

## The Space Between

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# The Space Between

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## Summary

Six months after the twins are born, one of them gets extremely sick. Jared isn't handling things well and an unexpected run-in with someone from his past threatens to shake apart his life, his future.

## Notes

Flashbacks/Memories are in italics.

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Jared startles awake, the baby monitor crackling to life next to his side of the bed with the sound of his daughter's distressed cry. He's on his feet instantly, ignoring Jensen's sleepy, muttered, "Wha?" Even though Jensen refuses to believe it, he can tell their cries apart and he knows that it's his youngest daughter currently screaming her little head off.

At just over six months old, Elizabeth and Brianna have just started to be able to shift. And last week, they'd gotten sick for the first time, within days of each other, but poor Brie has had it so much worse. Where Lizzie is already better, Brie can't seem to shake the flu that they picked up from Drew.

The birth of the twins was long and difficult. He'd labored for hours before Jensen was finally able to bring Lizzie into the world but Brie just wouldn't move down into the birth canal on her own and Jared had all but given up. As much as Jared hated it – and barely resisted biting the older beta – Jensen had brought Jim in to help him deliver his second daughter. Jensen's father then had to physically remove his mate so that Jim could even get close enough to a weak and laboring Jared to even help. From what they'd told him, Brie wasn't breathing when she was born and Jared hemorrhaged right after Lizzie was delivered, losing so much blood that he nearly bled to death. In the end, Jim was able to save both of them somehow. Jared still doesn't really know all the details, and Jensen isn't talking about it.

*Jared grunts in pain, his eyes sliding closed as another contraction hits, hard and fast. Jensen brushes the hair back off his forehead, running a cool wash cloth over his neck and down his back. "Baby, you need to shift," he says softly and Jared barely has the strength to pick his head up to glare at his mate. "Seriously, Jay, 's been hours and this isn't gonna go any further until you do."*

*"I can't," Jared whispers, digging his fingers into the mattress. With Drew, the urge to shift had been instantaneous and natural but for some reason, this time, Jared just can't get himself to do it. And he knows Jensen is right, he can't give birth to them like this but he just can't do it. "Somethin's wrong, Jen... I can't... I can't do it."*

*"Yes you can," Jensen murmurs, rubbing one hand up and down his back. "You have to. I know it hurts, sweetheart, but you can do it."*

*"No, Jensen," Jared grits out with as much strength as he can muster. "I really, seriously, cannot do it. I... it's..." Another contraction tears through Jared and he screams.*

*Jensen dips down low, mouth right next to Jared's ear. "You can, Jared. You're just afraid. It's in your nature to do this. Close your eyes and breathe, focus on your wolf, not the pain..." Jared sighs and does as his mate says. Jensen's fingers slide over his, smoothing his hand out flat, their fingers slotting together. "That's it, love," he murmurs. "Focus on breathing, on my voice." Jared calms down some, his breathing evening out. "There you go," Jensen praises. "Now shift," he commands.*

*Jared gasps as his eyes snap open, the shift happening almost without his consent – his inner omega reacting to his Alpha's command. It still hurts like hell – same as it did with Drew –*

*but Jared can't focus on that. He's been in labor for so long the first twin is already ready to come out. Jared pushes, howling harshly when he feels a sharp, tearing pain and a wet rush of fluid coming from his body. He collapses against the mattress, whining pitifully, barely able to open his eyes to look up at Jensen. His mate looks concerned, his brow furrowed and his jaw clenched, and Jared whines again.*

*Jensen looks up at him from down near his hind legs, reaching up to rub at his side. "It's okay, sweetheart," he murmurs, giving Jared a small smile that doesn't actually reach his eyes. Licking his lips, Jensen reaches between Jared's legs and whispers, "I love you," before Jared feels another sharp pain tear through him.*

*He's panting harshly but he manages to see Jensen cradling a bloody, wiggling ball of fur against his chest and Jared breathes a sigh of relief. One down. Now he just has to get through the next one. He bears down but nothing happens, his heart pounding against his ribs when he realizes that it's going to be even harder to deliver their second daughter.*

*"Jay," Jensen breathes, still holding their oldest daughter. "I can't... Baby, I gotta get Jim." Jared growls and raises his head and his mate runs one bloody, shaking hand over his side. "She's not... I don't know what's wrong, sweetheart. Please, let me get Jim?"*

The result is that Brie is slightly smaller than Lizzie and a little weaker. Jim assured them that she was fine and that she'd catch up, but it still freaks Jared the fuck right out when something happens to her – to any of his kids actually, but it is so much worse with Brie.

His little girl's face is screwed up in misery, big fat tears streaming down her red, chubby cheeks. "Oh, baby," he breathes, picking her up, his heart damn-near breaking when she curls up against his chest, one little hand fisting his t-shirt as her wet face buries in his neck. Lizzie is awake as well, watching from across the room in her own crib, bright green eyes blinking owlishly at her sister.

While Drew is a pretty perfect mix of him and Jensen – in wolf and human form – the twins are his mate's spitting image – with the exception of the dimples they get from Jared. And they are total papa's girls; the macho, stoic Alpha wrapped around their little fingers. In wolf form though, the girls look just like Jared, except for some larger white patches that they get from Jensen.

Thankfully, the screaming has stopped, reduced to pitiful little whimpers as Jared walks her back and forth, naturally swinging his hips, murmuring softly against the tuff of blondish-brown hair. He jerks slightly when his mate asks hoarsely, "What's wrong?"

As soon as Brie hears her papa, she pulls away from Jared, holding out her arms, chubby little fingers making grabby hands at Jensen. His mate takes her automatically, rocking her the same way Jared was. It still amazes him watching Jensen with their children. As an omega, Jared is naturally domestic and nurturing but Jensen is even more of a freaking natural with them.

He still remembers when he found out that they were having twins, the shock, the fear, his mate's unwavering strength and faith.

*Jim's eyes are bright when he moves the transducer over Jared's stomach, the sounds of their child's heartbeat filling the room. Jared looks over at Jensen, smiling when he sees his mate's attention focused fully on the grainy image. "Holy crap," Jim mutters and Jared's eyes snap up to the older beta. His grin is huge and he moves to the left just a bit and Jared can see – and hear – a second little blob. "Twins, boys."*

*Although he can see it for himself and Jim just said it, Jared still shakes his head, looking back and forth between Jim and Jensen. "No, wait. Twins? That's not..." he trails off, his gaze swinging to Jensen. "You knocked me up with fuckin' twins!?"*

*Jim chuckles when Jared smacks Jensen's arm hard enough that Jensen flinches. "Ow, Jay. What the hell? 's not my fault."*

*"Like hell it isn't," Jared grumbles, shaking his head again as he wipes the gel off his belly. "'s your fuckin' knot that put them in there."*

*Jim coughs discreetly and smiles when Jared turns his murderous gaze on him. "'m just gonna leave you two alone. Take all the time you need."*

*"Chicken shit," Jensen mutters as Jim quickly exits the room. He looks back to Jared, smiling sheepishly. "I love you," Jensen says sweetly, smiling softly.*

*"Don't even try it, Ackles," Jared warns, sitting up and forcefully tugging his shirt down. "Jesus Christ. Fuckin' twins." He shakes his head again, running one hand through his hair.*

*Jensen gets up out of the chair and stands next to the exam table, wrapping one arm around Jared's waist. He dips down and presses a kiss to the edge of Jared's mating scar. He shudders but forces himself to pull away enough to glare at Jensen. "Don't," he grits.*

*"C'mon, sweetheart," Jensen murmurs, his hand sliding over Jared's slight bump. "What's wrong? Really?"*

*"'s just..." Jared starts, pausing to look over at the frozen, black and white image of his twins. "Two of 'em, Jen. It was hard enough with one when Drew was a baby. And not to mention the labor..." Jared trails off, shuddering for a different reason this time as he remembers the pain of giving birth to their son. "I don't... I don't think I can do it," he finishes, voice small and terrified.*

*"Baby, you will be great," Jensen assures him, pressing a kiss to the corner of his lips.*

*Brie's face is buried in Jensen's neck – just like she was doing with Jared – so Jared grabs Lizzie, bouncing her on his hip. "She's still feelin' bad," Jared explains to Jensen. Lizzie grabs his hair and despite the fact that his heart is pounding against his ribcage with worry for his youngest, he still smiles at his older daughter. "Hey, sweet girl," he murmurs, pressing a kiss to her forehead. With the screaming over, Liz is already falling back to sleep so Jared tucks her back into her crib and jerks his chin toward the door. "Bring her," he tells his mate.*

Jensen follows Jared back to their bedroom, broad hand looking huge against her tiny back. Jared ducks into their bathroom and grabs the medicine that Jim gave the girls when they first got sick. Jensen holds onto her, cooing softly when she wrinkles her freckled nose when Jared gives her a dose of the liquid.

She quiets down completely after a while, the medicine obviously doing its job, cupid-bow lips wrapped around her little thumb, sucking rhythmically. “You want me to take her?” Jared whispers.

Jensen shakes his head and lies back down on their bed, settling on his side. Jared follows after Jensen, laying on his side as well, their little girl safely nestled between them. “mma call Jim in the mornin’,” Jared whispers, trailing his finger over Brie’s cheek.

He’s expecting Jensen to tell him that he doesn’t need to, that he’s over-reacting. He’s surprised when Jensen nods, his hand rubbing comforting circles on her tiny back. “Think that’s a good idea,” he murmurs.

Jensen falls asleep not long after that but Jared sits up the rest of the night, watching his mate and his youngest daughter sleep.

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Megan takes Drew to pre-school the next morning while Donna keeps Lizzie, leaving Jared to take Brie to see Jim again. He’s surprised when he finally gets up and heads downstairs to find Jensen in the kitchen waiting for him.

“Don’t you have work today?” Jared asks, grabbing the mug of coffee his mate hands him with a grateful – if exhausted – smile.

Jensen shakes his head and takes Brie from Jared’s arms, cradling her in one arm against his chest. “Nah,” he mutters, jerking his chin toward the food on the counter, “Mom made breakfast before headin’ out back with Lizzie. Eat somethin’ and we’ll head out.”

Jared looks over at the food, feeling his stomach clench and roll at the thought of eating. If he didn’t know better, he’d think he was pregnant again. “Uh, that’s okay. ‘m not really hungry.” Jensen looks up at him, one eyebrow raised. “What? It happens,” Jared mutters, downing the coffee in his mug before pouring himself another one.

Jensen snorts and shakes his head. “Yeah, rarely. Usually only when you’re pregnant...” he trails off and Jared can see his mate doing the math in his head and barely resists the urge to smirk. Jensen’s shoulders drop with relief when he realizes that it’s not possible.

Jared shrugs one shoulder and grabs Brie’s bag – even though they’re only heading to Jim’s – and heads toward the door, Jensen following behind with Brie. “Why aren’t you headin’ in today?” Jared asks, hoping to take Jensen’s attention off the fact that he hasn’t been eating well lately.

It’s Jensen’s turn to shrug as they make their way out the door. “Wanted to go to Jim’s with

you,” he says softly. “Wasn’t like I’d be able to concentrate. ‘sides, it’s not anythin’ that I can’t do from home later, ya know?”

Jared hums in agreement, listening but his mind is a million miles away. Jim is in his kitchen and he smiles at them when they enter, the action dimming when his gaze falls to Brie and he takes in her flushed cheeks and fever-bright eyes. “Hey, boys,” he mutters, pushing himself out of his chair. “She still not doin’ any better?”

“No,” Jared answers, shaking his head, as he gently rubs his daughter’s back. “She woke up screaming last night. I just... ‘m really worried,” he explains, almost apologetically.

“Understandable,” Jim assures him, leading them back to one of the exam rooms. Jared’s always found it interesting – and loving the fact – that Jim’s home is his office as well. Jensen sits down on the exam table with Brie still cradled against his chest; the only time she seems remotely content is when she’s with Jensen, when she can feel and smell him.

She fusses a bit while Jim examines her and Jared’s stomach lurches again as he watches the frown deepen on Jim’s weathered features as he listens to her lungs. “‘m afraid this might’a gone past a bad case’a the flu,” the older beta explains, dropping his stethoscope on the table behind him. “I... I’ve got a friend – a fellow were – that works at the hospital in town,” Jared knows that he’s talking about the human town just on the other side of the woods, the one he was raised in and his heart slams painfully against his ribs, that old panic coming back, “think it might be best to take her to him and have him check her out.”

Jensen frowns, rubbing one hand down Brie’s back. “Why?” he asks, tone as tense as Jared feels.

“Honestly? She’s sicker than we thought, Jensen. I can’t... I’m afraid that this is beyond what I can do here. It’s rare but it happens sometimes and we have’ta send someone off to an actual hospital. That’s why Eric works there.” Jim clamps one hand down on Jensen’s shoulder, squeezing for a moment before letting go. “I know that you don’t wanna take her to a human town, son. And I get it. But Eric has been workin’ there – and treatin’ weres in secret – for decades.”

Jensen sighs and looks over at Jared. “What’d’ya think?” he asks.

As much as the thought of going back there scares the shit out of him, Jared knows that there’s no way he’s not going to do everything in his power to make sure his daughter gets better. “I think that if we need to take her there to get her better, that’s what we’re gonna do.”

Jensen nods and looks back to Jim. “You heard the man.”

It’s no secret among their pack that, while Jensen may be Alpha, when it comes to their children, Jared runs the show.

Jim smirks and grabs Brie’s file. “Okie dokie. I’ll just go call Eric. I’ll call y’all and let ya know what he says.”

Donna is still in the back yard with Lizzie when they get back home and Meg's back from dropping Drew off at school. Jared takes Brie from Jensen and heads straight upstairs, holing himself up in the nursery. She's thankfully asleep, her cheeks flushed but her fever's down a little. Jared curls up in the huge chair, rocking his sleeping child as he stares out the window.

*Jared wakes up, sore and confused. Pain rips through him when he tries to move and Jensen is at his side in an instant. "Shh, easy, love. 's okay. You're okay now." He pauses and rubs between Jared's ears. "Can you shift back for me?"*

*Jared looks up at Jensen and shakes his head, whining pitifully. Jensen smiles sadly and presses a kiss to the fur he was just rubbing. "Okay, 's alright. Take your time." He smiles when he sets two bundles of fur down in front of Jared, gently nudging their daughters against his chest. Jared lifts his head enough to sniff at his pups, shaking his head when he scents the smaller one and smells someone other than himself and his mate. The pup whines and shakily nudges against Jared's belly, her tiny little paws padding at his fur. Her sister is more active, more secure in herself, already seeking out a nipple to nurse.*

*Jared flops his head back down on the mattress, his eyes sliding closed when Jensen sighs softly and helps the smaller one latch on as well. Weirdly, this was the one thing he never got used to when Drew was still a pup. Jensen curls up against his back, kissing the top of his head. "I love you," Jensen whispers before shifting, his huge wolf form wrapping protectively around Jared and their girls.*

*Jared sleeps for days and there aren't those same bonding moments that they had right after Drew was born. He doesn't remember anything after Jensen placed his frantic call to Jim, aside from snarling at the older beta, until he woke up and Jensen laid the pups against his chest. At first, he refuses to shift back, too tired and weak but also not really wanting to talk to Jensen. He can sense his mate's growing frustration, knows that pretty soon Jensen will command him to shift.*

*The girls are a week old when Jared finally shifts back. Jensen is with Drew and he's alone for the first time all week. He looks down at his daughters, smiling sadly as he strokes over their tawny fur. "Hey, puppies," he whispers. "'m so sorry." His voice catches in his throat and the tears fall mostly without his knowledge as he cuddles their tiny, furry bodies against his chest.*

*Jared looks up when Jensen clears his throat, his heart slamming against his ribs at the sight of his mate. Jensen's leaning against the doorframe, Drew squirming in his arms, his little legs kicking out, obviously trying to get down. He tries to ignore the fact that he couldn't sense him ahead of time.*

*"Someone's a bit anxious to meet his little sisters and to spend some time with his daddy," Jensen says with a smile.*

*"Hey, baby boy," Jared murmurs, smiling slightly when bright green eyes snap to his.*

*"Papa," Drew whines. "Can I get down now?"*



*“Remember what we talked ‘bout, puppy,” Jensen warns softly, setting their son on the end of the bed. Drew crawls up the mattress, his eyes wide and his tiny button nose wrinkled when he looks up at Jensen then Jared.*

*“They’re so tiny,” he says softly, his head tilting to the side as he gently pokes one finger into their oldest daughter’s belly.*

*Jared chuckles softly and cards his hand through his little boy’s hair. “You were at one time too, son.”*

*Drew looks thoughtful for about a half a second before he shrugs and looks up at Jensen. “Can I shift too, papa?”*

*Jensen nods and Jared watches as his son screws up his face, his nose wrinkling as he forces his shift. Once he’s done, he flops down next to his sisters, gently nosing against their heads. Jared looks up when Jensen sits down next to the children, one hand rubbing up and down Jared’s thigh. “How’re you doin’?” he asks softly.*

*“Better. Thank you,” Jared whispers, not taking his eyes off his kids, unable to look at Jensen for some reason.*

*Jensen sighs and scoots closer, stretching out on his side so that the kids are between them. “Have you thought of any names yet?”*

*Jared shakes his head and looks up at Jensen briefly. “I named Drew,” he mutters.*

*Jensen sighs again and reaches out, tucking a strand of hair behind Jared’s ear. “I love you,” he murmurs.*

*“Love you,” Jared rasps.*

*“How ‘bout Elizabeth and Brianna?” Jensen suggests after a few moments of silence.*

*Despite the confusing feelings flowing through Jared, he smiles and looks up at Jensen. “I love it,” he whispers.*

Things have been stressful ever since the twins’ birth. Jensen hasn’t said anything but Jared feels guilty as hell, knows he did something wrong. He almost lost Brie once and the thought of losing her again terrifies him. Her being so sick now definitely isn’t helping that.

He’s been a shell of himself since their birth, withdrawing into himself more than he ever did before – even when he was living with his adoptive parents and hiding half of himself from the world. He’s not been eating or sleeping well, creeping into the nursery almost every night just to sit to watch his daughter sleep, making sure she’s still breathing.

He can’t talk to Jensen about this though. And it’s causing a lot of trouble in their relationship. Jensen knows him better than anyone, knows that there’s something wrong that Jared’s not telling him and it makes Jensen angry. This, in turn, makes Jared angry and

defensive. But he just can't stand the thought of Jensen knowing how weak he is, how he feels like he's unable to keep their children safe, how much he feels like a failure. Most of all, he doesn't want to hear Jensen agree with him about all his mistakes and shortcomings when it comes to being a parent.

He doesn't realize that he's crying until he feels the tears splash against the back of his hand. Wiping angrily at his cheeks, he pushes himself up out of the chair and settles Brie into her crib, knowing that she needs the rest more than anything.

He meant what he said at Jim's; if taking her to a human hospital is what it takes, that's what he'll do. But the thought of stepping foot in that city again makes him feel like that skinny, naïve, lost kid he'd been when he ran away. He'd never thought that he'd be faced with the possibility of seeing his adoptive parents again. He doesn't even know what they did when he ran away, what they thought happened to him. And for the last nine years, he hasn't cared. Honestly, he doesn't even care now. He's not that same boy he once was. But the last six months have brought out all those old fears and insecurities – not in his wolf this time, but in himself – and he's not sure if he can handle seeing them again, even after all this time.

Jensen clears his throat and Jared's head snaps toward the door, sees his mate leaning up against the frame. His arms are crossed over his broad chest, his head tilted slightly, his brow furrowed in concern. "Are you... Are you crying?" he asks softly, immediately pushing off the doorframe to enter the room fully, dropping to his knees in front of Jared's chair. Jensen's hand reaches out toward him but his mate drops it at the last second, curling his fingers around the arm of his chair.

It makes Jared want to cry more, makes him want to fall against his mate's strong chest and never let go. Jensen hardly touches him anymore and even though Jared knows he doesn't deserve his mate's touch, he misses it like breathing.

Jared snuffles and looks away from Jensen, goes back to staring out into the backyard where his mother-in-law is outside playing with his eldest daughter. Lizzie is such a happy, playful baby, much like Drew had been. Jared thinks that Brie takes more after him – quiet and shy – where their older children take after Jensen.

He gasps when he feels Jensen cup his cheek, his eyes fluttering closed at the touch. It feels like it's been years since Jensen has touched him. "Jare," Jensen mutters, thumb brushing under his eye, wiping away the tears still streaming down his cheek. "C'mon, love. What's wrong?"

Jared finally turns back to his mate, inhaling his familiar scent. He opens his mouth, not sure what he's going to say, when Megan pokes her head into the room. "Sorry, guys," she says softly, smiling apologetically when they both look over at her. "Jim called. He said that he called Eric and y'all can head over to see him today."

Jensen smiles at her and nods. "Thanks, Meggie," he says softly. Once she's gone, Jensen looks back to Jared. "Can we talk later?" he asks, tone still soft but Jared can tell it's not really a request.

Jared sighs and nods, pushing himself out of the chair once Jensen stands up, his mate automatically grabbing their daughter.

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The trip into town will take a few hours since they have to drive around the woods and Brie is still sleeping when Jensen straps her into her car-seat. As much as Jared knows she needs the rest, he can't help but wish that she was awake so they'd have the distraction of having to take care of her. Instead, he sits in the passenger's seat and stares out the window, for the first time in nine years feeling uncomfortable around his mate, not knowing what to say to Jensen.

Jensen sighs and Jared looks down when he feels his mate's hand on his thigh. He looks back up and Jensen glances over quickly. With a sigh of his own, Jared grabs Jensen's hand, twining their fingers together. "Gonna be a long trip," Jensen says softly, his thumb brushing back and forth over the side of Jared's hand. "Feels like I haven't really seen or talked to you in forever."

Jared's eyes slide closed and his heart feels like its breaking. He knows that the strain on their bond is his fault but he hadn't realized that Jensen was feeling it to. He didn't realize that Alphas felt the distance when things were off, not like their mates did.

"Yeah," Jared agrees, reopening his eyes to look at Jensen again. Even after being together for nine years, he still gets butterflies in his stomach when he looks at his mate, still feels so incredibly lucky to have Jensen, that Jensen loves him too. And he can't figure out why he's letting it all go to hell.

As much as he wants to fix things, he has no idea where to start. Thankfully, Jensen doesn't seem to have the same problem. "Wanna tell me what was wrong before we left?"

Jared sighs again and drops his head back against the seat. "'m worried 'bout Brie," he says softly. It's mostly the truth.

"Mmhmm," Jensen hums, darting another glance at Jared. "But that's not all, is it?"

Damn Jensen for knowing him so well. "Not really," Jared mutters. "I... 's partly goin' back there," he admits quietly. "I mean, you know better than anyone what I went through and that I haven't been back since I ran away..." Jared trails off, turning his head to look at his mate. "I started... I started thinkin' about it, wonderin' what they thought when I left."

Jensen frowns, squeezing Jared's fingers. "Who cares what they thought?" Jensen asks harshly. "I mean, shit, Jay, look what they did to you..." He pauses, shaking his head. "I understand that you're nervous but I'll be there with you the whole time. And 's likely that you may not even see them."

Jared nods, knowing that Jensen is right but it still doesn't stop the nervous racing of his heart or the churning in his gut. "Yeah, I know..." he sighs. "But 's not just them. I lived there for sixteen years, Jen. And I may not'a had any friends but there might still be people that I know."

Jensen frowns more, a muscle in his jaw twitching. “It doesn’t matter, Jared. We’re only goin’ there because Brie needs this. That’s all that matters.”

Jared sighs and pulls his hand away from Jensen’s, folding his hands together in his lap. “Yeah, of course,” he mutters, once again looking out the window, tears stinging his eyes.

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Dr. Eric Kripke is a short, balding man with kind eyes and Jared likes him right away. Jim sent over Brie’s – and Jared’s – file, so he has most of their history. He leads them into a small office on the second floor of the hospital, cooing at Brie and making funny faces at her when she looks up at him with wide, leafy-green eyes, blinking slowly.

“She’s just adorable,” the Alpha doctor says around a grin, tickling under Brie’s tiny chin. “So, from what Jim sent, seems she’s been sick for about two weeks? And hasn’t gotten any better?”

Jared busies himself with changing Brie, letting his mate talk to the doctor. Even though he likes Eric, he’s never been comfortable around Alphas that he doesn’t know.

“Yeah,” Jensen sighs. “Our four-year-old brought home the flu from school a few weeks ago. The girls of course got it as well. Jim gave them some medicine that did wonders on Lizzie but it just didn’t work the same for Brie.”

Dr. Kripke hums in the back of his throat, looking through the file once again. “I see here that there were some complications when she was born?”

Jared cringes, his eyes squeezing closed. He knew that there was a strong possibility that this would come up but he was hoping that they could avoid talking about it. Nothing has ever made him feel like such a failure. It is in his very nature – his biology – to get pregnant and give birth and he managed to fuck it up, gave up when his little girl needed him the most.

Jensen inhales deeply and Jared pulls Brie close to his chest, rubbing over the back of her head. “The delivery was very hard on Jared,” Jensen states, his tone oddly devoid of emotion. “Brie wasn’t breathing when she was born.” Jared glances at Jensen out of the corner of his eye, sighing softly at the look on his mate’s face. “Jim was able to get her breathing again and stop... He saved both of them. But Brie’s always been a little weaker than Lizzie.”

Dr. Kripke nods and walks around his desk, holding his hands out toward Brie. “May I?” he asks, looking at Jared with one eyebrow raised, a soft smile on his lips. Jared nods and hands his daughter over, curling his hands into fists to keep from grabbing her back when she whimpers and reaches for him.

“Da!” she cries, tiny fists balled up, big tears in her eyes – eyes so much like Jensen’s it damn-near breaks his heart.

Jared’s breath hitches and tears sting his own eyes. Both girls have been playing around with

making sounds but that is the first time she's come close to Dad. Jensen sees him about to reach out for her and closes the distance between them, curling his arm around Jared's waist. Dr. Kripke smiles at them both and jiggles Brie on his hip. "I'm just going to take her to an exam room and check things out, run some tests. It'll take about an hour. Go get some coffee or lunch or just go for a walk." He looks at Jared and smiles again. "She's gonna be okay, Jared. I'll do everything I can to help her get better."

With that, the older Alpha takes his daughter, leaving him and Jensen alone. Jensen's arm is still around his waist and Jared tries to pull away but Jensen won't let him go. Instead, he wraps his other arm around Jared and pulls him into a hug. The tears that he'd barely been holding back stream down his cheeks and he collapses against his mate's chest, all their problems and the distance between them not mattering for the moment. "Oh, baby," Jensen whispers, squeezing his arms around Jared. "She's gonna be okay. Jim trusts him so I do too. And she's strong and stubborn, just like her daddy," Jensen teases, rubbing soothing circles on the small of Jared's back. "I promise you, sweetheart. I will do everything in my power to make sure our baby gets better."

Jared buries his face in Jensen's neck, inhaling his mate's familiar, calming scent. "She called me 'da'," he rasps. "I can't... I can't lose her, Jen."

"I know," Jensen murmurs and Jared can hear the frown in his tone. Jensen sighs and pulls back enough to press a kiss to Jared's temple. "C'mon, let's go get some lunch like Eric suggested."

Jared shakes his head and pulls himself out of Jensen's arms. "I'm not hungry. But we can go if you are."

Jensen frowns and shakes his head. "I don't," he sighs, "I don't know what's up with you but once Brie's better, we gotta talk about this."

Jared's jaw clenches and he heads for the door, all but running out of the room, ignoring his mate completely. He can't explain it, he just needs to get away, can't stand to look at Jensen and see the disappointment in his eyes.

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Truthfully, he's not surprised that Jensen doesn't follow him but it does hurt like hell. He ends up wondering the hallways and grounds outside the hospital, his brain a mess of confusing feelings and emotions. He's not really paying attention to anything around him, damn-near runs straight into an older woman as he checks his watch, sees that it has been nearly an hour.

Jensen is already in the room that they were in earlier, staring at the wall, back straight and his jaw clenched. He barely looks up at Jared when he walks in, goes right back to staring straight ahead like Jared doesn't exist. Nearly ten minutes later, Dr. Kripke enters the room with a bright smile. "Jensen, Jared," he says around a nod, taking a seat at his desk. "The good news is, Brie's going to be just fine."

“And the bad news?” Jensen prompts. Jared’s still stuck on the news that his daughter is going to be okay.

“Bad news is that she’s got a bad case of bronchitis. I’d like to keep her a day or two, get some medicine in her and some fluids. Once we get the treatment going, she’ll be good as new.”

Jared’s knees almost collapse and he feels a rush of relief go through him. “Can I see her?” he asks softly, his voice breaking.

“Of course,” Dr. Kripke smiles and leads them down the hall to a private room.

She looks so tiny in the hospital crib, IV in her chubby little arm, her chest rising and falling as she breathes, her cupid-bow lips pursed, her cheeks still a rosy-red but Jared can already tell she’s more comfortable than she’s been in days. “We’ll bring a cot in so you can stay with her,” Eric says knowingly as he glances at Jared. “I’ll be back in a few hours to check on her.”

Jared doesn’t even look up when he leaves, his gaze trained on his daughter the whole time. Jensen gently presses a hand to the small of his back, merely to get his attention, not letting the touch linger. “I’m gonna go call my mom,” he says, tone still tense and flat. “Let her know what’s goin’ on and check on Lizzie and Drew. I’ll let her know that we’ll be here a few days.”

Jared nods but doesn’t look at Jensen. He ignores everything – the nurse bringing in the entirely too small cot and checking on Brie, the time passing while his mate is gone; everything. In fact, nothing registers until he hears a voice he hasn’t heard in nine years whisper his name.

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His head snaps up and he looks at the door, his eyes going wide when he sees his adoptive mother standing in the doorway, one hand over her mouth, the other pressed to her chest. “Oh my God,” she breathes. “It is you.”

“M-mom?” he whispers, blinking owlishly. He’s thought of her a few times over the years but it was always in the abstract. And even though she lied to him and hurt him more than she’ll ever know, she was the only mother he’d ever known, until he met Donna.

Tears fill her blue eyes and she sways in place and instinct more than anything has Jared jumping up to catch her before she falls. He leads her to a chair and grabs a glass of water. She looks up at him, shock clear on her face. “I... I thought that was you when you almost ran into me earlier but I wasn’t sure... So I followed you,” she admits even though he didn’t ask. “I... God, Jared, I thought you were dead. I mourned you.” Tears stream down her face and even after what she did, he feels guilty. Her gaze rakes over him from head to toe and back, her head tilting and a frown pulling down her lips when she looks at his neck. “What happened?” she gasps, reaching out a frail, shaking hand, fingers brushing the edge of his mating scar that’s just barely visible under the neck of his t-shirt.

“Nothin’, momma,” he murmurs. “I’m okay.”

“Where’d you go? What happened?” She pauses, her hand automatically going to the ever-present cross around her neck. “Even though it’s been so long... Thank the Lord I found you.” She looks past him, noticing Brie for the first time. “Your daughter?” she asks, smiling sadly. Jared nods and glances over his shoulder at his little girl. “Is your wife here?”

Jared swallows thickly and closes his eyes for a second. He should have known better to think that things would have changed. He’s just thankful that Jensen’s not here for this.

“No,” he breathes. “I don’t have a wife.” That seems like the easiest one to tackle first. She frowns and tilts her head again, her fingers moving over the crucifix resting against her chest.

“Oh, Jared. I thought we taught you better than that,” she scolds and all of a sudden, Jared’s five again and being told he was wrong – a monster – when he shifted into his wolf.

And because things aren’t hard e-fucking-nough right now, Jensen chooses that moment to come sweeping back in the room, all macho, protective Alpha. “Jared?” his mate asks, one eyebrow quirked.

Jared sighs and drops his head, his eyes sliding closed. He feels Jensen standing next to him, between his momma and him and the crib. “Who are you?” Jensen asks after a few moments of silence.

“Oh, where are my manners.” His momma laughs softly. “I’m Sarah. Jared’s mother.”

Jared damn-near chokes on the scent of Jensen’s anger. His eyes snap up, one hand reaching out to grab his mate’s wrist. But Jensen ignores him, shaking away Jared’s hand. He moves closer to Jared and Brie, his hand landing hard and heavy on Jared’s shoulder. Jensen’s thick, strong fingers brush against his mating scar, and despite everything, Jared’s whole body shudders, a quick shot of heat rolling down his spine. His body never fails to respond when Jensen touches it, no matter what else he’s feeling or what else is going on.

His mom’s gaze snaps to Jensen’s hand, the possessiveness of the touch, the familiarity of it, and Jared can literally see the moment she gets it. Her face goes pale, tears once again pooling in her eyes when she looks at Jared. It’s bad enough that he was born a were – a monster in her eyes – but the fact that he’s gay is not going to go over any better.

Brie must sense her papa and wakes up, whimpering slightly. Jensen goes to her immediately. “Shh, puppy,” he murmurs, pressing a kiss to her forehead when he picks her up, mindful of the IV and wires covering her tiny body. Sarah looks between them, her eyes going even wider.

“I thought she was your daughter?” she asks Jared, brow furrowed.

“She is,” Jensen answers before Jared can open his mouth. “She’s *our* daughter.”

“That’s not... that’s not possible,” Sarah insists.

Jensen snorts and shakes his head, gently laying Brie back in her crib, rubbing her back for a second as she drifts back to sleep. As soon as she’s quiet again, he turns back around, eyes flashing dangerously. “I assure you it is entirely possible,” he hisses. “I was there when he got pregnant with her and her sister. I was there when they were born.” He pauses, his hand once again sliding over Jared’s shoulder. “He is my mate, has been for nine years. Ever since he ran away from the abuse he suffered at your hands.”

Sarah gasps and looks back and forth between them, horrified. “You... you’re one of them, too.” It is more statement than question but Jensen nods anyway. “Oh God, what have you done?” She turns wide, terrified eyes to Jared. “What did you let them do to you?”

Jensen growls and takes a step forward. Sarah cringes away, terror in her eyes and Jared sees for the first time that she is really, truly afraid of weres, that it wasn’t just her trying to keep that part of him hidden from the rest of town. He steps between his mate and his mother. Jensen grabs his wrist but this time it’s Jared’s turn to shake off the touch. “No, Jensen. Don’t,” he half-begs, half-commands.

Jensen’s eyes snap to his and Jared almost takes a step back himself from the fury he sees in his mate’s eyes – for the first time ever aimed at him. “What the fuck, Jared?” he hisses, mindful of their sleeping child. “You’re just going to let her talk about me, about *you*, like that?”

“No, I’m not,” Jared answers softly. “But you know... I told you what she thought of me when I was growing up, what she made me believe about myself. You goin’ all badass, macho Alpha isn’t going to help matters right now. Just...” Jared huffs a sigh and runs one hand through his hair. “Just let me handle it, okay?”

Jensen bristles, his jaw clenched, and Jared can tell it’s taking every bit of his self-control not to attack – at least verbally. “Fine,” he grits out. “But not here. Your *wolf* child is sick, Jared,” he points out and the venom in his tone, the unnecessary wording, hits Jared in his already wounded heart.

Jared licks his lips and nods, knows when he’s been dismissed. He shoots one last glance at Brie’s sleeping form before turning back to Jensen. “Yes, Alpha,” he mutters, not a lick of respect in the title.

Jensen narrows his eyes, his hands clenching at his sides. “Watch it, Jared,” he warns. “I am in no mood for you to be a bitch right now.”

His mother gasps, her shaking hand in front of her mouth again and Jared turns his back on his mate, leading her out into the hallway and into one of the empty consultation rooms across the hall.

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Jared drops heavily into one of the most uncomfortable chairs he’s ever sat in, both hands



running through his hair, fingers clenching into fists and pulling at the strands for a moment. “Jared?” his mom asks softly, her fingers soft and gentle when she brushes the tears off his cheeks. “What... I don’t understand. What’s going on? Who is that man? What has he done to you?”

Jared sighs and leans back in the chair, looking up at the woman he considered his mother for sixteen years, even when she made him hide a huge part of himself, made him afraid of being a monster, of hurting people.

She looks the same, a little older and a few more wrinkles. But there’s judgment in her eyes, the same look that’s been there as long as he can remember, he just never knew what it was before.

Inhaling deeply, Jared sits up straighter, remembers the long days and weeks that Jensen spent all those years ago teaching him – and showing him – that there’s nothing wrong with him. “That man,” he starts, voice bolder and stronger than he actually feels, “Is my mate and the father of my children. He didn’t ‘do’ anything to me. I’m a were. I always have been. When I... When I left, I was a mess. He found me, he *saved* me.”

“He was going to *hurt* you, Jared!” she cries. “And me. You know what I told you about... about *them*. They’re monsters. And he’s turned you back into one. Into a... a freak that can give him freak children. I didn’t... I didn’t raise you like this... To be, to be with a man, a w-wolf.”

Jared’s jaw clenches, feels his wolf clawing at his insides at the insults to his mate, his children. “We’re not violent – especially me – but I’ll warn you not to talk about my mate and my children like that. Jensen... Jensen is amazing. He taught me about that part of myself. You... You can’t scare it out of me, not anymore. And as for being with a man? I knew I was gay before I even ran away, before I even knew what my true nature as a wolf was.”

“He’s brain-washed you,” she murmurs sadly, shaking her head. “I... Come home with me, Jared. I can save you again.”

Jared can’t help it, he laughs. “*Jensen* is the one who saved me,” he says softly. “I love my mate and my children, the family that I found when I met him. The family that has accepted me, without question, from the beginning.” Although he really cares less now than he did before, he has to know. “Why are you so scared of weres? What happened to you?”

She shakes her head and tears fill her eyes again. “When I was a little girl,” she starts, tone so soft, Jared can barely hear her. “A w-wolf killed my brother.”

Jared gasps, shaking his head. “No, that’s not... I swear, we’re not violent. How do you know it was a were? What happened?”

Her voice is shaky when she tells him the story of when she was younger and she and her older brother were playing in the woods behind their house – the same woods Jensen found him in, the same woods he and his mate run in and take their children to. She doesn’t

remember much, just that they happened to stumble on an injured wolf and her brother got too close. The wolf attacked, killing her brother. “Of course, at first, I thought it was just a normal wolf,” she whispers, shaking her head. “But when I screamed, it... it changed. Into a man. There had been rumors for years of werewolves living in our woods but it was mostly just fairy tales or things our parents told us to keep us away... I never believed it was true until I saw the proof.” She pauses, taking a deep breath before letting it out slowly. “When... when you came to us, it was a miracle, Jared. I was meant to save you from becoming a monster like that.”

Jared shakes his head, his eyes wide. “Don’t you see? He was injured and frightened. Anyone would react the same way. Human or were.”

“There was a, I don’t know, I guess it was a puppy there with it,” she says, shaking her head, ignoring him. “The little thing was covered in blood. It was probably eating the poor thing.”

Jared’s heart sinks and he shakes his head again. “That was probably *his* pup, his *child*, and he was protecting it from perceived danger. What parent wouldn’t fight to save their child?”

“It’s not natural, Jared,” she whispers, pleading. “You’re a man. How can you... You can’t birth children. You’re not meant to. That’s against God’s plan!”

“God made me this way,” Jared argues. “Yes, I am a man. But I am also an omega wolf and I can conceive and give birth. I have three children.” He sighs and stands up, looking her straight in the eye. At least this way, he’ll have closure, he’ll be leaving this time on his own terms, not because he’s scared and confused. “I am as I was made to be,” he says, soft but firm. “It’s as much a part of me as my height or the color of my eyes. My real parents were weres, my siblings are weres, my mate and my children are weres.” He pauses, taking her shaking hand in one of his own. “I’m sorry about what happened to your brother, I am. But that is the exception, not the rule. You knew me for sixteen years, did I ever seem violent to you?” he waits until she reluctantly shakes her head ‘no’, “Exactly. But if one of my children was hurt like that, I wouldn’t hesitate to kill anyone who came near them. Wouldn’t you have done the same for me?”

“That’s different...” she starts.

“No,” Jared interrupts. “It’s not different at all. Nine years ago, when Jensen found me, he taught me who I really am. And for the first time, I felt whole. I’m loved – cherished even – and I have three beautiful, amazing kids. And I’m happy. Be happy for me. Please?”

“I... I can’t, Jared,” she whispers sadly.

“Then continue to think I’m dead because my life is with my family, my mate and children, and our pack.” With that, Jared turns and leaves a clearly stunned Sarah behind.

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Jared stops just outside his daughter’s room, inhaling deeply, exhaling slowly. Surprisingly, he feels better after his confrontation with Sarah. He finally sees that it wasn’t him that she

was afraid or ashamed of, it was weres as a whole. He hadn't realized that he still held so much hurt and anger and insecurity over the whole thing.

Jared closes his eyes and takes another steadying breath, squaring his shoulders and standing to his full height as he prepares himself to enter the hospital room and face Jensen. For the first time in nine years, he's uncertain about seeing his mate, unsure if he's welcome or wanted.

Knowing that he can't put it off any longer, Jared pushes open the door, stopping just inside the room. Jensen is standing next to the crib, his attention on their sleeping child, his back to Jared. But by the minute tensing of Jensen's broad shoulders, Jared knows that Jensen's well aware of his presence.

Steeling himself, Jared forces his legs to move, coming to a stop next to his mate. "Can we talk?" Jared asks softly, his fingers twitching at his side with the need to reach out and touch Jensen, to reconnect.

Jensen glances over at him and the look in his beautiful green eyes damn-near breaks Jared; hurt, betrayal, anger but burning bright under all that in the unwavering love and devotion Jensen usually looks at him with. "Not now, Jared," Jensen sighs, his temper obviously burnt out.

"Jensen," Jared whispers, voice breaking on his mate's name.

Jensen finally turns to him fully. "No, Jared. Seriously, not here. Not now," he repeats. "We have'ta talk, more now than ever, and we will. But just..." he pauses, sighing again as he looks at Brie. "This isn't the time or the place."

Jared nods, well aware that Jensen is right but it still hurts like hell and he feels tears stinging his eyes again. And because Jensen knows him so damn well and knows exactly what Jared needs, he grabs Jared's hand and twines their fingers together. It's a small gesture but for right now, it's enough.

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Jared sits in the uncomfortable plastic chair next to the crib where Brie's sleeping peacefully. Her temperature broke a few hours ago and the medicine seems to finally be doing the trick. He stares at her, lost in thought, watching the rise and fall of her tiny chest.

"You should get some rest," Jensen says softly.

Jared jerks slightly, not expecting Jensen to be back so soon from calling Donna and checking on Lizzie and Drew. Instead of answering, he merely shakes his head, tracing one finger over the rounded curve of Brie's cheek.

Jensen's hand slides over his shoulder and Jared closes his eyes, wanting to lean into the touch. "Seriously, Jay. She's restin'. There's no need for you to sit here and watch her sleep like you do at home." Jared's eyes snap up to Jensen's, his lips opening to deny it, but Jensen

shakes his head. “Don’t,” he says simply.

Jared licks his lips and turns his attention back to Brie. To his surprise, instead of leaving him alone like he thought Jensen would, his mate grabs his wrist and gently tugs him out of the chair and pushes him down onto the too small cot. “Jen,” Jared sighs, looking up at his mate.

Jensen crawls onto the mattress next to him, pulling Jared down fully. The cot isn’t big enough for Jared alone, so the two of them in it together is mostly impossible. But Jensen doesn’t seem to care, simply pulling Jared so that he’s mostly lying on him instead of the mattress, his arms wrapping around Jared’s shoulders. “Rest, Jare,” Jensen murmurs, pressing a kiss to the top of Jared’s head.

Despite his protests and the lingering tension and distance between them, Jared has missed being this close to Jensen; not to mention the fact that he is actually pretty exhausted. He inhales deeply, catching the familiar scent of his mate and it helps to calm his racing mind. He finds himself snuggling closer and his eyes slide closed.

When he wakes up a few hours later, he’s alone in the cot and Jensen is sitting in the same chair he was. Only Jensen’s not watching Brie sleep, he’s watching Jared. “Wha?” Jared mutters, scrubbing his hands over his face then up through his hair. It may be only two days, but he feels like he’s been here forever.

“Eric came by,” Jensen says quietly. “He’s gettin’ the paperwork ready to release Brie so we can take her home.”

It’s good news – great even – because it means that she’s well enough to leave. But panic still grips Jared and he scrambles out of the cot, shaking his head as he goes for the door. “No,” he damn-near whispers, mostly to himself. “’s too soon. She needs to stay here where they can make sure she’s okay.”

Jensen grabs him around the waist, pulling Jared into his arms, his back against Jensen’s chest. “She’s doin’ much better, Jared. Eric wouldn’t be sendin’ her home if she wasn’t.” He pauses, his arms tightening around Jared’s stomach for a moment. “You need to calm down. She’s gonna be okay.”

“We thought that before, Jensen,” Jared snaps.

Before he can say anything else, Eric comes in, paperwork all ready to go and Jared watches as Jensen scoops their daughter up and heads out of the room, leaving Jared no choice but to follow.

The ride home is even tenser than the ride there. Jared leans up against the window, pretending to sleep even though he knows he’s not fooling anyone. The house is oddly empty when they get home, only Donna there to meet them at the door. Brie is all smiles and bright eyes again, reaching out for her grams as soon as she sees her. Jared doesn’t say anything, just presses a quick kiss to Donna’s cheek and retreats upstairs.

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Jared wraps his arms around his waist, listening to the murmur of voices just outside the nursery, Jensen and Donna no doubt talking about what's been going on. A few long moments after she leaves, Jared finally gathers the courage to turn around and face Jensen.

Jared's breath hitches, his heart pounding jack-rabbit fast against his ribcage. Jensen has always been breathtaking and this is definitely no exception. Even though it's been a hard few weeks and an even harder few days, Jensen still looks gorgeous standing there, leaning against the doorframe – even with the reddish-brown stubble covering his jaw and his eyes red-rimmed and tired.

“My mom took the kids,” Jensen says, unnecessarily.

Jared nods and drops his eyes, his arms tightening around his middle. He has never felt so cold and alone – even when he was younger and had no idea about his true nature. Back then, he hadn't known what he was missing not having love or a mate or a real family. Now, he knows and it's impossible to go back.

Jensen sighs and Jared sees him push off the doorframe and enter the room fully out of the corner of his eye. Whatever Jensen is going to say to him, he can't stand the thought of finally talking all this shit out in his daughters' room. The nursery had always been pure joy to Jared, his peace and sanctuary, and he doesn't want what he's sure is going to be his mate breaking his heart, to happen here.

“Wait,” he gasps, “Can we not...”

“Damnit, Jared!” Jensen growls, interrupting him harshly. “We have to fuckin' talk about this.”

“I know,” Jared damn-near whispers. “Just... not here, alright?” He pauses, looking up at Jensen. “Please?”

Jensen huffs out another sigh but steps aside, holding one hand toward the door. “Lead the way,” he mutters, following Jared across the hall to their bedroom. It really isn't a much better option, this room holds as many memories and as much love – it's where their children were conceived and born, where they've spent nine wonderful years together.

Jensen stands in the middle of the room, his arms crossed over his chest, his stare a physical weight on Jared. He doesn't say anything and Jared can't take the silence, the anticipation, anymore. “Don't take them away from me,” he begs, his voice cracking on the emotion tightening his throat.

“What?!” Jensen snaps and Jared sneaks a peak up at him. Jensen's eyes are wide, his lips hanging open, looking for all the world like Jared just smacked him. “What're you... Have you lost your damn mind? What the hell does that mean?”

“When you... I-leave me. Don't take the kids away from me. They're all I have.”

“Why would you think... What the fuck, Jared?” Jensen crosses the distance between them, grabbing Jared’s biceps. “Look at me,” he commands and Jared is helpless to resist. “Why the fuck would you think ‘mma leave you?”

Jared shrugs one shoulder, doesn’t even care anymore about the tears pooling in his eyes. His heart is breaking and he wants Jensen to see that. “Things’ve been... off, bad, for a while. And I just... after what happened in the hospital...” Jared trails off, biting down on his bottom lip.

“Jared,” Jensen sighs. “Even if... Even if I wanted to leave you – which I don’t, by the way – I can’t. Remember the whole mating for life thing? I wasn’t just sayin’ that to get in your pants. ‘s the fuckin’ truth.” Jensen pauses, head tilted to the side. “Where’s this comin’ from?”

“I... I messed up,” Jared whispers, his throat tightening up even more. “With the girls... when Brie needed me, I gave up,” he croaks, tears breaking free to stream down his cheeks.

“No,” Jensen breathes, his hands loosening their hold on Jared’s biceps, sliding up his arms, palms cradling his neck. “No, baby. That’s not... You really don’t remember what happened do you?”

“I know that our daughter almost died because ‘m weak,” Jared admits, his eyes sliding closed.

“You... Lizzie wasn’t in a good position,” Jensen starts as he leads Jared to the couch in their room, gently pushing him down before sitting next to him. He grabs Jared’s hand with both of his, his gaze watching his own thumb move over Jared’s knuckles. “There was a lot of blood and she was... I think she was just too big but if she’d been in the right position in your birth canal, it wouldn’t’a been so bad. And Jim agreed. Anyway... when you were pushing, you started hemorrhaging. It freaked me the fuck out. I... I reached inside you and grabbed Liz and pulled her out. She was okay, luckily, but you... God, Jay there was so much fuckin’ blood. That’s when I begged you to let me call Jim, I didn’t know what else to do.”

He takes a shuddering breath before continuing, “You were still tryin’ to push but Brie just wasn’t movin’. By the time Jim got here – a few minutes at the most, I knew... I knew it was really bad. My dad, Josh, Christian and Steve had to remove me from the room. I almost bit each of them... I knew... I knew you were dying and I didn’t wanna leave you.” He stops, swallowing thickly and when he finally looks back up at Jared, there are tears in his eyes.

“Jim was in with you forever,” he whispers, his tone thick and rusty. “I could smell the blood but I couldn’t smell you, or Brie. When Jim didn’t come out, Dad sent Mom in. She was crying when she ran from the room... After Dad calmed her down, she told us what happened with Brie, that Jim was trying to save her but she wouldn’t tell me about you.”

He pauses, licks his lips and clears his throat. “I damn-near ripped the door off the hinges to get to you... By that time, Jim had gotten the blood stopped and Brie was breathin’ but it was still touch and go with you... You almost killed yourself laboring with both of them but with Brie... Jim lost you for a few minutes...” Jensen stops, a few tears creeping down his cheeks

and Jared doesn't remember the last time he saw Jensen actually, full-out crying. "Once I knew you were okay, I swore I'd never talk about it again."

Jared's at a loss for words. He just shakes his head, breathing a soft, "Jen."

"I just don't... After we knew you were okay, you withdrew. Mack said it was depression and that she had it with Will and that it'd pass. But it never did. I didn't, I don't, understand why you're pullin' away from me. I can't... I can't feel you anymore, Jare. Just like that day..." he trails off again, sniffing softly.

"I failed you, our girls. I feel... I feel weak and useless. And I didn't want... I couldn't stand the thought of you thinkin' that I'm not good enough. I didn't want to hear you agree with me about being a bad father, about almost killin' them."

"Sweetheart," Jensen breathes, pulling Jared against his chest. "You are the best daddy those kids could ever have. You are amazin' with them. And you're not weak or a failure. I told you when you had Drew that you're stronger than I am, than I could ever be." Jensen cups Jared's cheek, wiping away the tears. "You have the ability and the strength to bare our children. That's a miracle, baby."

"Jen," Jared breathes, nuzzling under his mate's neck, feeling their bond slide back into place. He gasps, his eyes fluttering closed. It's been almost seven months since he's felt Jensen and he hadn't even realized that he'd been blocking him out.

Jensen growls and picks Jared up, stalking across the room, throwing him down on the mattress. His mate's eyes are wild, almost feral, and Jared feels that familiar heat creep through his body. Jensen practically rips Jared's clothes off, followed swiftly by his own. Jared's mouth goes dry, his gaze sweeping down his mate's perfect, muscular frame. Before Jared can open his mouth – ready to demand or beg, whatever it takes – Jensen crawls up onto the bed, his hands sliding up the inside of Jared's thighs. Jared's cock twitches, a fresh pulse of slick leaking from his hole.

He knows that things aren't completely back to normal, they still have to deal with what happened with Sarah, but right now all he can think about is Jensen hovering over him, the feeling of Jensen's hand on his hip, of Jensen's lips presses against his own in a hot, hungry kiss.

Jared gasps when Jensen finally pulls back just slightly to nip at Jared's bottom lip. "Flip over," Jensen growls, lips catching and dragging against Jared's. A harsh moan tears from Jared's throat and he scrambles to comply, wiggling around underneath Jensen until he's lying on his belly. Jensen hums in approval, first his hands then his lips and tongue trailing down Jared's back. Strong hands grip his cheeks, spreading them apart and even though he was expecting it, the first swipe of Jensen's tongue over his rim still makes him jerk. Jensen's soft chuckle vibrates his whole body and Jared moans again, grinding his trapped cock against the mattress.

"Uh uh," Jensen murmurs, grabbing his hips and pulling him up onto his knees. Jared whimpers, burying his head in his arms, his fingers clenched around handfuls of the already

messy sheets. Jensen presses a kiss to the small of his back before trailing his lips and tongue lower, once again laving over his entrance. He takes his time, licking and nipping at Jared's rim, slipping his tongue inside in short, quick jabs. Jared is pretty much already incoherent; his hips thrusting back against Jensen's talented lips and tongue.

He chokes on a broken moan when Jensen slides two thick fingers inside next to his tongue, brushing against his prostate on the second thrust. Jared's eyes slam closed and he bites down on his bottom lip hard enough that he gets a brief, coppery tang of blood across his taste-buds. Jensen pulls away, lips sliding back up his spine, nipping at his mating scar when he gets to the crook of Jared's neck. "Don't hold back," Jensen rasps. "Lemme hear you, sweetheart."

"Jensen," Jared gasps when Jensen slips a third finger in and bites down once again on the mark on Jared's neck.

"C'mon, baby," Jensen whispers against his ear. "We're all alone. Want you to be loud for me."

Jensen presses his fingers all the way in and stops. Jared's just about to complain when Jensen quirks his fingers just right and rubs at his sweet spot. "Fuck," Jared cries, pushing up onto his hands, his head thrown back. "Jensen, please. I'm ready. Need you. Please?"

He barely bites back the whimper that wants to escape when Jensen's fingers slide free. Jensen wraps one arm around his waist, pulling him up until he's kneeling, legs spread wide over Jensen's thighs, his back pressed against Jensen's chest. "Grab the headboard," Jensen commands softly, nosing through the sweat-damp hair at the nape of his neck. "Want you to ride me just like this."

Jared doesn't even bother to try and hold back the whimper this time, his head falling back against Jensen's shoulder. Jensen nudges his cheek and Jared turns his head enough so that Jensen's lips slide against his in a messy, off-center kiss as he presses his cock forward, not stopping until he's buried to the hilt. The small bite mark on his lip stings when Jensen licks over it, his mate moaning harshly as he licks away the tiny drops of blood.

Jensen's hands slide up the inside of his thighs, spreading his legs impossibly wider as he starts to shallowly thrust, his cock rubbing against that sweet spot perfectly. At first, Jared's frozen, pleasure shooting up and down his spine leaving him unable to move. Jensen bites down on his neck, right above his mating scar and Jared cries out again, tipping his head to the side. "C'mon, baby. Ride me," Jensen growls.

Jared's eyes flutter closed when he rolls his hips back against Jensen's, his fingers tightening around the wooden slats of their headboard. His mate feels huge like this, feels deeper than he's ever been and Jared can't get enough. He grinds down against Jensen's cock, feels his mate's knot already starting to swell. He turns his head, nosing at Jensen's cheek. Jensen presses a surprisingly soft, chaste kiss to his lips, pulling back just enough so that his forehead is resting against Jared's temple. "I love you," Jensen rasps, sliding his hands over Jared's stomach and chest. "So much, baby."



Jared presses a kiss to the side of Jensen's lips, the rolling of his hips slowing down. Jensen thrusts up against him, moaning when his knot catches against Jared's rim. Jared cries out softly when he pulls back before thrusting forward again as far as he can go. "I love you, too," Jared whispers, circling his hips in tight figure-eights. "'m close, Jen," he adds, moaning softly when Jensen pulls him even closer, his knot pressing up against Jared's prostate.

"C'mon, sweetheart," Jensen urges. "Come for me. I know you can do it, just on my cock, my knot. Do it. Come, Jared."

Jared cries out again, harsh and loud and long, his untouched cock swelling and twitching a split-second before his climax hits. Jensen grabs his jaw and kisses him, fast and dirty, his tongue almost brutally fucking into Jared's mouth. He kisses Jared through his orgasm, nipping at his lips before pulling away. He slides his hand up into Jared's sweat-damp hair and pulls his head back against his shoulder again, slightly tipping it to the side so that his mark is exposed. "Mine," Jensen growls, biting down on the same mark again, hard enough to reopen the scar.

Jared's whole body trembles, vaguely aware of his mate coming at the same time that he bites down. "Oh God, Jensen," he moans. "Yours. Always yours." He knows without a doubt that if he hadn't just came a few moments ago, that would've tipped him over the edge. As it is, it's already got him mostly-hard again.

Jensen doesn't let up like he usually does when he bites at his mark and it slowly dawns on Jared through the pleasant orgasmic haze that Jensen's reclaiming him. Prying one hand loose from the death-grip he has on the headboard, he reaches back and grabs the back of Jensen's neck, fingers digging in bruise-tight in the strong, corded muscle. "Jensen," he whispers.

Jensen finally lets go, laving his tongue over the bleeding mark in silent apology. Jared whimpers when Jensen tips them onto their sides, gently laying them out on the mattress. Jensen wraps both arms around Jared, keeping his back pressed against his chest, keeping them as close together as physically possible. Jared's eyes flutter closed and he shivers, sighing softly, contently, when he feels another pulse of Jensen's come hit his still oversensitive inner muscles.

"'m sorry, baby," Jensen whispers, sliding his hand up so that his palm is resting over Jared's heart. Before Jared can ask what for, Jensen continues, "I knew something was up with you since the girls were born but I didn't... I didn't know what or how to fix it. I should'a made you talk to me sooner." He pauses, kissing Jared's jaw. "I promise it won't happen again. I'll pay better attention."

Jared sighs and looks at his mate as best as he can over his shoulder. "I didn't want you to see, Jensen," he admits quietly. "Told you, I couldn't stand the thought'a you being disappointed in me, thinking that I failed you and them."

"Still, you're my mate, the love of my life, and I should'a tried harder." Jensen inhales deeply, exhales slowly before adding, "And 'm sorry 'bout what happened at the hospital. I was... I was outta line. I *never* should'a talked to you like that. It's no real excuse but... I

was just worried 'bout Brie and then your... mom showing up... All I could think about was her tryin' to take you away from us, from me."

"She tried," Jared admits, wincing a little when Jensen's whole body tenses and his knot pulls against his rim. "Jensen," he sighs. "After *everything* you can't honestly think I would'a even considered it. Even if it wasn't for you and the kids. There's no way I could'a went back. She'll never accept me for who I am, as a man and as a wolf. But it doesn't matter. My place is here, with my family, with our pack." He pauses, hesitating for a moment before adding, "'m sorry too. For the way I've been acting. For not coming to you so we could talk things out. And 'm sorry for what happened at the hospital. I never should'a talked to you like that either."

Jensen smiles softly and presses a kiss to Jared's forehead. "'s okay, love," he murmurs. "We were both wrong. We learn from it and move on."

"Is that what this," Jared motions toward his neck, "was about?"

Jensen licks his lips, a sheepish look gracing his beautiful features. "Sorta, I guess. I mean, we just... we seem to have grown apart over the last couple'a months, lost our way a little. I guess I just wanted to, I don't know, re-establish our bond."

Jared smiles at his mate, nipping at his bottom lip. "Sap," he teases, despite the tears stinging his eyes at the gesture.

Jensen mock-growls and tightens his arms, deftly rolling them over so that Jared's trapped beneath him. They're still tied and Jared moans when Jensen's cock pulses with another wave of his release. "I'll show you a sap, sweetheart," Jensen drawls against his ear, grinding his hips forward, pressing his knot against Jared's prostate. Jared's cock twitches, fresh pre-come oozing from the tip, and his hole clenches.

They spend the day wrapped together in each other's arms, fucking and talking and reconnecting in ways they haven't done in years. There are still some lingering doubts but Jared's sure that it'll all work out in the end, as long as he has Jensen by his side.

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