, dark brown eyes twinkling, mouth turning up in a smile to reveal even white teeth, and Jensen feels a pull in his gut. He swallows his hot coffee a little too hastily and ends up choking a bit. Jason pats him on the back and Jensen feels himself flush and wonders...

He doesn't have to wonder long thankfully. As soon as his coughing fit is over, Jason tilts his head towards the tables set up outside and asks Jensen to join him while they finish their drinks. Jensen finds himself smiling widely and accepting.

Jason, he discovers, is the manager of an art gallery in SoHo, a native New Yorker, two months younger than Jensen and very, very interested in seeing Jensen again for dinner or drinks or *something*. Jensen catches himself blushing but writes his number on the back of a napkin anyway, trying to hide how badly his hand is shaking, how much he wants to just lean over and kiss Jason, see if he tastes as good as Jensen thinks he will.

They go out to dinner that weekend and Jason is the one to make the first move, kissing Jensen delicately yet deliberately outside Jensen's apartment building. Jensen is shivering, hard, by the time he pulls back and Jason stops kissing him, smiling and promises to call Jensen the next day before he's gone, down the street.

He explains to Jason about his birthday epiphany over coffee at the place they met two days after their first date and Jason smiles and pats Jensen's hand. He promises to try and not do anything that spooks Jensen. When Jensen asks why he's willing to be so patient, Jason just winks and says, "Oh, I think it'll be worth it."

Jensen blushes and Jason chuckles, not meanly, and leans over, brushes a light kiss over the burning skin high on Jensen's right cheek. Jensen smiles at him from under his lashes and they spend the rest of their time together sipping their coffee and sharing secret glances as the sun sets slowly over the building across the street.

...

Jared, man. So. It's April. Play's doin' okay - not as good as the last one but Sylvia, she's my new agent, thinks I might be able to get a part in Shakespeare in the Park. I hear that Schreiber guy is doing it again this year.

Met this guy Jason a couple of weeks ago. He's pretty cool. Been takin' me to the Met and stuff. He couldn't believe I've lived here almost two years and never made it up to all those museums yet. He's been showing me around the city, where to eat and stuff. Lots of new places I can show ya if, well. If you ever decide to visit.

I'm meeting Jason in a few to go get something to eat. I'll... talk to you when I talk to you, man.

Click

...

The second week of May, Jensen takes Jason out for dinner to celebrate his birthday. When Jason invites Jensen up to his place for coffee - the light in his eyes making it clear that coffee is the absolute *last* thing on his mind - Jensen accepts, his stomach fluttering with both nerves and anticipation. Jason had been great about not pushing Jensen any further than he was willing, content to make out and grope for hours on his or Jensen's couch, both of them laughing afterwards like giddy school kids. But Jensen finds himself unable to wait any longer, wants to know what it's like, wants to feel all of Jason's skin pressing him into Jason's bed.

Jason sucks him off that night, pushing Jensen down once they're naked, after they kissed their way through his spacious apartment. Jensen bites his lip practically bloody at how fucking fantastic Jason's mouth feels around his cock, distantly wonders, in the part of his brain that isn't focused entirely on *hot, wet, tight, oh god, more, god, more* why the hell he waited so long to let Jason do this. He comes after long minutes, his head pushing back against the pillow, body arching as he empties himself into Jason's mouth. He collapses against the now sweat-damp sheets, panting as Jason crawls his way up to Jensen's mouth, lips swollen and curved in an inviting smirk.

Jensen manages to cup a hand around his nape, pulling Jason into a lush kiss, before moving so they're on their sides, facing one another. He keeps kissing Jason as he traces hands down over his flat chest, flatter stomach and then, down, down, fingers tangling in dark hair before reaching Jason's flushed, wet cock. Jason makes a choked off noise into Jensen's mouth and Jensen smiles, fumbling a bit before finding a rhythm, wondering at the smooth feel of Jason's cock, the plump roundness of the head, the way Jason's entire body jerks when Jensen rubs right under the crown with his thumb.

All in all, he doesn't think it's too bad for his first ever hand job. A little sloppy, not that much technique but Jason comes hard, clutching at Jensen's biceps before kissing him deeply, so he counts it as a success.

They fall asleep curled together under the sheets and Jensen wakes early the next morning, the sun shining brightly through the Venetian blinds. Jason is in the shower, singing a Bob Dylan song terribly off tune and Jensen smiles, gets out of bed to pad quietly into the bathroom. He joins Jason in the shower and, he decides, watching as Jason falls completely apart for him with water running in rivulets down his body, that all he needs to improve is some practice. He says as

much to Jason as they kiss under the shower spray and Jason chuckles before slicking Jensen's own cock with a soap-filled palm. Jensen sucks in a deep breath and Jason smiles.

"I think more practice can be arranged."

The only response Jensen can muster is a low moan.

...

Hey man. Listen, I know you're doing that new Ang Lee flick but I got a part in A Midsummer Night's Dream - fuckin' Shakespeare, can you believe it? It runs in July, right around your birthday. Was... Ah, hell, Jared. I want you to come in, see me. Spend a few days - I can show you around, maybe get drunk. Want you to meet Emma and George. Think Andi might even be in town.

And... I know Jason wants to meet you, too. I talk about ya all the time, man. Think about you too. I fuckin' miss you. I hate this shit. I hate always havin' to carry on one-sided conversations with your damn voice mail.

Just. Fuckin' call me or something, alright, Jared?

Click

...

Jensen is ecstatic when he lands the role of Puck for the July run of Shakespeare in the Park. He walks around in a haze for three days after he gets the call. Emma teases him mercilessly when he stops by her work for lunch, but he can see the pride in her gaze as she asks him how many doors he's walked into that day.

Jason takes him out to Tavern on the Green to celebrate and that night, Jensen lets Jason fuck him for the first time ever. It's different, a little weird and it hurts more than he thought it would but he knows he's going to do it again. Soon. It was intimate in a way he'd never experienced before with sex, with any of his ex-girlfriends, and unwittingly, as he's lying beside Jason in the dark that night, he finds himself thinking about Jared and what he might be up to at that very minute.

He starts rehearsals not long after that, finds himself working with Liev Schreiber, who is playing the part of Demetrius. The weeks and days go past in a flurry of rehearsals and costume fittings and outings with George and Emma to Montauk and dates with Jason to a few plays on Broadway and the two of them sleeping together at Jensen's apartment more nights than not.

The play opens the last Friday in July and Jensen feels so nervous that he actually ends up puking in a bush minutes before his cue. But once he's out there, among the other actors, everything else fades away, like always, and he *is* Puck, he inhabits the character and forgets how to be Jensen Ackles for a bit.

Before he knows it, it's over, the audience is giving them a standing ovation and Jason is gifting him with a huge bouquet of flowers. They both laugh a little at the corniness of it all but Jensen appreciates the gesture and later, in the cab ride back to his place, shows it by blowing Jason in the backseat, high on adrenaline and oblivious to the leering of the cab driver.

They tumble into Jensen's building, hands grabbing and tugging at each other's clothes. They're giddy and horny and Jensen pushes Jason back onto his bed, once they're both finally naked and proceeds to fuck himself on Jason's cock until they're both trembling and sated and exhausted.

Jensen wakes up to the smell of bacon and coffee the next morning and crawls out of bed with a small wince. He feels sore and exhilarated and in love with life. He tugs on a pair of sweatpants and makes his way out into the kitchen where Jason is making breakfast, clad only in a pair of boxers and wearing his glasses. Jensen feels his dick stir in his pants, idly interested, and comes up behind Jason, wrapping his arms around his waist, propping his head on Jason's shoulder.

"Smells good," he murmurs, licking a stripe up Jason's neck and tasting sweat and Jason and him. He smiles when Jason shivers, presses his hips against Jason's ass and loves the way Jason's back feels against his chest. Jason has just turned around to start kissing Jensen in earnest, his hands dipping under the elastic of Jensen's ancient sweatpants when Jensen's doorbell starts to buzz. And then continues to buzz and buzz and buzz.

They laugh, breathing shaky, and press their foreheads together for a moment before separating, Jason going back to fixing breakfast, Jensen padding softly to the door. He swings it open and feels his jaw practically hit the floor when he sees Jared standing there, hair shorter than it's been since he was on Gilmore Girls, duffel over one shoulder, cheeks scruffy and with circles under his eyes.

He beams at Jensen and Jensen shakes himself out of his stupor to grab Jared and hug him, tight. Jared squeezes him back just as hard, nearly picking him up. They're still laughing when they break apart and Jensen claps Jared on the shoulder as he steps back, lets the other man inside.

"Jesus, Jared! What in the hell are you doin' here?" he says as soon as the door is closed and locked again.

Jared lets his duffel fall to the floor and shrugs, beaming. "Finished up my shoot, thought I'd swing by, see this guy I used to know. He started out doing soaps but now he's an actual thespian and shit? Doing Shakespeare? Maybe you've heard of him..."

Jensen chuckles and punches Jared hard in the arm, once.

"Fuckin' asshole. I haven't seen you since. God, since before I left L.A."

Jared turns sheepish. "Sorry 'bout that man. Sort of... Buried myself in work. Was tough to be done with the show and not see you every day." He shrugs again. "Not the best way of dealing but, shit, Jen. You know me."

Jensen beams and grabs Jared for another hug, this one shorter and less bone-crushing. “Yeah, Gigantor. Guess I do.”

Right as Jensen lets go of Jared, Jason peeks his head around the corner, bare-chested, his hair rumpled.

“Hey, breakfast is ready,” he says, smiling at Jared. Jensen nods and turns back to look at Jared, maybe make the introductions, but he stops before he can even get started, raising an eyebrow in question at the weird look that is now written all over Jared’s features.

“Jesus, Jensen! What the hell, man?” he says, trying obviously to whisper and failing miserably. And unless Jensen is mistaken, there’s a thread of anger in his voice. “Who the fuck is that??”

Jensen feels his hackles rise at that, and he straightens himself to his full height, crossing his arms across his chest.

“That’s Jason. I mentioned him in one of my messages.” Jared scowls and Jensen frowns. He’s not sure what the hell Jared is so pissy about but goddammit, he doesn’t have much of a right to be. “What the hell is your issue, Jared?”

Jared snorts and goes to answer, but right then, Jason steps into the entryway and lays a soft hand on Jensen’s arm. He’s completely dressed, although his hair is messy, and he’s still wearing his eyeglasses.

"What the hell is *my* issue, Jensen?" Jared says, raising his eyebrows and looking pointedly at where Jason's hand is resting on Jensen's wrist.

Jensen can feel Jason shifting from foot to foot behind him a second before Jason sighs and murmurs, "I'm gonna head out." He presses a chaste kiss to Jensen's kiss, ignoring Jensen's protesting noises, and turns to nod stiffly at Jared, who is standing against the opposite wall, jaw clenched, face wiped clean of his earlier scowl, features unreadable. "Got a few early meetings with potential investors. I'll call you later, okay?"

Jensen nods, kisses Jason on the corner of his mouth and waits until the door clicks quietly shut behind him to lay into Jared.

“What in the fucking hell is your issue, Padalecki? Is it the guy thing? Never figured you for a homophobe,” he spits out, pissed off and hurt, wondering if he’s going to lose one of the best friends he ever had. Wonders if he hasn’t already lost him.

Jared rolls his eyes and snorts. “I don’t give a good goddamn who you fuck, Ackles. But you could’ve at least had the decency to tell me you were *fucking* him. And having sleepovers and playing house and... Fuck.” Jared hisses the last word out and then paces a few steps into the living room and back, hand raking angrily through his hair.

Jensen snorts and shakes his head, the anger shooting through his system making his heart pound and his hands shake. "You know what, Jared? Fuck. You. In the two years since the show ended, I think I've talked to you a total of fifteen minutes on the phone. I haven't seen you once. You do *not* get to act all offended and pissed off because I didn't come out and tell you what Jason was to me exactly." He pauses to take a deep, shuddering breath. "Maybe, just maybe, if you picked up the fucking phone once in awhile and actually talked to me, had an actual *conversation*, I could've told you." He waves his hand in an agitated gesture at Jared, ignoring the way the other man is shooting daggers. "Not something you say in a voice mail, man."

Jared shakes his head and laughs once, mirthlessly, looking defeated, and a little hurt, which makes Jensen's blood pressure rise a bit. What the hell does he have to be hurt over?

"Whatever." He brushes past Jensen and picks up his stuff, motions jerky and stilted with anger. "I knew this was a mistake." He slings the bag up over his shoulder and opens the door, pauses to wave back at Jensen, eyes dark and mouth turned down.

"See ya around, Ackles." And with that, he slams the door shut behind him. Jensen turns around and punches the wall hard, instantly regrets it when his hand starts to hurt and then slides down to the floor, wondering what the fuck just happened.

He spends the rest of the day in bed, not getting out until it's time to leave for the performance and he feels off-kilter all night. Thankfully, he manages to not flub any lines or miss any cues but it's a close call. Jason collects him afterward, eyes questioning but not asking anything outright about the little scene at Jensen's apartment that morning. They head back to Jason's place that night and despite all of Jason's valiant efforts - including an attempted blow job that Jensen thinks would normally make his knees give out - he can't get it up.

Jason is understanding and okay with it, content to let Jensen just jerk him off and then go to sleep, but Jensen can't; lies awake besides Jason all night, staring out his tiny bedroom window, listening to him snore and wondering why Jared's reaction to finding Jensen's boyfriend in his apartment so unsettling.

Jason doesn't say anything the next day, either, when all Jensen can talk about is Jared and their time in Vancouver and how Jared's normally nicer and even though Jensen knows he's fixating, he can't stop himself. For some reason, it's essential that Jason understand how important Jared is to Jensen.

It isn't until after his performance that night that he gets how loud and clear his message was received.

After the play, Jason waits for Jensen to change and clean up a little and then they start to head out. He starts to hail a cab but Jensen stops him, insists he wants to walk instead.

They meander past the Nature Observatory and then down towards the lake. Jensen pauses on Bow Bridge, leaning back to take in the bright glow of the city around them. Jason has his hands in the pockets of his denim jacket and Jensen shivers in his short sleeves. Wishes for a moment

he'd brought his own jacket before Jason looks at him oddly and settles next to him against the railing.

"So. About Jared and what happened the other day," Jason says, voice soft.

Jensen nods, picks idly at a spot on his fingernail, unsure of what to say, how to excuse Jared's behavior to Jason.

Jason bumps his shoulder into Jensen's and doesn't speak until Jensen is looking him in the eye.

"You didn't tell me," he murmurs quietly and Jensen feels his face screw up in confusion even as he stumbles over his words.

"Tell you... Oh, no, no. Jason, we're not - Jared isn't - I mean, we're just friends. I think," Jensen sighs, tips his head back. "Fuck, I don't even know now."

Jason chuckles without much humor.

"Think you do."

Jensen turns his head, eyes Jason speculatively. "What do you mean?"

Jason sighs and shifts his feet a little. "It's sort of obvious when you talk about him how you feel. I was," he pauses and swallows. "I was always hoping he'd never show up. That you'd just get tired of having this one-sided relationship but. If wishes were horses, right?"

Jensen knows his face must be completely blank; he can't quite comprehend what Jason is saying.

"You're in love with him, Jensen," Jason says, eyes and voice gentle. Jensen immediately shakes his head 'no' in protest but Jason grabs his shoulders and makes him turn so they're standing toe to toe. "No, Jensen, listen to me. I didn't think you knew. Otherwise, you wouldn't have been doing whatever it is we've been doing with me. You're not that kind of guy. But trust me. You are in love with him. And I'm not sure what's there on his part but," he traces a soft line up Jensen's neck with his thumb, seeming to savor the moment, the feel of Jensen under his hands. "There's something there. I don't know if he knows what's there or if it's just friendship but, Jensen. You gotta figure it out or it's gonna eat you up and ruin every relationship you have. Including the one you have with Jared."

Jensen swallows hard and takes a shuffling step forward, hooks a shaking finger in the belt loop of Jason's jeans.

"You're..." he has to swallow again, his mouth gone bone dry. "You're breakin' up with me."

It isn't a question.

Jason just nods and tugs Jensen forward a little, places a gentle kiss on his forehead.

“Yeah. Yeah, I am.” Jensen thinks those words should hurt more but they don’t. Not as much as the fight that morning with Jared had hurt.

“Still wanna be friends?” Jensen says and then groans, putting his head down against Jason’s shoulder. “God, could I be any lamer?”

Jason laughs and pats Jensen on the back. “Not lame. And yeah. I’d like that. But I...” He swallows, loudly and Jensen raises his head to look at him. Jason looks more affected than Jensen is or thought Jason would be.

“I need some time, okay?”

He presses a kiss to Jensen’s lips, short and bittersweet and then turns around, walking west towards the busy street.

Jensen stands there, watching him leave until he’s just a dark shadow moving amongst the trees and then he stuffs his hands in the pockets of his jeans and wanders aimlessly around the park. He ends up at Strawberry Fields, staring down at the ground, at all the flowers and pictures and candles.

Ends up wondering what the hell he's supposed to do now.

...

Hey. Um. Hi, Jensen. Bet you're surprised to hear from me, huh? Listen... I. I um. I wanna apologize about... ya know. I was totally out of line and you're so, so right. I should've kept in touch, called you more. I'm a punk - that's not news. But, um.

Anyway. I was wondering if you had a coupla free days around the end of this month. My movie's premiering in L.A. and I was wondering if you wanted to fly out, have a guys weekend. Or something.

Jason... You can bring Jason if you want. He's more than welcome.

Talk to ya later, man.

Click.

...

The weekend after Jason breaks up with him, after the play is done, Emma comes over with a tub of Cherry Garcia and a stack of movies. Jensen answers the door in a pair of ratty basketball shorts and an old tee shirt. He gladly accepts the ice cream but raises an eyebrow at the movies.

“You know, Emma. I’m not *really* a girl,” he comments as she makes her way inside, toeing off her shoes and flopping down on his couch.

She rolls her eyes at him when he sits down next to her and waves the plastic cases in his face. Jensen finally looks at the titles and flushes. He should’ve known Emma wouldn’t let him down. She smiles and smacks him affectionately upside the head before making him get up and put the first *Die Hard* in the DVD player. Jensen gets some spoons for the ice cream out and they settle in for a long afternoon of John McClane and watching him blow shit up.

Once the fourth installment is over and the credits are rolling, the ice cream long since devoured and the sun hanging low in the sky, Emma turns to Jensen, tucking her tiny feet underneath her on the couch.

“So. Wanna tell me what’s up? Because, dude, I know you liked Jason but he’s *so* not the reason you’re being all Mopey McEmoPants right now.”

Jensen snorts, rolls his head against the back of the couch to stare at her. “You’re weird, you know that Emma?”

She snorts back at him and then pokes him. “Not news, Ackles. Now. ‘Fess up.”

Jensen sighs and turns the television off.

“Jason broke up with me because he thinks I’m in love with Jared.”

He looks at Emma after making that statement and expects to see shock or dismay or... or *something* on her face. Anything but the ‘well, duh’ look she’s sporting. It fades after a minute and she scoots closer to Jensen, laying a reassuring hand on his arm.

“Oh, Jesus. You didn’t know! We all thought you knew!” Jensen straightens up at that, shooting her a look.

“‘We?’ Who is this ‘we,’ Emma?” She shrugs before answering.

“Me. George. Andi. Jason. Mac. The homeless guy at the corner, that skinny barista over at Starbucks. Jesus, Jensen, EVERYONE. Your face lights up whenever you talk about him.” She cups his cheeks then and stares deep in his eyes. “Listen, you may have liked Jason and liked what he could do with his cock,” Jensen felt his cheeks flush; he would probably never get used to Emma’s blunt mouth, “but everyone knew he wasn’t who you really wanted. We all just assumed...” She sighs and presses a kiss to his cheek. “It’s not important.”

Jensen clasps her hands in his and swallows. “No. Tell me.”

Emma sighs again. “We all just assumed that you either had tried in the past with him and it went bad and you were carrying a torch or you just didn’t wanna fuck up the friendship. We didn’t think you didn’t *even know*.”

Jensen laughs, sardonically and falls back to lean against the arm of the couch. He puts his left arm across his eyes and swallows, hard.

“I didn’t, Em,” he says, voice small. “I had no fuckin’ clue.”

...

Hey. It’s, uh, me. Got your message about the premiere. So if the offer still stands... I’ll be coming out on Thursday. Think you can manage to pick me up at the airport?

I’m... Shit, Jared. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about Jason, but, fuck. I didn’t think... I just didn’t think, alright?

So. See you in a few. Don’t forget me at LAX, man. I have your momma’s number in my cell and I’m not afraid to use it.

Click.

...

Jared’s waiting for Jensen at the baggage claim in LAX and they hug a bit awkwardly and then spend the first five minutes of the ride to Jared’s house sitting in silence before Jared starts laughing. Jensen joins in after a few moments and then it takes them almost the rest of the ride to calm down. When they get out of the truck in Jared’s driveway, Jared pulls Jensen into another hug, this one more genuine and like what Jensen is used to.

He tries to ignore how his heart races, or the way he clings to Jared’s back or, god, even the way he smells but it’s pretty much a losing battle.

Jared claps him on the back and grabs Jensen’s bags out of the bed.

“Missed ya, man.”

Jensen smiles and pushes his sunglasses up his nose.

“Missed you, too.”

...

Hey, Jenny! It’s Emma, I’m on my break, wanted to see how things were going out in LaLa Land with your big gay love. Call me after the premiere - if you see Shia LaBeouf, slip him my digits, okay? Oh, and wear that shirt I picked out for you, it brings out your eyes.

And remember! If Jared breaks your heart, I’ll be more than willing to kick the shit out of him for you. Love ya, sugar lips. See you in a few days! MWAH!

Click

...

Jensen gets Emma's message while they're in the limo on the way to the premiere, laughing quietly to himself as he deletes it. Jared is sitting next to him on the wide leather bench, Jared's agent and his publicist sitting opposite them. They hadn't spoken a word to either Jared or Jensen, instead spending all their time on the phones yelling at various minions and Jensen realizes how much he *doesn't* miss L.A. in that moment.

He's whisked off to wait for Jared inside the theater as soon as they arrive while Jared walks the red carpet solo, answering questions, posing for photographs and charming every last person he comes across. He finally makes it inside just as the house lights are being dimmed, and they're hurried to their seat by a timid looking usher.

Jensen is enthralled for the next two hours, the movie drawing him in and just keeping him there. Jared is phenomenal and Jensen tells him so afterwards at the reception for the cast and crew at a nearby hotel. The early murmurs are of nothing but good reviews so the party is full of good cheer and even better spirits.

By the time Jared and Jensen climb into Jared's limo, the sun is starting to peek up over the horizon and Jensen's drunker than he has been in a long damn time. Jared, it seems, isn't faring much better. He's got a bottle of champagne clutched in one hand and once they tumble inside the cool, dim interior of the Towne Car, he slumps against Jensen's shoulders and sighs.

Jensen pets his hair awkwardly and feels a surge of affection in his chest. He turns his head and presses a soft kiss into Jared's hair, right at the crown of his head. He doesn't think Jared notices, just snuggles closer to Jensen, and he laughs.

"I think I really, really missed you, you fucker," Jensen slurs and Jared giggles.

"Yeah, yeah. You just missed my ability to get you into A List parties."

Jensen pauses as if he's considering this, having fallen back into their easy banter over the two days he's been out in California with Jared.

The easy, light-hearted moment is gone though, once Jared straightens (or straightens as much as he can in his current state) and stares at Jensen.

"Jensen... I..." he trails off and Jensen feels the sharp bite of anxiety at the back of his throat.

"What is it, Jared?" he asks, running a hand up and down Jared's arm.

Jared sighs and then, the next thing Jensen knows, Jared is kissing him. It's sloppy and a little

too wet but, god, even drunk it's the best kiss Jensen's ever had. He knows, if he were a little bit more sober or a little less in love with Jared, that he'd be strong enough to turn away from Jared, to stop him. To make him see that this was just going to be a drunken mistake that could possibly ruin their friendship, which Jensen thinks might already be on shaky ground.

But Jensen isn't that strong or noble or, for that matter, that sober. So instead he opens his mouth to Jared's tongue and lets the other man press him back against the leather seat, the champagne bottle dropping forgotten to the floor as the kisses grow deeper and more intense. Jared whimpers into the kiss and Jensen runs a hand from Jared's nape down his back, trying to soothe him. Not long after, everything turns dirty, wet and hot. Jensen pulls back with a moan, panting a little as Jared starts to nibble on his throat, a huge hand working its way between them to cup Jensen's erection through the expensive fabric of his trousers. Jensen lets out a grunt at that and Jared chuckles before he starts to work open both of their zippers.

They're both laughing by the time they manage to undo belts and buttons and unzip zippers and push their underwear and pants down to mid-thigh, but their laughter dies soon after, Jared's eyes heavy with lust as he straddles Jensen's lap. Jared cups Jensen's head with his hands as he starts to kiss him again, huge cock dragging wetly against Jensen's hip, pubic hair and then, *oh, fuck*, against his own erection. They both moan at the feel and then Jared takes one hand and wraps it around both of them. Jensen lets his head thump back against the leather seat as Jared starts to jerk them – clumsy at first, but getting the hang of it soon enough.

Jensen runs his fingers through Jared's hair and arches into his touch, panting his name with every stroke. Jared has his head buried in Jensen's neck, sucking and licking at Jensen's pulse point as they climb higher and higher. With every movement of Jared's hand on their cocks, every slick slide, every time a rough spot on Jared's hands catches on sensitive skin, Jensen feels like there are fireworks going off inside of him and, god, he never wants it to fucking stop.

Jared starts panting harder, louder, interspersed with tiny little hitching moans that sound like Jensen's name, and Jensen thrusts up into his grip, trying to help him along. He grabs Jared's ass, cups his hands over it and Jared keens, spilling wet and hot between them, spurting all over their shirts. Jensen groans at the sight and Jared picks up his head long enough to smile dopily at Jensen before going back to sucking what's going to be one hell of a hickey come morning into the skin of Jensen's neck, all the while using his own come to slick Jensen's cock as Jared continues to stroke it.

All Jensen can do is sit there and take it, panting and overwhelmed by what's happening. Every stroke, every twist of Jared's hand is fucking perfection and Jensen can't help but wonder why he'd let it go this long, why they hadn't been doing this for years, god, Jared was a fucking expert at hand jobs.

He must've mumbled that last bit out loud because Jared chuckles against the skin of Jensen's neck and speeds his hand up, thumb swiping across the head of Jensen's cock, catching the pre-come gathering there and then rubbing around the bottom of the crown, nearly making Jensen swallow his tongue.

“I don’t know about an expert, Jen,” Jared murmurs in his ear, his strokes faster now, harder, with a definite goal in mind: to watch Jensen completely fucking lose it for him. “But maybe a natural. This *is* my first hand job.”

And with that, Jensen jerks, hard, and comes messily all over Jared’s hand and his own belly and the seat. He lets out a low moan as Jared continues to pump his cock, working him through it, gentling his touch as Jensen’s body shivers and arches with aftershocks. Jared finally takes his hand away, wiping it haphazardly on the floor before leaning back and pressing one last kiss to Jensen’s swollen lips. Jensen opens up his eyes and stares dazedly up at Jared, wondering if he had maybe bumped his head back at the theater and this was all some elaborate fantasy.

But just then, the car stops and the driver gets out, reality setting back in. Suddenly they're scrambling to right themselves, scavenging the limo for tissues, napkins, anything, to wipe the come off their clothes, their hands, the *seat*. They manage to make themselves semi-presentable – like the driver doesn’t know what they’ve been doing anyway, privacy screen or no privacy screen; neither of them had been exactly quiet. They watch as the red tail lights fade into the night and then start up the small incline to Jared’s house. They both start laughing at about the same time before stumbling inside the house and up to Jared’s room where they strip off their now clammy and sticky clothes and collapse into bed together.

Even as he falls asleep beside a naked and sated Jared, Jensen knows there was no way this is going to last.

...

Hello and thank you for calling American Airlines Reservation Services. My name is Candace; how can I be of service to you today?

...

Jensen knows even as he’s quietly calling a cab from Jared’s living room and sneaking out to head to LAX the next afternoon that it’s a shitty thing to do. Unfortunately he can’t help it. He woke up with Jared curled around him in bed, both of them still sticky and reeking of sex and had absolutely *freaked the fuck out*.

It was one thing to realize you were in love with your best friend of eight years; quite another to exchange drunken hand jobs in the back of a limo on the way home from said best friend’s big Hollywood movie premiere.

And yeah, okay. Jensen will admit that partially, it’s because he doesn’t want to have to deal with the look on Jared’s face when Jared ultimately tried to let him down easy. To explain to Jensen that it was a drunken mistake and that it could never happen again. Never mind the fact that Jensen will never, ever forget what Jared looks like, sounds like or, fuck, *feels* like when he comes or that it *did* mean something to Jensen.

He just can’t deal with that. If that makes him a pussy, he figures: so be it.

So by one o'clock that day, he's slumped in an aisle seat next to an overly friendly grandmother from Huntington, hung over and feeling like he's lost his best friend.

Which, he figures, he probably has.

...

Hey um. It's me. Uh, Jared. You... you left without saying goodbye or anything and. Shit, Jensen. I think... We need to talk, man. Gimme a call when you get this, okay?

Click.

...

Emma meets him at JFK with a huge hug and then a smack upside the head. As he rubs his aching scalp, she sighs and rubs his arm soothingly, mouth pulled down in a frown.

"You alright, Emmie?" he asks as they start to make their way to baggage claim.

She sighs as they wait for his luggage to appear on the carousel.

"No. God, Jensen. What the hell were you thinking?" She says, trying to keep quiet and not entirely succeeding. "I mean, fuck, I know you're in love with the guy but seriously. Drunken hand jobs in the back of a limo? Could be you any more like some bad teen movie?" Jensen furrows his brows, opens his mouth to start defending himself but Emma beats him to it, holding a hand up for silence and continuing to lecture.

"I know, I know. It just happened. Just. Shit, Jensen. I don't wanna see you get hurt, okay?" she sighs again and Jensen can see the pain in her eyes and, fuck, what an asshole he'd been, what a fucking jerk of a friend not to notice. Emma smiles at him, lips a bit wobbly. "Sleeping with the person you love who doesn't love you back doesn't make it hurt any less or go away any faster, honey. It just makes everything worse."

Jensen wraps an arm around her shoulders as the luggage from his flight starts to appear. He presses a kiss to her hair, ignores for both of their sakes the fact that Emma is surreptitiously wiping her eyes, and wonders how the hell George can be so blind.

Or, for that matter, himself.

He spots his battered suitcase and grabs it, taking Emma's hand as he heads towards the exit.

"Come on. Let's get some Chunky Monkey and then watch some shit get blowed up on TV."

Emma smiles at him, gratefully, while Jensen hopes that at least one of them will get the happy ending they deserve.

...

Hey. Look, Jensen. We gotta fucking talk about what happened, all right? Just. Don't shut me out, okay? I know I've been a shitty friend and a jerk but, fuck, I don't want to lose our friendship over... whatever the hell happened.

Call me, man.

Click.

...

August gives way to September and Jensen does a few more guest spots on Law & Order in between acting classes. He deliberately ignores all of Jared's calls, not sure of what the hell he wants to say, or what he needs to say or doesn't *want* to say so instead, he takes the coward's way out and he just doesn't say anything.

He spends a lot of time with Emma, confusing George, who can't figure out why Emma is suddenly giving him the cold shoulder. Jensen's tempted to tell him but in the end he doesn't. He feels a sense of solidarity with Emma, the victims of unrequited love and unwanted affections.

He knows he's being a bit melodramatic but he usually only has those thoughts after Emma has dragged him out to a bar and he's well on his way to being completely wasted.

When he's not hanging out with Emma or pestering her at her job, he takes long walks in Central Park. September is chilly that year and he breaks out his pea coat much earlier than the previous autumn. He does a lot of thinking about himself and where he is versus where he was two years ago. Realizes he feels at home finally in New York, as he watches the kids flock to the Alice in Wonderland sculptures. Loves his work, his apartment, his friends - almost everything.

The only thing that's missing from this life he's carved out for himself in this tough and cynical city is a space for Jared. On one of his walks in the park during late September, the leaves already crunching underfoot, he wonders if this is how it's supposed to be. His mother always told him while he was growing up that people often come in and out of your life, sometimes permanently, sometimes for just a short while but every person you made a connection with made an impact on your life. Just as you did theirs.

As Jensen kicks some leaves with his foot on his way towards Central Park West to head home, he wonders what kind of impact he's had on Jared's.

...

So apparently you're not speaking to me. Now I know how you felt when I didn't pick up the phone for months on end.

This sucks, man...

Listen, Jensen... I. I need to talk to you. I miss you... Just.

Fuck. Never mind.

Click.

...

The first weekend of October is sunny and bright but rather brisk. Andi's in town for a few gigs, crashing on Emma and George's couch like always. Jensen makes plans to pick up Emma after her day shift that Saturday and then grab some dinner before heading over to watch Andi play at this little wine bar called Vintage.

He's in the middle of futzing around with his hair, trying to decide how he wants to wear it, when his door buzzes. He yells at whoever it is to hold on and hurries out from the bathroom to open the door. He swings it wide, expecting George or maybe Emma, who had been trying to get out of work early, but when he focuses on the person standing out in the hallway, Jensen feels his stomach drop.

"Jared," he says, the shock evident in his tone, face slack with it. Jared gives him a sheepish grin and gestures towards Jensen's apartment.

"Mind if I come in?" he asks and Jensen manages to shake himself out of his stupor long enough to let Jared past him and inside the apartment. Jensen quietly closes the door and locks it, takes a minute to brace himself, tries to block from his memory what happened the last time Jared was here. Or what happened the last time he saw Jared.

When he turns around and makes his way into the living room, Jared is standing with his hands deep in the pockets of his jeans, taking in the framed playbills and posters for Jensen's plays and a few other things he's got hanging in his living room.

"Nice place. Didn't get a chance to look around the last time I was here," Jared says, cheeks wearing a high flush. Jensen fidgets a little, tugging nervously on the cuffs of his blue dress shirt.

He takes a step forward, closer to where Jared is standing as they both start to speak at the same moment.

"Listen, Jared, I-"

"Jensen, I wanted-"

They both laugh awkwardly then and Jensen rubs a hand across his mouth, gestures for Jared to go ahead. Jared sighs and straightens up, shoulders back but he can't quite meet Jensen's eyes.

“I wanted to apologize,” he starts out. He takes a deep breath before continuing. “I was a really, really shitty friend to you for about two years. I was busy but so were you and you always made time to call me and let me know what was going on in your life. I just...” Jared pauses, rubs the back of his neck a little self-consciously. “Aw, shit, man. I don’t even know. I think I was just so upset over the show finally being over and not seeing you every day and then you up and moving here that I just. Stopped talking to you... to protect myself?”

He laughs then, humorlessly. “What a stupid reason, right? Hell, that’s not even a reason, it’s an excuse. See the thing is, Jensen, I don’t have a good reason. I was a jerk. And I had no right to come in here and say all those things to you.” Jared finally looks at Jensen then. “I won’t lie. It hurt that you didn’t confide in me about what exactly Jason was to you, but hell. I would’ve done the same if the shoe had been on the other foot.”

Jensen waves a hand, stomach still in knots about the other thing they are definitely going to have to address. “Water under the bridge, man. I told you that before.”

Jared smiles, obviously still nervous. “So, um. About. The other thing...”

It’s Jensen’s turn to swallow and be unable to meet Jared’s eyes. “I. I was avoiding you, Jared. I’ll admit it. I just...” Jensen sighs and rests his hands on his hips, daring a glance at Jared. “It just happened. Doesn’t have to mean anything or...” He waves a hand. “Whatever.”

Jared blows out a huff of air but doesn’t look entirely comfortable yet.

“We cool?” he asks, voice low and Jensen smiles, feeling completely off-kilter but willing to lie through his perfect teeth if it puts a smile back on Jared’s face.

“Yeah. We’re cool.”

Jared beams at that, a truly genuine Jared Padalecki grin, and Jensen feels his heart beat a little faster; it’d been so long since he’d been on the receiving end of one of those. The next thing he knows, Jared’s grabbing him in a huge bear hug and squeezing the living daylight out of him. He pounds hard on Jared’s back, once, twice and then they pull apart, laughing a little sheepishly.

Jensen gestures with a thumb over his shoulder towards the general direction of the door.

“Listen, I was just on my way out the door to hear my friend Andi play a gig at this little wine bar - you wanna come? How long are you in town for, where are you staying, man?”

Jared’s nodding before Jensen can even get the rest of his question out. “Yeah. That sounds... that sounds like fun. I have a room down at the Hilton.”

Jensen can’t help but poke fun at him for that as he grabs a suit jacket out of his closet and calls Emma to apprise her of the situation. Jared takes it all in stride, needling Jensen about becoming

a true New Yorker as they stand on the curb, Jensen swearing in the process of hailing a cab.

He punches Jared in the arm and they laugh, tumbling into the back of the cab, and Jensen thinks about how much this feels like old times and that maybe, just maybe they'll be okay.

Emma's waiting for them outside the bar, wearing a cute little black dress, killer red heels and an expectant expression. Her eyes widen when Jared unfolds himself from the backseat of the cab and she whistles, low.

"Damn, Jenny! What in the hell do they *feed* you boys growing up down there in Texas?" Jensen and Jared both laugh at that, nothing they haven't heard a million times before.

Jared immediately charms Emma by kissing the back of her hand when they're introduced and, as he offers her his arm to escort her into the bar, Jensen thinks she might have fallen just a little bit in love with him, too.

As he watches them make their way to the small reserved table down front, he thinks that he knows exactly how she feels. George is waiting for them and his eyes widen comically as they take in Emma, dressed to the nines instead of her usual uniform of Chuck Taylor's, black concert tee's and jeans, and Jared, almost a foot and a half separating them but not doing one thing to stop them from flirting shamelessly with one another.

Jensen smirks to himself and hopes maybe someone in the bar that night will get their head out of their ass and make a move. As Jared pulls Emma's chair out for her, he doubts again that he'll be the one with the storybook ending.

Andi takes the stage soon after they all sit down, Jensen making the introductions again and for the next hour or so, they're completely wrapped up in Andi's music. She takes a break then and hurries down off the stage, face shining with perspiration from the bright lights and eyes twinkling with the buzz of performance, and bundles Emma into a fond and tight embrace. She pecks both George and Jensen on the cheeks and then leans back and eyes Jared.

"And who, pray tell, is this tall drink of water?" she says, affecting a fake Southern accent and dramatically fanning herself. Jared chuckles and Jensen rolls his eyes good naturedly as he once again introduces Jared. After he does so, Andi eyes Jensen speculatively and then drags a chair over to insinuate herself between Jensen and Jared.

"Jared, honey, listen. Maybe you can help me." She pauses and lays a firm hand on Jensen's forearm where it's resting against the table top. "Jensen here helped me write this gorgeous song, even did some back up vocals for me in the studio but," she sighs, dramatically and Jensen resists the urge to clap a hand over her mouth, knowing exactly where this is going, "Jensen, he refuses to get up there tonight with me and sing. He'll get up in front of all those people night after night for his precious plays but he won't sing one itty, bitty, little song with me. Now I ask you. Does that seem right? Because it just doesn't seem right to me."

Jared's smirking, dimples winking as he looks over Andi's head at Jensen. "Now, Andi, no. That

just doesn't seem right at all. I mean, it's one little song, right Jensen?" he says, eyes laughing and Jensen wants to hit him in the arm. Hard. Or maybe his face. "You can sing one little song with her, can't you?"

Emma and George chime in then, egging him on and finally he agrees to their demands simply to shut all of them the hell up. Andi smirks knowingly at him, having a good idea of what the lyrics he'd supplied for the song meant and who *exactly* they were meant for.

"Okay, Jensen. We're gonna do that one at the top of this set." She stands and holds out a hand. "You ready?"

Jensen takes a deep breath and stands, shrugs out of his jacket before handing it to Emma, and takes Andi's hand. He steals one of Emma's shots of tequila and slams it back, shaking his head a little at the burn. "As I'll ever be."

Andi makes arrangements for a second mic to be set up and the next thing Jensen's aware of, she's picking up her worn, golden brown guitar and starting up the first few chords of "I'd Be Lost." She looks at him expectantly and he realizes in that instant she doesn't want him to just sing the song with her, she wants him to just plain out *sing the song*. He swallows hard, misses his cue the first time and waits for her to start the intro over again before he can get the first line out.

He gets into the music then, lets the lyrics and the emotions behind them wash over him. He closes his eyes and sings his heart out, almost literally. When the song is coming to a close, Jensen lets his eyes drift open and through the blinding haze of the stage lights, he meets Jared's gaze and knows that Jared realizes, too, exactly who that song was written for.

And exactly what the meaning behind it is.

He makes his exit with a tiny bow amidst applause, makes his way back to their table on shaky legs. Between the adrenaline rush of singing on stage and having Jared look at him *like that*, in a roomful of people, he feels like his skin is too tight, like he can't breathe.

He grabs his suit jacket and looks pointedly at Jared who stands immediately, no words needed between them. They make their excuses to Emma and George, Jensen leaving them with instructions to let Andi know that they were sorry they had to leave. Jensen ignores the knowing looks Emma gives him and instead just follows the line of Jared's broad shoulders out into the chilly October night.

They manage to get a cab with no trouble and climb inside, this time, completely silent, Jared's jaw clenched tightly and Jensen fidgeting the entire ride back to his place. Jensen pays the cabbie and makes his way into the building with Jared on his heels, the four flights of stairs to his apartment seeming like a climb up Mount Everest in that moment.

They don't say anything, just practically spring up the steps, finally standing in front of Jensen's door. Jensen fumbles a little trying to get his keys out of his pocket and the door unlocked, the

both of them laughing nervously and then finally, finally the door is open and they're inside.

Jared is on Jensen almost as soon as the door is shut and bolted behind them. He cups Jensen's face and presses him back against the door, both of them whimpering a little into the other's mouths as their bodies press together from neck to knees. Jensen can feel the hot, hard line of Jared's cock against him and he opens his mouth just a little wider for Jared's tongue in response.

He cups Jared's hips in his hands through the rough denim of his jeans and kneads, pinkie fingers dipping under the white shirt Jared has on to stroke across the soap-soft skin of Jared's sides. Jared whines into Jensen's mouth at the touch and Jensen pulls away from the addictive taste of Jared's mouth to take a few steps backwards, pulling Jared along with him by his jeans.

"Come on. This will work better if we're both horizontal," Jensen murmurs against Jared's lips. Jared smiles wickedly and starts kissing Jensen again, short, sweet little nips against his mouth as they make their way through Jensen's apartment to his bedroom. They break apart once inside and hurriedly undress, hands fumbling with buttons and zippers, chuckling a little nervously as they bump hands and get tangled together in each other's clothes.

They share a few quick, almost shy glances while getting naked and finally, Jensen can't help himself, has to cup Jared's face in his hands while Jared struggles to get his socks off. Jared makes a surprised noise into the kiss and Jensen smiles, pushes him back onto the bed. He feels his expression grow wicked as he kneels above Jared, slowly crawling up his body until he's straddling him, all of Jared's gorgeous, naked, tan skin within his reach.

Jared looks a bit dazed but also a *lot* turned on, his chest flushed, eyes dark and heavy lidded and Jensen can feel Jared's hard on brushing against his ass with every slight movement they make. Jensen is a little awed that he's the one that did this to Jared, that he's the reason Jared's hard, he's the reason Jared is breathing heavy, he is the one that put who look on Jared's face.

It's a heady feeling and one Jensen intends to savor. Their last encounter was hurried and he only can remember it through a drunken haze and dammit, if this is all he gets with Jared, then he wants to damn well remember every minute of it.

Jared has his large hands cupped around Jensen's hips, his thumbs smoothing along the cut of muscle there and Jensen tries to hold back the shudder it evokes but can't. It feels too good to be naked with Jared, to have Jared naked against him. All that skin bare for Jensen to lick and suck and taste and bite to his heart's content. He winks at Jared and then bends down, sucks and licks a path from Jared's neck downward; over his collarbone, across his chest, paying special attention to his nipples. Nips at the delicate skin of Jared's belly, tongues his navel just to hear him gasp. Drags his nose along the path of dark hair arrowing down from his belly button to the proud jut of his cock.

Jared is shivering, panting by the time Jensen's mouth is hovering over his erection. He looks up from underneath his lashes at Jared and smirks, breathing hotly against the slick, swollen head of Jared's dick, then bypasses it completely to nuzzle into the crease of his thigh.

Jared practically whimpers at that, hands burying themselves in Jensen's hair, trying to guide his mouth back towards his cock.

"Fuckin' cock tease," Jared mumbles, words slurred and full of the slow, syrupy heat of Texas. It's a tone Jensen always used to associate with either too much booze or too much work; he now has an entirely different situation to relate it to.

Jensen smiles once more before nipping hard at the inside of Jared's thigh, just to hear him yelp and then looks up the length of his body.

"Gonna suck you now, 'kay?" He doesn't wait for Jared to answer; not like Jared's going to say no after all. He just swallows Jared down, one hand wrapped tight around the base, the other rubbing circles on the thin skin of Jared's hip.

Jared keens as Jensen goes down on him, tongue riding the thick vein on the underside. Jensen moans involuntarily as he takes Jared in, lips meeting his hand and then slowly dragging back up against the velvety flesh of Jared's dick. Jared moans even more at the vibrations and Jensen has to look up, has to see what this is doing to Jared. He has his head thrown back against the pillows, lower lip caught between his teeth and his skin is damp with sweat, body flushed and trembling.

Jensen thinks he's never seen anybody so goddamn gorgeous before.

He goes back to Jared's cock, hand and mouth working in tandem to bring him higher and higher. Jensen wishes he could deep throat for an instant on a down stroke; although with Jared it would take lots and lots of practice. But god, he wants to be able to do that. Wants to feel it for days afterward, the rawness in his throat, wants Jared to hear it when he talks, voice gone raspy and rough. Wants Jared to get hard at the memory, wants so goddamn much. He sucks harder at the thought, bobbing his head, tonguing the slit, hand working Jared faster.

Jensen takes his other hand, cups Jared's balls with it when he feels Jared's body start to tighten. He rolls them gently, listens as Jared moans long and low and feels his own cock throb in response. He pulls off of Jared's cock with an obscene noise, his hand still pumping the slick flesh.

"Come on, Jay. Wanna see you lose it for me, wanna feel you come in my mouth," Jensen murmurs, before sucking him back down, letting Jared thrust up into his mouth a little, listening as he pants and groans his way towards orgasm. Jared only lasts another moment or two before his entire body goes still and he arches, coming with Jensen's name on his lips. Jensen swallows everything down, sucks him gently until Jared pushes at his head and he knows it's got to be too sensitive then. He pulls away, his lips tingling, throat feeling a bit raw and all he can taste is Jared.

Jensen rests his head against Jared's thigh and moans, reaching down to wrap a hand around his sorely neglected cock and giving it one, two, three firm tugs. It feels so fucking good, and he

swipes a thumb over the head, spreading the pre-come around a bit to make it all that much slicker when Jared bumps him in the arm, starts pulling at him. He's saying something and it takes a minute for Jensen to comprehend what it is.

"Jensen, Jensen, come on. Let me... I wanna... Let me..." he's saying so Jensen goes, moving so he's lying on his side, facing Jared. Jared smiles at him, wraps a huge hand around the back of Jensen's neck, cupping his nape, and replaces Jensen's own hand on his cock with Jared's. Jensen moans at the first pull, the way the rough patches on Jared's palm catch in just the right way. Jared pulls him into a deep, wet kiss, tongue fucking his mouth as he jerks Jensen off and Jensen knows that it won't take long for him to come. He's been on the edge for what seems like forever, even before sucking Jared off, and now, with the taste of Jared on his still burning lips and Jared's large hand urging him towards oblivion, there's no way to stave it off.

He brings a hand up and grips Jared's shoulder tight and between one heartbeat and the next, he feels his orgasm wash over him. His eyes slam shut as he groans out Jared's name, body shivering as he empties himself over Jared's hand and wrist and both of their stomachs with pulse after glorious pulse of pleasure.

When he figuratively shakes himself out of his post-orgasmic stupor, Jared is staring at him, both of them still on their sides, Jared's face wreathed with a dorky grin. Jensen finds himself smiling back, probably just as dopey and slides closer, tangling their legs together.

"Hey," Jensen rasps, trying to silence the tiny voice in his head that is wondering what the hell is going to happen now.

Jared leans forward and presses a soft, almost chaste kiss to Jensen's lips before pulling back just a bit, one of his arms crooked under his head, both of them sharing the same pillow.

"Hey," he says and, this close, Jensen can see the happiness dancing in his eyes. He feels something loosen in his chest and suddenly, it's a little easier to breathe.

Maybe, he thinks, just maybe, this wasn't such a bad idea. He spares a brief thought to Emma and George and then Jared's running a soft hand down Jensen's arm, grabbing hold of Jensen's hand, thumb rubbing circles over the palm.

Jared bites his lip for a second and then takes a deep breath, still caressing Jensen's hand.

"So listen. I, um. I have something to confess," he starts out and he looks so freaked out and nervous that Jensen feels the need to crack a joke, even if Jared is going to tell him they can never do this again, that he's really straight. Anything to relieve the tension that is drawing every muscle in Jared's body tight. That's how Jensen knows he's so screwed; he'd rather help make breaking his heart easier on Jared than watch him twist himself up in knots over it.

Jensen waggles their joined hands a little and smiles, softly. "If it's about the Cheez Whiz incident with Murray, I already know about it."

Jared huffs out a laugh and rolls his eyes, bumping Jensen's arm with his. "Not that, you ass. I'm trying to have a serious conversation here."

Jensen clears his throat and schools his expression into what he always called in his head 'Dean's thinky face.' Jared sees it and tries to glare but starts laughing in the middle of it. He mutters 'jerk' under his breath and then he's kissing Jensen again, the hand that had been holding Jensen's now sliding up and around his neck, holding him in place for the deep searching kiss. Jensen sighs into it, lost in feeling, and follows Jared's mouth when he pulls away.

Jared chuckles, causing Jensen to open his eyes. "What's so funny?"

"You," Jared says, shaking his head and rolling onto his back, Jensen sliding towards him, propping his head up on his hand. "We can make out more after I say what I need to say, alright?"

Jensen feels a silly, lovesick smile break out on his face and nods. Whatever Jared wants to tell him can't be that bad if he still wants to make out. "Okay. So spit it out already."

Jared slides him a mock-irritated glare and then says. "So. The reason I flipped out when I came to see you and uh, found out about you and Jason was. Um..." he trails off and then squeezes his eyes shut tight and says, in a rush. "Because I was jealous of him."

It takes Jensen a moment to decipher the slur of words but then he does and he's smiling wider, feeling that knot in his chest dissolving further.

"Jealous, huh?"

Jared rolls his head to look at him, cheeks a bit pink, whether from left over arousal or embarrassment, Jensen can't say. "Yeah. I just... I didn't know it until I was back on the plane to L.A. Couldn't figure out why I was so pissed, you know? Not like you've never dated other people or anything and shit, I'm not your momma." Jared starts to idly pick at a loose thread on one of the sheets. "But a five hour flight is a long time to think and..." He pauses to look at Jensen, eyes wide. "Do you know what it's like to realize at thirty-thousand feet that you're in love with your best friend and didn't know it until he fell in love with another guy?"

Jensen can't help himself. He laughs and then, at the offended look on Jared's face, pulls him in for a quick kiss, chock full of emotion and a slight hint of heat.

"I don't know what it's like at thirty-thousand feet but yeah, Jared. Sort of familiar with the feeling."

Jared has what can only be called a deer in the headlights look going on and Jensen chuckles, snapping his fingers in front of Jared's face.

"Earth to Jared. Come on, man. I practically gave you a lap dance in the limo out in L.A. and then jerked you off - you had to suspect I had feelings for you."

Jared finally shakes himself out of his stupor and sits up, twists to look down at Jensen.

“But... but! I thought you were just like, hot for my bod or something!” He exclaims and Jensen can’t help but burst out laughing, burying his face in his pillow at the wounded look on Jared’s face at that reaction.

“I’m so-sorry, Jared,” he manages to gasp out after a few moments. “But... seriously - *‘hot for my bod?’*”

Jared pouts a little and settles back down on the bed, lower lip jutting out just a bit.

“Well. It could happen. I’m quite a catch, you know,” he mutters.

Jensen smiles, scoots over the last few inches separating them and presses a soft, delicate kiss to the warm skin of Jared’s shoulder. Jared turns to look at him and Jensen lets everything he feels show on his face.

“Believe me, Jared. I know you are.” Jared’s face softens at that and he leans towards Jensen, presses their lips together for a brief moment before pulling back.

“So wait. If you knew you were in love with me, why were you with Jason? Were you just using him, Jensen, because that’s just *cruel*,” he says and Jensen finds himself biting back laughter at how fast Jared can go from being offended on his own behalf to being offended on the behalf of Jensen’s *ex-boyfriend*.

Jensen slings a leg across Jared’s thigh and rests his head on Jared’s shoulder.

“I think I realized it about the same time you did. And apparently everyone knew but me. Including Jason. Who broke up with me right after you showed up.” He runs a finger lightly up and down Jared’s chest, cataloging the way it makes him shiver, goose bumps breaking out all over his tan skin. “Think you and I were the only ones who didn’t get the memo.”

Jared shifts and wiggles until he can get his arm around Jensen’s shoulders, hand resting warmly on his side.

“Well. We did. Just... much, much later than the rest of the world, apparently,” he murmurs and Jensen recognizes that tone of voice, knows from years and years of long night shoots that Jared is minutes away from being dead to the world. Jensen thinks idly of the dried spunk all over both of them, the still cooling sweat and how uncomfortable they’ll be when they wake up but he’s warm and comfortable and doesn’t want to move.

So instead he slurs to Jared to turn off the light, presses one last kiss to the pulse point in Jared’s neck and buries his nose there, drifting off to sleep to the symphony of Jared’s heartbeat and breath swooshing in his ear.

...

Hey, Jensen. It's Emma... you guys sure disappeared in a hurry last night. Just wondering what happened after you left Vintage. And also if you two have come up for air long enough to re-hydrate. Give me a call later. Let me know how you're doing hon. Love ya.

Click.

...

When Jensen wakes up the next morning, it's to the glare of the sun filtering in through his blinds and Jared's god awful rendition of some Britney Spears song in the shower. He smiles and stretches, wincing a little as the hairs on his chest and stomach pull in the dried come, but still enjoying the way his joints pop, his muscles feeling used and sore in a way they haven't for a long while.

He gets out of bed and pads naked to the bathroom, stifling his laughter at Jared bopping naked in the shower, hair soaped into a Mohawk, singing some bubble gum pop song at the top of his lungs. He's using a bottle of shampoo as a microphone and Jensen quietly makes his way over to the shower stall, trying to open the door as soundlessly as possible.

It doesn't work, the one hinge that always squeaks making a loud noise, loud enough for Jared to hear over the cascade of water coming from the shower head and his butchering of 'Toxic.' His eyes widen and he flails around a bit looking like a fish out of water as Jensen nearly laughs himself sick.

"Jesus fuck, Jensen! You scared the daylights outta me!" Jared practically squeaks, one hand pressed to his chest, right over his heart.

Jensen's laughter dies down to quiet chuckles as he closes the shower door the rest of the way, stepping into Jared's personal space. He smiles, takes the shampoo bottle out of Jared's now limp hand and wraps his arms around Jared's waist. Jared is trembling a little and Jensen has to lean in and just nuzzle at his jumping pulse point, dragging his nose against the wet skin on Jared's neck. Jared shivers again but this time, Jensen knows it has everything to do with the right kind of adrenaline and nothing at all to do with anything like the fight or flight response.

"Sorry, Jared. Didn't mean to scare ya. Just looked so damn... cute. Had to come in here and join you," Jensen murmurs, taking great delight in rubbing every naked inch of his body against Jared's. Jared's eyes go dark and he grabs a hold of Jensen and then impossibly, they're pressed even tighter together. Jensen feels his breathing go all wonky as his half-hard dick suddenly goes all the way hard. Jared smirks a little when he feels it against him, can't *not* feel it, and Jensen makes a face.

"Smug prick," he mutters and Jared laughs, trailing one large hand down to cup Jensen's ass.

“Something like that.” Jared pauses, squeezes Jensen’s cheek, smiles wider at the way Jensen moans involuntarily at the action and does it again. “So. Wanna help me get clean?”

Jensen nods even as he’s rubbing himself wantonly against Jared, finding himself not caring one bit that he’s doing so, that he’s letting Jared know just how much this, how much *Jared* affects him.

“Sounds good. But only if you help me get dirty again first,” Jensen says, mouthing at the skin on Jared’s right shoulder. Even in the shower, the water tracing translucent lines and patterns over Jared’s darker skin, he still tastes good, tastes like Jared, and Jensen thinks he might be addicted.

Jared snorts a short laugh out at Jensen’s comment and rolls his eyes. “Nice, Ackles. Nice and corny. But really, who am I to turn down shower sex?”

Jensen winks and then grabs the shower gel, squirts some onto his palm and then wraps his now slick hand around both of their aching hard cocks.

“That’s my boy,” he murmurs and then starts to stroke.

...

Jensen? Hey, it’s Murray. Long time, no talk huh? Listen... I was wonderin’ if you’d seen or heard from Jared lately. He said something about maybe heading to the East Coast to visit you and that was almost a week ago. No one’s heard anything from him and well, I just wanted to make sure some rabid fan girl didn’t kidnap him to fulfill her kinky and twisted fantasies.

Give me a call, man. Murray out.

Click.

...

They spend the next five or so days together, Jensen showing Jared around the city, taking him to some of Jensen’s favorite museums and restaurants. They have brunch with Emma and George, who are holding hands under the table and trying to be subtle about it, and Andi, who just winks at Jensen and smiles knowingly. Jared continues to charm them and when he heads towards the bathroom right before they leave, Emma leans over and whispers at Jensen over the crowded table.

“I can understand why you feel the way you do about him, Jensen. He’s one in a million, all right.” She pats Jensen’s hand then and smiles, warmly. “You two are cute together.”

Jensen feels himself blush, feels ridiculous even doing so at his age and is still smiling like a dork when Jared makes his way back to the table, all happy eyes and wide smile. Jensen feels himself lean just a bit into Jared’s space while Jared subtly slips a hand onto Jensen’s knee under

the table and squeezes, a light pressure but it's enough.

They don't talk about what's going to happen after Jared leaves on Sunday. It's not because he wants to, Jensen knows that. It's that he has obligations and responsibilities. Press junkets and auditions and everything else that comes along with being a big time Hollywood hot shot.

Jensen realizes he doesn't miss that, or even wish for it as much as he used to.

In between spending time with Emma and George, minus Andi who is back out on the road, and taking in the sights, they spend the rest of the week either in bed or watching movies together on the couch, beer bottles strewn across the table, Madden '10 tournaments breaking out at midnight or Grand Turismo or whatever other games Jensen has lying around.

It's easy, he realizes as Jared tackles him to the floor after Jensen whoops his ass spectacularly at some game or other, to slip back into this, Jared 'N' Jensen and the games and the taunting and the teasing and the laughter. But as Jared starts to bite at Jensen's neck, hands working under Jensen's tee shirt, trailing up his rib cage, he realizes it's also so very, very easy to add this, the touching, the kissing, the sex, along with everything else.

He thinks, idly, as Jared strips him naked in front of the still blaring television, that that should probably scare him more.

Then, as Jared grins up at him wickedly from between Jensen's thighs, mouth screwing down tightly over Jensen's cock, he's not thinking about anything anymore.

The night before Jared's flight leaves, they're lying in bed, panting, come sticky and smeared all over both of their bellies and chests, when Jared turns onto his side, head propped on his hand and looks at Jensen, brow furrowed a bit. Jensen, who is still trying to keep his heart from escaping his chest, sees Jared move out of the corner of his eye so he turns his head on the pillow, flops an arm above his head and pants out a breathy, "What?"

Jared smiles, tiny and nervous as he stares at the bed for a moment, hand idly picking at the sheet before looks back up at Jensen and asks, "What happens after tomorrow?"

Jensen, who thinks his brain might have possibly been sucked out through his dick, frowns and licks his lips before answering. "Um. Monday?"

Jared rolls his eyes and whaps Jensen across the chest. "No you ass. I meant what happens *after I leave*, not what day comes after Sunday. What happens with... us."

His voice is so small, and so un-Jared-like that it finally penetrates the post-sex fog that's clouding Jensen's brain and he turns, cups Jared's nape and says softly, "Hey, hey listen," as he presses tiny kisses all over Jared's mouth and chin.

"Listen, Jared. It'll... okay, shit. I won't lie. It's gonna suck. But we both really want this," he pauses, lets the uncertainty and doubt swell in his chest for a minute before Jared nods, eyes

wide, face trusting. “Okay. So we both *really* want this to work. And we’ve both done the long-distance thing before, we at least know what *not* to do.” Jared smirks, hand rubbing up and down softly on Jensen’s flank.

“So. We just suck it up and spend as much time together as possible,” Jensen finishes, although he thinks he could’ve come up with something a bit more reassuring and a little less lame.

Jared swallows audibly and runs his thumb across the delicate skin and thrumming pulse in Jensen’s wrist before speaking. “You don’t... you don’t ever want to move back to L.A., do you?”

Jensen takes a minute before answering, studying Jared’s face and the emotion in his eyes and finally *gets* why Jared avoided him for so long, wouldn’t call. He was angry, felt betrayed that Jensen had chosen New York over him, over Jared. And even though Jensen could argue that Jared chose being a big movie star over them and their friendship and Jensen, he won’t. It won’t get them anywhere and he knows, logically, that neither of them actually did that to the other, despite how it might feel. Emotions, he thinks, as he smiles affectionately at Jared, are rarely logical.

“It’s just... it’s not home anymore, Jared. Don’t think it ever was.” He presses a quick kiss to Jared’s frown before continuing. “New York... isn’t somewhere I ever expected I’d end up, let alone belong. But I have a life, Jared. Friends, a nice place, work I’m proud of...” he feels himself flush, a bit embarrassed, a bit with happiness, “You, finally. So no. No more L.A. I’ll visit, though,” he says, desperate to reassure at the look in Jared’s eyes.

Jared nods, tugs and pulls until Jensen’s resting on his shoulder, Jared’s long arm curved around Jensen’s body, anchoring him.

“I didn’t think you were moving back. Had to ask though.” He kisses the crown of Jensen’s head and sighs, not entirely unhappy but not exactly ecstatic either. “This city... I hate to admit it but it suits you. I can tell you’re. Content.”

Jensen strokes a finger across the expanse of Jared’s chest. “I am, Jared. But promise me, we’ll make this work. I can’t lose you a second time, not after...” He trails off but knows Jared gets what he’s trying to say when Jared just tips his chin up, kissing Jensen sweetly, delicately before pulling back and half-smiling.

“I know, Jensen. We’ll make it work.”

Jensen nods, stomach and chest still hurting at the thought that he wasn’t sure of the next time he’d get to have this, have Jared and so he held on all the tighter, held onto Jared until the sun was peaking insistently over the horizon and they had only mere hours before Jared’s flight would be leaving the tarmac at JFK. And Jensen.

...

Hey, Ackles. Listen, this is Sylvia. I know you're pinin' away for your lost lover or whatever but I have the audition of a lifetime lined up for you here. It's for a play on Broadway. This is the big time, kid. Nathan Lane is already signed on for the lead role.

Gimme a call as soon as you get this. Or I'll kick your keister all the way from here to Yonkers and back.

Click.

...

October slides effortlessly into November, the weather turning colder, grayer, gloomier even as the city lights up around Jensen, twinkling and sparkling like a magical fairy land as it always seems to around the holidays.

He wishes, idly, as he walks past the windows of Macy's, crowds of children and adults alike pressed close to *ohh* and *ahh* over the themed displays, that he could get more excited about it this year, more involved.

But despite finally having Jared back, talking to him on a daily basis and landing a small but still supporting and vital role in a Nathan Lane play, he feels more miserable than ever. He knows Jared feels the same, can hear it in his voice every night when they talk, how the effort is wearing them down and he wonders how long they can last before one of them breaks and he's back to being alone in a city of millions, back to carrying on a one-sided relationship with the mechanical voice on Jared's voice mail.

He trudges his way up to his apartment on a bitter cold day in mid-November, snow swirling about his ankles before he gets inside the building. He stomps his feet a little on the rug inside to clean them off and to also try and revive some of the feeling in his toes. He stupidly thought it would be a good idea to take the subway instead of a cab home, thinking the cold would be invigorating, refreshing.

As he fumbles his door open, his mail stuffed in his mouth, bag full of script notes and various other things sliding down his arms, he acknowledges how very, very wrong he was when his practically numb fingers lose the keys for a third time. When he finally manages to get inside, he dumps everything on the floor in the hallway, tosses his jacket in the closet, cranks up the heat and heads into the kitchen to make some hot cocoa.

While the milk is warming, he pads into his bedroom, tugging off his jeans and dark blue sweater in exchange for a pair of flannel pajama pants, a comfortable wash-worn Longhorns hoodie and a pair of thick socks Emma bought him last year as a gag gift, the pattern of tiny dancing frogs looking absolutely ridiculous on his feet. Jensen finds himself caring very little about what he looks like as his limbs and various other body parts start to finally thaw out.

Before he makes his way back out into the kitchen to get his cocoa and maybe order in some

Thai for his dinner, he remembers about the electric blanket his momma had sent him the year he'd moved to New York. He doesn't use it often but, as he feels a shiver charge through his still chilled body, he decides tonight might be a good night to break it out.

He flips the light on in his tiny closet and starts to rummage around on the shelf for his blanket, figuring that, as he swears under his breath, of course it had to be shoved way in the back, behind boxes and hats and god knows what else.

He almost has it in his hands, the thick baby blue fleece brushing his fingertips, when the box that is perched precariously in front of the blanket wobbles just a bit too much, over-balancing and heads towards the floor (and Jensen's head) at an alarming rate. Jensen manages to side-step it at the last moment, hand flying to his chest as he does so, letting out a startled shout of, "Holy shit!" The box spills its contents everywhere and Jensen sighs, bending down to start scooping up old take out menus and postcards from Mac and other odds and ends back into the cardboard.

He's flipping through a pile of photos from his brother's bachelor party years before when a postcard falls out and drifts to the floor. He picks it up and lets out a bark of laughter as he realizes it's the one he bought years before at the Grand Canyon and intended to send to Jared and then never did. He smiles, finishes putting everything back in the box and gets out the blanket before heading out to watch some Tivo'd episodes of *The Office* while he sips his cocoa and waits for his food to arrive.

The next day, he stops by the post office down the street from his apartment and buys a stamp, smiling as he pushes the postcard through the slot into the mail box, sending it on its way to Jared and L.A. and hopefully, a welcome reception.

...

Hey, man, where the hell are you? I have a surprise for you but I really, really need you to pick up the phone, okay?

Jensen? Jensen, man, come on. Pick up!

Okay. Shit. Just. Give me a call on my cell when you get this, okay?

I... I love you.

Click.

...

Jensen gets out of the shower the Monday before Thanksgiving, toweling his hair dry to find a bunch of missed calls on his cell and the display showing he has sixteen new messages. Feeling his brow furrow in confusion, he dials his voice mail as he putters around the kitchen, wondering what the hell to do with himself for the next few days, what with the play not having rehearsals because of the holiday and Emma demanding his presence at her and George's first official

holiday as a couple.

He's trying to decide if the green lump in his crisper is an apple or an orange during Jared's tenth message demanding he answer his damn phone already, when he gets a beep signaling his call waiting. He pulls the phone away from his ear to check the display and smiles when he sees Jared's name. He switches over from voice mail to Jared, smiling wider when Jared practically yells, "Finally!" in his ear.

"Nice to hear from you, too, Jared. So what's so important that you have to leave sixteen messages in the time it took me to take a shower and trim my beard?" Jensen remarks, deciding that it doesn't matter if it's a fruit, vegetable or mineral, the fuzzy green thing in his fridge has to go before it becomes sentient.

Jared sighs in his ear, loudly, and Jensen chuckles, can picture Jared looking skyward as if praying for the patience to deal with Jensen.

"I have a surprise for you. Jesus, is that so terrible?" Jared whines in his ear and Jensen has to snicker.

"No, guess not. So. Surprise? What is it? Did you get me a pony?" Jensen demands, just to be a smartass.

Jared swears under his breath and Jensen thinks he might be driving. He bites his tongue instead of giving into the urge to lecture Jared for the five hundredth time about driving and talking on his cell phone and how Jensen prefers his boyfriend in one piece and breathing, thank you very much.

Usually the only thing Jared seems to take from this lecture is that he's Jensen's boyfriend and proceeds to make kissy noises over the phone at him, in between cussing at other drivers and probably swerving all over the four-oh-five.

"No, I did not get you a pony, you thirteen year old *girl*. Go down to the front door of your building and wait. It should be there in..." he trails off and then comes back, voice louder. "About ten minutes."

Jensen smirks and decides to tease Jared just a bit more before he goes and does what he says because a surprise from Jared is always entertaining, always interesting and more times than not, endearing and thoughtful. The other times they're just downright off-the-wall.

"Okay, but I guess that means I have to go put clothes on. Don't wanna show the entire neighborhood the goods." Jared curses loudly in his ear and then Jensen hears brakes squealing, horns blaring, and more patented Padalecki swearing.

Despite his promise to himself mere moments earlier, Jensen launches into his lecture only to be cut off by Jared a couple of sentences in.

“I know, Jensen, I know. Driving while on the phone is bad. Got it. But, Christ! Don’t say things that imply *you’re naked* and expect me not to react!”

Jensen has to laugh at that, needling Jared on just a bit more, just because he can. “Well, I did say I was in the shower. What, did you think I showered with my clothes on suddenly?”

Jared’s only reply was a quiet and emphatic, “Fuck you.”

To which Jensen replies, “Next time I see you, sure.”

Jared’s quiet on the other end for a minute before he speaks, voice low and a bit strained, nervous. “Mean it?” he asks and Jensen knows the conversation has just gone from goofing off to deadly serious in about point two seconds flat.

He swallows before answering. “Yeah. Yeah, I do.”

Jared’s only response before he clicks off the line is, “Then get the hell dressed and go downstairs. Now, Ackles.”

Jensen clicks his phone shut, chuckling dryly to himself before slipping his feet into his worn tennis shoes that are lying by the couch. He’d actually gotten dressed before checking his phone but damn, it was too much fun messing with Jared to tell him that. He grabbed his keys off the stand in the hall before he made his way downstairs, whistling, wondering what kind of kooky surprise Jared has up his sleeve this time.

Jensen thinks of and discards a few possibilities on his way down to the ground floor, including giant teddy bears, candy, balloons and singing telegrams - Jared knows after Jensen’s thirtieth birthday that sending him a singing telegram will only end in tears for everyone involved.

He grabs his mail out of his mail box in the lobby, exchanging some small talk with the little old lady who lives on the second floor with her two excitable and insane terriers before he makes his way outside into the bright yet deceiving sunshine of late November. He stops dead in his tracks then, at the sight of Jared standing by his truck, his dogs panting inside, boxes everywhere, Jared’s Wii on the front seat, and feels his mind go utterly blank.

“Surprise,” Jared says, smile a little unsure, obviously unable to pinpoint what Jensen’s reaction is going to be. Jensen is a little unsure, too, not one hundred percent certain what exactly all this means.

Jensen takes the five steps that separate them, face slack with shock and disbelief before reaching out, wrapping a hand around Jared’s wrist, just to reassure himself that he’s real and not some figment of Jensen’s imagination.

“Jared?” he whispers, has to swallow once to get his voice sounding a little more normal, a little less strained. “What... what does this mean?”

Jared smiles almost timidly and rubs at the back of his neck awkwardly with the hand that Jensen isn't now holding tightly. "Um. Me and the kids," he points over his shoulder at the panting, tail-wagging dogs in the cab. "We were wondering if you um, maybe had room in your place. For, uh. You know. Us."

Jensen's heart stutters over a couple of beats and then starts thumping in triple time. He feels his face break out in a wide smile, sees Jared's face mirror his, and steps closer. "You mean it, Jared? You wanna live with me?"

Jared simply nods, dimples deep and Jensen finds himself wanting to taste that enthusiastic smile. So he hooks an arm around the back of Jared's neck and pulls him into a deep and decadent kiss, almost inappropriate for midday Monday on a busy New York street. Jensen finds himself not caring with the part of his brain that isn't focused on Jared, kissing him, here, in his arms, in New York, *permanently*.

He pulls back, both of them panting, lips swollen and smiles so hard it hurts. "Of course I have room for you," Jensen says, pausing to press a tiny kiss to the corner of Jared's mouth, just because he can. "Don't ever have to ask. Jackass," he adds fondly and Jared smiles before wrapping Jensen tight in his arms and kissing the living daylight out of him, laughter filling the air around them.

One of Jensen's neighbors from his floor comes out after awhile and wolf whistles at them and they break apart, blushing, wiping their mouths a little as they steal quick little glances at one another. They find Jared somewhere to park his truck and then head back into Jensen's building with a couple of boxes and the dogs, both of them smiling giddily and bumping shoulders as they walk.

Once inside Jensen's place - although, he thinks idly, it's not just his anymore - they set the boxes down wherever as the dogs happily wag their tails and sniff and slobber all over Jensen's stuff before flopping onto the floor and falling asleep in a puddle of sunlight coming in through one of the wide windows.

Jensen stands there watching them, smirking and then turns to Jared, finds him watching Jensen with a hungry look and Jensen feels his entire body flush, cock twitching in his jeans at the look in Jared's eyes. Jared smiles wolfishly and grabs Jensen's hand, pulls him towards the bedroom and then shuts the door tightly behind them.

The door isn't even closed the whole way before Jared's pressing Jensen back into it, a hand fisted tightly in the fabric of Jensen's tee. He smiles at Jensen once, wide and happy, eyes sparkling, before he dives in, taking Jensen's mouth in a hard, wet and messy kiss. Jensen lets his mouth fall open under Jared's, hands clutching at his biceps as he moans into the kiss, tangling their legs together.

When they break apart, panting and flushed, Jensen lets out a tiny laugh, a little bit giddy and grinds up against Jared. He watches Jared's pupils blow wide and does it again, this time accompanying it with a long, slow lick up the tendon in Jared's neck.

“I think... bed?” Jensen rasps out and Jared nods, frantically, eyes glued to Jensen’s lips. Jensen licks them subconsciously and Jared whines in his throat, cups Jensen’s face and takes his mouth in another searching kiss as Jensen takes a handful of Jared’s buttocks down and starts manhandling him back towards the unmade bed.

They tumble onto the bed in an awkward tangle of limbs, Jared’s hands trapped in Jensen’s shirt as he tries to tug it up and off, both of them laughing as elbows and knees are jostled and bumped. They manage to sort out what belongs to whom and they both lose their shirts, finally settling onto their sides facing one another. They smile and then Jared runs his fingers up Jensen’s jaw, cups his face and draws him in again, pausing right before their lips meet to speak.

“You have some awesome ideas, Ackles,” he murmurs, insinuating one knee in between Jensen’s thighs and pressing *up*. Jensen whines in his throat, clutching at Jared as their lips meet in a desperate kiss, Jensen grinds down gracelessly into the delicious friction Jared’s providing with his knee.

For all that Jared seemed impatient to get Jensen inside and into the bedroom, he’s taking his time now, devouring Jensen’s mouth with long, languorous kisses, tongue learning and re-learning the contours of Jensen’s mouth. Jensen feels like he’s swimming on a sea of arousal, unable to keep his head above water. He thinks as he rubs his erection against Jared, groaning deeply into their kiss, that if this is what drowning feels like, he never wants to surface again.

He does pull back, though, after what seems like a lifetime, panting and flushed, dangerously close to coming in his pants like a damn teenager. Jared doesn’t seem to be in much better shape if his glassy eyes and the flush creeping up from his chest to his cheeks is any indication. Jensen takes one hand and trails it down over the flat and tan expanse of Jared’s stomach, watches how his eyes flutter and then hooks his pointer finger under the rough fabric of Jared’s waist band.

“I think,” Jensen says, punctuating his words with short, biting kisses to Jared’s lower lip. “Nakedness is in order, don’t you?”

Jared just nods, whining low in his chest and there are another few awkward moments while they deal with belts and unwieldy zippers and tented boxer shorts. Jensen smirks at Jared before slipping his hand underneath the wash worn fabric of Jared’s navy underwear, rubbing the palm of his hand briefly against the already slick head of Jared’s cock before taking and gently coaxing the fabric down and off of Jared’s slim hips.

Jared has his head buried in Jensen’s neck the whole time this is going on, hands skirting restlessly up and down his arms, panting and whimpering quietly. When Jensen finally has Jared’s underwear off, he lets go of Jared’s dick, sliding a soothing touch up Jared’s side to his neck, pulling him up. Jensen takes Jared’s mouth in a deep kiss, cupping his jaw, getting off on the feel of Jared completely at his mercy - files it away for another time, because there will be plenty of other times, Jensen will make sure of it.

But now, right now, there’s one thing Jensen wants and that... That’s all he can think of.

He pulls back, rubs a none too gentle thumb against the swollen curve of Jared's bottom lip and murmurs, their breath mingling, "Want y'to fuck me, Jay."

Jared's eyes slam shut and he reaches down between them to fumble and circle the base of his cock with one hand, rolling away from Jensen for a moment, other arm slung over his eyes as he tries to bring his traitorous body back under his control. Jensen waits patiently, divesting himself of his own boxers, giving his cock a few short, sharp tugs - just enough to make his hips stutter before he stops, grabs a condom and some lube out of the night stand.

By then, Jared has his arm resting against his side, is staring at Jensen with wide, dark eyes and Jensen smiles, leans over and presses a soft, almost chaste kiss to Jared's lips, so at odds with the want and need burning through both of their systems. Jared lets him control the kiss, keeping it simple and sweet before groaning and then pushing Jensen over onto his back, straddling Jensen's thighs and pulling back to smile wickedly before he starts moving down Jensen's neck with sharp, stinging bites, soothing the skin with short laps of his tongue.

Jensen feels his temperature ratchet up another twenty degrees or so as Jared slowly but methodically works his way down Jensen's body; surely leaving marks Jensen will finger the next day in the shower, on the bus, at the store, remembering the feel of Jared's mouth claiming him, making him *want*.

When Jared finally reaches Jensen's navel, he's writhing on the bed underneath Jared, fingers twisted in the silky strands of Jared's hair, unable to articulate with words that he wants Jared's mouth on his cock. But Jared, god, fucking Jared seems to get the message because he takes his mouth from where it had been tormenting Jensen's stomach below his belly button, teeth worrying the pale skin and fine trail of hair there and smiles, as he finally, fucking *finally* takes Jensen's aching hard on in one large hand and strokes, once, not nearly hard or fast enough, just enough to leave Jensen needing *more*.

He whines in his throat and Jared chuckles low and dangerous before bending down and Jensen bites his lip, holds his breath as he watches, thinks to himself '*oh fuck oh fuck, he's gonna-he's gonna finally-*' but Jared switches targets at the last minute instead, places his mouth against the sensitive skin of Jensen's hips and *sucks* before pulling back just enough that he can sink his teeth into the same patch of skin he just turned rosy and red under the suction of his mouth.

Jensen thinks that if it wasn't for the firm pressure of Jared's fingers around the base of his erection, he would've shot off right then, the sharp burst of pain/pleasure something he'd never experienced before, only ever wants to feel with Jared ever again. Jared blows on the damp skin and Jensen arches, eyes slamming shut at the burn of cool air on his stinging skin. He shudders and can distantly hear Jared chuckle and when he can finally open his eyes again, Jared's staring at him, chin resting against the hair roughened skin of Jensen's upper thigh.

His eyes are dark and filled with so much emotion Jensen feels oddly touched in that moment, wonders why the hell it took them so long to get to this point. Jared strokes his cock once, twice and then winks at Jensen before moving and slowly, oh so fucking slowly Jensen thinks he's

actually going to die, taking the head of Jensen's cock in his mouth, tongue flitting against the underside of the head just a bit, just enough to make Jensen shiver and clutch Jared's hair tighter between his fingers.

It'd be obvious Jared was inexperienced even if Jensen didn't know this was only his third time ever giving Jensen a blow job but Jensen himself was a novice not too long ago and he manages to find a store of patience he didn't know he had inside himself. It doesn't hurt that despite not really knowing what he's doing, Jared is eager and willing to take direction to improve his technique. Jensen lightly rubs three fingers across the nape of Jared's neck while Jared keeps up a steady rhythm of in and out, up and down, pulling off to lap delicately at the slit on the head, sometimes, at the urging of Jensen, tonguing the underside of the crown, smiling against Jensen's dick when he hits that bundle of nerves, making Jensen shiver and cry out.

Jensen can feel himself start to get closer to that edge again, thinks about how much he wants Jared to fuck him. Shudders as Jared sucks him back down, shivers at the thought of Jared's long, slick fingers opening him up, at the thought of his thick, gorgeous cock fucking deep inside of Jensen, and he tugs Jared's head up, traces a trembling finger along the line of Jared's cheekbone, loving the way Jared's cheeks are flushed, red mouth swollen, spit-slick and shiny.

He bites his own lip and then jerks his head in the direction of the bottle of lube, Jared's eyes tracking the movement and they widen when they catch sight of the Astroglide. Jensen has to smile at that, can't not, but then Jared is scrambling to open the bottle, slicking up one, two fingers, lube spilling everywhere but Jensen can't find it in him to care when Jared looks up from under his lashes and gives him a smile – a sweet, secret smile that is just for him – and he feels his heart fit to burst in his chest at the gesture.

Jared leans up, presses a quick, dirty kiss to Jensen's mouth, the taste of Jensen heavy on his lips and tongue, salty, musky and Jensen finds himself chasing his own taste in the dark cavern of Jared's mouth, wants to lick it right out of him. Jared pulls back, smiling and Jensen whines but Jared cups Jensen's jaw with sticky fingers as his other hand starts to slowly, slowly circle Jensen's hole.

“Can you... Can I make you come from this?” Jared asks, a fingertip slipping inside. Jensen nods, eyelids getting heavy as Jared slowly pushes the rest of the finger inside.

“Yeah, I...” He hisses in a breath when Jared brushes past his prostrate, shudders when he goes back and *deliberately* rubs against it. “I... it might be easier, if I - *oh fuck, right there* - if I come first. I'll be... be more. Relaxed.”

Jensen manages to get the rest of his sentence out despite the fact that Jared seems to intent on driving him higher and higher with no respite, the first finger being joined by a second, stretching him open gently but not slowly; no, they're both too gone now for slow. Jared presses one last tiny kiss to Jensen's mouth and then he's scooting back down, fingers pressing in deeper as he corkscrews his mouth down over Jensen's cock, sucking hot and hard.

Jensen howls with pleasure, hands coming up to clutch at Jared's head, hold him there while he

sucks with dirty intent. He fucks Jensen with his fingers, ruthlessly, rubbing against that spot inside again and again, making electric bursts of pleasure rip through Jensen's body, his mouth a glorious suction around Jensen's cock and he can feel it, can feel himself start to, it's almost there...

And then he's coming, white hot lights bursting behind his eyelids as shudders wrack his frame, body tightening around Jared's fingers as he comes inside Jared's mouth in short, sharp surges of overwhelming pleasure. Jared sucks him through it, lets go when Jensen pushes at his head, the touch too much sensation on his spent cock, he still keeps his fingers inside of Jensen though, a warm, steady presence, not moving, just there.

Jensen lies there panting, throws an arm across his eyes again and tries to remember who the hell he is and what year it might be. He can't ever remember coming that hard with anyone before, and distantly, with the part of his mind that is slowly coming back online, he wonders if it's because they're in love. He starts to smile to himself, realizes how dopey he must look and finds himself really not caring, not even one little bit.

Jensen finally starts paying attention to what's going on around him when Jared slides his fingers out. Jensen whimpers, pulling his arm away from his eyes and looks at Jared, who is kneeling between Jensen's splayed legs, slicking up his cock, condom already on, eyes dark and hot as they trace the lines of Jensen's body, Jensen's now-soft cock lying against his belly, a few stray droplets of come shining along the shaft. Jensen smiles up at Jared languidly as he takes his leg, rubs it up against Jared's side.

"How d'ya want me?" he slurs, body still heavy with lassitude and the last lingering shocks of orgasm. Jared bites his lip hard and starts to pull and tug Jensen until he's turned around kneeling, facing away from Jared on his knees, Jared a steady presence against his back.

Jared wraps an arm around Jensen's waist and nudges at Jensen's hole with the head of his cock, slowly, slowly starting to edge inside.

"Like this. Want you like this, want you every way I can have you," he murmurs against Jensen's sweat damp neck. Jensen shudders, tangles the fingers of one hand with Jared's where it's resting on his stomach, his other hand reaching back and bracing himself against Jared's thigh as Jensen slowly pushes back, whimpering as Jared's cock opens him up. Jared grunts, buries his face against Jensen and pants, roughly, until Jensen can feel the soft pressure of Jared's balls resting against him, moans at the knowledge that all of Jared is buried deep inside of him.

He starts to move then, rocking into Jensen, growls before grabbing a hold of Jensen's hips with both hands and just going for it, fucking into him with long, hard strokes, setting off tiny little shock waves inside of Jensen's body at the oh-so-right angle. It feels good, so fucking good, and Jensen knows there's no way he's getting it up again but fuck, he doesn't care, doesn't care at all. Just loves the way Jared is pounding into him, teeth worrying the vulnerable skin at the nape of Jensen's neck, hands gripping tightly onto his hips as Jared loses himself in his pleasure, in Jensen.

It doesn't take long until Jensen can feel Jared tightening up behind him and his strokes start going jerky, erratic and Jensen takes up the slack, pushing back and fucking himself on Jared's cock, needing to feel Jared lose it inside of him. Jared groans, long and low, then stills, sinking his teeth into Jensen's neck before his entire body shudders, hips thrusting desperately into Jensen, the sound of their skin smacking dully a counterpoint to the throaty growls Jared is burying in the skin of Jensen's neck.

They collapse after that, bodies separating slowly, Jensen wincing a little as Jared slips free. He settles down onto his back, body aching pleasantly, heart hammering and waits while Jared disposes of the condom before he flops back onto his side, throwing a leg across Jensen's thigh, burrowing his face into Jensen's shoulder, still panting, shivering a little.

Jensen runs a soothing hand down his arm, links their fingers together and nudges Jared with his nose. Jared looks up at him, expression dazed, eyes wide and dark and blown and Jensen smiles, presses a kiss to his mouth.

"You okay?" he rasps, and Jared nods, eyes blinking owlshly before he smiles, a little dorky, making Jensen's heart twist in his chest.

"Better than okay. Fantastic," he murmurs, voice a bit blurry around the edges. Jensen smiles and feels sleep start to seep in, despite it being the middle of the afternoon. He presses one last kiss to Jared's now sweaty and damp hair and murmurs softly, "Love you."

Just as sleep is pulling him under, a warm, safe blanket of darkness all around, with Jared's heart beating in time with his, he hears Jared answer, "Love you too, Jensen."

...

Hello! This is Rebecca Mayer, calling from the offices of Westside Realty. We just wanted to let you know that the offer you put in on the apartment at Reardon Towers was accepted. We'll be sending you the paperwork to get the ball rolling on everything by courier later today.

Congratulations! You're now the proud owners of your very own piece of Manhattan real estate!

Click.

...

Jared gets word of his Screen Actors Guild nomination while they're knee deep in packing peanuts and cardboard boxes. He tackles Jensen to the floor of their new Upper West Side apartment - located at the pricey address of West 105th and Broadway - after he hangs up, letting out a yell and then pressing messy kisses all over Jensen's face as he blurts out his news.

It's about six days before Christmas and they're scrambling to have at least the basics set up in

their new place before their families descend on them for their first Christmas in New York, their first Christmas as a *couple*. It's crazily busy and Jensen isn't sure how the hell they've both managed to accrue so much stuff over the years, DVDs and books and pots and pans they hardly ever use.

But with the help of George, Emma, Andi - who is in town indefinitely recording an EP - and even Jason, they manage to get everything in order for the very first joint Ackles-Padalecki New York Christmas. (Jared wanted to call it the Ackles-Padalecki Manhattan Christmas Mayhem but Jensen just shook his head, nixing the idea with the threat to never blow Jared ever again.)

The holidays fly by in a flurry of sisters and brothers and parents, in-laws, friends, parties, gifts and too much food. By the time Jensen can get his head above water again, it's January tenth and they have ten days before the award show. Thankfully, Jared has a team of people whose job it is to make his travel arrangements and by extension, those for his boyfriend.

His publicist, who is a bitchy ex-New Yorker that sort of frightens Jensen, wasn't very happy about how public they were about the new status of their relationship but Jared stood his ground and they had a nice article about Jared coming out in *People*, the cover shot a picture of Jared and Jensen sitting in Central Park with the dogs sprawled all over their legs.

They have at least a hundred copies of the magazine now, strewn all over their place and Jensen has to laugh every time he looks at one of them. If only all the people who had written them encouraging e-mails and beautiful letters and cards had known that Jared had actually spent the morning gleefully playing pranks (including trying to get people to pull his finger) on Jensen during the photo shoot, much to the chagrin of the photographer, Jensen, Jared's publicist, and the homeless lady whose bench they'd apparently appropriated for the shoot.

They had their fair share of hate mail, weirdoes calling them names when they walk down the street but Jensen just shrugs it off - he tells Jared it happened all the time before he figured out he was gay. Just New York. He likes to flick Jared's forehead and tell him that he's kind of an easy target, too. What with being taller than the Empire State Building and all. Jared usually gapes in mock-outrage and then gives Jensen noogies and Jensen wonders how the hell anyone mistakes them for responsible adults, let alone responsible adults who are to be trusted with real estate and other responsibilities.

But things are starting to calm down a bit by the time they board their flight for L.A. The American public is busy devouring the newest celebrity gossip - the apparent reconciliation of a certain pop prince and princess and Jensen has to laugh at Jared who spends the entire flight pretending to be reading a copy of *Dead Souls* when in reality he's scouring gossip rag after gossip rag for the latest news about the scandal.

They land hours later, Jared having fallen asleep somewhere over the Great Divide, and Jensen has to wipe the drool off of his shoulder before they leave the airport and get driven to Chateau Marmont where they'll be staying. It's late, later even for them, and they barely undress before they crash into the big California king, both of them passing out between one breath and the next.

The next few days are hectic; Jared has audition after meeting after interview and Jensen mainly hangs around while he's doing the latter two or heads over to Steve's place or down to the beach for a bit to get some peace and quiet.

The day of the awards show rolls around and despite Jared proclaiming loudly and to anyone who will listen that he doesn't care whether he wins or loses, it's just an honor being nominated, he throws up three times that morning and spends the rest of the day twitching. Jensen contemplates finding someone who can give him a Valium to slip into Jared's drink.

The car comes to get them around three and by four-thirty, Jensen is having the surreal experience of walking the red carpet at the SAG Awards with his... life-partner and, wow, he thinks, watching Jared charm a reporter from E!, you just really never know how you're life is going to turn out.

Jared turns and catches Jensen's eye, winks at him, and Jensen thinks he's alright with that.

...

And the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role goes to...

Jared Padalecki, for his role in Sense Memory!

...

The world turns into a blur once Jared's name is read. He stands up, face wiped blank from shock and Jensen remembers pressing a kiss to his mouth as he pushes Jared out into the aisle and up towards the stage. He remembers Jared clutching the statue and stammering a little at the beginning of his speech, his Texas accent that years and years of L.A. had yet to beat out of him prevalent.

He remembers Jared looking right at him towards the end of his speech and smiling, dedicating the award to him and feeling his chest burst with warmth and affection.

But most of all, he remembers them crawling into the limo later that night, Jared still cradling his award, their cheeks flushed from too much champagne, the crowded after-party being left in their tail lights and Jared, leaning over, pressing a kiss to Jensen's lips at the same time he pressed the award into Jensen's hands.

"Meant it. 'S for you," Jared says, cheeks turning a brighter shade of pink as Jensen stares at him.

Jensen smiles but takes one of Jared's big hands in his and then wraps the statue in their joined hands.

“No. It’s for us.”

...

Hey, you’ve reached Jared and Jensen’s place. If you’re our parents, we’re taking care of each other and making sure we eat our veggies. If you’re Chad, don’t ask us, just go straight to the doctor and get some penicillin. If you’re anyone else, leave a message after the beep and we’ll get back to you.

Beeeeeeeeeep.

END

Love is the flower you've got to let grow.
-John Lennon

Credits, Acknowledgments and Author's Note:

So. Where to start? First off, thanks to my betas, [unamaga](#), who has been such a huge help in regards to *everything* to do with this fic, and who isn't even really in this fandom - Thank you SO much, Mel - for the beta work, the encouragement and the really awesome covers for my mix. Also, huge, huge thanks to [wendy](#) who helped whip this thing into shape back when it was a hopeless mess of switched tenses and wayward commas among other things. I love you both so!

Thanks to [arabella hope](#), [hkath](#) and [l0stdrag0n](#) who all audienced this fic at various stages of both completion and editing. :) I also wanna thank [schneestern](#), who, when I bounced this idea I had for a fic based on a *Mandy Moore* song off of her (waaaay back in September or so of last year) encouraged me to write it - thanks Jules, this fic wouldn't exist without you. <3 I also want to thank [memphis86](#) who gave me so many ideas (and a few tips) in regards to Jensen's life and career in New York City - love ya babe! Thanks also goes to everyone on my flist who helped to convince me to do this challenge again. Your support means so much. :)

Huge, huge thanks go to [tinkabell007](#) for the beautiful artwork she created for this. I am so pleased with how lovely everything turned out - and the trailer! Oh, how I love it so! I'm so glad you picked me! :D

Last thank you! Which goes to [audrarose](#) and [wendy](#) for organizing this challenge and running it - *again* and with twice (I think it was twice?) the number of entries as last year. I have so much respect for you guys for doing this. :)

Ok, I know that I've gone on and on for far too long, but I just have to take the time to thank everyone who encouraged me in this process, anyone who has ever read any of my fics and all my fellow writers/artists who participated in this year's [spn_j2_bigbang](#) challenge.