

Open Warfare: The Secret of a Successful Marriage

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Open Warfare: The Secret of a Successful Marriage

by [WhiskyBoys](#)

Summary

There was a time that arranged marriages for Omegas were a common occurrence: thirty or forty years ago. Now, thankfully, Omegas have the same rights as everyone else, are free to live their own lives, to marry whomever they choose. Except for Jensen. Because, in a move that will save Ackles' Systems from bankruptcy, Jensen's dad has just signed him up for an arranged marriage to Jared Padalecki. Unfortunately, Jared is an idiot with a poor choice in friends, and Jensen is a stubborn dick with an unconventional profession, so it's no surprise when their marriage quickly degenerates into a state of open warfare.

Notes

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[ART LINK HERE!!!](#)



Jensen's stepmother prodded an errant carnation back into its rightful place with zen-like focus. Lucinda hadn't looked Jensen straight in the face once since he'd stormed through the door. "He's a lovely boy you know."

Jensen paced from one side of the kitchen to the other, a journey that took less than twelve steps, then he spun round and paced back again, scowling in his stepmother's direction. "So you've said."

"From a very well-off family."

"Again, you've already said."

"And this deal will ensure the continuity of two pure Were bloodlines."

Jensen stopped on the spot and glared at Lucinda who was still refusing to meet his eye. "This *deal*? I like the way you say that, like it's just another business transaction. This deal is my life, my future that you're so keen to casually sign away."

"Your future?" Jensen's father chimed in, appearing in the kitchen doorway. "Remind me again what that future involves, because as far as I can see you're not exactly setting the world on fire? How is the bartending going?"

Jensen noted the glass in his Dad's hand, the barely there swirl of whisky clinging to the bottom. "It pays the bills, thanks."

"Working in a dive bar. Gods above, what would your mother think?"

Jensen took the hit without blinking. It wasn't anything he hadn't heard before, especially when liquor had loosened his father's tongue. "What would she think about you selling off my ass, huh? Think she'd let that one go without a fight?"

"Donna would have understood." Alan Ackles strode into the kitchen, slammed down his crystal tumbler on the central island, directly opposite Jensen. "She would have realized that

this is the best option for everyone. Besides, your mother and I had an arranged marriage and we were perfectly happy."

"It's hardly the same," Jensen argued. "You both wanted an arranged marriage. It's just the way things were done thirty years ago. Hell, you and Mom had known each other since you were kids. You probably would have gotten married anyway. This Padalecki guy and I haven't even met."

"Padalecki. Jared *Padalecki*. He's a fine, hardworking young man. An Alpha. Obviously. He's already worked his way up to vice-head of the Padalecki's Marketing department."

"Vice-head of Marketing in his daddy's company. Yeah, that's a real achievement." Jensen rolled his eyes.

"Well it's more than you've managed," Alan retorted, slapping his hands flat down on the island. "You're twenty three years old, Jensen. It's time for you to grow up and shoulder your responsibilities. You're marrying Padalecki. In two weeks. You're moving out of that tiny apartment you share with those so-called friends, you're throwing those ridiculous suppressants in the trash and you're going to damn well start behaving like a proper Omega."

There it was. Just what Jensen had been waiting for. "A proper Omega? You think we're living in the fifties, Dad? You want me barefoot and pregnant and tied to the fucking kitchen? You want to buckle a goddamn collar around my neck while you're at it? Screw you."

"Jensen," Lucinda gasped. "Don't talk to your father like that."

Jensen didn't even acknowledge her. He was too focused on his own anger and the ugly purple vein pulsing in his father's temple. "Times have changed, Dad. I have a job. An apartment. My own money. My independence. I don't need an Alpha. I don't want an Alpha. This isn't happening. I don't care what you say. Tell Padalecki to go fuck himself. My ass isn't for sale."

Lucinda inhaled sharply, her hand flying to her mouth in response to his vulgar language. Jensen ignored her histrionics and stormed past her, uncaring that he offended her delicate sensibilities. Or rather, he tried to storm away. His father's hand curling around his bicep held him back. "This isn't just about you, Jensen. This is about the family. The business."

"Your business, you mean," Jensen said, shrugging out of his father's hold and turning to face him, toe to toe. "Yours and Josh's. We went through this when I switched my major in college. I've zero interest in the business. I want nothing to do with the company. Now or in the future."

"Yes, you made it perfectly clear you have no interest in the family business, son." Alan's breath was hot on Jensen's face, and bitter with bourbon and resentment. "That you'd rather waste your time and brains on a worthless music degree than studying anything remotely useful. That you'd rather work in a seedy bar and mess around with your deadbeat friends than earn an honest living working for me. But you're still an Ackles. And you have a responsibility to the family. And the company. So let me make this very clear. If the merger

with Padalecki and Sons doesn't go ahead, Ackles Systems will be in the hands of the receivers within six months."

Jensen blinked in surprise. As far as he knew the company was running just as smoothly as ever. He hadn't heard as much as a whisper otherwise.

"The details aren't your concern, but the fact of the matter is we're in trouble. The merger with Padalecki, the injection of cash this deal will provide, will save us. All of us. Without it the company will go bust. I'll lose the business, the house, everything. So will your brother. Your sister in law and nephews will be homeless and penniless. Hundreds of people will lose their jobs. Their homes."

Jensen's stomach plummeted. His knees dipping under the sudden pressure. His father had him over a barrel. And he knew it.

"You're lying." But Jensen knew he wasn't. Knew from the coldness in his father's slate-grey eyes.

Alan's tone changed, lifting from commanding to cajoling. "I know this is asking a lot, son. But the lawyers will make sure that you'll get everything you want. Everything you could possibly need. There will be safeguards in place to protect you. Not that you'll need them. The Padaleckis are an old honorable family. Jared is a good man. I'm not throwing you to the lions here. All I want is for you to be safe. Happy."

Happy. What a steaming pile of shit. His happiness was the last thing on his father's mind. Jensen wanted to puke. Wanted to sit down and cry. Wanted to punch his father in the face. His dad had sold him down the river. And there wasn't a damn thing Jensen could do about it, not without sacrificing the jobs of hundreds of people, not to mention his big brother's happiness. Those consequences were too dire for Jensen to live with. And his father knew that. Had counted on it. He'd finally found a way to turn Jensen into the Omega he'd always refused to be.

"So, the Padaleckis are swooping in to save the company, but what do they get for their cash? Apart from me?" Jensen asked, trying hard to disguise the tremor in his voice.

"Our expertise will enable them to update and upgrade their computer systems. And of course, the Ackles name still holds a great deal of respect within our community."

'Our' community being the 'Were' community. The last few families that could still claim to be true Were. Whose bloodlines hadn't been watered down so far as to make their Were genes all but obsolete. A bunch of elitist pricks in the main.

"And the merger couldn't be put together without my ass being involved?" Jensen asked bitterly.

"I believe that Sherri feels it's about time Jared settled down. Had children of his own. There aren't many families out there with bloodlines as pure as ours. You and Jared are the perfect match." Alan smiled, fake as a salesman and with dead-eyed insincerity. "This marriage could be the making of you, son. Give you the stability you need; financially and well...

physically. With an Alpha to care for you, you won't need those awful suppressants; you can let nature take its course. Trust me, this is for the best."

Jensen couldn't hide his disgust, his fingers screwed into fists at his sides and lips curled into a sneer. "The best for you, yes. The best for the company, sure. But the best for me? I don't think so, Sir."

"Jensen—" Alan tried to set his hand on Jensen's shoulder, either to comfort or convince, but Jensen stepped neatly to the side avoiding his touch.

"Oh don't worry; I'll go through with it. I'm not gonna run off and leave the company to sink. Not when it means hundreds of people losing their jobs. But don't fool yourself that I want this. Or that Mom would have approved."

Alan flinched and Jensen felt a grim victory that the words had cut through his self-righteous veneer. He had just one more thing to say before he walked out and didn't look back. "And don't think for one second that I will ever *ever* forgive you."

So, the thing was, the bar Jensen worked in five nights a week wasn't so much a bar as it was a club. And the bartending that he did wasn't as much bartending as it was dancing. On stage. Whilst taking his clothes off. So... stripping really, if one wanted to be pedantic. Although if asked, Jensen preferred the term professional entertainer.

Obviously, Jensen's father did not know this. And as far as Jensen was concerned he never would. Not that Jensen was ashamed of his current career but knowing Alan's contempt for the bartending profession, he was unlikely to react well to discovering that Jensen actually earned his pay check by shaking his naked ass in a club full of drunk people. A major coronary seemed the likeliest outcome. And while Jensen was hardly his father's biggest fan he didn't actually want to kill him.

Of course, with marriage now looming Jensen would not be a stripper for much longer. It seemed improbable that Jensen could hide the fact that he stripped for a living and Jared Padalecki was unlikely to approve of his husband parading his naked body in public on a regular basis. Not that Jensen had actually met the boy wonder yet. He had looked up photos on-line, curiosity getting the better of him once he'd calmed down, and sure the guy was good looking, but he was obviously an asshole if he thought it was acceptable to buy himself a husband.

"You're quiet tonight, Jen."

Jensen forced a smile at Misha in the mirror they were both using. Misha was carefully applying the brightest flare of peacock colors to his eyelids, making the blue in his eyes pop

bright. Jensen should have been applying the pink gloss to his lips; instead he'd been staring blankly at himself.

"Everything okay?"

Jensen sighed, and almost ran his fingers through his hair before he remembered that he'd glued it in place with gel and a thick cloud of hairspray. "Not really, Misha, no. Everything's completely screwed."

"You want to talk about it?" Misha asked, setting down his eyeshadow palette before picking up his mascara and shaking it.

"Nope." Jensen shook his head. "Not really."

Misha met his eye in the mirror as he screwed open his mascara. "Anything I can do to help?"

"I wish there was, Misha, but even you can't get me out of this mess."

"Sounds ominous," Misha said, mascara wand paused mid-air. "You're not in trouble are you, Jen?"

Jensen tried to reassure his friend with a smile, but it came out almost as half-hearted as his reply. "No, man. It's just... family bullshit, y'know."

"Ahh," Misha nodded sagely, then tipped his head up and started applying mascara to his already dark lashes. "Yes, family bullshit, that is the worst kind. Is old man Ackles causing problems again?"

Jensen snorted. "You could say that."

Before he could explain further, Mr. Morgan walked into the dressing room, unlit cigar hanging from his mouth and a familiar page of writing paper flapping in his hand. "Hey, Ackles! What the fuck is this shit?" Matt and Sterling who were changing into their boy band outfits had to jump out of his way as he stormed through the room, which was already cramped with the five guys in it. Rich made an 'Oh shit' face and frantically stubbed out the cigarette that he shouldn't have been smoking in the dressing rooms, and tried to waft the tell-tale cloud of smoke out the door.

Without turning around, Jensen, who had been expecting a visit from Morgan sooner or later, replied, "That would be my two weeks' notice."

"What?" Misha gasped, quickly following up with a pained, "Shit fuck," after stabbing himself in the eye with the mascara wand and ending up with a black smear across his cheekbone. Jensen passed him a tissue to mop up the mess. "You're leaving?" Misha asked, once he'd recovered his composure. "Why?"

"I'm getting married," Jensen blurted out, Band-Aid rip quick.

A heavy silence descended on the room. Every head turned his way and Jensen's neck prickled under the scrutiny.

"No, you're not." Misha swiveled around on his stool and stared.

"I am."

"Who the hell to?" Morgan asked.

"Jared Padalecki."

"The fuck?" Misha's expression leapt from disbelief to stunned shock.

Jensen had planned on keeping the whole 'arranged marriage' crapfest quiet, but somehow he found himself spilling the beans, all of them, as the rest of the guys, in various states of undress, listened quietly like it was story time in the kids' corner of the library.

"Well, that's bullshit." Misha, unsurprisingly, was the first to react. "You aren't gonna go through with it."

"What choice does he have?" Matt answered for him. "He can't risk all those people losing their jobs. Think of the kids, man."

"That's not Jenny boy's fault though, is it?" Rich added. "Why the hell should he sacrifice his pretty ass for a bunch of people he doesn't even know."

"Because it's unquestionably the right thing to do," Sterling said, his deep voice uncompromising. "It's for the greater good."

"Greater good my ass," Misha snapped. "It's nothing more than manipulation and blackmail. You think any of those people would give up anything for Jensen?"

Sterling crossed his arms and scowled at Misha. "Don't get your panties in a twist; it's just an arranged marriage. They aren't unheard of. Especially for Alphas and Omegas."

"Oh, drag yourself into the twenty-first century, Sterling. Why should Jensen have to marry some meat-head Alpha just because he happens to be an Omega. He has the same rights as you or me. Padalecki has no right to force Jen into marriage or his bed."

"Mhmm, to be honest I wouldn't mind a tumble in Jared Padalecki's bed. That is one fine looking man." Matt had a phone in his hand and was smirking at a googled image of Padalecki, Richard nodding approvingly over his shoulder.

Misha huffed out an exasperated breath. "It doesn't matter how good looking Padalecki is, the point is he doesn't have the right to buy himself a husband. Or force Jensen into coming off suppressants. It's tantamount to rape."

"Rape? Hardly," Sterling scoffed. "He's marrying Jensen, not fucking him dry in some seedy back alley."

"Guys.." Jensen tried to intercede, not exactly comfortable with being discussed like he wasn't in the room, but Misha waved him off much to Jensen's bemusement.

"And you think because he's marrying Jensen that makes it okay, do you? You think he has the right to force him into a heat."

"You know what, Collins, I do. Suppressants are a sin. Omegas are supposed to have heats. It's what the Gods intended. They were put on this Earth to carry children, it's just a fact. And all your liberal bullcrap can't change that," Sterling ranted back, unaware of the shocked inhalation that his uncompromising statement elicited.

"Woah now, Sterling old buddy," Richard said, casting Jensen a concerned glance. "Back up a minute with the Pro Alpha rhetoric. Times have changed, man."

"Obviously, not everyone is happy about that though." Misha pushed himself up from his chair, his usual easygoing smile replaced with an ice-cold glare. Sterling tensed in response, baring his teeth in an Alpha-grin that was anything but conciliatory. "You think equal rights for all regardless of gender or assignation is 'liberal crap', Sterling? You think allowing people to have autonomy over their own bodies is liberal crap? Gods above, next you'll be telling me that Jensen should have a goddamn collar around his neck."

"Guys." Jensen stood up too, not entirely sure how the news he was getting married had devolved into this shit show.

"Gentlemen." Jeff's gravelly voice caught Misha and Sterling's attention where Jensen's had failed. "I'm running a strip club, not a debate team. Misha, fix your makeup. Sterling, shut the hell up, before I feel inclined to throw you the fuck out the door. Jensen—"

A voice yelling from the corridor cut off whatever Jeff had been about to say. "Jensen, you're on in two."

Jensen didn't think he'd ever been so relieved to hear DJ call out his cue; facing a room full of drunk guys and overexcited women suddenly seemed like a welcome escape.

Jeff nodded, and gave Jensen a tight smile. "Move your ass, kid. Come and find me later if you want to talk. The rest of you layabouts do whatever the fuck it is I'm paying you to do, and Matt, that doesn't include googling naked pictures of Jared Padalecki."

Matt shrugged, unabashed at being called out, and continued scrolling through his phone. Jensen gave Misha a reassuring wink, grabbed his mask, and slipped it on while he was running out the door.

He got to the stage just in time to hear the dying roar of the crowd and the last catcalls as the previous act took his final bow. Ty strode off stage, blow torch in his hand and face mask pushed back on his head. His welding routine was always popular. "There's a good crowd tonight," Ty puffed, setting the blow torch down on the prop table and grabbing a towel to wipe away the sweat dripping down his face. "Usual Friday night faces, plus a couple of bachelor and bachelorette parties that are loud, horny, rich and drunk. They're gonna love you, brother."

"Yeah, thanks," Jensen managed to get out, his nerves as always quickly building up to a serious case of stage fright. If DJ didn't get his music on quick, Jensen would end up

hyperventilating before he got out there. Ty grinned, accustomed to Jensen's panic-stricken appearance before every show, and slapped him on the back on his way past.

Jensen fiddled with the Velcro-ed seams of his pants, pulled at the neck of his shirt and adjusted the mask where it sat across the bridge of his nose, leaving just his mouth and jaw visible. If it wasn't for the mask, he wouldn't be able to go out there at all. Hiding his face gave Jensen the shot of bravery he needed to take those first few steps on to the stage. Once he was out there and the music was pounding he was fine. Better than fine. He was a damn God, actually. Performing was something that came naturally to him. So long as he was in character.

"So what did you think of Benny Bear?" Jensen heard DJ address the crowd. Ty used Benny Bear as a stage name and it kind of suited him. Most of the performers had stage names, Jensen was no exception. Although Jeff had laughingly nixed Jensen's suggestion of Fantastic Fred. Jensen didn't know why, it wasn't any worse than Benny Bear.

"Yeah!" DJ yelled when the whoops died down. "Our Benny's a sparking hot bear. And our next act, well he's something pretty special too. Hold onto your hats, people, or whatever else you wanna hold onto because Dean is gonna blow your... now guys get your minds out of the gutter... our pretty pup Dean is gonna blow your mind!"

As DJ finished talking, Jensen's music started up, the lights dimmed and that was his cue. Checking his mask was firmly in place one final time, Jensen rolled his shoulders, took a deep breath and ran onto the stage.

"In the beginning..." A voice —Jeff's voice actually because that man had a rugged drawl that could melt panties— spoke over the opening notes of the music. "The Gods sent two wolves down from the heavens, the Alpha and the Omega. They granted these wolves many gifts, the greatest of which was the power to shift form and blend in with the humans who walked the Earth."

Jensen waited in the dark only half listening to the dramatic history recap, hoping the crowd wouldn't get too restless with the forty second monologue. It added to the drama, gave his act a little more mystery, but sometimes it just took a couple of drunk assholes shouting over it to ruin the atmosphere.

"Many of us here today are descended from these two sacred wolves. The first Alpha and Omega. The passage of time and years of persecution have weakened our bloodlines and dulled our senses. Now only few of us can feel the call of the wild wolf locked inside of us. And fewer still can release him."

The music paused for a beat and when the next note struck the spotlight flashed on Jensen finding him crouched center stage. Jensen tipped his head up on the next beat and let the light illuminate the sparkling wolf mask that obscured most of his face. The crowd cheered. And Jensen jumped to his feet and let the music flow over him.

The first time Jensen had performed Jeff had literally shoved him on to the stage, after giving him a generous shot or three of tequila. Jensen had, grudgingly, agreed to perform at the last minute to help Jeff out. Three of his dancers had come down with food poisoning —that was

the last time any of them went to the taco place down the street— and Jeff had tempted him with the promise that dancing paid more than double his usual bartending wages, plus tips. At the time Jensen was a broke college student; he couldn't afford to say no. That first time he'd worn someone else's slightly too large black pants and shirt, a cape and a Zorro mask. He'd felt utterly ridiculous. And probably looked it. But somehow by the end of the routine, the crowd was cheering, Jensen was grinning, high as a kite, and scooping up handfuls of dollar bills.

Nowadays Jensen had his own routines, his own music and his own specially made costumes. He still sometimes needed a shot of tequila if his nerves got out of hand but that didn't happen quite so often anymore. He knew he wasn't the best dancer. He didn't have the fancy moves that Matt did or the muscles that Ty had. He didn't have an outgoing personality like Rich, and he didn't smolder like Sterling or dazzle like Misha. But he had something. Something that kept audiences enthralled night after night.

He prowled the stage like he owned it. Let the music ripple through his muscles. Teased the audience with glimpses of his body. The first thing he stripped away was the silver faux fur cape draped over his shoulders. Jensen hated the damn thing. It was hot as a motherfucker and stank of sweat and booze. Jensen was always glad to be able to throw it to the side of the stage. His character was more animal than man so Jensen's shirt didn't have buttons to unfasten like some of the others. He wore a barely-there tee that he played with; tugging down past his collarbone or dragging up his belly to whoops of delight, before eventually ripping it off his body, leaving him half-naked. His oiled up chest glistening under the lights.

He didn't have shoes to worry about. Most of the guys wore heavy boots, but with Jensen's act it wasn't practical, and he loved to feel the pounding beat of his music thrumming up through the bare soles of his feet and spreading through his body.

The mob of girls standing in front of the stage screamed when Jensen finally ripped away his leather pants revealing a pair of relatively modest black boxer briefs that clung to the curves of his ass. Jensen made a show of running his hands over his chest, plucking at his nipples before trailing his fingers down his belly and dipping them below the waistband of his boxers. He licked his lips, then grinned, teeth-bared, and bucked forward so it almost looked like he was fucking into his own hand. He turned his back to the audience, swiveled his hips and shook his ass, preening under the approving holler of the crowd. Hooking his thumbs into the waistband of his boxers, he dragged them down over his hips, slow enough that the crowd were screaming themselves hoarse by the time his underwear finally fell down around his ankles. Jensen stepped out of them, kicked them away before twirling around with a flourish.

Disappointed groans mixed with excited yells at the realization Jensen still wasn't naked. Underneath his boxers he wore a pair of tiny panties. More of a G-string really. They didn't cover his ass at all, but they did cover his junk, just about. Jensen moved with the music, locked his hands behind his head and thrust his hips forward. Turned on the spot and did it again. The screams ratcheted up a notch at the sight of his peach-perfect ass jiggling. Then Jensen dropped down to his hands and knees and crawled, with all the grace of a predator, from one side of the stage to the other, close enough for those nearest to graze their fingers

across his skin. With the end of his routine nearing, Jensen crawled toward the back of the stage for his finale.

With a last look over his shoulder, he crawled behind the screen that had been placed there. It was designed so that the audience could only see his silhouette through it. Jensen climbed to his feet and stretched out his muscles, listened with a smile as the audience worked themselves up into a frenzy. Then, teasingly slowly, he wriggled the last piece of his clothing down, stepped out of the tiny scrap of material and tossed it as far as he could from behind the screen. With rather more care he took off his mask and slid it towards the stage wings. He scrubbed his fingers through his hair, shook his head, gave the audience one last shimmy then crouched down and shut everything out; the crowd, the noise, the smells, the music. He slowed his breathing, concentrated on the beat of his heart, the call of his wolf.

A crack of his spine, one brief rippling wave of not-quite pain not-quite-pleasure, and Jensen felt his body crack open. His wolf break free.

The music had dropped to a dark thrumming rhythm, the audience subdued, not quite sure that what they were seeing was real. Jensen stalked out from behind the screen, and they went wild. He prowled the stage, his thick fur coat gleaming silver under the glare of the spotlight that followed him. Stopping in the center of the stage, he stared out at the crowd, danger glinting in the curl of his lip, the flash of his teeth. A flick of his tail and Jensen turned around and leapt, launching himself on to the platform raised about the stage. The crowd gasped, Jensen stalked around in a circle to face them, threw his head back and howled. And the lights went out.

Jensen jumped down from the metal platform under the cover of darkness and ran into the wings, his body vibrating with exhilaration. By the time he got back to the dressing room he was walking on two feet and grateful for the towed robe that Matt tossed to him. No one mentioned the argument from earlier. Although most of the guys seemed to be giving Sterling the cold shoulder and Sterling was very definitely avoiding Jensen's eyes.

As usual Jensen had about thirty minutes to get himself ready for the last routine of the night. The grand finale. It was a superhero routine, complete with masks, capes and a variety of mostly phallic props. Matt had choreographed the whole thing and every one of them participated. Really, it was just an excuse for the guys to show off their pumped muscles and fancy moves. And whip the audience into a money spending frenzy.

It had taken some time for Jensen to get over his insecurities and feel part of the group and not just a scrawny kid wannabe. While he was lean and toned, he wasn't a big guy, not nearly as ripped as the rest of them. Neither was he a born showman like Misha or a professional dancer like Matt. He'd soon figured out though that the audiences seemed to love him all the same, bow-legs, freckles and all. For the Superhero number Jensen was dressed as Captain America, or a slightly sparklier version of him at least, and by the end of the number he was left in little more than a star-spangled G-string and his mask. All the guys were buzzing with adrenaline when they ran off stage for the final time, dripping with sweat and pulling dollar bills out of their underwear.

It maybe wasn't the most dignified way to make a living but Gods, it was fun.

If he'd made plenty in tips by this point, or was just plain exhausted, Jensen would skip out and head home. But most often he'd pull on a pair of buttermilk soft leather pants and a black leather eye-mask and head back into the club to circulate for a while. He could usually earn double his pay just by flirting and giving a few lucky customers a private dance. Sometimes, if the mood took him, he would prowl through the club as the wolf, grudgingly allowing Jeff to fasten a collar around his neck. Those nights he made a small fortune letting people run their fingers through his thick fur and tuck banknotes into his leather collar. If he growled when people got overenthusiastic or snapped his teeth at fingers that roamed where he didn't want them to, it just made him more popular. Everyone loved playing dangerous games.

Tonight, Jensen figured he'd just head home. He had a meeting with the Padaleckis' lawyers in the morning to discuss the marriage contract, and he wanted to make sure he was awake enough to spot if they were trying to screw him over.

"Holy shit," Matt said, shoving Jensen's shoulder when they got back into the dressing room. "Did you see who was out there?"

"Dude, I didn't see anything apart from the drunk blonde that kept trying to shove a dollar bill in my crack," Jensen laughed. "Why? Who's got you so excited? Your next sugar daddy in the audience?"

"With any luck," Matt smirked. "But no, you blind bastard, Jared fucking Padalecki!"

Jensen swung round to stare at Matt, expecting to see a teasing twinkle in his eyes. "You're shitting me!"

"Nope." Misha walked into the room, wiping his oiled chest down with a towel. "Him and a bunch of asshole suits. They're sitting in a booth knocking back beer with tequila chasers, and not the cheap stuff either."

Jensen's jaw was practically on the ground. "What the fuck are they doing here?"

"Celebrating, by the look of things," Misha said with a roll of his eyes. "Your boy looked trashed."

"He's sure as shit not my boy." Jensen grabbed a towel and started rubbing himself down vigorously enough to take off a layer of skin. "Gods, I can't even... what the fuck? I mean honestly... what the actual fuck?"

"You gonna go out there?" Misha asked.

"No! Of course I'm not going out there." Jensen stared at Misha. "Are you insane? I don't want him to know where I work."

"It's not like he's going to know you," Matt pitched in. "Just stick your mask on like normal. Or just, y'know, wolf-out."

"Yeah, dog boy, fur up and go sniff your husband's butt like a good puppy."

"Fuck off," Jensen grumbled, throwing his towel at Rich's head.

It was a bad idea. With absolutely no purpose. There was no way in the world that Jensen should risk going out there when Jared Padalecki was within sniffing distance.

Which didn't explain why fifteen minutes later Jeff was reluctantly buckling a black leather collar around Jensen's furry neck and lecturing him on the twenty different ways this could go horribly wrong. Jensen yawned and rolled his eyes, flicked up his tail and stalked out into the club. After Misha opened the door for him.

The music was always too loud when Jensen prowled into the club like this. The smell of liquor and body odor sour in his nose. He wound his way around table legs, stopping every now and then to let people run their fingers through his fur. The touches never felt right, never made Jensen feel like anything other than a performing dog, but the customers loved it. They oohed and ahed over him, their scents rich with as much fear as awe. Jensen stood long enough for shaking hands to tuck money into his collar before walking away towards the next table on his targeted route.

Jared's table was probably the rowdiest in the club, with the exception of the bachelorette party taking up three tables that Jensen had no intention of getting within petting distance of. There were eight guys that Jensen could count, all of them reeking of booze. Jensen lurked around the edges of the group, keeping low and trying to disappear into the shadows.

"Come on, Jay man, let me buy you a private dance. What about that twink with the dark hair? Is he your type? I mean, I'm not into the whole dick thing, but he had a pretty awesome mouth. Lips that were made for fucking."

"You sure you're not into guys, Chad, cause that's a pretty gay thing to notice."

"Fuck you, Milo! Everyone knows I'm a ladies' man of epic proportions."

"Funny that you knew about this club then."

"What the fuck ever, Jeff. I'm just looking out for your little bro. Helping him sow his wild oats before your dad sells them off."

"Dude," Jensen's ears twitched when Jared spoke for the first time, his drink soaked words slurring lazily from his tongue. "He's not selling off my jizz. That's just gross."

His loud-mouthed friend, Chad, laughed at him. "Nah, he's not selling your jizz, Jay, just your pretty little hand in marriage."

"Murray, JT's landed himself a goddamn genuine Omega. Without even trying. We're celebrating here, not drowning his fucking sorrows." And that was Jared's older brother Jeff talking, slapping Jared on the back and shoving a shot glass towards him. "Come on, little bro', drink up."

"So what if it's a fucking 'mega whore he's getting hitched to?" A guy, stocky and beady-eyed, said from the other side of the table. "Jay hasn't even met the guy. He could end up shackled to some butt-ugly mongrel."

Jeff sent the guy a long hard look that made Jensen's skin crawl like he'd picked up fleas. "Shut the fuck up, Pellegrino."

"Yeah, shuddup," Jared said, pushing his shaggy hair out of his face with the hand that he'd had splayed out over the table top and almost toppling off his chair in the process. He didn't even seem to notice everyone laughing at him, or Jeff hauling him back up onto his stool by the scruff of his shirt neck. "He's not a dog, right, Chad?"

"Yeah, yeah, Jay. You got yourself a looker." Chad rolled his eyes, but couldn't hide his grin.

"You checked him out?" one of the guys asked.

"Course we did," Chad said. "I wasn't gonna let my boy get landed with a fucking dog. Found a few photos of Ackles junior online, turns out the kid's quite the looker, if you're into twink-assed pretty boys."

Jared grinned smugly then hiccupped. "Getting married to a pretty 'mega."

"You sure are, bro." Jeff laughed. "He's gonna look good on your arm."

"And hanging off your knot," Beady-eyes added.

There was a groan of complaint from Jeff, because yeah, Jensen doubted that Padalecki wanted to think about his brother having sex, but some of the other guys jumped right on board. "Fuck yeah, you ever seen Alpha-Omega porn? That's shit's fucking epic."

"Right? Nothing hotter than some in-heat Omega slut begging for a good fucking. Their asses were fucking made for it."

"Gods, yeah." One guy —Milo, Chad called him earlier— panted, his tongue practically hanging out of his mouth. "I heard an in-heat Omega'll go ass-up for anything with a knot on its dick."

"Well, that rules you out, doesn't it?" Beady eyes laughed, but he was the only one. "We all know there's only one other Alpha at this table. So, if you ever feel like sharing, JT, you know I'll be happy to step in. Take some of the load off when your 'mega is in-heat. Everyone knows what they get like. Hell, most of them need a knot in both their holes just to shut them up, whiny sluts." There was snickering around the table. Jensen tried to tamp down the growl that was rumbling in his chest. "Yeah, JT, just you give me a call and I'll help you settle down that Omega bitch in no time. Help you train him up real good."

"Dude, no." Jared waved his arms about, sloppy and wild. "Omega is all mine. Not sharing with anyone."

"Of course not, JT." Jeff grabbed the glass that Jared had just about sent flying. "Settle down, bro. Stop riling him up, Pellegrino."

"Man, I'm just trying to help." Pellegrino held his hands up, but his smirk was still firmly in place. "You don't want your little bro getting screwed over by some Omega princess. You need to show them who's boss. I hope you're not gonna let him take that suppressant shit."

"No," Jeff replied for Jared. "That's part of the deal. Ackles has to come off the Suppressant meds."

Pellegrino nodded. "If it wasn't for that fucking suppressant bullshit, Omegas would be right where they're supposed to be; collared and on the end of an Alpha's leash. Or his dick."

Pellegrino chuckled at his own joke. "All this Omega rights crap has gone too far. Time was you could smell a ripe Omega a mile away, bend them over and fuck them before they could even think about saying no. Now it's impossible to even fucking find one. Well, not unless you've got the right connections I guess." He eyed the Padalecki brothers meaningfully.

"Okay, then," Chad butted in, "so, private dance, Jay?"

Pellegrino ignored the interruption. "All I'm saying is, if you're lucky enough to find a decent bitch, JT, I hope to hell you know what to do with it."

Jeff Padalecki looked like he was ready to punch the smug grin off Pellegrino's face but it was Jared who lurched to his feet, hands slapping down onto the table top to steady himself when he tilted precariously to the side. "Course I fucking do, Mark. Gonna show that pretty bitch who's boss. Gonna fill him up with pups and—"

"Whoa there, hoss." Jeff grabbed Jared's arm and pulled him back down onto his stool. "I think you're about done for the night."

He was done alright. So was Jensen. Done with listening to this crap. Done with giving Padalecki a chance. If that asshole thought he was buying himself a breeding bitch, he could think again. The growl that rattled in Jensen's chest was too loud to hide this time. His angry snarl too near the surface to bite back.

"Holy shit." It was Chad that noticed him first. "Is that the wolf-boy from earlier?"

"Well it's not a goddamn puppy, is it?" Jeff said, holding his hand out towards Jensen like he wanted Jensen to sniff his palm or something. Dickhead.

Jensen curled his lip and showed him his teeth. His ears flat back and fur bristled.

"Dude," Chad said. "What did you do to piss him off?"

Pellegrino tried next, his hand shooting out toward Jensen's neck. "Here boy, come and let us see what a pretty bitch you are." Jensen danced out the way of his sweaty hand, and growled, mean as he could, spit flying from the corners of his mouth.

"Fucking bitch is feral."

"Hey now, darlin', don't be like that." Jared slid off his stool, booze turning his limbs to liquid. "Come and say hello."

Jensen took a step towards him, too pissed to think straight, imagining sinking his teeth right into the asshole's meaty arm, tasting his blood on his tongue.

"He looked a damn sight friendlier up on that stage," someone commented uneasily.

Jared didn't have the sense to listen. Ignoring a warning "JT!" from his brother, he swayed closer, until Jensen could almost taste the tequila on his breath. Jensen crouched down, back legs bent low, ready to pounce.

"Hey there, pretty boy, you gonna let me see you?" Jared bent down to pet him, suicidal moron. Jensen twitched his tail, bared his teeth, his lethal fucking teeth that even an idiot would know not to get near, and pounced.

Except he didn't get anywhere because of a huge hand gripping the back of his collar. Jensen's only options were to relax or choke.

"Hello, boys, I see you've met Dean." Jeff Morgan tugged at his collar, and Jensen growled, tail tucked in between his legs.

"You sure that animal should be allowed to wander around out here?" Pellegrino asked, eyebrow raised. Supercilious asshole. Serve him right if Jensen tore a chunk out of him.

"I guess Dean's a little fired up tonight," Jeff replied, his laid-back drawl turned on full force." Sometimes he gets that way. But trust me boys, his bark is way worse than his bite."

Jensen snapped his teeth, and felt deeply satisfied when the guys looked at Jeff dubiously. But then, with a nod from Morgan, a waiter was distracting them with a tray of drinks, and Matt was slinking his way towards the group. Soon the only one left paying Jensen any attention was Jared, who was fucking cooing at him like he was a goddamn baby.

"Come on, darlin', don't be like that. I'm not gonna hurt you."

Damn right he wasn't. Jensen was going to make sure of that.

It took Jared's brother distracting him, and Morgan practically dragging Jensen away by his collar, to end the stand-off without bloodshed. Jensen was still fuming when Jeff finally let him go, after dragging him back into the safety of the dressing room. With deft fingers, Jeff unbuckled the collar from around his neck and stood watching while Jensen changed back, quicker than normal. Quicker than he should. Quick enough that if he wasn't so mad, he'd be whimpering at the sharp snap of bone and rough twist of muscle.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Jeff said. "Gods above, Jensen, it looked like you were about ready to kill someone."

"What was I thinking? Hell, Jeff, did you even hear those assholes?" Jensen grabbed a towel from the clean pile on the counter, and wrapped it around his waist.

"They're drunk, Jensen. You know what guys get like when they've had a few drinks. Especially in a place like this. All the fucking booze and hormones, makes them lose half their damn brain cells."

"My future husband called me an Omega bitch, Jeff," Jensen yelled. "Said he was gonna breed me up and show me who's boss. He's lucky I didn't rip his fucking throat out in front of all his asshole friends."

Jeff raised an eyebrow slowly, and settled his hands on his hips. He wasn't as a rule keen on yelling. Not when he wasn't the one doing it.

"Sorry," Jensen apologized sheepishly, and shrugged. "But—"

"But the guy's apparently a dick." Jeff nodded. "I get it. But you can't rip his throat out. Not without spending the rest of your life in jail. Or worse. So calm down and use those goddamn brains of yours. What are you going to do about it?"

Jensen took a deep breath, and ran his fingers through his hair. Jeff was right. He needed to think this through. The fact was, he had to marry Padalecki. If he wanted to save the family company and all those jobs. Which he did. It wasn't like he had a choice. But that didn't mean he had to play nice.

"You know what, Jeff, rip up my two weeks' notice. I'm not quitting. Not for that asshole."



2.

"Jensen, I'm real sorry about this. I told Dad no, I swear."

Jensen stood up when his older brother walked into the waiting room, relieved to see a friendly face. He allowed his brother to pull him into a hug and a fraction of the rigid tension in his spine away.

"I know, man." Jensen smiled thinly. "It's not your fault."

"Listen," Josh dragged him down into a seat far enough away that the Ackles' lawyer couldn't easily hear them talking, "screw the company, okay. We'll find another way through this. It's just a short-term cash flow problem anyway. Don't sign anything, just walk away right now. No one is going to stop you."

Gods, Jensen loved his big brother so much. Which was exactly why he couldn't walk away. "I can't do that, Josh. You know I can't."

Josh huffed out a tight breath, glared at the lawyer staring at them from the other side of the room. "This is fucking archaic, Jensen. You can't just throw your life away because Dad's made a few bad business decisions."

"I'm not doing it for Dad. I'm doing it for you and Victoria and the kids. And for all the people that could lose their jobs if I don't."

"Jensen—" Josh started to object, but the door to the meeting room was opening and Jensen didn't have much time.

"Listen, Josh, don't worry; it'll be fine. Just back me up in there, okay? Please? Even if Dad's asshole lawyer doesn't like it."

Josh gave him a quizzical look as they both stood up. "You got a plan, Jen?"

Jensen tugged at his jacket sleeves, smoothed down the front of his suit pants, and laughed dryly. "Not a good one, no."

The meeting between Alan Ackles, Gerald Padalecki, their assorted business executives and lawyers had already taken place. The deal wrapped up to everyone's satisfaction just an hour earlier. All that remained was for Jensen and Jared to draw up a marriage contract.

Thankfully the only people at this meeting apart from the mediator were Jensen and Jared, one person of their choosing and a lawyer each. Jensen had Josh by his side, and when they walked into the conference room he discovered that Jared had his brother for backup too. And a brown-suited lawyer who looked as equally dour as his own.

Introductions were made by the stony-faced mediator, who introduced herself as Miss Barnett, handshakes were exchanged all round before they took their places around the pristine glass table and got down to business. Not every person, however, appeared entirely engaged. Or even particularly awake. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, and Jared Padalecki sat slumped in his chair, with a pair of oversized aviator shades obscuring his eyes, and an extra tall Starbucks cup gripped in his white-knuckled hand like a life preserver. He was the very image of a man suffering from an epic hangover. Jensen looked from Jared to Jeff and

raised an eyebrow. Jeff, at least, had the decency to look embarrassed. He nudged Jared with his elbow then murmured something in his ear that made the other man shake his head, very carefully. Interesting.

"So," the mediator smiled. "As you all know, we're here to negotiate a marriage contract between Jensen and Jared. One that protects both men's interests and happiness."

Jensen snorted, quickly covered his mouth with his hand and pretended to cough. Right, sure, that's what they were here for. Jensen might have believed if it wasn't for the obvious fact that no-one in the room other than Josh gave a shit about Jensen's happiness.

"Would you like some water?" Miss Barnett offered Jensen, her frosty expression not thawing when he assured her he was fine to continue.

"Now, to ensure a successful marriage there are several issues that we need to agree upon. Most importantly as far as the Padaleckis are concerned is the issue of suppressants. Now I understand Jensen has already agreed to stop taking them."

Jensen leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath. Game on.

"I haven't agreed to anything yet," Jensen pointed out, to the obvious surprise of everyone else in the room. "This deal was mentioned to me for the first time less than twenty-four hours ago. I wouldn't say that's given me enough time to agree to anything."

"Ridiculous." Across the table, the Padalecki's lawyer looked like he'd swallowed a lemon whole. Beside Jensen, the Ackles lawyer seemed to be trying to attract his attention. Jensen ignored them both.

"As I understand it, Jensen, the contract between your parents and the Padaleckis will not go ahead without your acceptance of this term. I was under the impression that we were only here today to discuss the smaller details."

"Oh, I'm not saying I won't accept it. I'm just saying I won't agree to it without a few conditions of my own."

"And those would be?"

"First, my career."

The mediator looked at Jensen over the rims of her eyeglasses, her steely expression giving Jensen the impression that she didn't expect this to come up for debate "I'm sorry, what? Aren't you just a bartender?"

"I believe that my chosen profession is my business."

"Bartending is hardly a profession. Or a career," the Padalecki's lawyer scoffed. "And it's definitely not a suitable job for an Omega."

"A suitable job for an Omega?" Jensen's right eye twitched. "You do realize we're living in the twenty first century, right?"

Both lawyers in the room sighed loudly. Josh subtly gripped Jensen's arm when a low, wolf-like growl reverberated in his chest.

"Either I carry on working in my chosen profession, without complaint, derision, or hindrance, or I walk out of here right now."

The Padalecki's lawyer picked up a pencil and scrawled a furious line of words on his pad, clearly unimpressed with Jensen. "Don't be ridiculous."

"Try me." Jensen tensed in his seat, not sure that he was prepared to follow through on his threat, but not entirely sure that he wasn't.

"Mr. Ackles--" Whatever the lawyer had been about to say was cut off by the first words past Jared's lips. "It's fine," he gently rubbed his temple. "I don't care. What next?"

Jensen returned the venomous glare the lawyer shot him across the table with a satisfied smirk. It seemed that the battle lines had been drawn.

Ten minutes later Jensen and Jared had agreed on several issues. First to having a small private wedding ceremony; Jensen's demand, he didn't want paraded around like a prize cow at some obscenely lavish wedding celebration. Next, living arrangements. Jensen agreed to move in to Jared's house as long as he had equal and full rights to do what he wanted in that house. Jared's lawyer wouldn't budge from the demand that Jensen accompany Jared to any and all business and family functions that it was expected a spouse would attend. And Jensen dug his heels in and refused to agree to utter a single word about obeying or honoring in his vows. And the suggestion, by Padalecki's lawyer, of using a traditional ceremonial collar during the wedding ceremony was shouted down by an apoplectic Josh before Jensen got over the shock that it was even a thing.

"So, is that everything?" the mediator asked tightly, the pen in her hand tapping out an aggressive rhythm on her notepad. Miss Barnett had been made largely redundant, and she was apparently a bit put out. She'd obviously envisioned a more exciting afternoon than this.

Well, Jensen still had one major demand so there was a chance she could still get it.

"Marital relations," he looked at Jared, but could feel every eye in the room on him.

"What?" Jared still didn't sound entirely awake.

"Sex. I'm marrying you... fine. I'll live with you and act the dutiful husband in public... fine. I'll even stop taking suppressants. But let me make this very clear, I'm not a breeding bitch or an Omega whore. Just because we're married does not mean I'll go ass up for you." The room was deathly silent by the time Jensen finished talking. The Ackles' lawyer's hand shaking as he took a sip of water. The mediator's face pink.

Jeff Padalecki licked his lips and cleared his throat before he spoke, not quite able to look Jensen directly in the eyes. "Sex is part of a marriage. This deal was made with that in mind."

Jensen shook his head with a dismissive snort. "As far as I'm concerned, sex and marriage have very little to do with each other. Your brother isn't an innocent virgin waiting for his wedding night to claim his mate. And if you think that I'm an innocent virgin then I'm afraid you've been offered false advertising."

"But." Jeff was obviously trying to pick his words carefully. "This union is designed to bring together two pure bloodlines. To ensure the Padalecki line will remain strong for another generation. You've agreed to have children."

"I have agreed to stop taking suppressants. I haven't agreed to bend over and take it whenever your brother feels like it."

There was a shocked gasp from Miss Barnett at the head of the table and Josh shifted uncomfortably on his chair beside Jensen.

"Omegas do have rights," Jensen continued. "Eighty years ago, you could have slapped a collar around my neck and fucked me whenever you felt like it, passed me around to your friends. Hell, you could have beat me bloody and locked me into a breeding bench in the city square and no-one would have blinked. But times have changed, thank the Gods, and now I have as many rights as anyone in this room. Forced into marriage or not."

"And we all want to ensure those rights are preserved." The Padalecki's lawyer kept his attention on the papers in front of him rather than looking at Jensen. "However, in this situation the Padaleckis are paying for—"

"Sex?" Jensen butted in. "Because I'm not a hooker. And I'm pretty sure that's illegal."

The lawyer tugged fretfully at his tie. "No, no, that's not... Look, when this marriage was suggested it was understood that it would be a... a normal marriage, with all that entails. Including sexual relations."

Jensen laughed bitterly. "Let's not fool ourselves that this is a *normal* marriage, gentlemen. Normal marriages also involve love and respect. And I don't see any of that."

"Yes, but—"

Again, Jensen interrupted the lawyer's bluster. "I'm not saying that my feelings won't change. I'm not saying that once Jared and I get to know each other our marriage won't be consummated. But, forcing me to have sex when I don't want to is rape. Pure and simple. Married or not. Is that what you want, Jared? To start off married life by raping your husband?"

"Gods," the lawyer swept a sheen of sweat from his brow. "That's not at all—"

"No!" This time it was Jared who interrupted him. "No, that's not what I want."

"Jared," Jeff said, "we need to think about this."

"We don't. I'm not... Gods, I would never... I'm not gonna have sex with anyone who doesn't want it. Fuck, I'm not a monster."

Jeff nodded. "I know that, JT, I know. Maybe, we need to rethink this deal."

Jared finally took his shades off, revealing his waxy face; his blood shot eyes squinting against the sunlight streaming in through the windows when he addressed Jensen. "Look, our parents want this union. They're fans of traditional marriages and want the family lines preserved or whatever. You're obviously not that thrilled about it. But the fact is, if we don't marry, the deal apparently falls through, and a lot of people are going to suffer. I'm not gonna have sex with you if you don't want it. Obviously. But our parents are adamant you need to come off suppressants. Which means you'll go through a heat. And okay you don't want to have sex with me, but you sure as hell aren't gonna have sex with anyone else if we're married."

Jensen was surprised Jared was that coherent under the weight of his hangover. "Fine. But you don't get to sleep with anyone else either."

"Fine," Jared agreed easily. Jeff looked at him in disbelief.

"And if you do," Jensen continued, "the marriage is over. But my family's business is not affected."

"And if you do." The Padalecki's lawyer took over. "We will sue your parents and ensure the Ackles' company ceases to exist."

Jensen's belly flipped uneasily at that threat, but he'd expected nothing less. "Agreed."

The lawyer beside him coughed, and Josh turned to speak to Jensen for the first time. "Are you sure about this?"

"Positive."

Josh took a deep breath and nodded, apparently satisfied that Jensen knew what the hell he was doing. Jensen hoped that faith wasn't misplaced.

"And I want you to sleep with me," Jared suddenly added from across the table.

Jensen frowned. "We just agreed—"

"No." Jared shook his head, which was apparently a bad idea as the last of the color leached from his face and he slapped his palm across his mouth, swallowing hard. Jeff shoved a glass of water at him, and they all watched him take a long sip before he spoke again. "No, I mean just sleep... in my bed. I won't touch you. But if we're married, we should share a bed. It would look weird to family or guests if we had separate rooms."

Jensen hadn't expected that, but he guessed it couldn't do any harm. Looking at the size of the man, the width of his shoulders, the length of his legs, it was highly unlikely that he slept in a tiny bed.

"I don't think," Josh started to say, but Jensen laid his hand on his brother's arm. "No, it's fine. Sure. I don't have a problem with that."

"We have a deal then," Jeff said.

The Ackles' lawyer wagged his finger in the air. "There is the matter of an allowance; Mr. Ackles needs—"

Jensen waved him off. "Nope. I have everything I need."

Jeff and Jared both stared at him in surprise. "Jensen, it's fine, we were expecting this," Jeff said. "My family is happy to offer you a generous monthly allowance to cover any expenses that—"

"No," Jensen said, more firmly. "I don't need your money."

"Jensen, you're only a bartender for the love of the Gods." Jared sighed, and pinched the bridge of his nose. "That's hardly the best paid job in the world. My father is more than happy to—"

"I said no." Jensen stuck his chin out. "I don't want your money. Now, are we done here? I have things to do."

The lawyers didn't look overly happy but shrugged their assent and when it seemed that no-one had anything to add, the meeting drew to a tense close.

"We'll have the contracts drawn up and sent to your lawyers," Jeff said, shaking first Josh's hand and then Jensen's.

"Great," Jensen muttered, without enthusiasm.

"You know, we really don't want you to feel as though you're being forced into something you don't want."

"Really?" Jensen arched an eyebrow.

Jeff smiled ruefully. "Okay, I guess that's hard to believe. But it's not like this was Jared's idea. He's been coerced into it as much as you. He's a good guy, I swear."

Jensen looked to where Josh was having a hushed conversation with Jared a few feet away. Jared's shades were back on, his hands were stuffed in his pockets and he was staring down at Josh like he was trying to incinerate him with the power of his mind. Or he might have been dozing on his feet, again with the glasses it was hard to tell. One thing was for sure, he wasn't the good guy his brother was trying to make out. Maybe if Jensen hadn't seen him last night, hadn't heard him talking about breeding his Omega bitch he would have believed that the guy was just some floppy-haired harmless giant with overbearing parents.

"Look, Jensen," Jeff tried again. "I know you're not thrilled about this whole thing, but you could do a lot worse than Jared. He agreed to everything you wanted. He's not gonna screw you over. Maybe you should try and make the best of the situation. I think you guys could be really good together."

Yeah, Jensen didn't think so. "So what, you think I should be grateful... that I've landed on my feet? Caught myself such a wonderfully benevolent teddy bear of an Alpha?" Jensen asked, turning his attention back to Jeff. "Why? Because he's agreed not to rape me, and to let me work? Things that most people would consider their basic rights. Gods, for all I know, he only agreed because he's too damned hungover to argue."

Abashed, Jeff cast a sidelong glance towards his younger brother who was now walking towards them, a seasick sway in his step.

Jensen didn't let up. "I agreed to this shotgun wedding to save my family's company. End of story. If you think there's gonna be a fairytale ending to this bullshit marriage you're seriously fucking deluded." Jensen stopped and glared when Jared reached them, Josh following a few steps behind.

"Jensen," Jared's voice was still rough as hell, and pitched low enough not to aggravate his obviously fragile head. "Maybe we could meet up, soon. Talk things over. Before the wedding."

"That's what today was for," Jensen growled. He'd had enough. More than enough. If he didn't get out of these stuffy offices and the goddam tie that was trying to choke him, he thought he might actually punch someone. And that someone was going to be his future husband.

"Gods, Ackles, if you'd stop being an immature dick for just one minute—"

"I'm being an immature dick! You're the one that turned up hungover," Jensen hissed.

"Yeah? Well at least I'm not acting like a fucking drama queen!"

"A drama queen?" Jensen took a step towards Padalecki, his hands bunching at his sides. Jared stared down at him, lines creasing around his mouth. "You're not the only one getting married off here, y'know. You think I wanted to end up saddled with some tight ass Omega with a chip on his shoulder?"

"Jared," Jeff warned his brother.

"No," Jensen seethed, "you wanted an Omega bitch that would bend over whenever you felt like wetting your knot."

"Guys, please," Josh grabbed Jensen's arm just in time to stop him from throwing a rash punch. "Let's keep this civilized."

"Civilized went out the door when y'all forgot that I was more than a prize breeding bitch." Jensen shrugged out of Josh's hold, and stormed out of the office. He could feel the weight of his brother's disappointment hot on the back of his neck. But fuck him. Fuck Padalecki, fuck civility. As far as Jensen was concerned, this marriage was going to be open fucking warfare. And there was only going to be one winner.

There was so much crap to deal with in the two weeks before the wedding that the day itself seemed to arrive out of the blue. The only good thing was that Jensen had been too busy to waste any time worrying. There had been doctor's appointments, lawyers to visit, the marriage license to apply for, tux fittings, a fuck load of whisky to drink, and his father and stepmother to avoid. And of course, all his belongings to pack up.

He'd felt guilty as hell, leaving Chris and Misha with so little notice. The guys swore blind they didn't mind, not his fault, blah blah. And Jensen had made sure the Padalecki's compensated them for the loss of Jensen's rent money; it had been the only financial compensation he'd agreed to. Anything else would have felt like whoring himself out. But he'd been friends with the pair of them for a long time, Chris since his very first day at college, and Misha since he started work at the club, and he hated leaving them like this. He was gonna miss them. Even if they did drive him round the bend with their bickering most of the time. Honestly, the pair of them were like oil and water. It was a wonder they hadn't come to blows. Okay, no, it was a wonder they hadn't come to blows *more often*.

"You sure you don't want us to come with you?" Misha re-knotted Jensen's black tie for the third time, then stood back and scrutinized his work.

Jensen resisted the urge to loosen the tie, and instead picked up the white rose boutonniere and handed it to Misha. "No, really, Misha, its fine. I don't want you guys to get caught up in this fiasco."

Misha hummed without comment and pinned the fresh flower to Jensen's lapel, his deft fingers securing it in a matter of seconds.

"It's not too late to hit the road, son," Chris said from where he was leaning against the wall, arms folded. "We could jump in my pickup and head to the border. My guitar, your perky little ass, Misha's pot, we'd be all set."

"As great as that sounds, you know I can't, man." Jensen tugged at his shirt collar, grumbling good-naturedly when Misha knocked his hand away. Holding his arms out, he turned around for inspection. "So, you think I'll do?"

"You look gorgeous." Misha smiled, but he couldn't quite hide the telltale tremble in his bottom lip.

Chris stepped forward and patted Misha brusquely on the shoulder, as near to comforting as he was likely to get. "You look like a Ken doll, which I guess is what Padalecki wants."

Misha whacked Chris across the chest, and Jensen laughed at Chris's shocked whimper. He'd told Chris time and time again that Misha was stronger than he looked. The idiot never learned.

All three of them jumped when a car horn honked obnoxiously outside their little apartment.

"Well." Jensen swallowed hard. "I guess that's my limo."

Nobody moved for nearly a full minute. And then shockingly it was Chris—author of the legendary no chick flick moments house rule—who strode forward and threw his arms around Jensen, enveloping him in a spine popping hug. Jensen didn't even get a second to catch his breath once Chris finally released him, before Misha took his place, embracing him fiercely. Jensen thought his face was probably turning an oxygen deprived shade of purple by the time Misha reluctantly let him go. His eyes suspiciously bright, Misha busied himself straightening out the wrinkles in Jensen tux. "Go on, stud." Misha sniffed, giving Jensen's tie one final tweak. "You got this. It's just another show, right? Go and grab center stage."

"Yeah," Chris pitched in. "Slap a smile on that pretty boy face and give 'em hell."

"Sure," Jensen agreed, the side of his mouth tilting up wanly. "It's just another show, no problem."

He repeated the mantra to himself all the way to the Padaleckis' ranch.

The limo crawled through the heavy iron gates, and drew up outside the Padaleckis' house—which more resembled a sprawling castle—with only minutes to spare. From the car, Jensen could see his father pacing back and forwards at the top of the driveway, mopping the perspiration from his ruddy face with a wilted white handkerchief. If his mood had been lighter, Jensen might have found the look of relief on his father's face when he set eyes on Jensen comical. As it was he simply shoved his hands in his pockets and tried to ignore him.

Unfortunately, Alan Ackles for once decided he wanted to talk. "Jensen, son, you look good."

Jensen shrugged and carried on walking, the Padaleckis' maid was waiting in the open doorway to let him in. "Well, you paid for the tux, Sir, so I'm glad you like it."

Alan shook his head and grabbed Jensen's wrist, stopping him from walking away. "That's not what I meant. Jensen, you're not still upset about this, are you?"

Jensen couldn't believe it. His father didn't honestly think he'd come 'round, just like that. "Upset? Try furious. Or how about betrayed?"

"Gods, Jensen. I thought once you had a chance to think about this marriage, you'd gain some perspective. I did this for you more than anything."

Jensen snatched his arm out of his father's grip, any remaining respect he had for the man slipping away. "That's bullshit and we both know it. You did this for you. For the company. I wasn't even a consideration."

Alan seemed set to argue, so Jensen was taken aback when his shoulders suddenly slumped. "The company's difficulties were... well, that was part of it, son. But you have to know that I did this for you too. If I didn't think it was for the best I would never have suggested it. You're an Omega."

"You think I don't know that?" Jensen snarled.

Alan glanced around them nervously, obviously not wanting a scene. Jensen couldn't give a fuck.

"I mean... you need an Alpha," he rushed on ignoring Jensen's angry growl. "I know you're a modern Omega and independent, and... and... so on, but your biology is what it is. I know what happened to your mother, Gods rest her soul, was awful, and I know it affected you badly. Skewed your views, especially about Alphas, but Donna would never have wanted you to deny yourself happiness because of—"

"You don't get it, do you?" Jensen felt like screaming. "This isn't about mom. This is about me. About what I do and do not want. You... you have no fucking idea—"

"Gentlemen? Is everything alright?"

Heads snapping in unison towards the interruption, Jensen and Alan shot Gerald Padalecki matching scowls. Padalecki senior smiled back, unaffected.

"It's just that everyone is waiting. Jensen? Is there a problem?"

"No," Jensen said, lips thinning into one final cold glare directed towards his father. "No, everything's just peachy."

The deal had been a small wedding. No fuss. And afterwards, a party for the Padaleckis and Ackles closest friends. Unfortunately, when Gerald Padalecki escorted Jensen and his father through to the garden it soon became very clear that Jensen's idea of a small fuss-free wedding didn't match up with anyone else's. He had, naively, assumed that allowing the wedding to be held at the Padalecki's house, would ensure the numbers were kept to a minimum and the whole shindig would be a low-key affair. In reality, what it meant was marrying in front of over nearly two hundred of the Padaleckis' and Ackles' closest friends. Jensen personally knew about twenty people. And the only ones he actively liked were his brother, his sister-in-law and his nephews.

The ceremony itself was an anxiety inducing ordeal. All those people, all looking at Jensen. All judging. Nowhere to hide. And no chance of running. Scarlet faced and pulse racing, Jensen felt every eye burn into him as his father walked him through the filled gallery of white wooden chairs to where Jared was waiting like a prince in a Disney romance under a trellised canopy of trailing roses.

When not hungover or falling down drunk, Jared scrubbed up well. Even Jensen had to admit that. His tux fit him like a second skin, emphasized the sculptured width of his shoulders, the trim nip of his waist. The way his legs went on for miles. He even smelled delicious, now that the cloud of booze wasn't hanging over him. Not that Jensen cared. No, all he cared about was surviving the ceremony without making a complete idiot of himself. He almost managed. More or less. It was far from easy. Especially when stumbling, dry mouthed, over vows that tasted like crumbling ashes in his mouth. And while Jensen's jaw ached from keeping his fake smile pinned in place, Padalecki actually looked like he was enjoying himself; grinning dopily at Jensen through the entire twenty-minute ceremony like a cat who'd caught a poor dumb canary. Jensen wanted to smack the blinding smile off his stupid face.

The party that followed afterwards was even worse. With every socially awkward minute that dragged by, Jensen grew ever wearier. And even more tense. He managed to smile model-wide for the photographs, pretended to laugh along with everyone else at the speeches, even shuffled awkwardly around the temporary wooden dance floor for the first dance with Jared, but that was his limit. His patience frayed and mood black, it was impossible to fool himself that he wasn't there under duress.

He escaped as soon as he could, slipped unnoticed first to the bar, and then to the darkest spot he could find. Not so easy when it seemed like every fence post, bush and tree had fairy lights draped over it. Leaning against the huge old oak tree at the bottom of the garden, he yanked his tie loose and made a start on his plan of drinking himself past the point of giving a crap. Unfortunately, he didn't manage to stay unnoticed for long.

"So," Jared said, appearing from nowhere and almost scaring Jensen right out of his polished wingtips. "I guess my parents idea of a small wedding isn't quite the same as everyone else's."

If Jensen didn't know better, he'd say that Jared looked a little embarrassed. Or maybe like a kid that'd been told to go play nice with the neighborhood weirdo. "It's not the discreet wedding we'd agreed on." Jensen gestured expansively across the garden at the crowds of people drunkenly celebrating the wedding of two people they barely knew.

Jared shrugged his shoulders and smiled sheepishly. "To be fair, as far as Mom is concerned, this is practically a tea party. She's a go big or go home kind of woman for sure."

Jensen took another sip from his bottle of Jack in response.

"Your mom looks like she's enjoying herself," Jared said, nodding to where Lucinda was throwing back another glass of champagne and laughing, too loud and too long, at whatever story Jared's dad had just told.

Jensen grimaced. "My step-mother," he corrected. "Not my mom."

"Oh, right." Jared's eyes went wide, his hand jumping up to his mouth like he wanted to shove the words back in. "Sorry. I forgot. Your mother, she passed away when you were a kid, huh?"

"She was killed," Jensen said bluntly, before taking another long draw from his bottle. He felt a mean punch of satisfaction when Jared's face blanched.

"Shit, sorry, man. I didn't realize. That's awful. What happened? I mean, if you don't mind me asking?"

"What happened to her?" Jensen stood up straight, jaw tight with anger. "I'll tell you what happened to her. Some knot-head Alpha who thought all Omegas were fair game happened to her. Followed her while she was out dropping her kid off at school. Me. And when she wouldn't just roll over and let him use her like a breeding bitch, he killed her. Practically tore her apart."

Jared reached out to touch Jensen before changing his mind at the last second, shoving his hand in his pocket. Even Padalecki wasn't foolish enough not to notice the fury radiating from Jensen, the tension in his muscles straining to break free. "Gods, I'm sorry, Jensen, that's... that's horrific."

"Yeah," Jensen took another sloppy gulp from his bottle, rolled the liquor around his mouth in an attempt to chase away the bitter taste. He hated talking about this. Hated thinking about it even more. Honestly, his dad thought he had a problem with being an Omega because of what happened to his mother, but truth be told, he'd have hated himself more if he'd presented as an Alpha. To be one of those assholes born with all that power and aggression but without the self-control to contain it, or the intelligence to realize it didn't make them more important than anyone else. "Yeah, it was fucking horrific. But she was an Omega, right? She was probably asking for it."

Jared winced, "Jensen, that's not... I would never think.."

Jensen cut off Jared's platitudes with a withering look. "Let's not pretend that you actually give a shit about my mother, or my sob story."

"Jensen, please, can we not." Jared sighed. "I mean, I get it; you're pissed. But don't you think we should maybe make an effort now. To be friends at least."

"No," Jensen snorted. "No, I really don't. I know this must be a real fucking inconvenience for you, Padalecki; getting married off to some pissy Omega. But this, this has been the worst damn day of my life. And trust me I've had a lot of bad days. Get this through your thick skull; I don't want to be your husband. I don't want to be your Omega. And I don't want to be your goddamn friend."

Jared's eyes flashed, an amber glint that looked a lot like frustration, that looked a lot like he wanted to wrap his huge hands around Jensen's scrawny neck and throttle him. There was no chance for him to respond though because another figure was sauntering out from the growing shadows.

"Well, hello there, boys." Jensen swung around in surprise, Jack sloshing out of the bottle in his hand. He almost swore out loud when he recognized Mark Pellegrino's oily smirk. "You having your own private party down here? You got room for one more?"

"Mark," Jared huffed, stepping in front of Jensen. "This isn't a good time."

Pellegrino chuckled, and patted Jared's chest. "Of course, bro, your wedding night, right? My bad. Maybe some other time."

Behind Jared, Jensen bristled, all his instincts, wolf and human, telling him to attack the fucker. He threw the bottle of Jack down and tried, unsuccessfully, to push past Jared.

Pellegrino carried on, regardless, his voice whisky-slack. "You wouldn't mind another Alpha joining in the fun, would you, Jenny? The more the merrier when it comes to Omegas, am I right?"

Jensen finally side stepped out from behind Jared's bulk, hand already bunched and ready to punch Pellegrino in his smarmy face. "You even think about touching me and I'll rip off your knot and stuff it down your throat." Jared caught his arm just as Jensen was about to launch his fist through the air.

Pellegrino laughed, head thrown back and shoulders shaking like it was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. Then he smirked at Jared. "You got yourself a real feisty one here, JT. Remember what I said now, you need any help training him up, just give me a call. I'll be more than happy to help teach him his place."

"Mark," Jared snapped, holding Jensen back as he spat out a stream of obscenities that would have made a dockworker blush.

Pellegrino just slapped Jared's shoulder and walked away.

"He didn't mean it," Jared rushed to say, not letting go of Jensen's arm. "He's an ass, but he's all talk I swear to the Gods."

Jensen was so angry he couldn't even see straight. There was a vein in his neck that felt as though it was about to explode. He ripped his arm free from Jared's grip with a growl. "Fuck you, Jared. And fuck your slimeball friends. I'm leaving. Right now."

"Of course," Jared agreed, long legs easily keeping pace with Jensen as he stormed around the flowered borders of the garden towards the exit. "Just let me tell my parents that we're going."

Jensen rounded on him. "Do what you have to do, but I'm done being paraded around here like a prize pig."

Jensen stalked off before Jared could do anything stop him. And if he'd been able to leave without Jared he would have. Unfortunately, with nowhere to go and no way to get there, he had to wait until Jared reappeared, breathless and flushed. He lead Jensen to what looked like a brand new shiny truck festooned with just-married graffiti, balloons and streamers. Jensen gave it all a dark look before throwing himself in the passenger seat, and slamming the door bone-rattling hard behind him.

"I'm sorry." Jared turned to face Jensen when he sat down beside him in the driver's seat. Jensen ignored him, spine rigid, jaw clenched tight, staring straight ahead through the windshield, unblinking. Jared sighed heavily at the response, but turned back around and started the car much to Jensen's relief. They didn't exchange a single word the entire time it took to drive back into the city, although Jensen could feel Jared casting him discreet glances out of the corner of his eye. Even once they arrived at Jared's townhouse, and Jared showed him around, Jensen stayed tight-lipped. He didn't utter a single word the rest of the night, not even when with a dark scowl, and exhaustion-heavy legs he reluctantly climbed into Jared's bed, wearing honest to God pajamas like he hadn't done since he was twelve years old. He simply ignored every attempt Jared made to talk, turned his back on the other man and fell into a restless sleep.



3.

Jensen started married life the way he planned to continue it: ignoring Jared Padalecki whenever possible. And against all odds, that ended up being a pretty easy thing to do. It helped that while Padalecki's house wasn't quite the size of his parent's palatial mansion, there was enough space to make a game of hide and seek last forever. Four huge bedrooms, three bathrooms, a kitchen that was bigger than Jensen's first apartment—and which to Jensen's delight housed a state of the art coffeemaker—a games room with an insanely huge television screen, as well as a study, a dining room and a fully decked out gym.

Jensen was unsurprised to discover that Jared employed a motherly cleaner who came in three times a week to keep it all in immaculate condition, and who of course thought Jensen was just adorable. Jensen had to admit the whole set-up was pretty sweet. And as an added bonus, it wasn't even all that far from Morgan's club, just a handy twenty-minute bus ride.

So, three weeks in and while Jensen still couldn't say he was remotely happy about being married off to an Alpha knothed, he wasn't as miserable as he'd been afraid he would end up. He suspected, however, that this whole marriage business wasn't panning out quite like Jared had imagined. For a start, Jensen was avoiding him at all costs and if that proved impossible he made do with simply ignoring his new husband. Sure, it made things kind of awkward, but Jensen had agreed to marry the guy, not make idle chit chat. There had been no contractual clause demanding pleasant conversation. And frankly, it wasn't like they had much to discuss. Jensen couldn't give a shit about Jared's day so he wasn't going to ask. And he sure as hell wasn't going to talk about his own. He also wasn't going to cook for Padalecki, or wash his underwear, or do anything other than what he'd agreed to: live in the same house and sleep in the same bed. And, considering the behemoth of a bed that Jared owned and their wildly differing work/sleep schedules, even that hadn't proved too troublesome so far.

It hadn't taken long for Jensen to figure out that Jared spent a lot of time at work. A lot of time. He often worked six days a week. His alarm set for the ungodly time of six am, he was out of the house by seven and usually didn't return until after Jensen had left to go to the club. Jensen, on the other hand, slept until lunch time, then spent an hour or so working out in Jared's gym, maybe messed around with his guitar or Jared's gaming system to kill some time, before heading out to work. He still performed five nights a week, and he'd even picked up an extra shift or two bar tending on the nights that he wasn't dancing.

It wasn't a perfect system, and Jensen knew the uneasy lull in hostilities wouldn't last forever, but he was quite happy to carry on the way he was going. Jared however wasn't.

It was a Sunday. Jensen had been working the night before, and as usual hadn't dragged himself out of bed until way past noon. He'd half thought that Jared might be at work, but wasn't totally shocked to find him standing in the kitchen.

"Afternoon," Jared said.

Jensen ignored him in favor of pouring out a cup of coffee.

"You're not working tonight, right? You don't usually work a Sunday?"

Jensen shrugged his agreement and closed his eyes as he took his first reverential sip of hot black rich nectar. He did love Jared's coffee, even if he never wanted to know how ridiculously expensive it was.

"Great," Jared grinned. "My boss is coming for dinner."

Jensen nodded, still blissfully enjoying the moment. When he registered Jared's words, he almost spat it out. "What?" he coughed, spluttering into his arm.

"My boss. He's coming for dinner. With his wife. And a couple of other colleagues."

"So," Jensen screwed up his nose, he wasn't awake enough for this shit. "The fuck do you expect me to do about it?"

Jared smiled, wide, his dimples winking. "I don't expect anything other than for you to be here, and be polite, and not fuck this up. Just like you agreed."

"I agreed?" Jensen didn't know what the fuck Padalecki was talking about. He'd only been awake for fifteen minutes, he hadn't agreed to shit-all.

"You're my husband, in case it's slipped your mind. You need to act like it in front of my business associates. Especially in front of my boss. It was a condition of the deal."

Jared could be a real smug son of a bitch at times.

"Doesn't your daddy own the damn company?" Jensen griped.

"Yeah, he does, and one day Jeff and I will take over. But I've worked my way up the company from the bottom. Started out in the mailroom when I was still at college, and earned every promotion I've gotten."

"Sure you have," Jensen scoffed and shook his head. "Not like you had, y'know, a huge advantage over everyone else or anything. You totally worked your way up the company. What are you, twenty-seven years old and VP of Marketing. Yeah, no favoritism there."

Jared folded his arms over his chest, and glared.

"Whatever," Jensen said with a roll of his eyes. "I hope you don't expect me to cook."

Padalecki didn't. Give the guy his due, he had more sense than that. He'd no doubt seen the charred remnants of Jensen's attempts at cooking for himself. If it wasn't for microwave meals for one, Jensen would survive on sandwiches and chips.

The caterers arrived a few hours later with boxes of equipment and bags of food. When they started clanking about in the kitchen, Jensen retreated upstairs. As much as he'd have loved to be a complete ass and blow the whole thing off, he had agreed to act the loving husband for things like this. And what with Jared's surprise attack before Jensen had actually woken up, sneaky asshole, it wasn't like he'd had the time or brain power to come up with an excuse. Besides, all he had to do was make small talk for a few hours, how bad could it be?

Pretty damn bad.

"You don't honestly expect me to wear that, do you?" Jensen came out of the bathroom in a cloud of steam to find an outfit laid out on the bed, presumably for him, seeing as how Jared was already fully dressed in an open-necked grey shirt and black slacks.

"What's wrong with it?" Jared asked, with what Jensen was sure was a sly smile hiding in his eyes.

Jensen held up the shirt. "It's pink." Actually, it was pink with a white stripe through it. The silk tie draped over it was white and the pants were grey, as was the vest. There was even a pair of white shoes sitting by the bed. It wasn't something Jensen would choose to wear. Ever.

"So? You afraid of a little pink?" Jared raised an eyebrow in challenge. "I wear pink all the time. These are designer clothes. I thought you'd like them."

A muscle in a Jensen's jaw twitched. "I can pick out my own clothes."

"Sure you can, and you look awesome in them but ripped jeans and a band tee aren't the dress code for tonight."

"Look, Padalecki—"

"And maybe, just for appearances' sake, you think you could not call me Padalecki in front of my guests."

"How about asshole? Can I call you that?" Jensen tossed after Jared as he walked away.

"For the love of the Gods, Jensen, will you just play nice for once; you signed the contract, you know the terms," Jared called back before shutting the bedroom door.

Jensen bit back another snarky response and scowled at the shirt in his hand. Versace. Fucking Versace. At least the asshole had style. And plenty of money. But really, did it have to be pink? Pick your battles, he told himself as he slipped the outfit on, it fitted perfectly, right down to the Armani shoes.

He didn't rush downstairs, not even after the doorbell had rung twice. He pottered about and fussed with his hair, smoothing it into submission, tied, and re-tied the white silk tie. When the doorbell rang for the third time, he was still standing there looking at his reflection in the mirror and scowling at the preppy douchebag staring back. Gods, he couldn't go anywhere looking like this. Seriously. It wasn't that he looked bad; he looked smooth as hell as a matter of fact, he just didn't look like himself. But the problem was, of all the battles he was going to have to fight, wearing a pink Versace shirt was undoubtedly a pretty petty issue to go to the mattresses over.

Ten minutes later, Jensen finally walked down the stairs, ruffling his fingers through the now messy spikes of his hair. He was still wearing the shirt, and everything else other than the vest that Jared had picked out for him, but the white tie was tugged loose to almost halfway down his chest, the top three buttons of his shirt were undone and the sleeves casually folded. He probably still looked like a preppy douche-nozzle but he felt a little more him.

It wasn't hard for Jensen to follow the sound of chatter to the lounge. "And this must be Jensen," a woman, loud and overexcited, squealed when Jensen walked in.

Jensen smiled—as bright and true as a broke stripper working for tips—and shook hands all round as Jared, eyes narrowing as he took in Jensen's appearance, made introductions.

There were six guests in all: Jared's boss Kurt, bald, fat and oily, and his, too young and pretty for him, wife Brianna; Tim and Alaina, a striking couple who smelled of power and money the way other people smelled of cheap fabric conditioner; and Mark and Rob, another couple as far as Jensen could work out, although if he could put money on it, he'd bet they'd had an argument before they arrived since Rob kept shooting Mark sharp looks like he secretly wanted to smite him dead. Probably married then.

"It's a pleasure to meet y'all," Jensen lied smoothly. Just because he hated this kind of thing didn't mean he had no manners.

"Indeed," Mark said, giving Jensen a leering once over that had Rob gripping the stem of his champagne glass a little tighter. "We've all been very curious to meet Jared's new husband. Your wedding pictures did you no justice; I can see why Jared's been hiding you away."

"Drink?" Jared offered Jensen a glass, delicate crystal filled to brim with fizzing champagne. Jensen took it gladly and downed most of it in one go.

"So, no honeymoon baby then?" Alaina noted, one perfectly shaped brow arching at the glass in Jensen's hand.

"No honeymoon," Jensen pointed out, with a dramatic pout. "My Jaybear just works far too hard, don't you, darling?"

"Jaybear?" Kurt snorted, and Jared's ears turned pink.

Jensen smirked.

"Why don't we head through to the dining room." Jared grabbed Jensen's arm, and escorted him, firmly, from the room, hissing in his ear like a pissed off cat, "What the hell are you doing?"

Jensen slid his arm out of Jared's grip and smiled saccharine-sweet back at him. "I'm playing nice, Padalecki, just like you wanted."

Dinner was delicious. Conversation was awkward. Mainly for Jared.

Kurt was a fat-necked, sexist asshat. But Jensen had met his type often enough and knew exactly how to deal with him. Ignoring him was the best tactic. Offensive bores like him thrived on attention. Jared's boss or not, every time he uttered something snide or offensive — so every time he spoke— Jensen flipped the conversation in another direction. He wasn't discreet about it either, everyone else had to have noticed. Jared seemed to be the only one concerned that Kurt's face was slowly growing puce, and his eyes bulging alarmingly.

"So, you didn't want to follow your brother into your father's business?" Mark asked, as they tucked into the main course; some kind of chicken dish that Jensen couldn't pronounce never mind cook.

"No, business isn't really my thing."

"Of course it isn't," Kurt butted in. "The cut throat world of business is no place for pretty little Omega like you."

Jensen turned to Brianna. "I'm sorry I didn't catch it earlier, you're Kurt's daughter, Brianna?"

Kurt choked on a mouthful of potato. Brianna laughed and slapped the table in delight. "No, you silly goose, I'm his wife."

"Really?" Jensen looked at Kurt then back at Brianna with a conspiratorial grin. "I'd never have guessed. So, tell me, just between us, what attracted you to Kurt? His good looks, his charm, his great big—"

Jared dropped his fork.

"—brain?" Jensen finished, with a wink.

Brianna giggled, and batted her mascara-thick eyelashes. "You are naughty, Jensen."

"Isn't he just?" Mark said, dryly. "So, Jensen, you never said, what exactly is it you do?"

"Jensen—" Jared tried to answer the question for him, no doubt with some lie or half-truth that would hide the fact his husband was a lowly bartender. As far as Padalecki knew anyway. Jensen had half a mind to tell them the truth, see what Jared would make of that bombshell. He didn't think it was quite the right time though.

"It's okay, sugarbuns, I can answer," Jensen interjected sweetly. "I'm a bartender."

Kurt scoffed. "You don't let him work in a bar, do you, Jared?"

Jared, cheeks the same color as Alaina's cherry-red lipstick, did a wonderful impression of a goldfish; his mouth opening and closing wordlessly.

"It's the twenty first century, Kurt," Timothy coolly pointed out, returning Kurt's resultant glare with a stern look, one that reminded Jensen of a hot professor he'd once had a huge crush on.

"Still, it's hardly a suitable career for an omega. Especially one married to Padalecki's marketing VP." Kurt sniffed.

Jensen speared a tomato with his fork, feeling a strange sense of satisfaction when its seedy guts squelched out. "Do y'all work at Jared's daddy's company then?" he asked brightly, looking around the table.

Yes, was the general upshot, from everyone apart from Timothy, who turned out to be an ex-special forces, bee-keeping, house-husband. Brianna was Kurt's personal assistant. Jensen barely contained his eye roll at the predictability of that cliché. Alaina had a terrifyingly impressive job title which left Jensen with no idea what she actually did. Mark was the head of HR and Rob did something in R&D.

The conversation moved on. Jensen made small talk until he thought his brain was going to turn to cheese and melt out of his ears. At one point Kurt tried to suggest that the women and Jensen should move back through to the lounge while the men smoked cigars and drank brandy. Watching Alaina verbally eviscerate him was all kinds of entertaining.

"So, Jensen," Brianna coughed, and flapped away the cloud of cigar smoke that Alaina had just blown in Kurt's direction. Jensen thought he could grow to love that woman, from a safe distance. "Kurt was telling me that you're a real, purebred Were. Like, one that can change and everything? Is that true? Can you wolf-out?"

It wasn't the least tactless question Jensen had ever heard, but it came close. It seemed that everyone wanted to hear the answer though, even if they hadn't had the guts to ask. "Yes," Jensen admitted. "I can."

"Oooh," Brianna tossed her blonde hair over her shoulder and stared at Jensen in wonder. "That is so cool. Is it like, a moon thing? Or can you just rawr whenever you want to." The clawing action she did with her hands as she asked was hilarious, as was Kurt's expression when she did it. "Does it hurt?"

"Brianna." Alaina looked at her in disapproval. "It's not polite to ask—"

Jensen waved her off. Brianna wasn't being cruel. She was curious, understandably, and at least honest, and guileless, enough to admit it. "It's fine, really. Yeah, I can change whenever I want, but I understand that not everyone can." Jensen looked towards Jared because Jared was pure Were too, and should be able to transform as easily as Jensen. Jared shrugged noncommittally. Jensen suppressed the urge to roll his eyes at Padalecki's reticence, figured it probably meant the guy had performance issues, and carried on. "It doesn't usually hurt, although it can if I do it too quickly."

"Wow." Brianna's eyes were wide. "I've never known a Were before. Well, apart from Jared," she blushed. "And he never talks about it."

Jensen laughed, not unkindly. "Maybe you have. It's not like we're that much different from anyone else."

Kurt snorted, and Jensen wondered how satisfying it would feel to pop his fork into the asshole's piggy eyeball.

"I bet you're a real cutie-pie as a wolf," Brianna sighed, no doubt picturing Jensen like a big cuddly puppy.

"Maybe when I was a pup," Jensen smiled at her.

"Oh." Brianna's face suddenly fell. "You don't hunt, do you? You're not going to suddenly feel the urge to eat all the family pets in the neighborhood?"

Jensen laughed. "No, your pets are safe. I'm still pretty much me once I've turned. I can still think, still reason. And as a rule, I don't believe in hunting down dumb animals." If his eyes flickered toward Kurt at that point it was purely coincidental. "Do you have any pets, Brianna?"

And just like that the conversation changed track again. Brianna didn't have a pet, Kurt's surly reaction to the question made it clear why. Mark and Rob owned a snake. And Alaina and Tim had several cats, along with a few hundred bees.

Jared's nose wrinkled the same way Jensen's did at the mention of the snake, but Jensen was surprised to see it did the same thing when Tim mentioned their cats. Interesting.

Cigars smoked, brandy and coffee drunk, and with everyone working the next day, the party broke up before ten. Thankfully. Jensen returned Brianna's hug before she left and tried not to punch Kurt in his annoying face. He had no idea what Brianna saw in him. She could do so much better.

"What the fuck was that?" Jared rounded on him once they were alone.

Jensen slipped his tie up and over his head and started unbuttoning the monstrosity of a shirt. "That was me playing nice, just like you ordered me to."

"Really?" Jared scoffed. "Because that looked to me like you were being a dick."

"I am a dick, Jared," Jensen grinned, lips back and teeth bared. "Maybe if you actually knew me before we got married you'd have realized that."

Jensen stripped off the shirt as he walked away, striding up the stairs two at a time. Jared grabbed his arm to stop him. "Jensen—"

"Get your hand off me." Jensen shrugged him off, almost losing his balance on the stair as he did it, his arms still tangled in his shirt sleeves. Jared grabbed him again to steady him, his fingers pressing hot into Jensen's bare skin. "Gods, you're infuriating."

Jensen shook him off again, finally pulling free from the shirt and shoving it at his chest. "And you're a giant asshole, with horrendous taste in friends."

"They're my work colleagues, and they aren't that bad."

Jensen sneered, the image of Mark Pellegrino still too fresh in his mind. "The point still stands. And just for future reference if you want to wheel me out like some performing poodle, a little notice would be nice. I do have a freaking life. Unlike you, Padalecki." Jensen took off up the last few stairs at a run, leaving Jared muttering grimly in his wake, the pink shirt a scrunpled ball in his hands.

Things changed after that night. And not for the better. The brittle truce between them eroding away slowly but surely. Silent avoidance turning into purposeful needling. It started small. Little things. Like Jensen using all of Jared's fancy-pants shampoo. And Jared leaving his big-ass boots lying around for Jensen to trip over. Like Jensen throwing Jared's disgusting protein shakes in the trash. And Jared finding Jensen's hidden stash of animal crackers, eating them all and leaving behind the empty box. Jensen did much the same when he discovered Jared's secret supply of gummy bears. Although he did leave one behind. With the head bitten off. The next day all of Jared's PS4 games mysteriously disappeared. Apart from one. Just Dance.

After that Jensen upped the game. He started cooking; breakfast, lunch, supper, whatever he could. Just whenever Jared was home. Every meal a deliberate and usually burnt disaster that set off the smoke alarm's deafening blare. They were fast running out of saucepans, and casserole dishes. He even managed to set fire to the toaster, and —on one terrifying occasion — the microwave. That one wasn't entirely deliberate.

In retaliation, Jared dragged Jensen to a family dinner with his parents, brother, sister, and their terrifyingly large broods of children. And also made him wear a pink sweater vest.

The following week, Jensen accidentally turned off Jared's alarm clock when he got in from the club. Four days in a row.

That weekend, Jared all but blackmailed a semi-conscious Jensen into accompanying him to an early breakfast meeting, where he ended up sitting squashed in between a perky morning-loving Brianna and Kurt who ate grilled fish for breakfast. And to add insult to injury, Jared made him wear a damn suit.

Jensen forgot to tell Jared that his cleaning lady was taking off for a month to visit her pregnant granddaughter. Although he did make up for it by very helpfully doing Jared's laundry. In a boil wash. Dying all his white shirts pink. And shrinking them to normal human size. Accidentally.

Jared broke the coffee maker. Left it lying in sad little pieces on the kitchen floor.

Jensen mourned. Then seethed. Then he ordered a new one with same-day delivery, on Jared's account. And then he went out and bought a kitten.

"Why?" Misha looked at Jensen doubtfully when he walked into the dressing room with a ginger ball of fur snuggled in his arms.

"Because," Jensen replied, tickling the kitten under her chin. "He doesn't like cats."

"And you figured this out just because he didn't turn into a gooey pile of mush when a coworker mentioned her cat?" Misha tilted his head, obviously skeptical of Jensen's theory.

"And because last week he acted like a man-eating tiger was on the loose when the neighbor's cat sneaked into our yard. He chased the poor thing off with a water hose and a baseball bat."

"He's scared of cats?" Misha asked incredulously. "An Alpha that's built like a God. And he's scared of a tiny ball of fluff?"

Jensen shrugged, figuring, a touch maliciously, that there was only one way to find out.

"Is that a fucking kitten?" Jeff stomped into the dressing room, cigar as usual dangling from the corner of his mouth. "Why the fuck is there a kitten in my goddamn club? It's not part of your act is it?"

"Oh, he's adorable." Coming in behind him, Matt scooped the kitten out of Jensen's arms before he could object. Within two minutes the tiny cat was leaping around the floor like a maniac chasing a feather boa that Rich was dangling in front of her nose.

Hands on his hips and brooding eyebrows clearly indicating he was unamused, Jeff glared at Jensen. "It's just for a few hours. I'm taking her home tonight." Jensen winced when the kitten pounced on Jeff's shoe laces, its tiny teeth doing their best to maul them.

"And what exactly are you planning on doing with the little runt until then?" Jeff scowled down at the kitten tenaciously chewing his shoes. Jensen gave Jeff what he hoped was a winning smile.

Jeff took the cigar out of his mouth and shook his head. "No way, Jensen, no goddamn way."

Despite his objections, and although Jeff would deny it until his dying day, Jensen had to practically pry the kitten out of Jeff's clutches by the end of the night. It seemed that despite his grizzled exterior his boss was secretly a pushover for cute fur babies, something that Jensen found equally disconcerting and hilarious. "You're not gonna start petting me the next time I wolf out, are you? I mean, honestly, I'm not a huge fan of tummy rubs," Jensen lied, tucking the kitten safely inside his jacket. "But sometimes I do get this itch, right behind my ears, y'know, if you felt the urge to—"

Jeff shoved him out of his office with a growl that didn't quite hide the fond look in his eyes. "Get the fuck out of my office, you little shithead."

Jared's reaction to Jensen's new friend was less warm and fuzzy. But equally hilarious.

Startled by a high-pitched squeal that probably woke half the neighborhood, Jensen jackknifed upright, heart pounding, to find Jared lying rigid on his half of the bed, a kitten attached to his head, needle-sharp claws curled into his hair, quite possibly his skull. The

poor kitty's eyes were saucer wide and her ears flat back. Jared's scream no doubt terrifying the living daylight out of her. Jared's chest was heaving as he slowly turned his kitten-topped head and stared at Jensen. "What the everloving fuck?"

"You've met Charlie then?"

"Charlie?" Jared cautiously removed a hooked claw from the tip of his ear.

"She's a kitten."

Jared breathed out shakily and tentatively prodded the furry fiend trying to hide in his hair. "I can see that. Why is there a kitten in my bed?"

"Our bed," Jensen corrected. "Because I rescued her."

"Rescued her? From where?" Jared asked, fingers clenching in the bed sheets as the kitten took the hint and climbed down from her hiding place, stepping delicately down the broad plains of Jared's chest.

"From..." Jensen hesitated. From the animal shelter, truth be told, but that indicated the amount of premeditated planning that went into the kitten's appearance. "...the street. She was on the street. All on her own. Abandoned and terrified. Half starved."

Jared glared, first at the kitten prowling down his body, and then at Jensen. "It's not staying."

The kitten jumped on to the bed in between Jared and Jensen, to Jared's obvious relief, and started licking her butt, rather inelegantly. Jared's nose screwed up in disgust.

"Of course she's staying." Jensen collapsed back down flat onto the bed, snuggling into his pillow. "I'm not throwing her back out on the street; she's a defenseless little kitten."

"So, take it to a shelter."

"No."

The kitten untucked her head out from between her back legs, and started to investigate the bed.

"This is my house," Jared was probably aiming for authoritative but unfortunately for him, he sounded more like a whiny kid.

"No, this *was* your house. Now, it's *our* house," Jensen smirked. "And I have equal rights to do what the hell I want, and I want to keep her."

Jared no doubt had more to say on the matter, but the kitten chose that point to leap into action and dive on the prey she'd been carefully stalking. Claws out, she pounced like the tiny predator she was, and attached herself to Jared's toes which were sticking out from the bottom of the sheet.

The squeal that burst from Jared's lips was even louder than the one that had woken Jensen earlier. Unfortunately for Jared, that only made the kitten cling into his foot tighter, tiny spots of blood blossoming under her claws.

"Get it off!" Jared shrieked. "Get it off!"

More for the kitten's sake than Jared's, Jensen —with no sense of urgency whatsoever— sat up and pried the angry kitten free, snuggling her into his chest afterwards. Jared almost landed on his face he jumped out of bed so quickly, sheets tangling around his legs. He hopped towards the bathroom, blood trickling between his toes, and shouting over his shoulder, "That evil furball is not staying here."

Jensen scratched the purring kitten underneath her fuzzy chin, smug in the knowledge that there was nothing Jared could do about Jensen's new pet. Not without breaking the terms of their contract.

So, Charlie stayed. And Jared fumed, and bitched and plotted, and eventually retaliated.

"Karaoke?"

"That fucking cat has peed in my boot again."

Jensen ignored the, by now familiar, look of disgust on Jared's face, to repeat, "Did you say karaoke?"

There was a flash of something victorious, something smug, in Jared's eyes when he turned his head and nodded at Jensen. "Yep. Tomorrow night. You're not working. I checked your schedule."

"No fucking way." Even watching the cat pee drip from Jared's new boot didn't appease Jensen's ire. He'd mentioned it one time. Someone, at some stupid business thing had asked him about his college major, and Jensen, had for some reason admitted to studying music. And when pushed had mentioned, with unusual honesty, the stage fright he suffered from that made playing or even worse singing in front of an audience a trial rather than a pleasure. He hadn't thought Jared had overheard. Now, he suspected he may have been wrong.

"Yes fucking way."

Jensen spluttered, "Business and family events. That was deal. Not stupid fucking karaoke."

"It is business." Jared grinned. "A charity event. Brianna organized it. And some of my family are gonna be there. And my friends."

That did not make matters any better as far as Jensen was concerned. "No. Fucking. Way." He repeated through gritted teeth. "I'm not going to any fucking karaoke night."

Jared set down his boot and focused all his attention on Jensen, his wide mouth tilting in a triumphant smirk and his voice taking on a sing-song tone that set Jensen's nerves on edge. "It's a business function, Jenny-bean. It's in the contract."

Right at that second, Jensen wanted to shove the contract up Jared's irritating arrogant ass. But the Gods be damned, he was right. Point to Padalecki.

Jensen found himself with an armful of Brianna almost as soon as they walked through the door. "Jensen," she squealed when she saw him, her hair bouncing in a halo of curls around her face. I'm so glad you made it."

"Sure, no problem, wouldn't miss it for the world." Jensen squeezed her tight before patting her on the back and trying to disentangle himself. "And you too, Jared, of course." Brianna smiled, still managing to keep hold of Jensen's hand, her surprisingly powerful grip suggesting she was holding on for grim death.

Looming beside him like a storm cloud, Jared nodded, barely managing to produce a friendly smile. His mood had turned sour since they'd bumped into Tim and Alaina as they'd arrived at the club. Gods only knew why. He'd gotten what he wanted after all; they were here. Maybe it was because Jensen had for once point-blank refused to wear the flowery button down that Jared had bought for the casual dress code affair. Instead he was wearing his own black button down and a pair of fitted black pants which frankly made his butt look fantastic. Alaina obviously thought so, he could still feel her handprint on his ass cheek. That woman was a handful. If he swung that way, he'd imagine that she'd be a hellcat between the sheets.

Brianna tugged on his hand. "Jensen, please tell me you'll sing."

"Aw, Brianna, I don't know. I'm not great at this kind of thing." Jensen looked around the room, at all the people awkwardly avoiding making eye contact with the karaoke DJ, and the decided lack of volunteers to start things off. More drink was obviously needed. For Jensen if no-one else.

"It doesn't matter if you're not a great singer, honest; that's half the fun. Please, Jensen, *please*. No one's signed up yet. The evening's going to be a disaster. Kurt said it was a stupid idea. I guess he was right." Brianna looked close to tears, and Jensen could feel his steely determination not to sing, no matter what, falter.

"Why don't *you* get things going?" Jensen encouraged. "It's your night after all. You should get up there and show them how it's done. Go on, I'll cheer you on. It'll be fun."

Brianna looked around doubtfully. "Get up in front of all these people? I don't think I can. I work with most of them. What if I make a fool of myself. I'll never be able to show my face again."

Jensen's palm started to grow clammy, his pulse doing strange fluttery things.

"Come on, Jennybean," Jared chimed in. "You're a great singer."

Jensen shot him a dark look over Brianna's head. "You know I'm not good at singing in public, Jarebear."

"Please, Jensen, please?" Brianna gazed up at him with huge begging eyes, just as Kurt walked up, slapping Jared on the back and grinning his smarmy grin. "Hey, boys, glad you could make it. You don't have a drink yet? Damn, Brianna, these caterers you hired are useless. I told you to hire my guys."

"You know they were twice the price, Kurty," Brianna replied, anxiously trying to flag down a passing waiter. "And the profits are for charity. I was just trying to keep costs down."

Kurt sneered, and Brianna's hand which was still clasped in Jensen's began to tremble. "Well if people can't get a damned drink the night's going to be even more of a disaster. I don't know what possessed you to organize a karaoke night. Karaoke!"

"I think it's a great idea." Jared spoke up, turning his foul mood on Kurt. "Something a bit different from all the usually stuffy fundraisers."

Kurt's bug eyes narrowed, displeasure bitter in his voice. "You think so? I guess, maybe, but if no-one's gonna get up there and sing then—"

"I am," Jensen declared much to everyone's surprise, including his own. "Right now. Going to sing. On stage." And great, words were already failing him. This was going to be a disaster.

"Oh, thank you, Jensen, thank you." He didn't have time to chicken out before Brianna started dragging him towards the stage. "Brianna," he hissed. "I need a drink. Or three. Right now."

"What?"

"Seriously. I'm not joking. I'll not be able to... not without a..." Jensen took an unsteady breath as his gut suddenly tried to twist itself into a pretzel. "Just.. I get stage fright. *Bad* stage fright. Just grab me a drink, please."

Brianna shot him a worried look, but caught the arm of a passing waiter almost causing him to drop his tray of drinks. Jensen took the opportunity to snatch two glasses as the waiter steadied the tray, knocking them back one after the other. Grimacing as first gin, then vodka martini hit his belly.

"Better?" Brianna asked, eyes wide.

Jensen shook his head, feeling distinctly nauseous.

Brianna glanced back towards Kurt and Jared. "You don't have to do this. I'll understand—"

If he backed out now, Jensen could only imagine how incredibly smug Kurt would be. It didn't bear thinking about; the guy was already a pompous prick with an ego the size of Texas. Taking a deep breath, Jensen gave Brianna a brief hug, followed by a watery smile, then climbed up the steps to the stage, his knees wobbling and sweat-slick palms slipping off the steel handrail.

The DJ was so obviously relieved to see him that Jensen almost felt bad for her. Especially when he could barely get the words out to explain which song he wanted to sing. With a doubtful look and a heartfelt 'good luck' she shoved the mic into Jensen's hand before he could change his mind and left to cue the machine. Jensen tried not to throw up. He could do this. He could totally do this. He took off his clothes in front of a crowd of paying customers on a regular basis. He could totally sing a crappy rock ballad in front of a room full of people that he didn't give a single fuck about.

He passed the mic between one hand and the other and back again, wiping his damp palms on his thighs at the same time. Gods, if the music didn't start up soon he was gonna bolt. His eyes found Jared's across the room, and hell if Padalecki didn't look kinda nervous too. The asshole was probably scared Jensen was going to make a fool of himself in front of all his colleagues and friends. The way Jensen was feeling, the chances of that were pretty high to be honest.

The music started out of the blue, Jensen jumped and fumbled with the mic, a river of sweat flowing down the middle of his back. He wanted another drink. A real one. Tequila. Or scotch. Something that burned the lining of your throat before it set your belly on fire.

The words flashed up on the screen in front of him, bright green lettering that swam, dizzying and illegible, in front of his eyes. It was just as well Jensen knew the words like they were ingrained in his heart, that he'd sung the song a hundred times before. Mouth suddenly dry, Jensen licked his lips, trying to summon enough spit to unstick his tongue from the roof of his mouth.

The first notes he sang came out as little more than an off-key croak. Jensen coughed, willed his heart not to beat out of his chest, begged his mouth to form words. But the next line was inaudible even to him, and if Brianna hadn't been standing in front of the stage giving him a dorky thumbs up, Jensen would have said screw it and quit right then.

The next line, he didn't quite nail, but at least produced a sound that was somewhere in the region of musical. Jensen wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and tried to ignore the nervous sweat soaking into his shirt collar. And then slowly, gradually, the words came. In tune and in time with the backing track, until eventually by the start of the second verse Jensen had forgotten where he was, who he was singing to, and what he was so terrified of. He sang the words he loved, to the song he adored. He didn't even notice the way everyone stopped to listen, mouths agape.

When the last notes of Simple Man faded away, Jensen almost fell over in shock at the enthusiastic applause and whoops of approval that lit up the room. Brianna's the loudest and most enthusiastic of them all, a huge smile lighting up her face. And when Jensen's gaze wandered further back, just out of curiosity, Jared was clapping just as loudly as everyone else. And although Jensen told himself it was just for show, just because he was standing next to Kurt, surrounded by his colleagues and his friends, he knew, deep down, that the fondness in Jared's eyes couldn't possibly be a lie.

With a lot of encouragement, Jensen sang one more song, a loose and loud rendition of a Bon Jovi classic that left him grinning and bouncing on the balls of his feet, adrenaline pumping through his veins, the bass line vibrating in his bones. He almost, almost, didn't want to get

off the stage. But there was at last a bunch of volunteers eager to strut their stuff, so with a sheepish salute to the crowd, he handed over the mic and jumped down off the stage and into Brianna's waiting arms.

"That was amazing! Seriously." Brianna was flushed and breathless when she finally let him go. "Jeepers, Jensen, I had no idea you were that good!"

"Neither did I," Jared said, suddenly appearing beside Brianna with a disgruntled Kurt tagging along behind him.

Jensen shrugged, awkward and a little embarrassed, not quite sure how to respond. He wasn't sure why he cared what Padalecki thought, but there was no getting away from the fact that he did.

Thankfully the sound of the Spice Girls blasting out from the speakers was enough of a distraction to dispel the weirdness hanging between them. Brianna dragged Jensen away to introduce him to her friends while Jared was hijacked by some Kurt-look-alikes. Jensen found himself, despite his best efforts, almost enjoying the rest of the evening. The karaoke was mainly hilarious, drunk rich people singing cheesy songs was never not going to be funny. And then of course so many people wanted to compliment him on his performance, probably in an attempt to get on the good side of Padalecki's new husband, that Jensen barely had time to talk to Jared or his creepy friends.

Well, until they came looking for him.

It was Pellegrino, because of course it was the worst of the worst, who cornered him. He looked drunk or high, his pupils huge and steps staggered. Despite the drinks that Jensen had downed, he instantly sobered the second that Pellegrino advanced on him, his mouth quirked in a lopsided smirk. "Hey, Jenny, how's it hanging, 'mega?'"

"Fuck off, asshole." Jensen didn't even attempt a pretense of civility.

Pellegrino wasn't deterred, pushing into Jensen's space until he was backed against a wall, and Jensen was regretting his decision to hide out at the back of the room to catch his breath. "You got a set of pipes on you, I'll give you that."

"Gee, thanks."

Pellegrino leaned in towards Jensen. "And a pretty mouth."

Jensen rolled his eyes. "This Alpha bullshit is getting real old, Pellegrino. You need to get some new material. Or maybe, I don't know, stop acting like a frat boy knothed and grow the fuck up."

Taking a step to the side, Jensen tried to squeeze past Pellegrino but the Alpha was too quick and too solid; one hand against the wall caging him in, the other a heavy weight pushing against Jensen's chest. "You think you're too good for me, don't you, fucking smart mouthed bitch. But just give it a few weeks... you'll be begging for my fat knot like the Omega whore you really are."

"Only in your fucking dreams, dickhead," Jensen snarled, all teeth and spit.

Pellegrino smiled down at him, lifting his hand from Jensen's chest to trace over the bow of his lips. "How long is it since you stopped taking the suppressants, Jenny, eight weeks, ten? How long before your heat hits? You think you're still gonna be this cocky when you're burning up from the insides and your slutty hole is leaking slick?"

Jensen jerked his head to the side, and threw his knee straight up into Pellegrino's crotch. The Alpha doubled over with a grunt. Instead of taking the chance to walk away, Jensen bent down and growled in his ear, "If I was drowning in slick, and you were the last Alpha on Earth, I still wouldn't beg you to do anything except shut the fuck up. You're a scumbag. A loud-mouthed, tiny-dicked, scumbag."

Pellegrino's hand darted out, curling around Jensen's wrist as he moved to walk away. "You won't be saying my dick's tiny when I'm shoving it down your throat. You really think Jared's not gonna share his bitch's holes? After all the fucking bullshit you've put him through? You'll be lucky if he doesn't open his doors and invite the neighbors in to watch."

"Go screw yourself." Jensen shook free of Pellegrino's hold and walked away, forcing himself not to run, not to look back. Mark Pellegrino was a lying bastard, Jensen knew he was, but still his words had Jensen's heart hammering.

"Hey, you okay?" Jensen jumped, whirling round with his fists up when a hand gripped his shoulder.

Jared stepped back, raising his hands in the air in submission. "Whoa, sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. Is everything okay? You looked... kind of... upset?"

Jensen bit back the urge to snap. To ask Jared why the fuck he cared. To ask where the fuck he was when his buddy had Jensen pinned to the wall. "I'm fine."

Jared didn't look reassured. Jensen forced himself to take a breath, relax his shoulders, loosen his knees. "I'm fine," he tried again, this time managing to sound more like he believed it. He even managed a smile, of sorts. Right up until Mark Pellegrino sauntered up behind Jared, and clapped him on the shoulder. "Everything okay, boys?"

"Fine," Jensen ground out, his jaw clenched. "We were just leaving."

Jared looked at Pellegrino and then back to Jensen. And Jensen had to admit that while Jared might have been an asshole he wasn't an idiot. It was obvious he knew something wasn't quite right. Even if he couldn't put his finger on what it was. He did slip out from underneath his friend's hand though, and nod at Jensen. "Sure, we can go. See you later, Mark."

"Yeah, you will." Mark grinned. "In a couple of weeks, right? Just give me a call."

Jensen hoped it was confusion he saw on Jared's face. Maybe it wasn't. One thing was for sure though, Mark was right; the clock was ticking. It was time to stop screwing around. Time to end this joke of a marriage once and for all.

. interlude



Jared wondered, quite frequently these days, if it was normal to want to kill someone and kiss them at the same time. Maybe if you were a freaky psychopath, which he wasn't. Despite what Jensen probably thought.

Jared groaned into his palms. Jensen fucking Ackles. No. Jensen *no-fucking* Padalecki. The man who seemed determined to make Jared's life a living hell.

An arranged marriage hadn't seemed like such a bad idea when his mother first suggested it. Her timing had been as flawless as ever; the latest in his depressingly long list of boyfriends having just dumped him. Something that Jared was sadly used to. Stephen had been gentle but firm, he thought Jared was a great guy but there was just no future for them as a couple. Jared hadn't been surprised. Maybe a little disappointed that it had taken Stephen four months to figure it out. Just long enough for Jared to think maybe he'd found someone special this time around.

"It wasn't the poor boy's fault." Jared's mama had said handing Jared a cookie. Homemade, by Eva the cook, not his mom. "He's only human. He just wasn't designed for you." For his knot, was what she was trying delicately not to say. And for the huge streak of Alpha possessiveness that Jared just couldn't hide no matter how hard he tried. "What you need is an Omega, JT. Someone who understands. Someone who was born to be with an Alpha."

Jared had mumbled noncommittally around his mouthful of crumbly chocolate chip. It wasn't like Omegas were particularly common or easy to find.

"Now, hear me out." Jared had paused mid-chew; his mother looked shifty, he figured she was about to suggest a blind date. He should have known Sherri Padalecki thought a little bigger than that. "How would you feel about an arranged marriage?"

Jared choked, spraying a masticated mess of chewed cookie over the tablecloth with his customary impeccable style and grace.

"I know it's not so common these days," his mother had hurried on. "But it worked for your father and me. And my parents. And your Aunt Prunella." No mention of Jared's other aunt

who ran off with a carpet salesman from Florida. "And I just happen to know of a lovely young Omega who would be perfect for you."

At that point Jared should have said no. He should have done the normal thing and gone home and drowned his sorrows in a bottle of cheap tequila. He should have done a lot of things. But what he actually did, in a moment of mama's boy weakness, was cave in under his mother's pitying gaze and agree to it.

Of course, what she had failed to mention was the business deal that was tied in to his prospective nuptials. He didn't hear about that tiny detail until a few days before he was set to meet the lawyers and his future husband for the first time. Even then he'd convinced himself that everything would still work out okay. Omegas wanted to be married, right? Wanted a big strong Alpha husband to look after them.

Well, not all Omegas apparently. Certainly not Jensen freaking face-of-an-angel, temperament-of-a-hell-demon Ackles. If Jared had been more with it and not suffering from the worst hangover of his life, he might have had the sense to run for the hills the first time he set eyes on him. But even with a mariachi band playing in his head and a bloodshot glaze over his eyes from the liquor soaked night that was a black hole in his memory, he'd noticed how incredibly pretty Jensen was. No not just pretty. That didn't adequately describe him. Ackles was without a doubt the most beautiful guy Jared had ever seen. Even with the scowl that seemed permanently etched on his perfect face. Now, how Jared noticed that, but somehow managed to gloss over the fact that Ackles was also the prickliest son of a bitch that he'd ever met would forever remain a mystery.

He'd hoped that being thrown together in a car crash marriage would bring them together. Had rose-tinged dreams of Jensen and Jared pairing up in an epic romance. Love against the odds. Brothers in arms and all that. Instead Jensen had set out on a campaign of terror that grew from ignoring Jared to trying to blow up his kitchen. Admittedly Jared hadn't helped. He didn't think he was a petty guy. He wasn't perfect, sure. He was untidy and clumsy, put his foot in his mouth with alarming regularity, and farted too loud and too often, but he wasn't petty. Except apparently when his husband pushed him past the point of sanity.

Jared had tried to be the bigger man. Had tried not to rise to the bait too often. But the damn kitten had shoved him over the edge completely. And yes he knew his dislike of cats was irrational. He knew he could, within the blink of an eye, change into a wolf that could quite easily eat a kitten burrito for breakfast, but that didn't change the fact that he thought cats were evil little assholes, with their razor-sharp claws, soul shriveling stares, and Jekyll and Hyde mood swings. Actually, when he considered it, in a lot of ways Jensen reminded him of a cat.

It was Brianna, Gods bless her perky spirit, who plopped the opportunity for revenge right in Jared's lap. Karaoke. If kittens were Jared's Achilles' heel then performing in public was Jensen's. He probably didn't even know that Jared had heard him admit it. It was perfect. The day before the big night, because too much notice was risky, Jared had skipped out of work early to tell Jensen the good news before he left to go the bar.

Jensen's reaction when Jared dropped the karaoke bombshell was supremely satisfying. Jared had been unbearably pleased with himself, smug even. He was still in the best of moods

when Jensen left, mumbling curses —quite loudly— under his breath and slamming the door behind him. And Jared blamed those elated spirits for what he did next. And the kitten. Yes, the kitten got most of the blame. Jared had been walking out of the bathroom, naked save for the towel wrapped around his waist, when not for the first time, Charlie launched herself from under the bed at his ankles.

It hurt. A lot. There was shredded skin, blood and everything. Jared yelped, shook her off, hopping one footed, lost his towel, and crashed into the wardrobe. The kitten stared up at him unrepentant, her Jensen green eyes filled with distain. So, Jared shifted. It wasn't a conscious decision. Not really. It was more instinctual. Truly. And it wasn't like he would ever have hurt the little monster. He just wanted to show her who was boss. Stamp his authority on the situation. Charlie took one look at the giant wolf towering over her, arched her back and leapt, claws out like ninja knives toward Jared's nose. Jared had to admire her spunk. In wolf-form he was faster than her though, knocked her out of the air with one paw, growling softly in reprimand. The kitten climbed to her feet, licked her scruff, then her butt, then stalked, nose in the air, out of the room.

Jared whuffed proudly in victory, paws dancing on the spot, and his tail whipping happily against the bed. Then, while still basking in his post battle-glow, the most delicious smell hit him. Sweet and rich, like the darkest chocolate, and the freshest roses, but with strands of roasted coffee beans tangled through it. The scent was overwhelming, clinging to every molecule of air around him. With a needy whine, Jared followed the trail to where it was strongest, let his nose lead him until he was rolling around in it. Literally. Immersing himself in the glorious scent with the exuberance of an overgrown puppy. Which is when he realized he was rolling around on Jensen's side of the bed, nose buried in the sheets. He shifted back so quickly that he almost ended up with a tail. Then he changed all the bedding, had a stiff drink and tried to come to terms with the fact his wolf was apparently madly in love with his husband.

And maybe, admittedly, he was a little as well. Which was annoying. Because the guy was still a jerk. But when he turned up for the karaoke dressed all in black with his pants clinging to his ass, looking like sex personified, Jared almost whimpered. And when Alaina actually touched that ass, yeah, Jared might have growled a little. He'd hidden it well though, he thought, behind grouchiness and petty snark. And he'd almost convinced himself that Jensen being a jerk outweighed him being pretty and smelling like heaven, when Jensen had to go and spoil it by being totally unjerky.

Jared hadn't actually thought Jensen would get up and sing, not if his stage fright was as bad as he made out. Thought he'd make an excuse and chicken out handing Jared the ammunition to tease him forever after. But Jensen, he got up on that stage, looking like he was going to either puke or pass out, face green and hands shaking so hard he could barely hold the mic, just for Brianna. Just to save her from Kurt's assholery. It was the most selfless thing Jared had ever seen. His heart was doing weird things in his chest watching it. And then, well, then Jensen sang and Jared's heart exploded into tiny pieces. After the first stumbled lines, once he finally relaxed, Jensen's voice soared through the hall, stopping people in their tracks and leaving them stunned. The soul in his voice, the honesty and the rich rough tone was mesmerizing. And the way he lit up in front of Jared's eyes, like a different person, radiant and more alive than Jared had ever seen him.

And that's probably the minute Jared knew he was really screwed.

"Jared, dude, what the fuck are you doing in there?" Jared lifted his head up from his hands and glared at the back of the stall door.

"What the hell do you think I'm doing, Chad?"

"Well you're not shitting because it don't smell like rancid eggs, so I'd guess you're moping over your boy."

"Fuck off."

Chad banged against the door, the thin plywood shaking. "Get your ass out here, Padalecki. The guys are only at this lame karaoke thing because of you. And you know they'll get out of hand without supervision."

"They're grown men, Chad." Jared shouldn't have argued because Chad was right. Some of their friends could be assholes.

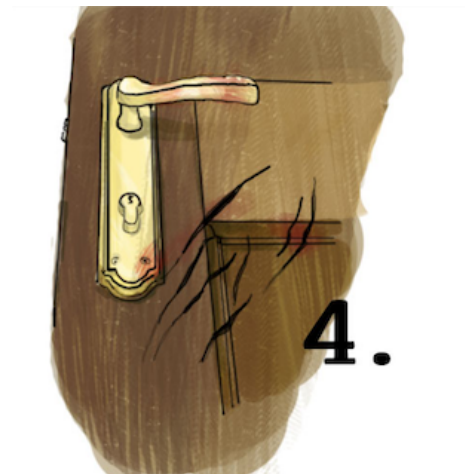
"Okay, fair enough. Just don't come crying to me when Milo pukes on your boss, or Pellegrino gets handsy with the waitress."

"Fine," Jared sighed, standing up, brushing himself off and opening the door. "Let's go."

"Dude." Chad stared at him. "You look like you got hit by a Mack truck."

Which was pretty much how Jared felt to be honest. Like he'd been knocked off his feet by a six foot, blonde haired, freckle-faced, kind-hearted, irritating jerk of a Mack truck.

No doubt about it; he was screwed.



Jensen watched as Misha stood in front of the mirror and studied his reflection with a critical eye. There was no question that he looked hot as hell. His jeans were more strategically

placed holes than denim, and his shirt clung obscenely to his body showing off his toned chest and flat stomach. It was a pared down look for Misha though, none of the glitter and accessories he usually wore. "I think this might rank as the dumbest idea we've ever had."

"Nah, not even in the top five," Jensen countered, without much conviction.

"I'm with Misha on this one, son," Chris chimed in. "This could go wrong in a hundred different ways."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Jensen grumbled, not hearing anything he didn't already know, but it was getting down to the wire, and he'd run out of options, good ones anyway.

"Look, I know this is a lot to ask and if it wasn't my ass on the line, I'd never put you in this position. If either of you want to back out—"

"No," Misha said, eyeing Jensen sharply. "No, I'm not saying that, not at all."

"We'd do anything for you, you know that, son," Chris added, grabbing his ball cap and jacket from the back of the sofa. "Just don't get your hopes up that this is gonna work out. We don't even know for sure Padalecki's gonna turn up."

"He should be there," Jensen said, adamant; they'd been over this plan a dozen times already.

"They have a table booked for seven at Franco's, and Brianna says they always go to Zak's Sports Bar afterwards for drinks. But look, if he doesn't show up, no harm, no foul. At least we tried."

Misha swept his fingers through his hair, artfully mussing it in a way Jensen could never do without half of tub of hair product and twenty minutes of fussing. "And if he does show up and doesn't take the bait?"

"He'll take the bait." That, Jensen was confident of. "Look at you, how could he resist. The guy hasn't had any action other than his right hand for months. Someone as irresistible as you comes on to him; he'll trip over his tongue to get a piece of that." Jensen slapped Misha's butt for emphasis.

"And then, wham bam, photos, divorce, and freedom." Chris threw Misha's favorite denim jacket at him. "Come on then, let's get your slutty ass out there on display for the big bad Alpha."

"You'll call?" Jensen said, following them out the door. "As soon as you can. Let me know what happened?"

Misha tugged Jensen into his side, one arm slung around his shoulder, reassuring and steady. "Don't worry, Jen. We'll let you know as soon as it's done."

"And you won't—" Jensen stopped and turned into Misha, fumbling with his words. "—you won't let him do anything you don't want. Cause that's not what this is about. You don't have to—"

Misha hauled him into a full-on hug. "When have you even seen me do anything I don't want to do, huh?" Hands wrapped around Jensen's biceps, Misha held him back at arm's length, blue eyes unusually somber. "Trust me, I know what I'm doing. I'll lure him in, grab some photos and bail before it goes too far. And if anything goes wrong, Chris will be right there. He's not going to let anything happen to me. And neither of us are going to let anything happen to you. I swear."

Jensen swallowed the lump of emotion that had suddenly appeared in his throat, and nodded. "Right. Right. Thanks. For this. For everything. I.. I.. "

"Alright, pretty boys," Chris cut in before Jensen could start rambling. "Enough of the tearful farewells; we're going to a fucking bar not a war zone. Let's get this show on the road."

Four hours later, and Jensen's phone was practically embedded in his palm, the plastic casing sticky with sweat. His grip was growing tighter with each passing minute hearing nothing from Misha or Chris. Good, bad or damp-squib strike out, he should have heard something by now. Shit, if anything happened to Misha he'd never forgive himself. His stomach dipped at the thought. The taste of bile sour at the back of his throat, Jensen stood up, and began pacing again. From where she was curled up at the end of the sofa snoozing, Charlie opened one eye with lazy contempt and glared.

When finally, twenty minutes later, Jensen's phone rang, Misha's number lighting up the screen, he almost dropped it in his fumbling rush to answer. "Misha, you okay? What happened?"

"I'm... I'm fine." Misha didn't sound fine.

Jensen's breath caught in his throat. "What's up? Did something go wrong? Did he hurt you?"

"No, no." Misha coughed, cleared the waver from his voice. "No, he... shit, Jensen, I'm sorry. Listen, things went kind of pear-shaped. And Jared well he... he kind of swooped in and saved the day."

"What?" Jensen took his phone away from his ear for a moment and stared at it, slack-jawed, like the phone itself was making no sense. "I don't understand, dude. What the fuck happened?"

"There was this guy at the bar. Some giant dick, acting like an Alpha but without the bark or the blood to back it up, you know the kind." Jensen did, unfortunately. And he had as much patience for them as Misha did. "I said no, more than once, straight up told him to fuck off. And I thought he'd taken the hint. But then one second I was watching Padalecki, waiting for the right minute to approach him, and the next, this dude was all up in my face, practically fucking humping me."

"Gods," Jensen said, scrubbing his hand across his jaw. "I'm sorry, Misha. That's... that's fucked up."

"It's not your fault, Jen. I'm irresistible, we all know it." Jensen could hear Misha's smirk from the other end of the phone and his initial panic began to subside, his heart rate dropping

down into the less fatal range of too fast. He sat down on the sofa, ignoring Charlie's disgruntled mewl and listened as Misha continued, "this shit could happen anywhere. Any time. Anyway, I wasn't that worried, Chris was there, across the other side of the room, and he was on his feet and moving before I even had a chance to knee the guy in the balls. But, well, shit, you see, before either of us could do anything, before anyone could do anything, Jared was there, hauling the guy off. He punched the fucker right in the face, then marched him through the bar and tossed him out the door."

"He did?"

"He did. And then he came back and made sure I was okay."

"And you were, right?"

"I was fine."

Jensen breathed out in relief at Misha's confirmation. "Okay," he nodded to himself, rubbing at the back of his neck. "Okay. So then, that gave you a chance to make a move? Proposition him? Lure him outside? Get him naked? Take photos?"

"Yeah, kind of. Except—" Misha hesitated and Jensen felt like shaking the phone to get him to spit out his damn words. "Except?" he prodded, his impatience snapping through the word.

Misha sighed. "Except, he was... he was really *nice*, Jensen. I mean, really nice."

"Are you shitting me, Misha?" Jensen knew he sounded like an asshole now, but fuck no, this wasn't how it was supposed to go.

"I tried, Jensen, I swear to the Gods. Once I'd gotten over the whole knight in shining armour moment, I was all over him, seriously; I laid on the old Misha-magic, but he just wasn't interested. We sat and chatted for ages, and I tried every trick in the book, but he brushed it all off with a laugh. He spent over an hour telling me all about his awesome husband."

"No fucking way."

"Yes fucking way." Misha didn't shout, but frustration lurked in his tone. "He couldn't shut up about how gorgeous he was. You were. How smart. How funny. How fucking talented. I don't how I managed to sit through it with a straight face to be honest. But, Gods, Jensen, he was so fucking earnest. Like a lovesick puppy."

Jensen didn't believe it for a minute. "Bullshit. He doesn't even like me. All he cares about is having a pretty little Omega sex toy."

"I don't know what to tell you, Jen, he didn't even mention that you were an Omega. Not once. He was just... sweet. It was like he needed someone to talk to about you, and I was it."

"Or maybe he knows," Jensen said, chewing on his bottom lip thoughtfully. "Maybe he found out. Who you are."

"I don't think so, Jensen. I really don't. The dude can't be that good an actor. Maybe... maybe you... maybe you should give him a chance."

"A chance to what?" Jensen growled into the phone. "To shove his fucking knot up my ass. To pass me around his friends?"

Misha sighed, sounded torn when he spoke. "No, no, that's not what I'm saying. And honestly, I don't think that's what he wants. Just... why don't you try talking to him for once? Like... y'know, he's a person, and not the enemy."

"I can't believe you just said that," Jensen huffed, betrayal slashing into his chest, bleeding the air from his lungs. "What happened to me having autonomy over my own body? You were the one shouting the loudest about how this whole marriage thing was ridiculous."

Misha's tone softened. "I know, Jen. I know. And if you want out I'm absolutely here for you. I'll help you run. Or fight. Whatever you want. All I'm saying, badly I guess, is the guy I talked to tonight, I think you'd like him. He's gorgeous, fucking huge all over, with the softest hair and the cutest dimples. He's sweet, kind, funny, charming. He's exactly your type. I think, if Old Man Ackles hadn't forced you into this marriage, if Padalecki hadn't been trashed out of his head the first time you met, well, maybe you could have fallen for him. All on your own. I just think you could give him the benefit of the doubt and maybe talk to him about all this."

"Yeah," Jensen said, lips thin, and the hand not holding the phone gripping his thigh hard enough to bruise. "Well, thanks for your advice. That's real helpful."

Misha's voice was uncharacteristically flat when he replied, "I swear I tried, Jensen. Ask Chris if you don't believe me. I'm sorry if you think I let you down."

And shit if that didn't immediately make Jensen feel like scum; after Misha had just done him a massive favor. "No, no, I'm sorry. I should never have... you didn't let me down. It was a stupid idea in the first place. Look, thanks... for trying. I really appreciate it. I guess... I guess I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Sure, I... yeah, I'll see you tomorrow." There was an awkward silence before the call ended. Misha obviously wanted to say more, but for once in his life, words seemed to have failed him. Jensen just felt wiped out. Empty. The last hope he had for an easy way out gone. And the clear-cut picture in his head of Jared Padalecki as a moustache-twirling villain was starting to blur around the edges.

His head was still churning, forty minutes later, lying rigid in bed, pretending to sleep. The sound of Jared padding into the bedroom was unmistakable, he just couldn't move quietly, even if he did try. A guy his size wasn't built for stealth. Jensen listened, barely breathing, shallow exhales carefully controlled, as Jared wandered in and out of the bathroom, shucking his clothes in favor of pajamas before slipping under the covers. Jensen was clinging to his side of the bed, the sheet pulled tight around him, and an ocean of mattress and a kitten between him and Jared.

"Hey, pretty kitty," Jared's voice was a throaty whisper in the dark. Jensen's ears strained to hear, just waiting for the sound of Jared scooping Charlie up and tossing her off the bed. "You didn't pee in my boots today, who's a clever girl." It was a struggle not to snigger at Jared's cooing. "That's four days in a row. If you make it a whole week, I might even buy you some catnip." Charlie purred the unmistakable whirr that meant someone was scratching her head. Jensen wondered if he was asleep and dreaming. That would explain the soft whuff of air he felt on the back of his neck, and the phantom brush of fingers through his hair. Jensen swallowed thickly, trying not to think about Misha's words. The truth in them. Sleep took a long time to come that night.

The club was busy for a Tuesday, usually the slowest night of the week, and just for fun the crowd seemed to consist mainly of coked-up assholes with watches more expensive than Jensen's college degree and the manners of horny primates. Jensen's thighs were bruised with gorilla hands grabbing him, and his Captain America costume had a huge rip right across the ass. If the bouncer hadn't stepped in so swiftly, Jensen would have been in real trouble. As it was, he'd only barely stopped himself from slipping into his wolf and ripping the douchebags to shreds. Elbows on the dressing table, Jensen rubbed his knuckles against his eyelids. He didn't need this shit. Not tonight. He already felt like warmed up crap.

Jensen jumped when Jeff's hand settled on his shoulder, so lost in his head he hadn't even heard his boss's approach. "You doing okay there, kid?"

"Sure," Jensen lied, opening his eyes and looking at Jeff in the mirror. The rest of the guys had either headed home or, like Misha, with an eye on making some extra cash gone out to mingle in the club. Jensen couldn't find the energy to do either. The fact that Padalecki would be waiting for him back home wasn't helping either. The atmosphere between them was all kinds of weird. No matter how snappy Jensen had been, how petty, or annoying, Jared hadn't bitten back, not once. There had been no last-minute business lunches requiring Jensen's presence, no fundraisers, not a single family dinner. Jensen preferred it when Padalecki was acting like a dick. At least he knew what was going on.

"You don't look so hot," Jeff noted, nodding in the mirror at Jensen's reflection. Jensen couldn't really argue. Without make-up hiding his pasty pallor and the dark shadows underneath his eyes, he looked exhausted. Felt it too. "You want me to call you a cab?"

"No," Jensen sighed, the exhaustion underlying his denial not exactly convincing. "I'm fine, honest. I'll catch the next bus."

Jeff frowned, indecision flickering in his eyes. "Maybe Misha—"

"No," Jensen said again, standing up, too quickly, the room spinning ever so slightly. He gripped the back of his chair for balance as he turned to face Morgan. "I'm fine, Jeff. I don't need you or Misha or anyone else fussing over me." And Gods knew, since the weird night

that Misha met Jared, Misha had spent half his time around Jensen apologizing and the other half trying to persuade him what a sweet guy Jared really was. Jensen would be lying if he said he wasn't a little upset by it. As far as he was concerned Jared already had enough people on Team Padalecki.

"Gods, are you still here?" Jensen and Jeff both turned around, matching scowls on their faces at the interruption. "I hope whatever's killing you isn't contagious because I'm far too pretty to look like that."

"Matt," Jeff growled. "Shouldn't you be making nice with the customers?"

"I was Jeff, but as well as being too pretty, I am also too classy to get treated like a two-bit hooker by a bunch of grabby mouth-breathers. That lot out there are making last Friday's grooms party look like a book club. They're out of hand, Jeff."

"Shit," Jeff scrubbed his fingers through his beard, and shot Jensen a sharp glance. "You're gonna go straight home?"

Jensen rolled his eyes, and shrugged into his jacket. "Yes, dad. I'm gonna go straight home. Go deal with those assholes before they wreck your club."

It showed how pathetic Jensen looked that Jeff let the dad jibe go without any more than a gentle slap to the back of his head. They walked out of the room together before going their separate ways, Matt masking his mouth and nose with his hand and giving Jensen a wide berth when he walked past. Fucking drama queen.

By the time Jensen finally dragged his exhausted ass home, he was regretting not taking Jeff's offer of a cab seriously. Between his aching muscles, and the fevered sweat prickling across his skin, he felt like he had the worst flu of his life. All he wanted was his bed. And enough Nyquil to knock him out for a week.

"Hey, Jensen, how was... holy shit, you look like crap." Jared jumped up from the sofa when Jensen staggered into the sitting room, still struggling to untangle his arms from his jacket sleeves.

"I'm fine," Jensen said for what had to be the hundredth time that night. In her favorite spot in the center of the sofa, Charlie stood up, stretched, and fixed Jensen with a skeptical glare. Traitor.

"It's just a touch of flu." Jensen said, as much to the cat as to Padalecki. Why he was explaining himself to either of them he couldn't say. The fever probably had something to do with it.

Padalecki hovered awkwardly beside him. "You sure it's not... I mean... it is *just* the flu, right? Not your... your heat hitting or anything?"

"Yes, I'm sure it's the goddamn flu!" Jensen snapped, finally freeing himself from his jacket, and throwing it on the back of a chair. "I think I'd know if I was going into heat. Honestly, do I look like I'm desperate to get laid to you?"

"Well, no, but—" Jared started to argue, but thought better of it after Jensen tried to kill him with the power of his mind. "Okay. Okay. So, can I get you anything?"

Jensen's scowl intensified. "No, I told you, I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

"Holy motherfucking hell, give it a rest, and stop making out that you give a shit. It's only me here, you don't need to put on an act."

Jared's chest puffed out as he heaved in a deep breath before slowly exhaling through his mouth. Jensen could practically see him mentally counting to ten. "Jensen, can you maybe declare a temporary ceasefire. Please? You look like death. I only want to help."

"Whatever," Jensen huffed, stalking away, or trying to at least until he tripped over... something, definitely not his own feet, and swayed into the door frame, almost face-planting when he bounced back off the wooden edge, the only thing saving him, Jared's strong arm wrapped around his waist.

"You're a stubborn idiot, y'know that?" Jared grumbled, leading him safely through the doorway, and up the stairs.

Jensen mumbled in disagreement but didn't have the energy to argue. Or shrug off Jared's help. In fact, he allowed Jared to steer him into the bedroom and on to the bed. Only letting out an indignant huff of complaint when he knelt down and untied his boots.

"Oh shut up," Jared retorted, slipping the boots off Jensen's feet. "You bend down to take off your boots and you'll never get back up again." Jensen glowered, and fell backwards, his head hitting the blessedly comfortable mattress with a soft whumf. Boy, he loved this bed. This bed was the best. He was never getting out of this fucking bed ever again.

"Well, that's great, but how about you get out of those jeans first at least and get under the sheets."

Screw that, Jensen wasn't moving. Not for anyone. Especially not for Padalecki, that big dumb-ass dimple-face.

"Gods, even when you're delirious you're a crabby jerk," Jared huffed above him. "Come on, let me help." And before Jensen could do anything to prevent it, Jared was helping him strip. Tugging his jeans down his legs once he'd bullied Jensen into unbuttoning them, and then helping him out of his shirt. For once Jensen didn't even care that he was going to bed half-naked, just the thought of putting on pajamas was enough to make him sweat. Padalecki even tucked him in under the sheets before fetching him some Nyquil and a cold glass of water. "Bossy," Jensen mumbled when the Alpha wouldn't let him go to sleep without taking the meds.

"You'll thank me for it later," Padalecki said, taking the glass from Jensen and setting it on his bedside table. "Go on, you can go to sleep now."

Jensen didn't need told twice. He was asleep almost before his head sank all the way into his feather pillow. Oh boy, he loved those pillows. Feathery pieces of heaven. He was pretty sure he heard Jared chuckle just before the bedroom door closed with a gentle snick.

"Hey, how you doing?" The curtains were open, pale light streaming in when Jared woke Jensen the next morning.

"Unf.." Jensen's head felt like it was thick with mud, too heavy to lift from the pillow.

"You slept right through, man. I wouldn't have bothered waking you, but I need to go to work and I wanted to make sure you were okay before I left."

Jensen licked his lips, dragged himself upright and tried to work up enough moisture in his desert-dry mouth to speak.

"Here," Jared waved a glass of water in front of his nose with one hand, and thrust a handful of pills towards him with the other. "It's just painkillers and vitamins. There's soup in the refrigerator if you want to heat it up later, and I've made up sandwiches and left them there for you too. Just in case. You still look like shit. Crap, I really wish I could take the day off, but I've got a meeting with—"

Jensen zoned out as Jared rambled, concentrated on swallowing down the pills, the iced water bliss against his throat. He wasn't quite sure how he felt. He guessed his muscles didn't ache quite as much, but he still felt off; his body heavy and belly rolling. The idea of food only made him nauseous. He flinched when Jared's palm brushed his forehead.

"You're still hot," Jared noted, concern clear on his face.

Jensen brushed his hand away. "I don't need you fussing, Jared. Go to work. I'll be fine."

Jared chewed on his lip, his forehead wrinkling. The croak in Jensen's voice probably wasn't reassuring. There wasn't much Jared could do though when Jensen snuggled back down under the covers and closed his eyes.

"Well, call me if you need anything," Jared said, as though Jensen would ever ask him for help. A moment later the door closed and Jensen relaxed. It was bad enough having the flu without Padalecki hovering over him too. A few more hours sleep and he'd be fine.

Except he wasn't. A few hours later he was very not fine. A few hours later he was in pretty deep shit. Sweat clung to his skin, his heart was racing, he felt like he was burning up from the inside out, arousal thrummed just below his skin, and worst of all his damn ass was leaking slick. There was no denying it anymore, he was in heat.

The more time passed, the worst the symptoms grew. In theory, Jensen knew what to expect. Had been prepared for it to happen ever since he'd stop taking his suppressants, but somehow everything he knew went straight out of his head. He didn't take cool showers to ease his

fever. He didn't drink cold water or eat while he still could. He didn't even search out the dildo he'd bought himself for when this time actually came. All he was capable of doing was gripping onto the sheets as his body raged against him.

By the time Jared walked back through the door, Jensen was a writhing mess in the middle of the bed, his skin flushed red, his dick in his hand and three fingers pumping in and out of his ass.

"Gods, Jensen, it smells like a... holy fuck!" Jared froze in the doorway, stared. A dark flush creeping up his face. "You're in heat."

"No shit, Sherlock," Jensen panted.

"I see it hasn't affected your snark."

Jensen took his hand off his dick and rolled over onto his knees, trying to get his fingers deeper into his hole. It didn't matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't find relief. He glared at Jared through his eyelashes, drops of sweat dripping down his nose and across his lips. "Jared, either fuck off or fuck me."

Stumbling forward, Jared's hand slipped down to his crotch, his fingers rubbing almost absently over the tented bulge in his pants. "Jensen, fuck. Your scent... I want to... I want to... fuck!" As if suddenly realizing he was practically jacking himself off, he ripped his hand away from himself and slapped it against the wall, before taking three steps back out of the room. "No. This is.. no. Not happening." And then he was gone, and Jensen was all alone. Not sure whether he was relieved or pissed.

The next time he appeared in the door, Padalecki came prepared. A bottle of water in one hand, and a knotted dildo in the other.

"What the hell is that for?" Jensen gasped, crawling over the bed towards him. "Just fuck me."

"No," Jared said, more of a high-pitched yelp, waving the sex toy in front of him. "You don't want that. Me. Not really. It's just the heat talking."

"Screw that," Jensen said, slinking down off the bed. "I know what I'm saying, and I want you to fuck me, Alpha."

Taking two cautious steps towards Jensen, Jared crouched down and set the dildo and the water bottle on the floor, then slowly stood up and backed away. "You... you need to drink some water. And then take the edge off. And then... and then maybe we'll talk."

"Jared," Jensen growled, but Jared, too quick on his feet, turned around and bolted, slamming the bedroom door behind him. "Get back in here and knot me, you goddamn coward," Jensen yelled, but the handle refused to budge under his clammy hands.

A muffled thud echoed through the door, followed by a pained grunt. Jensen walked back and picked up the water bottle, clasped it in his temper-tight fist, then threw it against the door

with a frustrated roar. The dildo went the same way.

It soon became apparent that Jared wasn't coming back. Jensen knew deep down, where a tiny part of him was still capable of thinking logically that Jared was doing the right thing. That he should be grateful. But as time passed, the only thing he could think about was the craving pulsing through his body. His dick heavy between his legs, his hole wet and needy, desperate to be filled. Knowing there was an Apha on the other side of the door, knowing he had a fat knot that would fill Jensen up and hit every sweet spot, was almost too much to bear. The dildo was a pathetically poor substitute.

Flat on his back in the middle of the bed, Jensen thrust the toy in his ass, hard and fast and without any thought to comfort. Just focused on one thing. On chasing away the feeling of emptiness.

When he finally came it was with a moan of relief rather than pleasure, leaving him drained and exhausted, tears dripping down his face. He dropped off to sleep right there on top of the ruined sheets, body a wreckage of slick, sweat and come.

He woke only with Jared's urging, head still sleep-muzzy, every muscle from his neck down to his feet screaming.

"Jensen? Hey, Jensen."

"What?" Jensen scrubbed his hand over his mouth, his lips so dry they'd stuck together.

"I'm sorry. I know you're wiped out, man. But you need to get cleaned up, and grab something to eat while you can. And we probably need to talk."

Jensen tried to ignore him, to brush him off, but Jared was dogged. Wouldn't leave him alone until Jensen got up and showered, which did leave him feeling slightly more human. It took two bottles of water to quench his thirst, even then his throat still felt raw, his voice a ragged shadow of its normal self. Despite not remembering the last time he'd eaten, he had no appetite. It took Jared more effort than it was worth to convince him to at least have some soup. Even that didn't sit easily on his stomach.

"How're you feeling?" Jared was sitting across the kitchen table from Jensen. The lights were dimmed low and the curtains drawn. Jensen's heat having decided to abate in the early hours of the morning.

"Sore," Jensen replied, honestly. "Kind of sick. Hot." Humiliated.

Jared nodded. "I'm sorry. I had no idea how rough it could be."

"Yeah, it's not as sexy as A/O porn makes it look, is it?" Jensen shoved his half eaten bowl of soup away, and folded his arms. "You know it would have been over a lot sooner if you'd just fucked me."

"Raped you, you mean." Jared's eyes bore into Jensen's, but Jensen couldn't hold his gaze. Not when he remembered what he'd done. What he'd said. The way his heat-addled brain

allowed him to behave. When he thought about the fact that it wasn't over yet, the little food in his stomach rolled uneasily.

"I asked you. No, I *begged* you. No one could have accused you of rape. Legally, you'd have done nothing wrong."

"You didn't want me, Jensen. You *don't* want me. You've made that perfectly clear. Whatever you said in the heat of the moment, it wasn't you talking. It would still have been rape."

Jensen was grateful that Jared hadn't taken advantage of the situation, of course he was, but it didn't make sense. Not if Jared was the knot-head Alpha Jensen had been convinced he was.

"Look," Jared continued, "we both know this isn't over. I did some research, while you were sleeping."

Jensen looked up in surprise. Jared smiled sheepishly back. "Well, Google is pretty instructive. From what I've read, I think maybe it's worse because you haven't had a heat since you were what... fifteen, sixteen?"

"Thirteen," Jensen said softly. "I presented when I was thirteen."

"Shit," Jared said, eyes wide in surprise. "That's young. That must have been rough, huh?"

Jensen didn't say anything, stared down at his hands. Nothing he could say would adequately describe just how horrific it had been to suddenly lose control of his body, to start leaking slick. To see the horror on his father's face when he caught Jensen whimpering on his bed and trying to shove his fingers up his ass. The disappointment when he realized what it meant.

"Yeah, stupid question," Jared admitted, combing his fingers through his hair. It looked like he'd been doing that a lot; his brown waves a wild tangle breaking free in every direction. "Anyway, presuming you went on Supprease straight away?" Jensen nodded in silent confirmation. "That means it's been, what... ten years since you had a heat. So apparently the first one after you stop taking the suppressants is the worst. Your hormones go mad trying to regulate themselves and, well... it can get pretty violent. But I guess you know that."

Jensen didn't feel the need to reply. Sweat was starting to pool at the nape of his neck again, and it was only a matter of time before he lost the power of coherent thought.

"The good news is it shouldn't last long. It's brutal but over relatively quickly. They say once your heat has peaked, forty eight hours is about normal, and I figure you've already been in full heat for a day or so..."

"...so just one more day of hell," Jensen finished bitterly. He didn't need Jared to spell this out for him, knew it all in theory, of course he did, the doc had warned Jensen in graphic detail what would happen when he came off the suppressants. And Jensen knew burying his head in the sand wasn't an adequate coping technique, but shit, he'd had enough to deal with lately without thinking about what might happen when his heat hit.

"I... yeah... so, look, I guess you don't want me around, and to be honest being here when you smell so... well, like this, isn't a picnic for me either, but the thing is, I don't feel safe leaving you. I mean if another Alpha came sniffing around, you wouldn't be in any position to say no."

"You think I don't know that?" Jensen snapped. "You think I'm enjoying this? That I enjoy being so out of my head that I end up begging to get fucked? You don't think there was a reason I stayed on the fucking suppressants."

Jared blanched, his eyes darting away and taking some time to focus back on Jensen's face. "Gods, Jensen, I know and I'm sorry. All I'm saying is... well, to be honest I don't know what I'm saying. But, I'm not gonna touch you, I swear. I'll be here. To keep you safe. That's all."

Jensen didn't know what to say. He shouldn't be grateful. Considering that if it wasn't for Padalecki and his family, he wouldn't be in this position in the first place. But still, Jared was being nothing but kind, understanding. Jensen let his head fall into his hands. Took a few deep breaths. Tried to center himself. Gods, his fucking emotions were all over the place. Running wild like Jensen never let them do. He was out of control, emotionally, and physically, and he hated it.

It didn't take long for another wave of his heat to hit. Jensen tucked himself away in the bedroom again before it got too bad, armed with supplies of water and a thick knotted dildo. Jared had changed the bedsheets, but a few hours in and they were a mess; Jensen's hole leaking so much slick he was covered in it, trails smeared down his thighs, dripping from his fingers, and trickling down his wrists. He put off using the dildo for as long as he was able, figured he'd be best saving it until he was truly desperate, but his fingers just weren't thick enough and no matter what he tried, how he contorted himself, he could never find quite the right angle. Even when, hard and aching and sobbing with need, he gave in and fucked himself with the soulless toy, it wasn't enough.

He wanted something real. Wanted someone to pin him down and fuck him until his throat was hoarse from screaming, wanted someone with a thick dick and a big fat knot that would finally fill his hole the way he needed. He wanted an Alpha. He wanted Jared.

Events after that were a confused blur. Fractions of time were embarrassingly clear in his head while others were nothing but a blank wasteland. Hours lost that he'd never remember. Or want to. He'd shouted for Jared until his voice cracked, pulled at the door handle until his palms bled, thrown himself at the door, uncaring of the bruises that were sure to bloom across his arms and ribs. When all that failed, without conscious thought, he transformed and allowed his wolf to take control. It didn't help. To Jensen's wolf senses, Jared's scent was overwhelming. Intoxicating. Jensen howled for his Alpha, clawed desperate at the door, wood splintering under his claws.

At long last, Jared finally gave in. Throwing open the door with human hands one moment, and standing in the doorway as a wolf the next; growling at Jensen the way only an Alpha could, the anger in his roar, the power, electrifying the air, and making Jensen's legs tremble beneath him. Jared was gorgeous in human form, but his wolf was breathtaking; wide shoulders and thick haunches, he stood taller than Jensen by at least a head. His fur was a rich expanse of browns and black that shone with vigor.

But if Jensen thought that Jared had transformed to finally mate him, he was soon disappointed. He tried baring his throat, presenting his ass, whimpering all the time, but even in wolf form Jared was unbending. Radiating Alpha dominance, he stood rigid, guarding the door, blocking Jensen from leaving. Iron-willed, he ignored the slick leaking from Jensen's ass, his Omega-ripe scent. In a desperate, final vain effort to provoke his husband, Jensen rushed at him, teeth snapping and eyes wild. Jared grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, like a damn pup, slammed him to the floor and held him there, teeth clamped tight, until he calmed. Until finally the fevered peak of his heat abated.

Jensen woke still in wolf form. Jared curled around him, his dark muzzle resting on the back of Jensen's silvery neck. It shouldn't have been comfortable but Jensen felt far too content to move, his thoughts still sluggish and limbs heavy, Jared's scent surrounding him like a blanket. He whimpered quietly at the dull ache spreading across his ribs and Jared licked at his fur in response, the gentle touch soothing in a way that made Jensen's eyelids heavy.

The next time Jensen woke, Jared was sat beside him on the floor, cross legged, fully human and fully dressed. "Hey there, sleepyhead," Jared smiled down at him. "I was starting to think you were gonna sleep the whole day away."

Blinking the sleep from his eyes, Jensen lifted his head and yawned, jaw clicking at the stretch. Jared laughed. "You've been out for fourteen hours. You can't still be tired."

He wasn't really, a bit sluggish perhaps, his muscles tender and head a little fuzzy, but he felt better than he had in days.

"You maybe want to change back?" Jared asked. "I'm pretty sure your heat's over, the worst of it for sure."

Jensen stood up and stretched, shook out his fur, padded around in a circle, stretched some more, and then with a sigh changed back, shivering as he stood naked in front of Jared, who jumped to his feet, grabbed a blanket from the bed and wrapped it around his shoulders. "You doing okay?"

"No," Jensen snorted, hugging the blanket around himself. "I can't believe I acted like that."

Setting his hand on Jensen's shoulder, Jared nudged him towards the bed, sitting down beside him on the mattress. The covers were fresh again. No sign of Jensen's hours of distress evident in ruined linen. "It won't be that bad again," Jared assured him.

"How can you possibly know that?" Jensen asked, dropping his head into his hands. "You Google it again?"

"Well yeah," Jared admitted. "The first one is always the worst. Everyone says so. I'm sure the next time you'll—"

"I'll what? Not try to force you to fuck me?"

"That wasn't your fault, Jensen."

Jared was right it wasn't. Not really. But that didn't change the fact that Jensen had ripped the place apart and literally thrown himself at Jared. "Yeah, well... thank you. For not... y'know..." Jensen's face must have been scarlet. "And for staying with me."

"Jensen, seriously, its fine. It's not like you had any choice here. Or any control of what you were doing. Fuck, this shit is so messed up. I can't believe our parents honestly thought this was a good idea. I can't believe I let them talk me into it. It's your body. It should have been your choice to come off the suppressants. I should have stuck to my guns. Told them I wouldn't do it."

"Why did you agree to it?" Jensen asked, looking up into Jared's face and pulling the blanket a little tighter around his shoulders. He'd never flat out asked, but he had begun to wonder why Jared had agreed to the marriage in the first place. Over the past few months, despite his first impression, Jensen had to admit that Jared didn't seem like the kind of jackass who was desperate to marry an Omega just for the bragging rights. He'd never forced himself on Jensen. And until Jensen started going out of his way to antagonize him, he'd actually been nothing but nice.

"My mother is a hard woman to say no to."

Jensen quirked an eyebrow at the lackluster defense. While that was undoubtedly true he knew Jared well enough to know it wasn't the whole story.

Jared caught his bottom lip between his teeth and played with his watch strap for a second before continuing. "And I figured she couldn't be any worse at finding a guy for me than I was. My dating history isn't what you'd call impressive." He smiled ruefully at Jensen who gawked back in surprise. Jared was a good looking guy, more than good looking, he was gorgeous with those hazel eyes and that mouth and his cute little nose and that tiny mole beside it, and hell, but he was built like a fucking god, his abs were rock solid and his hip bones a work of art. Jensen would have thought that people would be lining up for a chance to date him. "And y'know, my parents had an arranged marriage and it worked for them," Jared continued. "But Jensen, I didn't know how against the idea you were, I swear. Not until that first meeting with the lawyers. And man, I was so fucking hungover that day, I barely knew what the fuck I was saying."

"I figured," Jensen said, not mentioning that he'd also witnessed how wasted Jared had been the night before.

"Do you... do you hate me?" Jared's voice had lost all of it's Alpha confidence.

"No, no I don't hate you." Maybe at one point Jensen had hated Jared, but not anymore. He hated how they'd been forced together, but hating Jared was unfair. And quickly becoming impossible.

"Do you think there's any chance we can make this marriage work? Honestly?"

No, was Jensen's first reaction. Fuck no. Never. He'd been against the whole thing from day one. He'd been blackmailed into it and treated like a bargaining chip. There wasn't a cat in

hells chance that this fiasco of a marriage would work out. So why didn't he tell Jared that straight out instead of staring him like a mute guppy.

"Because if not, if you're never gonna be happy, here, with me, I'll talk to my parents. Tell them it's not working out. I'll take the blame, make sure your family's company is safe. Or I'll tell them I had an affair."

"Why? Why would you do that?"

"Because I like you, Jensen. Gods only know why. You drive me around the fucking bend. But, yeah, I like you, a lot. And watching you go through that heat, well, it wasn't pleasant. I can't force you to do it again. Not if you don't want to."

Jared had just handed Jensen a way out on a silver platter. The one thing he'd been desperate for. He should grab it with both hands. But Jared, Gods, Jared looked so damn miserable. And Jensen couldn't help but remember how safe he felt with wolf Jared wrapped around him. "It wasn't you that forced me, Jared. This whole situation is fucked up. But it's not all your fault."

"I've been a dick."

"Well, yeah, but so have I," Jensen admitted.

"So," Jared asked, nudging Jensen's knee with his own. "What now? Should I call my parents. See if I can get us out of this mess?"

"Is that what you want?"

"No," Jared's reply came immediately. "It's not. I want to give this marriage a chance. But I can't do this on my own. I wouldn't want to try."

"So it's up to me?"

"It is. What do you want, Jensen? The ball's in your court."

It was the first time that anyone had offered Jensen a choice. A real choice. With no strings attached. No hidden traps. But now he finally had the power to end this sham marriage, Jensen wasn't so sure it was the right thing to do. He had agreed to do this. Signed his name. Sealed the deal. And Jared Padalecki, well, honestly, the guy wasn't an ogre. Far from it. And maybe Jensen was still suffering from the after-effects of his heat, but to his wolf nose, Jared smelled like heaven, home. Like mate. Jensen was possibly deluded. Or suffering from Stockholm Syndrome. It was all too complicated to contemplate with a brain that felt like soggy noodles.

"What do I want? Honestly? A hot shower, a cold beer, and a rare steak."

"And then?"

"And then, I guess we'll see."

The despondent expression that Jared quickly tried to hide made it clear Jensen's reply wasn't the one he'd hoped for. But too much had happened too quickly. Jensen needed time to think. He couldn't rush into a decision this important. Not now.

"Okay," Jared nodded. "Okay. But this is a us declaring peace right? Whatever you decide. No more insane kittens. No more unplugging my alarm clock."

"And no more early morning breakfast meetings. Or pink shirts."

Jared pouted. "I like pink shirts."

"And I'm not stopping you from wearing them, but I refuse to look like a fluffy headed flamingo."

"A fluffy headed... okay, fine. If that's the way you feel."

"Oh it is."

"Fair enough," Jared held his hand up in playful surrender at Jensen's determined reponse. "But can I ask just one more thing, please?"

"What?"

Jared nudged his shoulder against Jensen's. "No more cooking? For the fire department's sanity if not mine?"

Jensen couldn't help but laugh. Despite everything.



"Gods, there's some handsy motherfuckers out there tonight." Jensen complained throwing himself down onto a stool. His first shift back after his heat and the Saturday night crowd was more frenzied than ever.

"They must have missed your gorgeous face, sweetheart." Ty walked into the dressing room behind him.

"Or they can still smell the lingering stench of your heat," Sterling glared daggers across the room at Jensen. "Does your Alpha know you're here?"

Jensen stopped wiping off his lip gloss and glitter just long enough to throw a filthy look back at Sterling in the mirror. "It's none of his business. Or yours."

Although Jensen had to admit, to himself not to Sterling, that he was starting to feel guilty lying to Jared about where he worked. In the short time since they'd agreed to cease and desist with their feuding, things between them had settled into something almost resembling friendship.

"He's your husband. Your Alpha. Everything you do is his business."

"Shut up, Sterling," Ty rolled his eyes. "Your chauvinism is showing."

Sterling slammed his hand against wall, a sliver of plaster falling to the floor. "I don't understand why any of you think this is okay. He's an Omega. He almost went into heat in the middle of the club. He should be safe in his Alpha's home, not flaunting his body to strangers."

"Like you do, you mean," Jensen jumped to his feet and spun round to face Sterling, squaring his shoulders and balling his fists.

"I'm an Alpha," Sterling spat back at him. "You're an Omega. Your body is sacred. The only person who should see it is your husband."

"I have autonomy over my own body. No one has the right to tell me what I can or cannot do with it. Not you. Not Jared. And certainly no ancient book or God." A blur of movement caught Jensen's eye; Matt appearing briefly in the doorway then spinning one eighty and walking away again just as quick.

"You're a disgrace to your kind." Sterling stepped towards Jensen, a vein jumping angrily in his neck. "I turned a blind eye when you were single. Fending for yourself. But now you're mated with an Alpha you shouldn't be here, endangering yourself. Degrading yourself."

Ty barked out an indignant 'hey' from the corner of the room and Jensen matched Sterling's step forward with one of his own. "Degrading myself," he growled. "I'm a dancer, a performer, just like everyone here. We're not degrading ourselves."

"And if that's what you think maybe you shouldn't be here." Jeff walked in with Matt on his heels, and Misha close behind.

"He's bringing shame on his Alpha," Sterling aimed his ire in Jeff's direction next. "You can't condone his actions."

"What the hell's going on?" Misha asked looking around the room in confusion.

Jensen didn't take his eyes off Sterling, because really... fuck him. "Apparently I'm degrading myself."

"Because you are an Omega," Sterling snarled, apparently not caring that he was making himself more unpopular with every word he spoke. "A married Omega. You shouldn't be flaunting yourself like a whore."

A chorus of angry voices burst out at that; no one happy with the slur.

"You think that's what we are? Whores?" Misha's asked, pushing forward, his eyes furious. "What the hell are you even doing here then?"

"That's not what I said," Sterling bit back, his voice growing louder. "There's nothing wrong with what we do. But it's different for Jensen. He's not like us. He's an Omega. When his heat hits he'll fuck anything with a knot. No one could blame an Alpha for presuming he's ripe for the taking when he spends most of his time shaking his ass for them. Trust me, one of these days—"

"Okay, I've heard enough." Jeff's voice cut the tension like a guillotine, sharp and deadly. "Sterling, get out. If you don't respect your colleagues, *all* your colleagues, you aren't welcome here."

Sterling's face turned ugly, the hate bubbling below the surface finally showing itself. "Fine. *Fine*. I've had enough of you and your seedy club anyway, Morgan. I only stayed here because of the easy money and the easier lays'. I'm better than this. Better than all of you."

Two things happened at the same time; Ty threw himself in front of an incensed Jensen, and Jeff lurched forward and grabbed Misha's arm, stopping him from taking a swing at Sterling. Then all hell broke loose. Sterling was lucky to make it out in one piece. Although he did end up with a black eye courtesy of Rich, who happened to be walking in the door just as Sterling was storming out of it and flinging one last vile curse back in Jensen's direction. It turned out that behind Richard's easygoing facade lurked a fiery temper and a mean right hook.

Jensen was still feeling a strange mix of guilt, fury and weary exhaustion by the time he got home that night. The things that Sterling said playing over and over in his head. Most of it was horse shit, but still... it made him think. Maybe it *was* irresponsible to be working when he was barely out of his heat. He, more than anyone, knew what could happen if the wrong Alpha caught an Omega's scent.

He'd expected Jared to be asleep by the time he'd showered and slipped quietly into the bedroom, so Jensen was surprised to find him sitting up in bed reading what looked like an incredibly boring book, Charlie the kitten curled between his knees. Jensen quirked an eyebrow in amusement, a smile playing at his lips. "I see Charlie's won you over."

The dimpled grin Jared threw Jensen's way did something funny to Jensen's insides. "Na, I'm just too scared to move her. The little psycho has sharp claws."

"Sure," Jensen chuckled, crawling into the bed, clad in just his boxer shorts. He'd given up on wearing pajamas; he hated them tangling around his legs in the middle of the night, and considering Jared had seen him buck naked with his fingers stuffed up his ass, trying to preserve his modesty seemed pointless now. "You're up late."

"I had some reading to do." Jared closed his book and tossed it on the floor, the resulting thud startling Charlie who jumped to her feet and shot Jared a disgruntled glare. "And I... well, honestly I wanted to make sure you made it home alright."

Jensen bristled. "I'm a big boy y'know, perfectly capable of looking after myself."

"I know. I know," Jared rushed to assure him. "I'm not suggesting any different. It's just... your heat's barely finished, and I... well, I worry. Sorry."

"No," Jensen sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "You don't have to apologize for worrying. I'm sorry for snapping. It's been a long night."

Jared carefully nudged Charlie, whose tail was swishing dangerously, down towards the bottom of the bed. Then he leaned over and switched off his bedside lamp before settling down on his side of the bed. "Is everything okay? They didn't give you crap for taking time off for your heat did they?"

"No, nothing like that. Just one of my co-workers being a dick. It's fine though."

"You sure? I know you can handle yourself, but if I can help—"

Jensen snuggled down into his pillow. "Thanks, Jared. I appreciate that. It's dealt with though. Morgan, my boss, he sorted it out."

"Okay, okay that's good then," Jared said. "Goodnight, Jensen."

"Night, Jared." Jensen closed his eyes and tried, unsuccessfully, to shut off his brain. After five minutes it became apparent that Jared was having the same problem.

"So, your boss is a good guy?"

Jensen blinked opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling, barely seeing it in the dark.

"Yeah, he is. I mean he wants everyone to think he's this real tough biker dude, he's got the tats and the scruff and the leather jacket, but underneath it all he's just a giant teddy bear."

Jared snorted. "Sounds a lot more interesting than my boss anyway."

"Yeah, not Kurt's biggest fan to be honest," Jensen said, quite happy to admit it. "I've no idea how he managed to land a cool chic like Brianna. She's way out of his league."

"Yeah, she's awesome," Jared agreed. "And she loves you. You know, maybe we should do something."

"Something?" Jensen asked.

"Yeah, like have a party, here. In the house. Invite some people round."

"People?" Jensen parroted.

"Yeah, friends. I mean you've met a lot of my friends, my business colleagues and all my family, but I've never met any of your friends. You do have friends, right?"

"Of course I have friends," Jensen said, a little indignantly. That didn't mean he wanted Jared to meet any of them. Not yet. And certainly not Misha. That could be awkward. And

dangerous. A nervous knot tightened in Jensen's belly. He knew, now that things had changed, now that he'd decided to give this marriage thing a go—well, maybe, *maybe* decided to give this marriage thing a go—that he was going to have to tell Jared exactly where he worked. It was inevitable that he was going to find out. But it didn't seem like the right time. Not when their relationship had only just progressed passed the antagonistic stage and entered civility.

"So, what do you think?" Jared pressed. Jensen could feel the puppy eyes boring into the side of his head. "About inviting some people round?"

No. No. Hell no, was what Jensen thought. "Yeah, sure," he found himself saying. "Sounds like a good idea."

"Awesome." Jared sounded so damn pleased, Jensen's stomach sank.

"I mean, I'm not sure when they'll all be free. Y'know a lot of us work weekends and—"

"We'll work something out." Jared sounded confident. And happy. "Man, I'm looking forward to it already. Night, Jensen."

"Night, Jared," Jensen said again. It didn't take long this time for Jared to fall asleep, his breathing growing slower and little puffs of air huffing from his open mouth. The cutest little snore Jensen had ever heard. It took a lot longer for Jensen to finally join him.

Three weeks later, Jensen still hadn't confessed to Jared where he worked. Jared was pressing him for a date for their party and Jensen was running out of excuses. There was a chance that Jensen could invite his friends to the house and none of them would get drunk and mention Jensen and stripping in the same sentence. There was even a chance that neither Jared nor his friends would recognize Matt or Misha or any of the other guys from the night they spent at the club. And there was a very slim chance that Jared wouldn't remember meeting Misha under slightly dubious circumstances. But that was a lot of maybes at one small party and Jensen suspected he was screwed.

He should just tell him. Admit everything. Jared was a reasonable guy. He might not be ecstatic about finding out what Jensen did for a living, but he wouldn't be a dick about it. Not now. Probably.

"So how's life in Casa Padalecki? You two crazy kids stopped playing games and started fucking yet?"

Jensen ruffled his fingers through his hair one last time in an attempt to tease it into place before he turned away from the mirror and looked at Rich. Rich sat on the dressing table opposite swinging his legs and smirking back at him, asshole.

"No, dickhead, we're not fucking." Although Jensen would be lying if he said the thought hadn't entered his head at all. Now that he'd stop staring at Jared through hate-tinted spectacles, he'd freely admit that the guy was sex on legs. If Jared wanted a change in career, he'd make an absolute fortune working in the club. Abs like his did not belong on an office drone; it just wasn't fair. But still neither of them had made the first step in pushing their relationship past the boundaries of friendship. Maybe because it had taken so long to get that far.

Richard shook his head, and reached for his packet of smokes and his lighter. "Gods, Jenny boy, why the hell not? That boy is delicious. And huge. All over I don't doubt. How long is it since your dick last saw any action?"

Action that didn't involve his own hand? Too long. Far too long. And that probably had something to do with why Jensen kept waking up with a boner and his face buried in Jared's pillow, breathing in his scent. Luckily Jared was always long gone by the time Jensen surfaced in the morning.

Richard lit his cigarette, took a deep draw, then grinned knowingly at Jensen's silent pout. "I knew it. Dude, it's not healthy."

"Yeah, well," Jensen huffed, "neither's smoking. Especially if Morgan catches you again."

"Yeah? Morgan can suck my dick."

"No thanks, Rich, I know where it's been." Jensen couldn't contain his grin when he spotted Morgan standing in the open doorway.

Rich stood up so fast he almost tripped over his own feet and face-planted on the floor. "Shit. Fuck." He pinched the tip of the cigarette between his fingers and shoved it in the pocket of his jeans. "Sorry, boss."

Morgan rolled his eyes. "Shouldn't you be doing something? And shouldn't you be moving your ass?" He turned to Jensen who held his hands up. "I'm going. I'm going. I just need to grab my mask and cloak."

Jeff walked with him to the side of the stage, holding his fur cloak as Jensen slipped the mask over his eyes. "You know, one of these days, it'd be cool if you could get up there without the mask. Let the paying folks see that pretty face of yours."

"They already see my pretty ass, isn't that enough?" Jensen quipped, trying to hide the sudden spike in his heart-rate at even the thought of performing without the security blanket of a mask to hide behind. Luckily, DJ announced his number before Morgan had time to push the issue or Jensen had time to work himself up into an anxiety attack. Grabbing his cape from Jeff, Jensen took a deep breath and ran on stage.

His performance went without a hitch. The music pounded and the crowd cheered. As usual, once his initial nerves disappeared, Jensen reveled in the attention; let the whoops of appreciation soak into his skin. By the time he was ready to let his wolf free his blood was

pounding through his veins, the crowd's excitement contagious. It wasn't until he settled into his new skin, that he knew something was wrong.

Through the usual stench of booze and money, cheap deodorant and stale sweat, something tickled at Jensen's senses, something incredibly familiar and very out of place. Nose twitching, Jensen stalked out from behind the screen, oblivious to the usual gasps and screams from the crowd as he prowled towards the front of the stage, searching out the source of his unease.

And there he was, straight ahead, standing at the bar, too far away for Jensen to see unless he strained his eyes, especially with the stage lights blinding him. But it was unmistakably him. Arms crossed, feet planted wide, and head held high, Jared Padalecki stood staring at him. Jensen froze, tail tucked between his legs. Unsure what to do. Wolf instincts roaring at him to run.

So that was what he did. To the crowd's bewilderment, and DJ's shock, Jensen turned and bolted from the stage like a hunter was on his tail, paws slip sliding against the wooden floor in his haste. He didn't stop to think about where he was going, what he was doing. He ignored every shout that rang out behind him, just darted between legs and raced through every open door he could see until he found himself standing outside in the alleyway behind the club, body vibrating with tension, with fear.

Jensen smelled him approaching before he saw him, heard the familiar step of thick soled boots three sizes bigger than his own. Head lowered, ears flat back against his head, Jensen tucked his tail between his legs and turned to face his husband.

"You know, I didn't remember even being here until I walked into the club tonight. Man, I was wasted that night."

Jensen looked up at Jared through his eyelashes; flinched backwards, belly low to the ground, when Jared took a step towards him. Jared didn't comment, pretended not to notice, but he stopped where he was and shoved his hands in the pockets of his suede jacket, hunching his shoulders in a way that Jensen knew he did when was trying to look less imposing. "Then when your music came on, everything came flooding right back. I can't believe I forgot. You took my breath away that night. You did tonight as well."

It wasn't the righteous anger that Jensen had expected. Jared was calm, controlled, and if Jensen smelled anything in his scent, it was a subtle, lilting hint of arousal. He tilted his head in confusion.

"Don't get me wrong, I was pretty fucking pissed when I found the letter shoved through the door telling me about the club. About what you actually did here every night. I guess whoever decided to tip me off was pretty pissed at you too."

Jensen growled softly in his throat. Fucking Sterling, he'd lay money on it; Alpha asshole with a grudge.

"And I don't know why you do it, or even *how* you do it, because... shit, man, I know you suffer from serious fucking stage fright, but the thing is, Jensen, you looked incredible up

there. Like, I don't know how to describe it... like, you belonged. Like you came alive."

Jensen sat down in surprise, not even noticing the damp puddle under his butt.

"It was like that night at the karaoke. I was an asshole making you go, but well... you'd been an asshole too, so I figured it'd just about make us even. And I did feel bad when I realized how bad your stage fright was. I dunno, I guess I thought you were exaggerating when you said you were scared of performing in front of people, that you just wanted the attention, but Gods, when I saw your face, you were fucking petrified. It was obvious you were just doing it for Brianna, and I was weirdly proud of you for that. Even if it did look like you were going to barf right there on the stage."

Jensen remembered clearly how close he'd been to doing just that.

"Then once you got into it, forgot where you were, you were breathtaking. Your voice, Jensen, fuck, I could listen to you sing forever and never get enough. And the way your face lights up when you perform, the way your eyes sparkle, it's just... it's mesmerizing. You... you're mesmerizing." Jared walked towards him, his steps cautious, and this time Jensen didn't flinch, although he couldn't stop the nervous tremble shivering through his body.

Jared crouched down so he was eye level with Jensen, hands resting on his knees and a dimple peeked out from his cheek. "I'm not saying that I'm not a little jealous. A little worried even. But if this is what you want to do, I'd never try and stop you. You know that, right? I mean as long as... as long as no one else gets to touch you. As long as it's me you come home to at the end of the night."

Ears twitching, Jensen cocked his head to the side and blinked slowly up at Jared, not entirely sure that he was hearing right. This was not the reaction he'd expected.

"You know, it would be a lot easier to talk about this if you changed back."

That was true. But then that would leave Jensen at the disadvantage of being buck-naked in a cold damp alleyway.

"Please," Jared said, puppy eyes out in full force.

How was Jensen supposed to resist? A little concentration, a bone cracking stretch and yet again Jensen was sitting in front of Jared in his birthday suit. It was becoming a habit.

"Hello," Jared smiled. Jensen ducked away, or tried to, until Jared's finger caught him under his chin, tipping his head up. "Can I kiss you? Please?"

There was that 'please' again, and those pitiful pleading eyes that Jensen was defenseless against. His lips parted just slightly, his tongue darting out to wet them and then Jared's lips were pressed against his, gentle and undemanding. Soft and tender. A perfect, sweet first kiss. Jensen sighed in disappointment when Jared retreated, blushing at the chuckle that followed. "I just thought you might be more comfortable not sitting in a puddle. I'm planning on kissing those gorgeous lips a lot more if you'll let me, darlin'."

The shiver that ran down Jensen's spine was due entirely to the cold and not to the heated flash in Jared's eyes. Or so Jensen tried to tell himself.

A cough from the nearby club exit startled both of them. Jared jumped to his feet just slightly quicker than Jensen, spinning around to confront whoever was daring to interrupt them, a feral growl escaping his very human mouth.

"Sorry," Misha squeaked, waving awkwardly from where he was standing in the doorway, a bunch of people lurking behind him, Morgan most prominently, glaring darkly at Jared.

"What do you want?" Jared asked, planting himself firmly between the crowd of onlookers and Jensen. Jensen rolled his eyes, not that anyone noticed.

"Well, to make sure you weren't killing my friend mainly." Misha said, a nervous cough clearing his throat. "And to see if he needed this." Misha held up Jensen's robe.

"Thanks, Misha," Jensen shouted, peeping around the immovable object that was Jared.

"No worries," Misha called back. "Everything okay?"

"A bit chilly, but other than that-"

"We're fine," Jared snapped. "Thank you."

"Hey, you little asswipe, drop the attitude." Jeff's voice rumbled down the alleyway.

"That's Morgan," Jensen whispered, quiet enough so only Jared heard.

"The teddy bear?" asked Jared, dubiously.

"You lay a hand on that boy and I'll rip off your dick and shove it down your throat," Jeff roared just to clarify his point.

"Deep down," Jensen said. "Deep, deep down. You think we could maybe take this inside? I think my balls are turning into ice cubes. They're definitely shrinking."

Jared didn't move. "Are they going to lynch me?"

"No, of course not," Jensen said just as Ty stepped forward, brandishing his prop Thor hammer from their superhero number. It looked menacing, but in reality weighed about as much as a hotdog.

Jared audibly gulped. Jensen laughed, shoving Jared towards his weird bunch of friends. "Come on, I'll introduce you. I promise they don't bite. Well, not hard anyway."

Misha met them half way down the alley, robe clutched in his outstretched hand. Jared took it, with a nod of thanks, and handed it back to a shivering Jensen before turning back around to Misha and peering at him through narrowed eyes.

"Hey, don't I know you?"

A party. Jensen didn't think it was a wise plan. But Jared couldn't be persuaded to abandon the idea. And considering his lack of a freak out over Jensen's profession, Jensen kind of owed him one. The problem wasn't Jared meeting his friends. That had pretty much been taken care of the night he'd turned up at the club. Jensen should probably thank Sterling for that one day. One day far away when he no longer wanted to castrate the bigoted knothead.

Once the pissing contest —figurative not literal despite Jared's instincts— had died down, and Morgan and Padalecki had settled into a wary truce, Jensen had watched in amazement as Jared proceeded to win over every guy in the room. In no time, his husband's boyish charm had Matt swooning and Rich snorting sea breeze out of his nose. Jared even managed to get Ty chuckling at his horrendous jokes before they left. It was no wonder the guy was such a successful businessman; he could charm the birds out of the trees. Or the panties off a virgin. Not that Jensen was a virgin. Or that Jared had tried anything of the sort.

Unfortunately.

Nope, Jensen still wasn't getting action. His sexual frustration was reaching new heights. Or new lows to be more precise, because jerking off with his face buried in Jared's sweat-ripe day-old shirt was definitely not the classiest moment of his life. At least they were kissing now. A lot. Not that it helped. It just meant that Jensen seemed to be in a permanent state of arousal. He wasn't sure if Jared was suffering as much. The kissing was definitely turning him on; more than once Jensen had felt Jared's dick, hot and hard, pressing against his hip, but Jared never once asked for more. Just backed off and walked away with a bashful smile, leaving Jensen red-faced, panting, and suffering from a serious case of blue balls. It shouldn't be allowed.

"So, I'm finally getting to meet the asshole then." Jensen choked on his mouthful of beer when Chris appeared at his side like a silent tiny ninja. Oh, yeah... Chris, Jensen had forgotten that he and Jared hadn't quite met yet.

"You know he's not really an asshole," Jensen pointed out, watching with some amusement as Misha poured his drink over Chad's crotch. Well, Jensen had warned Jared that his friends wouldn't put up with any stripper jokes.

"I'll believe that when I've had a chance to talk to him myself," Chris grumbled. "Where is the boy wonder anyway?"

Jensen actually had no idea. He hadn't seen him since... "Help me. Help me now." This time Jensen actually jumped, his drink sloshing out of the glass and down his hand when Jared appeared at his other side. And honestly, when did that giant pup suddenly develop stealth skills?

"Gods," Jensen puffed, heart pounding. "Where's the fire?"

"In your friend's pants, I think," Jared said, doing his best to hide behind Jensen as Matt stalked out of the kitchen, his eyes lighting up when he spotted Jared.

Jensen sniggered. "Matt? He's harmless."

"He asked me to feel his pecs," Jared hissed as Matt wound his way through the room towards them. "He offered to show me his pole dancing routine. And when I said we didn't have a pole, he looked at my crotch, licked his lips and said that wasn't what he'd heard. What has he heard, Jensen? *What has he heard?*"

By the time that Jared finished speaking his voice had leaped an octave, Matt was three feet away from them and Jensen was holding his belly because he was laughing so hard. "He hasn't heard anything," Jensen wheezed through his giggles.

Matt bounced up with a coy smirk and a lecherous wink. "Hey, Jared. Jeez, I turned my back for one minute to look for some oil and you disappeared. I almost thought you'd run off on me."

Jared squeaked. Jensen snorted. So did Chris who was watching the whole thing play out with a knowing smirk.

"Matt, behave," Jensen scolded. "Jared's a married man."

Matt pouted and batted his eyelashes at Jared. "But, Jensen, baby, he's so cute. And so big. Can't you share?"

"No," Jared said, clamping his hands on Jensen's shoulders and shoving him between them. "Absolutely no sharing. Ever."

"Jared, he's just teasing." Jensen's shoulders shook with laughter. Matt was the biggest flirt in the world, but he was harmless. If Jared had looked remotely interested, Matt would have run in the opposite direction. After high-kicking Jared in the balls for even thinking about cheating on Jensen. "Matt, you remember Chris, right?" Jensen decided distraction was the best tactic.

Ten minutes later, Jensen ducked out of the animated conversation Matt, Chris and Jared were having about football in favor of fetching himself another drink.

He passed Ty and Brianna chatting on his way to the kitchen; Ty's eyes sparkling and Brianna blushing all the way down her low-cut top. Kurt was nowhere to be seen. Jensen really hoped Brianna had come to her senses and ditched the weasely asshole. She deserved a lot better. Ty looked like he wanted to show her just how much better it could get.

"So, I hear you're a stripper." Jensen sighed and turned back around just before he managed to make it to the kitchen door. Mark Sheppard had the smarmiest grin on his ruddy face.

Jensen sighed. "I prefer the term Entertainment Professional actually. Does everyone know?"

Mark raised an eyebrow. "Well if they didn't before tonight, they do now, love. Some of your fellow professionals aren't terribly discreet." Mark nodded to where Rich was standing

talking to Misha and one of Jared's friends, a bright pink cowboy hat perched on his head, a matching feather boa wrapped around his neck and his t-shirt proudly emblazoned with the words Off-Duty Stripper. Jensen shook his head in silent despair. "Anyway, as long as Jared doesn't mind, I don't see that it matters."

Jensen's eyes widened in surprise.

"To be honest, I worked in the adult entertainment industry for a while myself."

Jensen tried not to let the shock show on his face, apparently not very successfully.

"We didn't all have rich daddies to put us through college, you know," Mark bristled. "And my videos were always very tasteful. There's a lot of money to be made in niche markets. Puppy play is a veritable gold mine."

"That's... " disturbing. Incredibly freaking disturbing. Because now Jensen had images ensconced in his brain that he'd never be able to erase. "...interesting," Jensen choked out. "Really interesting."

"That's how Rob and I met actually," Mark continued with a faraway look in his eye. "It's a funny story—"

"Ahh," Jensen squeaked in panic, sure he was not prepared in any way to hear this story. "Sorry, Mark, I just have to go... you know..." Jensen jerked his thumb towards the door behind him. "...check the thing. In the kitchen. Right now. I'll catch up with you later. Yeah. Right. Good talk." The thumbs up as he scurried away was dorky even for Jensen. But he was just relieved to get away without further scarring.

He was still patting himself on the back for his timely escape when he made it into the kitchen. His need for liquor growing more urgent by the minute. Unfortunately, Alaina and Timothy's need was even greater. Their need to be fucking against the refrigerator. Alaina's back pressed against the silver doors, her legs locked around Timothy's waist as they attacked each other's mouths with a ferocious enthusiasm Jensen hadn't seen since the last time he watched Shark week. And Gods above, what was with Jared's degenerate friends all of a sudden. And really, the refrigerator? Wasn't that unhygienic?

Trying not to look at the couple, or listen to them, Jensen blindly grabbed the closest bottle of something that looked alcoholic from the kitchen table, and backed out of the room. Alaina and Tim would never have known he was there, if he hadn't tripped over Charlie who'd come nosing for food. Arms flapping wildly as he tried and failed to keep his balance, Jensen barely managed not to flatten the cat but he did knock over a chair; the resultant clatter echoing through the room and paralyzing Jensen where he fell. Face red, he glanced up, with dread, towards the happy couple. Alaina grinned back at him from over her husband's shoulder, lipstick smeared like blood over her chin. Then, eyes locked on Jensen, she whispered something in Tim's ear and licked her lips in a way, threatening, hungry and downright predatory, that made Jensen's balls shrivel in fear. It was all the motivation he needed to move. Lurching to his feet, he took off like the devil was after his soul, bottle gripped desperately in his sweaty hand.

Not quite ready to face the party again, not until his overheated face lost its bright flush, Jensen sneaked up the stairs to the bedrooms.

His heart was in his mouth as, warily, he opened his bedroom door, half expecting to find a gangbang going on in the middle of the bed. The coast, thankfully, clear, he collapsed onto the bed, unscrewed the bottle and gulped down the booze he'd managed to pilfer. Which unfortunately turned out to be a bottle of cheap vinegary wine. His luck really had taken a turn for the crappy. It didn't stop him from drinking half the bottle though.

Fifteen minutes later, nerves settled, and booze bolstered, Jensen figured he'd better head back into the party before someone came looking for him. He forced down one last disgusting mouthful of wine from the bottle before discarding it on Jared's bedside table, and then he climbed to his feet, straightened his shirt and fluffed his hair.

Shaking his shoulders loose, he took a heartening breath and turned to face the door. Just as it opened.

"Well, fancy seeing you here." Mark Pellegrino leered at him.

Jensen scrubbed his hand over his face. Pellegrino hadn't been invited. Jensen had made damn sure of it. He hadn't graphically explained to Jared exactly what he had against the guy but he'd been adamant that Pellegrino wasn't on the guest list. Jared hadn't bothered to put up a fight. "What are you doing here?"

Mark strode into the room, closing the door behind him. "I heard there was a party. Thought maybe Jared had finally decided to share his new toy."

"Yeah?" Jensen said, chin tipping up defiantly. "Well, you thought wrong. And you weren't invited, so get the fuck out."

Chuckling, Mark took a step towards Jensen. "I don't think so, bitch. Not now I know what a slut you are. I heard some interesting conversations going on down there. A stripper, Jenny, really? Is that what the problem's been all this time? You only give it up for paying customers?"

"I'm a performer, not a whore," Jensen spat.

Mark took another step closer, pulling a black leather wallet out of his back pocket. "How much, Jenny, huh? How much for you to strip out of those clothes for me right now? Twenty dollars? Thirty?" Pellegrino opened his wallet, started pulling out bills and throwing them at Jensen. "How much for a lap dance?"

Jensen stumbled backwards, but his calves hitting the bed stopped him from going far.

"How much for you to get down on your knees and suck my dick."

"There's not enough money in the world."

"No?" Pellegrino threw his wallet down on the bed, tilted his head to the side and smirked. "I guess I'll just have to bend you over and fuck you then."

"Never gonna happen," Jensen growled, his wolf close to the surface.

"No?" Mark snarled, and pounced. Too sudden for Jensen to set his wolf free.

But just because Jensen was still human, just because he was an Omega, didn't mean he was a pushover. He'd fought his way out of more than one scrape before. Jensen bit at whatever flesh he could reach, twisted and thrashed and kicked. But Mark was strong, and focused, and fought dirty. And he was an Alpha. He didn't hold back. Knees and elbows hitting Jensen where it would hurt the most. Shoving him back onto the bed. Slapping him in the face, hard, when he fought back. And again when he wouldn't lie still. Fingers closing around his throat, cutting off his air. "Fucking Omega slut. If JT isn't willing to share, I guess I'll just have to help myself."

Jensen bucked on the bed, ears ringing and head cloudy, desperately trying to dislodge Pellegrino. He couldn't even shout out, could barely breathe. Shoved his knees up, fingers scrabbling to push Mark off, to scratch, to gouge, to do anything that might help.

"Gonna knot you up good, Omega. Gonna—"

Jensen didn't hear the bedroom door open. But he heard Jared's furious roar and he saw close-up the fear on Mark's face when Jared dragged him away, like he weighed nothing at all, threw him to the floor and started wailing on him.

"What the hell's going on in here?" Morgan, Chris and Matt stumbled through the door just as Jensen was rolling off the bed, fingers rubbing cautiously at his tender throat. "Gods, he's going to kill him."

"I'd say he deserved it," Chris observed, looking pointedly at Jensen's injuries.

"Yeah," Morgan agreed. "It ain't gonna look good in the papers though, is it? Come on, Jared, that's enough, kid."

It took all three men, Morgan, Chris, and Matt to pry Jared off Pellegrino. All of them panting with exertion by the time they succeeded, Jared red-faced with rage, and Mark covered in blood and curled in a cowardly ball on the floor.

"Should we call the cops?" It was Matt who asked.

"No." Jensen shook his head, his voice rough and throat raw. "Just get him the fuck out of here."

"You sure?" Jeff asked, hauling Pellegrino up off the floor and shoving him against the wall, his head smacking back hard enough to echo through the room. Pellegrino whimpered. Jensen didn't feel the tiniest flicker of sympathy. "Jared?"

"I see you again, I'll kill you," Jared snarled, shaking Chris and Matt off with little effort and pointing at Mark. "I mean it. No second chances."

There was ice in Jared's voice. Cold and unforgiving. Jensen shivered.

Jared nodded grimly at Jeff. "Get him the fuck out of my house."

"You okay?" Jared turned to Jensen when they were alone, shaking out the fingers of his bloodied fist.

"Sure," Jensen said, even though his throat felt like a gravel trap and his cheek was throbbing, along with his ribs. He couldn't help cringing when Jared reached out, running his thumb over Jensen's bruised face. "Mark didn't... he didn't—" Jared blanched, unable to even get the words out.

"No! No," Jensen reassured him quickly. "Gods, no. He just roughed me up a little. You rushed in before he could do anything."

Jared scowled. "They should have let me kill him. Fuck! I'm sorry. I didn't think he was like that. I should have known. I should have—"

Jensen placed his finger across Jared's lips, silencing his apologies. "It wasn't your fault. It really wasn't."

"Still," Jared mumbled, his lips brushing against Jensen's finger. "I'm sorry."

Jensen sat on the bed, catching Jared's hand and tugging him down along with him. His fingers traced a gentle path across Jared's bloodied knuckles. Lifting Jared's hand to his lips, he pressed butterfly light kisses across the damaged flesh. If he'd been in wolf form he'd have licked away the blood. "I'm fine. It's fine. It's over. You think we can throw everyone out now though?"

"If Tim and Alaina have finished defiling our refrigerator, maybe." Jared smiled ruefully, shuffling back on the bed until he and Jensen were sitting with their backs against the headboard, Jared's arm wrapped around Jensen's shoulders. "And Misha and Chad have stopped doing whatever it is they're doing in the bathroom downstairs."

Jensen's jaw dropped. "Misha and *Chad*?" That couldn't be right.

"I know, right?" Jared shook his head. "Chad isn't even into guys. Apparently."

Jensen snuggled back into the curve of Jared's arm. "Maybe we should just hide up here until everyone leaves. I don't think I can take any more surprises tonight."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Jared asked again, giving Jensen's shoulder a gentle squeeze.

"I'm fine." Jensen instinctively brushed his fingers over his bruised cheek, before dropping his hand onto Jared's thigh. "Although I'm a bit pissed that you had to rescue me like I was some defenseless princess."

"Well, he took you by surprise," Jared consoled him. "I'm sure if I'd been a minute later, you'd have had him."

Jensen hummed in response, not sure whether or not Jared was humoring him. Considering the circumstances, Jensen decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. This once. "You know

it was kind of hot,” Jensen admitted, side-eying Jared slyly.

“What was?” Jared’s eyebrows jumped in surprise, his fingers pressing into Jensen’s skin.

“You bursting in like some kind of avenging hero. All growly and possessive.”

“You thought that was hot?”

“Yeah, I did.” Jensen grinned. “Of course, I haven’t had sex for six months so I think pretty much everything you do right now is hot.”

“You do?”

“Of course I do. You’re stupidly sexy, Jared, just in case you hadn’t noticed. It’s not easy sleeping in the same bed without jumping you every night.”

“Wow, well, that’s... awesome. I mean, you too, obviously. I mean, you’re hot. Stupidly hot. And I wouldn’t mind.”

“Wouldn’t mind?”

“If you jumped me.”

“Right now?”

“Whenever you damned well want.”

And fuck it, maybe they weren’t the best circumstances ever, what with the attempted assault, and the houseful of guests, but, quite frankly, Jensen had waited long enough. Moving gingerly, he crawled into Jared’s lap, straddling his thighs and setting his hands on Jared’s biceps, the muscles jumping beneath his fingers. “So, now then?”

Jared placed his hand on Jensen’s waist, hesitantly, like he was afraid Jensen might break under his touch. “Jensen, are you sure this is a good idea. Doing this now?”

“Are you saying no?” Jensen leaned in, his lips brushing Jared’s. One thing was for sure, Jared’s dick wasn’t saying no, already fattening up under Jensen’s ass.

Jared breathed heavily against Jensen’s mouth, his eyes fluttering shut. “Gods no, Jensen. I’ll never say no to you. I love you.”

Jensen drew back in surprise. “You do?”

“I do.”

“Huh.”

“Huh?”

“Well, not just huh. I mean, I guess, I kinda might love you too.”

“You’re not bowling me over with your enthusiasm here y'know,” Jared said, but his lips quirked up in a wry smile.

“How about I make it up to you.” Jensen squirmed in Jared’s lap, his ass wriggling against Jared’s dick.

“With sex?” grinned Jared.

“With stupidly hot sex,” Jensen corrected.

“Yeah, I think that would be acceptable.” Jared’s words melted into a groan as Jensen pressed their lips together again and ran his fingers down Jared’s chest, wishing it was warm skin instead of crisp cotton under his fingertips. “Can you take this off please?” Jensen asked, plucking at Jared’s shirt buttons.

Jared chuckled. “So polite, Jensen. Are you sure you’re feeling okay?”

“Take your fucking shirt off, Padalecki,” Jensen growled, pinching Jared’s side.

“N’huh,” Jared laughed, fending off Jensen’s playful pinch. “Not unless you’re getting naked too.”

Jensen didn’t want to move. Was more than happy where he was, comfortably ensconced on Jared’s lap, his ass grinding down against the hard bulge in Jared’s pants. But on the other hand, he really wanted to see his husband naked. In the end, the need to feel that expanse of soft skin under his fingers won out. It was the fastest Jensen had ever stripped off in his life. There was no tease, no show, and not a hint of embarrassment. The only things that slowed him down were the aches and bruises Pellegrino had left behind, but those aches faded into insignificance when Jared was finally standing in front of him, his clothes discarded in a careless heap on the floor. His eyes focused on Jensen, his gaze hot.

“Fuck,” Jensen breathed. It was the first time he’d seen Jared stripped bare, and the sight before him was everything he’d hoped for and more. He knew Jared had abs of steel, had felt those muscles contract through his shirt during lazy make-out sessions, but there was so much more to him. From the strong width of his shoulders, and the cut of his collarbone, down to his impossibly narrow waist and those long, long legs; he was beautiful. Insanely beautiful. And his dick, well, Jensen had seen plenty of dicks in his life —sharing a tiny dressing room with a bunch of strippers with few personal boundaries made sure of that— but none of them, not even Sterling’s Alpha cock came close to the beauty that was Jared’s huge, fat knotted dick.

“You just going to stand there staring all day?” Jared smirked at him, hands braced on his hips and dick hanging thick between his legs.

Jensen licked his lips, considering his answer. “Maybe I will. The scenery is magnificent.”

“I could offer you an up close and personal view. If you like.”

Jensen took a step forward, eyes flickering up and down the length of Jared's body, overwhelmed and greedy, not sure which perfect part of him to focus on. That decision was made easy when his gaze settled on Jared's face and he saw those pretty lips curved into the widest, warmest smile. A smile that made Jensen's heart stutter and swell in his chest. "You sure you want this, Jensen? Really sure?" Jared's voice was soft this time when he spoke.

Jensen didn't need soft. Not anymore. So, instead of answering, he closed the distance between them, stretched up onto his toes, tangled his fingers in Jared's hair and kissed him. Tried to pour everything he was feeling into that moment, the love that was surging through him, and the desire, the *need* that was thrumming like music through his veins.

Any remaining doubts that Jared had quickly melted away, one hand curling around Jensen's waist dragging him close, and the other cupping the back of his neck, his palm hot against Jensen's skin. It wasn't long before they stumbled the last few steps to the bed, falling together onto the mattress, Jensen on his back, eyes blown wide, with Jared on his hands and knees above him, caging him in. Jared considered every move he made with care, mindful of Jensen's injuries, skimmed gentle kisses across his body, down his throat, across the peak of his collarbone, over his chest, his thumbs sweeping across Jensen's nipples, lingering there longer when Jensen shivered under the touch, before slowly moving further down his body, mouthing at his hip bones. Jensen's whole body seemed to vibrate. His ass leaking.

Jensen froze under Jared's touch. His ass was leaking. That didn't happen. Apart from when he'd hit his heat. Sex didn't make him... no matter how good... he just didn't...

"Hey, you okay?" Jared looked up at Jensen from where he was slowly pressing kisses in a messy trail down his thighs.

"I'm... fuck... I'm dripping slick."

Jared's nose crinkled up, puzzled at Jensen's reaction. "Yeah you are. You smell fucking delicious."

"That's not... I don't usually," Jensen tried hard to explain. "I've never before."

"Not ever?" Jared asked, sitting back on his knees, his fingers trailing abstract patterns across Jensen's thighs. "Not even when you slept with other Alphas?"

Jensen felt a flush crawling down from hairline. "I've never," he coughed, clearing the embarrassed rasp from his throat. "Never slept with an Alpha."

"Never?" Jared repeated, fingers stalling and eyes widening.

Jensen threw his arm over his face, the tips of his ears burning. "I might be a stripper but I'm not a slut, okay? I haven't slept with that many guys. And I've never wanted to sleep with an Alpha. Bunch of fucking assholes."

"Shit," Jared breathed. "So you've never... you've never been knotted?"

"No," Jensen mumbled. "Not with a real knot."

"Shit," Jared repeated.

Jensen cringed. "It's not a big deal."

Jared wrapped his long fingers around Jensen's wrist and pried his arm away from his face, kissing the crinkles at the corners of his eyes until Jensen finally, with an irritated grumble, opened his eyes. "It's a big deal to me. You still want this, right? Want me? Want my knot?"

If possible Jensen's face grew even redder; he nodded, his bottom lip caught between his teeth.

"Jensen?" Jared pushed, pressing a kiss against the soft skin below Jensen's ear. "Let me hear you, please?"

"Yes," Jensen's voice was little more than a whispered exhale. "Want you. Want your knot. Want you to be my first. My only."

The declaration was all the encouragement Jared needed. He didn't hold back any longer. Held Jensen down with gentle hands, mumbling praise against his skin as he mouthed kisses across his body, over every freckle, and every darkening bruise. Jensen writhed under the attention, caught between pleasure and frustration that he wasn't lavishing as much care on Jared's body. The slick leaking from his ass was a weird distraction, not uncomfortable but definitely strange and kind of filthy too, made him feel desperate for something in his ass in a way he'd never felt before. Like he was made for this. Made for Jared. And Jared was made for him.

When Jared's mouth suddenly engulfed Jensen's cock, swallowing him down with a pleased little hum, Jensen's back bowed off the bed, his fingernails catching in the sheets. A desperate whimper trickling from his lips as he tried not to buck his hips up into the brain-melting heat of Jared's mouth.

"Gods, Jared," he gasped, looking down at the gorgeous man kneeling between his legs. "You're gonna fucking kill me."

Jared pulled off, and stared up at Jensen, spit gleaming at the corner of his lips. "Not yet, darlin'," he grinned, then, eyes trained on Jensen's face, ducked back down and sucked his dick all the way down. Jensen groaned, closed his eyes and tried not to come.

It could have been a matter of minutes, or hours—Jensen was too overwhelmed to tell—until Jared's lips disappeared and with a rough demand and a light slap across Jensen's tensed thighs, he was manhandling Jensen over onto his knees. "Need to taste you."

Jensen didn't have time to argue that that was just what he'd been doing, before he felt Jared's hands on his ass cheeks, spreading them apart. Then Jared's tongue was prodding at the dip of his hole, licking away the trails of slick with a hunger that made Jensen's face flame, and what little coherency he had left flee.

"Delicious," Jared groaned, face buried between Jensen's cheeks, fingers pressing fresh bruises into his flesh. "Taste like you were made for me, Jensen."

Jensen bit down into his feather pillow and shuddered.

"Going to make you feel so good," Jared promised.

"Please," Jensen gasped, shuffling his knees forward beneath him, digging them into the mattress and shoving his ass up into Jared's face. Jared hummed his approval and nibbled at Jensen's rim, then screwing his tongue deep into Jensen's hole, greedily chased the sweet slick to its source.

If Jensen had remembered for one second that the house was full of people, he'd have tried to keep quiet, but the only thing on his mind was Jared's tongue eagerly lapping into him, his fingers burning hot against Jensen's ass cheeks.

"Fuck," Jensen, moaned, long, drawn out. "Need... need... "

"Need more?" Jared asked. "You want my fingers, Jensen? Huh?"

Jensen whined in response, barely understanding what Jared was asking.

Jared slipped a finger in alongside his tongue, then two, easily sliding them into Jensen's slicked hole, twisting and scissoring them in deep. Jensen would have been embarrassed by the sounds falling from his lips if he wasn't so lost in the pleasure of it all.

When Jared finally pulled away—his mouth and fingers cruelly disappearing—Jensen was left bereft. He writhed, empty and desperate, in the middle of the bed. "Jared?"

"Can I fuck you, Jensen? Please?" Jared draped himself over Jensen's back, the heat from his body consuming Jensen, his breath tickling Jensen's ear, his neck. Jensen shivered. Nodded. "Yeah, yeah. Please."

Between Jensen's slick and Jared's tongue and thick fingers, Jensen was more than ready. He didn't even tense up when he felt the head of Jared's dick tapping against his hole, easing slowly past his rim. He just let out a needy little whimper, dropped his head down onto the pillow, arched his back and wiggled his ass, encouraging Jared to keep going.

Even though he'd waited so long, must have been close to busting his knot, Jared took his time, inched into Jensen carefully, almost tentative, refused to be hurried no matter how much Jensen wriggled and pleaded. It didn't hurt, not really, despite the size, the unbelievable girth of Jared's Alpha dick. The worst Jensen felt was a bit of sting. And even that wasn't enough to stop him trying to shove himself backwards.

"Gods, have some fucking patience," Jared scolded. "I'm trying not to hurt you."

"I'm fine," Jensen complained, licking away a bead of sweat that was dripping down his top lip. "Get the fuck on with it, Padalecki."

Jared huffed a laugh against the skin between Jensen's shoulder blades, scraped his teeth in playful imitation of a bite against the nape of his neck. "You're a brat."

"And you're a chicken. I'm not gonna break. Fuck me."

This time, the bite at the delicate curve of skin where his neck met his shoulder was fiercer, less playful, teeth almost drawing blood. Goosebumps broke out across Jensen's skin. His inner-wolf whined and rolled over, submitted like a puppy.

"Fuck," Jared groaned, fingers digging deep into Jensen's side as he finally thrust in all the way, his balls slapping loud against Jensen's ass. Jensen's eyes squeezed tight, his breath punched out of him in one long low moan.

"Come on," he bit out, when Jared did nothing, held still, frozen on a knife's edge of fear and want. "Please."

He almost regretted it, just for a moment, when Jared started moving, rocking in and out. Sweat breaking out across Jensen's skin, his blood boiling below it. Jared was so big, all-consuming. His dick filling Jensen up in ways that he could never even have imagined, and had certainly never experienced. Finding spots hidden deep inside of him that exploded every time Jared nudged against them. Nerves flared white hot and lights blazed behind Jensen's clenched eyes. But Gods, he wanted more.

Arms shaking with effort, Jensen worked his elbows underneath him, trying to find the leverage to drive back into Jared's thrusts, not just kneel there with passive acceptance and take what he was given. He couldn't do much, his limbs were trembling and brain cells shot, but Jared seemed to at least appreciate his effort, pounding into him with a spurt of unbridled energy that left them both struggling to breathe.

Part of Jensen wanted to roll over, wanted to see Jared looming over him, make sure there was a hunger in his eyes, a desire that matched Jensen's own. He wanted to watch Jared move, see the sweat dripping from the tilt of his nose, the hair flying loose and wild around his head, the muscles roll beneath his miles of golden skin. He wanted to watch the ecstasy on Jared's face when his orgasm finally roared through him. Jensen wanted it almost as bad as he wanted the taste of Jared's dick in his mouth. His come on his lips. But they had time. All the time they wanted. And the next time they did this, later on tonight, Jensen would spend hours sucking on Jared's dick, licking at his balls, rolling them in his mouth. He'd take Jared apart just as thoroughly as Jared had done him, and then he'd climb into his lap, and kiss him rough until their lips stung while he rode him hard.

Now though, Jensen's orgasm was building, even without a touch to his dick, building pace quickly, growing from a low buzz at the base of his spine into an unstoppable fire that was lighting up his nerve endings. "I'm gonna... gonna come... sorry..." Jensen tried to warn Jared.

"Gods," Jared growled, his fingers curling into Jensen's hips, slipping across the sweat-covered skin. "Don't... don't you dare fucking apologize." Jared's thrusts grew frantic, his dick pounding mercilessly into Jensen's hole with Jensen whining and shaking under the onslaught, his cock slapping against his thigh and leaking almost as much as his ass.

And then Jensen felt more, felt something baseball wide pushing against him, and he had just one second, one terrified heartbeat of panic, where he remembered Jared's knot and thought that there was no way, no fucking way, it would ever fit inside him, before it was right there, shoving past his rim and his world imploded. He came with a scream that rattled through his

head and shook his bones, his orgasm ripping through him like a tsunami leaving him a wobbly mess in its wake. Jared's hands were the only thing holding him up. He could feel Jared coming deep inside him, his insides growing hot and heavy as Jared spilled his Alpha load; swore he could almost see his belly bulge. Jared's body trembled around him, his breathing as unsteady as Jensen's.

They collapsed together, Jensen caught on Jared's knot. Jared rolled them onto their sides, his fingers trailing lazily across the mess of spunk painted over Jensen's thighs and the swell of his stomach. Jensen lay there and let him, not even attempting to repress his satisfied little gasps or the aftershocks that still rippled across his skin. He lay content, almost drifting off to sleep in Jared's arms as their bodies recovered, relaxed, and eventually untied.

"Shit," Jared groaned when they pulled apart, skin sticking with sweat and slick and come. "We didn't use a condom."

"It's fine," Jensen said, head still a little doopey, nudging Jared until he had him just where he wanted. A perfect pillow to snuggle against. "We've both taken blood tests."

"But you could get pregnant, Jensen." There was definite edge of panic in Jared's voice. "I mean I know the chances are slim when you're not in heat, but—"

Jensen patted Jared's chest, his eyes already closing. "Relax, Jay. I'm on birth control."

"You're what?" Jared stiffened, just for a second below Jensen. "But the contract..."

"The contract stipulated that I had to come off the suppressants. It didn't say anything about birth control. Totally different thing."

Jared huffed a laugh against the top of Jensen's head. "You're something else, Jensen Padalecki."

"Jensen Padalecki Ackles."

"What?"

"I never said I was gonna take your name either. Did you even read the contract?"

Jared laughed, his chest jiggling under Jensen's head. "You'd make a damn good businessman, Mr. Padalecki Ackles."

"Nah," Jensen said, smirking. "I prefer to make an honest living."



the end

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