

Title: The Wanderer, The Dreamer, & The Brokenhearted

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Actors: Jared Padalecki, Jensen Ackles, Steve Carlson, Christian Kane, Chad Michael Murray, Genevieve Cortese, Sophia Bush, Jason Manns with mentions of or appearances by Misha Collins, Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Jim Beaver, Michaela Conlin from Numb3rs Agent Don Epps

Content: M/M, M/M/M, F/F and M/F Relationships and M/M, M/M/M Sex with mentions of M/F Sex but no graphic scenes, Angst, AU, mention of minor character death, Mild D/S play, Language, Redneck!Jason, Some biker talk – See Master Post for definitions.

Pairings: Jared/Steve, Jared/Steve/Christian, Steve/Christian, Jared/Christian, Chad/Sophia, Jensen/Danneel, Jared/Misha – past, Chris/OFC, Steve/Various – Past, Genevieve/Michaela

Summary: One is a Wanderer, never finding a place that wants him to call it home. One is a Dreamer, always imagining a love that will last forever and make all the pains in his past worth it. One is Brokenhearted, never feeling good enough; never feeling wanted enough, convinced that his future will never really be his. Three men, one relationship, and as the relationship starts to unfold they realize there are three not so clearly defined parts, each being the Wanderer, the Dreamer, and the Brokenhearted. Fighting their pasts in an attempt to grab their tomorrow with friends at their sides, all they want is each other in a world that doesn't seem to want any of them.

For: spn_j2_ bigbang 2010





Prologue: *I am the Wanderer*

Jared stood on the beach, tattooed arms crossed over his chest, gazing unseeing out at the never ending expanse of water in front of him. Somewhere to his left he could hear Chad and Genevieve bickering, but it was faint, as if they were a long way away instead of only a few feet. He stared at the gulf as if hypnotized; almost wishing it would give him the answers he sought to his life.

Would he ever be able to stop wandering? Would he ever be able to find a place where the three of them could belong and call home? Would he ever find the love and acceptance he's craved most of his life? Would he ever be able to let down his guard and be able to rest, knowing that it was safe to let someone else watch over him if only for a moment.

Jared was tired down to the bottom of his soul. He was tired of running. He was tired of having the weight of other people's lives always on his shoulders. He'd been thrust from his home at a point in his life when most kids were worrying about getting their driver's licenses and arguing with their parents about dating. Kicking him out hadn't really been all that tough of a decision for his rich country club guardians.

Their choices were either be faced with the humiliation of admitting to their equally rich country club friends that the child they saw more of as a possession than a human being was not just a rebellious teenager, but a rebellious gay out and proud teenager or just kick him out of their lives and pretend that he never really existed. When he'd left town the next morning, one of his eyes swelled shut, lip fat and split, and ribs bruised and probably cracked but neither of them had the experience to tell, he had no one but Chad by his side, but he wasn't all that surprised or upset either.

Jared wished that he could say that he'd clued in quickly, but he hadn't. Most of the crap that they had gone through had been in his opinion caused by his lack of "getting with the program" quick enough to keep them out of trouble. He knew he'd made bad decisions for them, but Chad, the always the supportive side kick never laid the blame at Jared's feet that he deserved, or felt he deserved.

"It is, what it is Jayman," Chad would say as calm as ever. "There hasn't ever been a decision you made that I didn't willingly back you up on. I ain't no damn puppet. I know how to say no, an' I know how to decide for myself when shit is wrong. I'm here for the same reason I'm always here. You're more my brother than my best friend, and I'm the one who has your back."

It was hard for Jared to argue with that, but his guilt never let up. He considered it his responsibility to get them to someplace better, and he would be damned if he'd stop fightin' for it before they got to it. Some days however, it seemed as though it was mission impossible. He had angry bikers on their ass, he had FBI men who wanted his cooperation and they hadn't had any real place to call home since they left their mansions, only layovers that lasted longer than others. He wanted a life for them. He wanted a real honest life for them, not this on the run lifestyle they'd had since Jared had been kicked out. He wanted fights that didn't mean losing everything they had. He wanted acceptance and laughter and forever. He wanted love.

He wanted the things every other human being on the earth was allowed, but for some reason he had always been denied. Slowly, Jared exhaled the smoke from the cigarette dangling by his hand before dropping the butt into the sand, feeling Chad come up beside him.

"What's up JT? You make a decision yet on where we're headed?" Chad asked turning to face him. "Yeah," Jared replied softly, almost reluctantly. In truth Jared decided several weeks back where they would be going next, he just wasn't sure he trusted his decision. The thing was it all seemed too easy, but regardless he wanted it.

Jared thought about the conversation he'd had with his old cell mate Jason Manns before they'd left their last resting place. Jason, as always, was trying to convince him to give his friends a shot.

"You'd like it there, Jay." Jason offered softly, unconcerned with the noise of the convicts behind him. "And I know you like Steve already, so don't even try to pull bullshit with me."

Jared sighed running long fingers through unruly hair. "I don't understand you, man. Why you tryin' so damned hard to get a guy like me with someone like Steve. He's a good guy. Ain't never done half of the shit you an' I've done. If he was my buddy I'd be tellin' creeps like us to stay the fuck away from him."

"Yeah well," Jason huffed turning to growl at the pipsqueak behind him, one of Jason's buddies staring evil eyed at the thugs standing behind said pipsqueak warning them to stay out of it. "For a genius you're quite a dumbass. You an' I may've had more than one run in with Johnny Law, but that doesn't make us hardened criminals like most of the freaks in here. Yeah, we make some fuckin' bad decisions, but most of the time we're tryin' to do the right thing with not a whole lot to work with."

"I trust you with Steve, and for that matter I trust you with Chris and hell even Jenny too. You'll protect 'em and you'll help me keep my shit together when I get out. You'll make the right decisions because all you've ever needed was a break."

Sighing Jared heard Jason snap at someone before he came back to the line. "OK look I gotta wrap this up, but seriously, Jay. This is your chance. This is the break you've

always wanted and always deserved. I trust my friends with you and I trust you with them. Be that man you've always wanted to be Jay, an' fuck the rest of the world. Be there when I get out, 'cause you know damned well I could use someone who gets it when I get back."

"Don't let me down, Jay."

And that was what really sealed it for him. Jason was probably only the second true friend he'd ever had in his life. After Chad, Jared knew Jason was right there. Jared knew deep down that Jason had his back. Jared would cut off his own arm if Chad needed it, and he saw no reason to do differently for Jason. Friends were the only family he had in this fucked up world, so, who was he to turn down a simple request from a friend only trying to give him something he'd been waiting for since his real family died.

Looking down at the sand his boots were slowly sinking into, Jared let his mind wander momentarily. He thought about being little and running around the beach barefoot, digging his toes into the cool wet sand, listening to his mamma call after him, his big brother chasing him, and shrieking when his daddy threw him over his shoulder running him into the surf. Jared wished he could still do happy silly things like that.

Before he'd left home and had been still attending school, there had been this kid who had called him a spoiled rich kid. He looked at Jared's clothes and the address he lived at and figured he knew all he needed to know. He'd said that Jared didn't know anything about what real people went through, didn't know what normal kids went through on a daily basis when you couldn't take for granted that you'd have money for just anything that came up. Jared had wanted to counter that most kids didn't know what it was like to be the only person left in your family at the age of 10, but he didn't bother. He'd always understood that people had preconceived notions of him and that there wasn't much he could do about it.

Sometimes when he closed his eyes he could still remember what it had been like before the world fell apart. He could remember being happy and feeling safe and he could almost remember what it had felt like not to know anything else in the world. He remembered nights around the dinner table playing board games and afternoons chasing his puppy around the back yard. He remembered fresh baked chocolate chip cookies and hugs anytime he wanted.

He also remembered pain and loneliness and the cruelty of people who didn't understand a little boy who had nothing and didn't want to even try. He remembered not being good enough, he remembered knowing his current situation held no future for him, and he remembered what it was like to survive on your own at 16 with only your best buddy as support. Someday he wanted to be able to look back on all the shit he was going through and be able to say that he remembered what it felt like to feel like you don't have anything but what you can carry on your bike, but most days he didn't believe it would happen anymore.

“Jason called me,” Jared started softly, hesitantly fibbing slightly as if it happened only once, as if Jason hadn’t been trying since they were locked up in that cell together. Allowing that door where he locked his happiness behind to crack open a bit as he gave in and let himself think about Jason’s friend for the first time that day. Steve was... hell Jared wasn’t brave enough to say what Steve was.

Calling him Jared’s one hope in a life of hopelessness sounded overly dramatic, but it was the best way Jared knew of to describe his feelings for the man. He still couldn’t figure out why Steve was giving him the time of day. Jason insisted that Steve was just that kinda guy, but it was hard for Jared to accept that, even though he really, really wanted to believe that maybe finally something was changing, maybe finally something good was gonna happen that they’d be allowed to hold onto.

Genevieve had joined them, but was standing by listening quietly. She knew her bond with them wasn’t anywhere near as strong as their bond with each other and respected the moments where she was merely an accepted outsider. She knew Jason only by name, and knew only that he was Jared’s cell mate the months he’d spent in jail. What either of them was in for, or why they kept in touch, she had no knowledge of, and didn’t really feel like it was any of her business unless they decided it was.

Chad grunted and to her it didn’t mean much, but she’d been around these two long enough to know that Jared probably got a whole chapter out of the sound. “Said he had a suggestion for us, some place that might be...” Jared stopped again and lit another cigarette pulling in a deep lungful of smoke, waiting until he was almost lightheaded before exhaling. “Some buddies of his need some help in their bar.” Chad nodded carefully, wondering if Jared was gonna finally fess up to the new guy he’d yet to tell him about.

Genevieve wished she could read him better, but unless you were one of the two of them, each man was pretty damned hard to read, always keeping his expressions carefully schooled. “He tell ‘em about our baggage?” Chad took out his own cigarette lighting his off Jared’s before turning his own gaze out over the blue water of the gulf. Instead of speaking Jared just shrugged, and Chad just nodded in return. The conversation between them wordless and probably more meaningful than anything Genevieve had had with anyone in the last month. She figured there was a good chance Jared wouldn’t talk again for the rest of the day. He’d been doing that a lot lately, but when she’d asked Chad about it he just gave her that look that said she should keep her mouth shut and not ask questions.

“So where we headed to then?” Chad asked and Jared huffed softly before replying, “Jus’ outside Austin.” Genevieve, not for the first time, was impressed at the skill Chad had with Jared, and wondered if she’d ever have that deep of a friendship with someone.

~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~

Jensen stood at the bar with Randy, washing glasses as his friend filled the coolers, both tried to act like they weren't watching Chris and Steve avoid each other while they tried to act like they weren't doing it. Steve, he figured was doing a much better job than Chris was, but then Steve was hiding at the old piano with his back to the room. Chris though was just sitting at a table supposedly working on paperwork glaring at Steve's back.

Chris was a lot of things, but subtle was not one of them.

"You think they'll ever just get over all this and start fucking again?" Randy finally asked softly and Jensen snorted before turning his head to flash a grin. The thing was he was pretty sure some day one of them would get over this... whatever it was going on between them, but the thing that worried him the most that it wouldn't be until after the other had found someone he wasn't willing to give up.

Jensen had a feeling it would be Steve.

Lately he had a look in his eyes, and Jensen had a suspicion it was what had led to the most recent breakup between his friends. Chris was just not the settling kind, or at least that was what Chris always said, and Steve was exactly the settling kind. Steve wanted to know there was one person that he would be with for the rest of his life.

For years Jensen knew his best friend had bet that Chris was it, but although he hadn't said different, Jen was pretty sure he'd come to believe different as of late. It was in the way he stared off into the crowd on a busy weekend night as if he was searching for something he didn't know how to look for. It was in the way he didn't seem to have the patience for the patented Chris bullshit that they'd all learned to deal with over the years. It was the way sadness just seemed to loom over him all hours of the day until Jensen decided that something drastic had to be done.

There had been four of them growing up. Himself, Steve, Chris, and Jason had been almost inseparable. They'd all been trouble on some level. Jason always seemed to be the one that got the biggest slap on the wrist, but they never forgot him and each one of them accepted his calls no matter what else was going on. That's just the way lifelong friendship worked in their books. Jensen didn't know how long his friend had been talkin' to this guy Jason'd shared a cell with some years back, but Steve had started taking notice of this stranger awhile back. Jensen had noticed how his name had started coming from Steve's mouth more often as of late.

Steve'd even talked to the guy a few times, and the easy laughter that came from him when he talked to this guy was a bad sign for Chris. Jensen had to admit, he thought it was weird, especially at first watching his friend so happy and relaxed talking to some strange ex-con, and even he had not been too thrilled with Steve's apparent attachment. Then however he stepped back and saw how genuinely happy his friend was, and it wasn't like they had ever judged Jason for any of his stints in prison. Hell

even Chris had done some time once when his temper got further than any of the rest of them had been able to contain safely, or that's the story they had all agreed upon anyway. Only Jensen himself and Steve were the good boys untouched by Johnny Law, mostly thanks to Jason and Chris.

Jensen had wandered upstairs one night needing to ask Steve if they had an extra bottle of Cherry Vodka somewhere and make sure the recipe he'd found for a Spanish Guitar had been right. He hated it when those damned yuppie's invaded asking for shit only Steve would drink... *Fuckin' girly drink crap*. Steve had the night off and he was the only one there that knew all them damned girly drink recipes off the top of his head. Hell it'd taken him 15 minutes to figure out the asshole hadn't been asking about one of their guitars. How the hell was he supposed to know a Spanish Guitar was a drink?

Stomping up the stairs cursing stupid customers under his breath, Jensen wasn't really paying attention and therefore was caught off guard by the sight in the living room that made him pause and momentarily forget the customers and the bar in general. The radio was on just loud enough to dull the bar's noise downstairs. Steve was seated on the sofa, leaned back with his head rested on the sofa back and his feet rested on the coffee table. You only had to look at him to see how relaxed and happy he was. Something funny must have been said, because he was laughing and his whole face was lit up with laughter and Jensen couldn't remember the last time he'd seen his friend smile like that.

That was why when Steve said he had offered Jared and Chad the bouncer positions and said they'd hire Genevieve on as a waitress to help Michaela and Danneel and the other random girls who worked a shift here and there, Jensen hadn't argued even when Chris called him a traitor for it. God knows, Jensen loved Steve and Chris like brothers, and he knew that they loved each other much more than that. The thing was that in Jensen's opinion they just needed something more if the two of them were ever gonna be happy together. Every time they got together it was as if something was missing between the two of them, some element that Jensen couldn't quite put his finger on but knew it was important.

It wasn't like this happiness was fleeting either. After talking to this stranger, Steve would walk around on a cloud for days, whistling and smiling for no reason at all. It was nice to see his friend not drowning in doom and gloom all the time because Chris just refused to pull his head out of his ass and see the light. Hell Jensen couldn't remember the last time any of them had made Steve that happy for that long. Oh sure they'd have moments where they'd mess around and they'd all laugh and joke, but once it was done Steve would go right back to being miserable and Jensen would feel like he had to start all over again trying to find a way to make him smile.

When Steve made that announcement, the already strained relationship had become like a battle zone. Chris might be oblivious some times, but he wasn't stupid and even he could see how this new guy was affecting Steve. Jensen knew that Chris took the idea that Steve would always be there waiting for Chris to wander back to for granted,

only this time it seemed like there was a chance Steve might be going far enough away he might not find his way back, if he ever even had any desire to.

“You know, I don’t really get what the big deal is.” The sound of Randy’s voice brought Jensen back to the present. “I mean, we don’t know what the guy did or why, and it ain’t like anyone here is a saint, even you an’ Steve, for all your good boy images. You just never got caught like the rest of us. If this guy is the one that’s been making Steve so damned happy for the last couple of months, shouldn’t that be all that matters? Hell even Shannon noticed, and he’s worse than Chris with that shit. We’ve needed the help forever, but now that we have it, Chris is all insistent that we don’t need anyone just because he dropped the ball and now it’s rolled outta his reach.”

Jensen looked at Randy, his huff of disgust working as that final nudge he needed, realizing that it was time he stepped up and stopped playing it safe. If even Randy’s dingy boyfriend Shannon noticed how happy Steve had been, then hiring these guys was the right thing to do.

Breaking into Steve’s collection of liqueur that really had no business being in a damned road house slash biker bar, Jensen took out the Vanilla Vodka, the Starbucks coffee liqueur, and the Dulceda Dulce de Leche carmel liqueur ignoring how Randy was watching him as if he’d lost his mind. Throwing the drink together, Jensen grabbed a bottle of beer popping the cap off and made his way out from behind the bar and crossed the room carefully sitting the drink on top of the piano.

Steve’s abrupt ending of the song he’d been pounding out made the bar seem too quiet, even though Jensen wasn’t sure that was really possible. “Caramel Macchiato Martini is your new craving right?” Steve nodded big and took the drink down taking a sip. “Good job, Jen.” Steve praised watching his friend and Jensen took a sip of beer trying to push through his nerves to answer the curiosity plainly visible on his friend’s face.

“I want you to know, I’m on your side.” Jensen started hating seeing the way Steve’s happiness dimmed at the mention of the fight and more determined pushed on. “I want you to know that all I care about is if you’re happy, and if this guy does it then he’s always welcome here as far as I’m concerned. Just... don’t let Chris change your mind ok? I’ve seen what this guy can do for you the last couple of months. I mean, you’ve been like a completely different person, more like the old Steve who laughed and was just chill all the time back before you and Chris started this... whatever you two have been doing.”

Steve nodded and Jensen looked down turning the bottle in his hands. “Just don’t forget Chris ok? And don’t forget even though he’s a prick right now that he really does love you. All this shit is gonna work out somehow, I know it. I don’t know how, and I ain’t saying that this guy isn’t everything you’ve made him out to be in your head...” Jensen paused as Steve blushed and Jensen had to grin knowing his friend and his romantic notions too well.

“I just don’t think things are really over for good with you and Chris. Hell maybe he’ll even turn out to be the glue that will finally hold you and Chris together.” Jensen was mostly joking at the thought, but with the way Steve’s eyes widened and the blush spread across his cheeks, he could tell his friend had already entertained the notion. Shrugging Jensen finished his beer and, shoving Steve over, sat down on the bench next to him.

“Alright bitch, let’s see how this is really supposed to sound.” If the door to the upstairs area slammed, Jensen and Steve both pretended they didn’t even notice letting themselves get caught up in the music and their friendship.



Chapter One: *New Town, New Friends, Old Enemies*

When the bell over the door jingled, Sophia looked up from where she was wiping down the counter to see two men walk through the door followed by a much smaller woman. The two men were both tall, one of them being ‘Oh My God’ so, and she guessed the three of them were of the roaming biker types that stopped in from time to time. Her place was one of only three establishments in the small town of Black Rose, Texas. Across the highway from her diner was the Strings and Studs Saloon owned and operated by three lifelong best friends Christian Kane, Jensen Ackles and Steve Carlson.

Down the road a bit was the gas station/grocery mart/garage run Old Man Beavers. The actual town had a grand total population of about 9 residents, but they were situated in a good spot between the Dallas/Fort Worth area, San Antonio, and Houston, sort of smack dab in the middle of the triangle if you looked at the three areas on a map. Because of this the three businesses did quite well for themselves, and given the limited number of residents the owners and employees were all fairly close.

In fact Old Man Beaver was seated at the far end of the counter hunched over his early lunch before they each got their midday rush, and looking at the newbies she was a little relieved for the company. Helmets in hand, their biker boots clunked loudly on the linoleum of the diner floor as they crossed the short distance from the door to her counter. Logically she figured the fact that there was a girl with them, should make her feel better. Only it didn’t. They all looked to be about the same age, Sophia guessed around her own age with the guys divided into one blonde and the other brunette. The blonde was the slightly shorter of the two, with the brunette being just huge. The girl was tiny. Sophia guessed she was at least a couple of inches shorter than she was with long brown hair.

As the two men took a seat in front of her with the girl seated next to the brunette she smiled weakly, but relaxed slightly once the sunglasses came off and she could see the eyes that had previously been hidden behind them were kind if somewhat steely. When the girl smiled friendly, Sophia took a deep breath and told herself she was being silly. While the blonde was more of her personal taste, it was the brunette who had caught her attention, something behind those odd hazel eyes of his had grabbed her and just didn't want to let go.

"We too early for lunch, ma'am?" He asked, his soft drawl startling her out of her daze, and shaking her head quickly she moved to grab three menus off the back counter. Sandy met her there, and concern was written all over her face. She could see Kristen watching her from back in the kitchen, eyes wide with fear behind her glasses. Sophia knew it was up to her to keep the ship afloat or the other two women would cave under their feet.

Straightening her back and rolling her shoulders, Sophia walked back to the counter, taking their drink orders, willing her hands to stop shaking. She didn't know what was wrong with her. Normally she wasn't some wilting flower to be so easily intimidated without even the slightest hint of provocation, but there'd been some other bikers through lately, ones that looked much rougher and more ruthless than the small group sitting at her counter and one could never be too sure.

She could feel all the attention on her from both and cursed her hands to stop shaking. Of course they didn't, which is why her grip slipped as she turned to serve them their Cokes and one of the glasses fell to the floor shattering. "Fuck." Taking a deep breath she flashed a smile at the brunette placing the two remaining pops in front of the blonde and the woman. "Sorry 'bout that. I'll get you one just as soon as I get this cleaned up." She promised and was startled to see the man she had decided must be the leader throwing a five on the counter.

"S'ok ma'am," the soft drawl came again. "We didn't mean to upset you. Whatever we did, I 'pologize for. We'll just wash up and get out of your hair."

"But Jayman, I'm starving," the blonde whined only to be popped in the back of the head by the woman as the leader headed to the bathroom. "Shut up, Chad," she shot back calm as ever Sophia felt more than a little guilty. Not sure what to do, she looked to Old Man Beaver who just shrugged at her and finally she went about cleaning up her mess, sighing frustrated.

She'd finally gotten everything cleaned, and had worked out a nice little speech to offer the tall one when he came back, that was if she could turn her focus away from the blonde, the *really hot* blonde, long enough to remember it, when the door jingled again. Looking up her eyes widened and this time she knew why she was nervous as the room suddenly tripled in occupancy, the most recent batch not welcomed in the least. Hearing a growl she was startled to see the blonde standing, hands clenched at his sides, eyes blazing, as he stood obviously ready to throw down at any second.

“Well, well, well what do we have here boys?” The leader sneered, his deep voice hiding none of his ill intent, his eyes turned to the woman who was trying to hide her fear behind her bravado. “Looks like little Sophie’s not the only whore here today.” Before she could so much as think about moving though, a voice boomed from the back of the dinner and for a moment she had no idea who it could belong to, the tone sounding nothing like the soft soothing drawl that she’d mentally attached to the image of the brunette.

“What the fuck are you doing here, JD,” the brunette growled crossing the room quickly, his long legs making the distance seem like nothing. Sophia was more than a little startled to see not only did he apparently know the biker who’d been causing so much trouble lately, but apparently wasn’t intimidated by him in the least as he’d moved to stand well inside the older man’s personal space.

“This just gets better and better,” Jeffrey Dean drawled all deep and easy, but you knew there was nothing but danger and evil intent behind his words. “Little Jay Jay.”

“Get the fuck out, JD,” the brunette spat, his friend moving to stand just slightly behind him and off to one side. “Leave before I remind you what happens when you fuck with me.”

Sophia jumped when a hand touched her arm, not having seen the old man get behind the counter, but was more than happy to hide behind his bulk when he moved in front of her. Before she knew what was going to happen, a knife appeared slicing the brunette in the side, although he didn’t seem phased in the least as his big fists flew. The brawl was violent but quick, and before she could barely believe what was happening, JD was turning tail and running his little boys following behind him like the whipped puppies they were.

“Fuck, Jay!” The blonde shouted and Sophia turned her attention from the door to where the two were sitting on the floor, the blonde pulling off a leather jacket and ripping off the shirt to get to the wound. For a second she got lost in the tight abs and bulging biceps exposed, but the sight of the blood finally got her moving and grabbing some towels she hurried around the counter. “I’ll call 911,” Jim said, but had barely gotten the words out before the blonde was shouting no.

“It ain’t that bad,” the brunette offered poking at the wound before taking the towels with a small smile. “Gen, go get the kit?” Sophia was startled to see the girl pop up from near the counter, shaking herself as if to brush off whatever had happened between herself and whichever of the biker’s she’d tangled with, and putting a knife of her own away. Sophia blushed having momentarily forgotten she was there and wondered how a girl like that stood against men twice her size as she watched the door bang behind her as she shot out to follow her boss’ orders.

“Here are some towels. How can we help?” Sophia asked moving next to the blonde, Chad she reminded herself, as she felt Jim’s presence behind her. “Are you sure you don’t need an ambulance?” She asked worried as the white cloth rapidly turned red.

“Naw,” the brunette assured smiling at her, and the flash of pearly white teeth startled her once again as it transformed his face from brooding stranger to seemingly happy little boy in no more than an instant. “Ain’t the first time Chad’s had to stitch me up. He has the most insane ability to get me into fights.”

“It’s not my fault even the women with boyfriends can’t resist me,” Chad said as the girl, Sophia thinks she remembers hearing her called Gen, coming back in and thrusting what must be a first aid kit in an old black leather doctor’s bag at Chad. “Here,” Sophia knelt down putting her hand over Chad’s not able to ignore the spark that ran up her arm at the contact, “I’ll hold these while you get set up.” Chad smiled and nodded opening the kit and pulling out a needle and thread.

“God, you saved me and I don’t even know your name,” Sophia realized and the brunette smiled again. “It’s Jared, but my friends call me Jay. How long’s JD and his bunch been bothering you?”

Sophia sighed watching as Chad began sewing up Jared’s side with an ease and precision that confirmed he really had done this more than once. “A few months. I don’t even know where they came from, one day they were just here.” Standing back up Sophia looked around the room and was surprised to see the girl talking to Sandy and Kristen who both looked a lot less rattled than she expected them to appear.

“Don’t worry about your girls.” Whipping her head back around, Sophia looked down at Jared. “Genevieve’s pretty good at calming people down. She’s been through this more than once herself.”

“However does she fight a guy and come out so well? It doesn’t look like she even has a black eye or even so much as a scratch!” Sophia looked at the girl again marveling at her.

“Appearances can be deceiving,” Chad said and Sophia looked down at him surprised he was even listening. “Not all wounds are visible to the human eye.” When Jared slugged Chad in the arm, Sophia blinked and looked back at the woman again with a new sense of wonder if the image in her head was even close to what Chad had been alluding to.

“Are they why you were scared of us?” Jared asked again the soft drawl back and Sophia was somewhat surprised to feel herself calming, not realizing Jared was intentionally trying to get her thoughts off Genevieve. Before he could answer through, the door crashed open and Sophia looked up to see the guys from the bar running in with their shotguns.

“You’re a little late, boys,” Jim drawled from somewhere behind them and Sophia guessed that he’d gone back to his lunch. “Fortunately for Sophia these boys were here to keep that damned asshole from wreckin’ the place again.”

Feeling someone next to her, Sophia shifted away seeing Christian kneeling down beside Jared as Chad calmly finished stitching up his best friend tying off the thread with a knot. “We were in the back stocking,” Steve offered as he came over pulling her into a hug. “You ok, girlie?”

Nodding shakily Sophia shot her chin in Jared’s direction. “He really did save my ass. You shoulda seen it! Knocked that JD on his fuckin’ ASS!! The coward turned tail and ran outta here so fast you woulda thought hell hounds were chasin’ him.”

“That’s ‘cause he knows he can’t take Jay,” Chad bragged pulling Jared up slapping his chest. “Jay’s got the old bastard’s number, don’t ya Jayman?”

Rolling his eyes, Jared just shrugged humbly not really wanting to talk about his exploits with Jeffrey Dean with virtual strangers. “I’ve taken him down a time or two,” he finally admitted, his eyes focused on the two men in front of him, wondering who had dug inside his head and pulled up his every fantasy and Chad snorted. “Cut it with the humble crap. The last time you two locked horns he ended up in the hospital.”

Jared sighed looking at Chad before shrugging on his jacket. Feeling a small hand on his back, Jared turned to smile back at Genevieve not surprised she had come over to be near them with more strangers in the room. Reaching back, Jared searched for her hand, squeezing it, signaling they were ok, pretty sure these were Jason’s friends. “I don’t recall coming out of it looking too hot myself.” He muttered and Chad just huffed. “Does this mean we can stay for lunch?”

“Please do,” Sophia hurriedly begged before Jared could insist they leave. “It’s the least I can do is offer lunch on the house. I really do owe you guys. My insurance can’t handle another luncheon with those heathens.”

Jared studied her carefully before flashing another smile and a nod. “Sure thing ma’am, if you’re positive, but we’re paying.”

“No you’re not,” Sophia insisted laying out menus again for her three heroes before turning to Chris. “Y’all eating too?” She asked but laid out menus anyway already knowing the answer.

“I’m Chris,” Chris said introducing himself, holding out his hand for Jared coming to the same conclusion Sophia had earlier that this was the group’s header. “This here blonde is Steve, and the other is our buddy Jenny. The three of us own the Strings and Studs Saloon across the way. I keep our books legal, Steve takes care of booking bands and shit mostly, and Jenny’s our bar manager and mostly works as bartender at night.”

“It’s Jensen asshole,” the man who thus far had remained quiet finally threw out and Jared turned his attention to him. He was shorter than Jared, but then not many people weren’t, with hazel green eyes and freckles dotting across his cheek bones and nose. His hair was spiked up and he was wearing tight jeans and a t-shirt. If it wasn’t for the other two, Jared might have been interested, but with Steve in the room, Jared didn’t have eyes for much else, and Christian had stolen the remainder of his attention.

“Jared,” Jay offered softly holding out his hand and was happy when it was wrapped up with a big grin and a friendly smile. “Nice to meet you man! I hope to God you’re Jason’s friend, ‘cause man with you two around we’ll be cruising smooth.”

Jared shrugged and smiled lopsided. “I suppose I am. Jason said y’all had a place for us. I hope it still stands. We could use with a chance to plant our feet for awhile.”

“So you’re the crook,” Chris said noticing the moment between the two and not missing how Steve was quieter than normal watching this Jared guy like a kid at Christmas. Christian decided he most definitely didn’t like it. The room fell into stunned silence as they turned their attention to Chris. Jared shrugged then headed to the counter, nearly shouting for joy when Steve shot around his friends, parking himself onto the stool next to Jared. He heard a yelp from Chris, but didn’t turn to see Jensen glaring angrily or Chris rubbing the back of his head.

Hiding his nervousness by taking a sip of the Coke waiting for him, Jared took a moment to wink at Steve before answering. Looking past Steve he saw Chad sitting himself on the guy’s other side putting his body between the strangers and Genevieve. “I’ve done some time.”

“Jason speaks highly of you,” Steve said smiling friendly if not shyly and speaking quietly his nerves getting the best of the excitement pumping through his veins. He did not want to go into the fact that he had himself extended an invitation to Jared and starting WWIII in front of the others, and was ok with a small lie by omission. “He said you had his back a time or two when you two were in together. So, we’re glad to have you here watching ours.”

Jared blushed slightly as he put in his order with Sophia who was going down the line before answerin’ while Jim quietly left, leaving the youngsters to their own devices. “He saved me a time or two himself, so I suppose fair is fair. It was nice to have a friend when I came outta there. He gets out in a couple a months right?”

“Yeah, we can’t wait.” Jensen said answering sitting on Jared’s other side with Chris next to him, knowing Steve would be mostly mute for awhile. “It’ll be nice to have him home.”

“What’d you do?” Chris asked then grunted when Jensen elbowed him hard in the side.

Jared glanced down at Jensen seeing him throw Chris an irritated look, before turning his attention back to Jared. Even though it was Chris who asked, Jared felt like it was really the two men on either side of him that he was responding to, because he was worried more about their reactions than anyone else's at the moment, and looked down at the counter, not quite brave enough to look up. Taking on JD in a knife fight was a no brainer, but putting himself out there for possible rejection from people who might just possibly hold their future in their hands and hearts was decidedly tougher. "I was convicted of carrying an unlicensed firearm. I served eight months of a three year sentence before the feds pulled me and Chad out."

"And who were you planning on murdering?" Chris asked then rubbed his head glaring at Jensen after getting a pop to the back of his head again. "Now knock that shit the fuck off!"

"Then stop being an asshole, givin' the man the third degree, askin' questions that shoulda been done in private at the bar, you fuckin' asshole," Jensen snapped back before smiling at Jared again. "You can ignore him; he gets prickly the second anyone shows the slightest bit of interest in Steve there."

Fighting to keep his smile at bay, Jared played with his straw paper, but before he could answer Chad jumped in. He could tell from the bite in his friend's tone that he was royally pissed off and the only reason he wasn't wailing on the irritating redneck right now was because Jared hadn't given him the ok. "He didn't fuckin' wanna kill anyone, bitch! We were trying to protect ourselves from Jeffrey Dean. If you haven't figured out he's bad news yet you're dumber than you look, asshole."

While Chad and Chris continued to bicker, Steve carefully slipped his hand over to put it over Jared's. He already knew all of this. Jason told him at least that much months ago when Steve started talking to Jared on the phone. He knew Jared didn't do anything terrible. He knew Jared was just trying to protect himself and his friend from people who didn't give a shit about two guys who just wanted their own place in the world. He knew Jared wasn't like JD and his friends, and he knew Jared made him happy.

Jared felt Steve's touch on his hand, but it took a few moments before he could relax enough for their fingers to twist together. It took half way through the meal before he had the nerve to look over him, but once he did it only took a bright smile before he relaxed the rest of the way and started enjoying his food. Eventually he even found the courage to speak again. Once more taking a chance and opening himself up.

"All we want is a place to fit in, a place where we are more than just fixtures. All Chad an' Genevieve an' I got are pretty much each other an' while I don't mind, it kinda makes things long and hard. It'd be nice if we had a place where we just... belonged."

"You don't have family?" Jensen asked softly his heart breaking for these people knowing what it was like for the only family you have to be the one you made for yourself. While Jared may be Steve's man, Jensen couldn't help but want to really get

to know him better. It would be nice if he could expand his social network past people he'd known since grade school.

"I'm pretty much persona non grata with what family I have left alive," Jared offered quietly before finishing off his Coke and pushing his plate away, while the others turned back to their food.

After everyone was done eating, Jared sighed listening to Chad flirt with the girl behind the counter who had introduced herself as Sophia and wondered where they were gonna go now since it didn't look like they were very welcome with all three owners. Jared had no interest in bringing drama into other people's lives just by his presence. He tried to pretend his dangerously broken heart wasn't cracking further at the thought of having to let Steve go before he even had a chance to have him.

"Don't mind Chris." Turning his head, Jared saw Jensen drawing pictures on his plate in the leftover ketchup, as Steve got up and yanked Chris off his stool. "He's just... over protective. He and Steve have this weird off and on history. They love each other, but they just can't make it work with only two of them. Steve needs too much open and out for the world, and Chris feels like he always has to hide and will never be open enough to put himself out for the entire world to judge, at least not where his sexuality is concerned. I know Chris' been a butthead so far, but I'd really like it if you stayed on. We could really use the help an'... Steve's been so happy and excited waiting for you to get here and he just..." Jensen trailed off leaving the sentence unfinished, shrugging instead as Steve walked over from where he'd been arguing with Chris.

"Jason said you both know how to tend bar too?" Looking away from Jensen for a moment, Jared nodded carefully to Steve, his interest in the man warring with his need to avoid unnecessary conflict. "Yeah, we don't know all them fancy drinks like they serve down at them martini bars and in night clubs an' shit, but we can do the normal shit. Chad's a little better at the mixed drink stuff than I am but I can hold my own. His parents threw more parties than my guardians did. So, he got more practice makin' that stuff before we left when I was fifteen."

"You left home when you were fifteen?" Chris asked and Jared looked over to the older man lifting his chin slightly.

"Yeah, I wasn't really welcomed. See I'm the black sheep. Wasn't really into the country club sports, wasn't really into wasting my life away spending Daddy's money, and I really wasn't into the right little debutants. So, after I got my ass kicked by my Momma's brother-in-law after he caught me with the stable boy, I packed my shit and left. T'wasn't like he argued or wanted me to stay so I left town."

"What about you Chad?" Sophia asked re-entering the conversation curiously.

Chad lifted his chin, a defiant flare obvious in his eyes. "Where JT goes I go." He said simply. Grinning Jared slapped his friend's back, eyes shining with gratitude. "Yeah,

Chad's a pretty kick ass buddy. He didn't even put up an argument, just packed his shit too and asked where we were goin'."

"Sounds vaguely familiar," Jensen drawled shooting Chris a look who had the good grace to look chagrined as Steve nodded. "What about you Genevieve?"

Genevieve looked around Chad and shrugged subdued, still not sure where she stood with these new guys. "I've only known Jared and Chad for about a year and a half. They... saved me... from... they saved me from JD. I know how to sling drinks though. Worked in a bar in Norman, Oklahoma before JD got his hands on me."

"Cool then, how soon can you all start?" Steve asked and Jared sighed turning to look back at Chad.

"I like it here, JT," Chad said softly scooting over into Steve's seat so he could talk to Jared and not be overheard. He knew the things that were going on inside his friend's head. "I think we gotta chance at somethin', and you were pretty jazzed about this place yesterday. Why are we lettin' a rocky start fuck up what could be somethin' good?"

Jared dropped his eyes to study his hands folded tightly together in his lap. "I jus' don't wanna cause bad feelin's." Jared said softly lifting his gaze to look at Jensen when he felt a hand on his arm.

Taking off his hat, Christian sighed and cussed at himself under his breath. He hated havin' to apologize, but it was pretty clear from Steve's words and the looks Jensen was throwing at him that if he let these three slip away just because he was feelin' like a jealous boyfriend protectin' Steve from some other guy, he was gonna be in deep shit.

"I really am an asshole sometimes," Chris offered walking over and blushed slightly at the raised eyebrow Jared gave him. "You really should stay, and you definitely shouldn't leave on my account. T'wouldn't be the first time I've had my head up my ass about someone for no real good reason."

Taking a deep breath, Jared studied the older man carefully. Jason talked about all of his friends a lot, and he'd said enough about Chris that Jared knew there was a bigger story behind this cowboy's anger. He could see it in his eyes, the angry simmering fire, the way he held himself, the way his fists were always kept out and ready to strike. This was a man used to having to fight for everything he wanted, and defend it to nearly the death once he got it. This was a man Jared understood. Nodding he looked back to Jensen then finally letting his gaze rest on Steve where it really wanted to be, letting himself drown for a moment in those eyes and that face that seemed to be welcoming him home. "We can start right 'way, if that's what ya'll want."

It was Steve's grin that convinced him he'd made the right decision.

Not long after he'd agreed to stay, Jared found himself walking into Strings and Studs with Chad and Genevieve close behind and immediately felt like he'd stepped into some place that felt like he'd been there a thousand times and yet like he'd never seen the place before. The inside was all wood from the walls to the floor and the ceiling showed exposed supports which were used to hang various objects ranging from animal heads to old guitars and tools.

"You gonna need a place to stay?" Steve asked and Jared brought his attention back to the blonde nodding. "Would be nice. Otherwise we're gonna hafta find some place, and I didn't see much around here."

"There isn't," Steve confirmed smiling. "The whole upstairs is divided into housing though bedrooms, a huge living room, and a large kitchen. You three are more than welcome to take the empty bedrooms if you and Chad don't mind sharing the one with the two full sized beds."

"If you're sure it wouldn't cause problems," Jared agreed softly not quite sure Chris had really changed his tune so easily.

Jensen stopped and turned to study Jared noticing Chad and Genevieve had remained quiet following behind their friend and it seemed as if they really were more than willing to let Jared call the shots. "It won't cause trouble, even if you and Steve do end up hooking up, things will be cool unless you hurt him. Then Chris won't be the only one you have to worry about."

Arching an eyebrow Jared shrugged not seeming to be too concerned. "You're his friends. I wouldn't expect anything else."

Sighing and rolling his eyes, Steve pulled out a chair at a nearby table. "Have a seat while I go get the paperwork I need the three of you to fill out." As Jared tracked Steve's path across the room, he finally spotted Jensen standing at the back glowering at his friend. But, when the other man finally looked at him, Jared just winked then laughed out loud as Jensen shot him a grin and hurried into the office after Steve slamming the door behind them.

"Are you two done yet?" Jensen snapped watching Steve trying to maneuver around Chris who was leaning back in his chair, feet up on the desk, doing his best to interfere with Steve who was looking for the employment forms the guys needed to fill out, both men ignoring him.

"GODDAMNIT DON'T IGNORE ME!" Jensen shouted picking up the nearest object throwing it at their heads making the two men look up at him with raised eyebrows.

"You done with your tantrum, Princess?" Chris asked and Jensen had to fight to stop himself from stomping his foot. "I swear to GOD if you ruin this for Steve, Chris, there's gonna be hell to pay!"

Before he could say anything else though, the door was yanked open, and Jared's huge body filling the door frame, Chad bouncing behind him trying to see. "Everything ok?" Jared asked carefully, trying to resist the urge shove his way in to pull Steve to safety behind him.

"S'fine," Christian drawled all easy and relaxed picking up the papers Steve'd been looking for off the desk from under his boots and held them out to Jensen. "Jenny here's gonna help you with your papers while Steve an' me talk."

Stepping back just enough so Jensen could pass between him and the door frame, Jared watched Christian quietly before shutting the door behind them.

~JRA~CMK~SPC~JRA~CMK~SPC~JRA~CMK~SPC~JRA~CMK~SPC~

Chris watched the door shut, and started to turn back to glare at Steve, but suddenly found himself on the floor with a sore jaw. "What the fuck!"

"You prick!" Steve shouted back eyes blazing as all the anger he'd been holding in while they were at the dinner spilled out. "You just had to be a jackass! You couldn't fuckin' wait 'til he was at least here in private... oh no not Christian fuckin' Kane. You had to air all his fuckin' laundry in front of God and everyone! Actin' like some goddamned jealous boyfriend when we both know you only want me when you gotta lull in the fuckin' parade of whores in and out of your fuckin' bed! I'm tellin you Chris, and you better fuckin' listen up. You fuckin' ruin this for me and I'm done. You run Jared off and I ain't stayin' around here with you and your shit anymore."

Angrily, Steve kicked the trashcan making it fly across the small room nearly taking Chris' head off in the process. "You need to figure out what the hell you want. 'Cause I'm done with your shit and if you don't catch up I ain't gonna be within eyesight of you anymore. An' know this... whatever decisions you make better fuckin' include Jared, because I AIN'T GIVING HIM UP CHRISTIAN!" Then before Chris could do more than continue to gape at his friend, Steve stormed out slamming the door so hard it just bounced back open.

Chris didn't even bother trying to get up. Lying down on the floor, Chris stared up at the ceiling feeling his throat tighten up. It was gonna happen. He was gonna lose everything. Steve, probably Jensen, the bar... the only things he'd ever really had that his Daddy couldn't take away.

Clenching his eyes together tight, Chris tried to calm his breathing, but wasn't succeeding. When the door shut again, Chris didn't have time to hide his pain and was glad it was just Jensen. "Damn it Chris," he heard muttered quietly before Jensen crossed the room and sat down next to Chris' head, leaning his back against the wall.

“What are you doin’?” Jensen asked quietly as Chris closed his eyes again at another burst of pain. “I know you love Steve. I know this whole fuckin’ playboy, bar stud routine isn’t what you want. I know you don’t wanna lose all of this, and yet that seems to be exactly what you’re trying to do. Why are you trying to smash this thing between you and Steve into so many pieces that it can’t be put together again?”

“He just ran off the first time he found something new!” Chris snapped angrily lifting a boot and slamming it into the wooden floor rolling onto his side wrapping his arms around himself. “Are you serious?” He heard from behind him, but refused to roll over, feeling like his arms were the only thing holding his guts in.

“Chris,” Jensen started then stopped sighing. “You and Steve... you’re like the ends of two bones. Without anything between you, all you do is rub against each other causing the whole body pain. What you need, is a cushion between you. Something that can protect the rough edges from digging into each other, something that understands how each part works, how each is unique, something that binds you two together.”

“Jenny can you cut the physical therapy references and just say what you mean,” Chris asked softly curling his body up in on itself.

“You need someone between you and Steve, someone who has Steve’s patience, but enjoys people like you do. You need someone who can put up with your bullshit and understand how to pull Steve out of his doom and gloom.”

Shaking his head, Chris rubbed his cheek against the rough floor. “And, lemmie guess. You think this guy of Steve’s can do that.”

Jensen huffed frustrated, but pulled his anger in willing his patience to hold. There was a good reason Steve was the one that usually dealt with Chris when he was in moods like this. Jensen just didn’t have the will to remain calm while Chris was acting like a preschooler. “Tell me before you knew who he was that you didn’t automatically want in his pants.”

Snuffling, Chris pouted for awhile thinking about his first sight of Jason’s prison buddy. Even though he’d been sitting on the floor, Chris could tell he was tall. That long shaggy hair, the tattoos that appeared to cover arms that looked to be big enough that Chris wasn’t sure he could wrap both his hands around one bicep. He looked like a guy that would take charge, make Chris do whatever he wanted Chris to do, but gentle enough not to take advantage. He’d protected women he didn’t know, and that made Chris believe that he’d never let men like his Daddy touch him again.

Squeezing his eyes tight again, Chris saw stars dance before his eyes, as his heart bled for things he’d wanted for so long, and yet never been strong enough to show. He wanted forever just as much as anyone else. He wanted someone to come in and tell him that he wasn’t worthless. He wanted to show someone the things that he’d accomplished in his life and see the pride on their face. He wanted someone to make

him be softer, not quite the hardass he feels like he has to at least pretend to be, knowing him well enough to understand he wanted to do it, and smart enough to see Chris would never be able to do it for himself.

He just wanted someone to tell him they loved him, and that he was safe with them.

“I don’t know what to do,” Chris whispered and startled when he felt Jensen’s hand on his hair. “You let them be for a bit.”

Jensen stroked his hand through Chris’ hair knowing that a raging headache would be starting. Chris locked his pain up so tightly that when it came out it physically sent him to his knees. “Let Steve be in love with this guy. Stop being an ass to Jared. Let Jared and his friends get to know you and the rest of us and let us get to know them! There’s no way Jason would have sent that guy here to tear you and Steve apart. So, trust him and trust us, and goddamnit Chris, trust yourself!”

“Don’t know how, Jenny,” Chris admitted finally rolling over and resting his head in Jensen’s lap. “Don’t know how.”

~JTP~CMM~GC~SPC~RKO~JTP~CMM~GC~SPC~RKO ~

Jared sat in his chair, back to the wall, facing the door, watching Steve closely as the blonde crossed the room to chat with Randy at the bar and get them all some beers. He could feel the weight of Chad’s stare on him while Genevieve sat and tried to be as invisible as possible like normal. Jared knew that he was going to have to be doing some explaining soon to his best friend about the whole Steve situation. For now though, he was content with just watching this gorgeous man who had caught his attention. It startled him a little to realize that he and Steve had been talking on the phone for almost a year now, ‘cause it didn’t seem like it had been that long, and yet some days it felt like he’d known the man his whole life.

Steve was just easy to care about. He was mostly sweet, very sarcastic, and didn’t take shit, but tried not to be an asshole about it. He was aware that sometimes Steve was a little promiscuous, but never when he was committed to being with someone and understood that at the end of the day, what the man really wanted was to just go to bed with the same man that he woke up with. He didn’t really get into sports, but loved cooking shows and was willing to compromise. His voice could brighten up the worst of Jared’s days and Jay ached to know what it felt like to have the man in his arms.

Hell, truth be told, Steve just made Jared ache, period. He made him want all the things he’d been putting off and thinking that he’d never have like real homes, and puppy dogs, and 2.3 kids, and endless lazy mornings in bed with a gorgeous blonde in his arms. He wanted to pull Steve tight up to his body and inhale the scent that was essentially him and know without even opening his eyes that it was him. He wanted to laze around in the kitchen and watch Steve work. He wanted to sit in a corner with his eyes closed

and listen to the man sing. He wanted to stand in front of him when he was in danger, and make everything better when he was sick or hurt.

He wanted time, he wanted opportunities, he wanted something that looked like maybe it was forever. He just hoped now that Steve wanted the same thing, and that the rest of his life would let him have all of that stuff. Maybe he should call Agent Morrow and give him what he wanted.

Steve turned and smiled at him, lighting up the room with obvious happiness in his eyes, and something in Jared clenched and then relaxed leaving him a little dizzy and breathless. For the first time in his life, Jared was wondering if maybe this keeping silent thing wasn't the best way to go. He knew what snitching on JD could do, but at the same time, he'd finally found something that was too big to be packed onto the back of his cycle and hauled off to the next town when things got too dangerous. Two hours ago the thought of giving in on one of his basic principles just because of some man who at that point was more myth than reality would have been ludicrous. Now though, after having watched the man, after mere moments in his presence, Jared was willing to trade everything he believed in just to insure that he was allowed more than moments, that finally he was offered lifetimes and forevers.

It was a little scary, hell it was very scary what just the sight of this man was doing to him, but for Jared, who hadn't had anything real and substantial since before he'd had acne problems on a regular basis, there were just some things that you didn't take your time with. He was beginning to realize that Steve was one of those things. Steve was someone you grabbed on to and held to for dear life and didn't waste any time about it for fear that someone better and smarter than you would come along and swoop him up while you were still thinking.

"So, you gonna tell me about the pretty boy, or are you just gonna keep starin' at his ass?"

Turning his head toward Chad, Jared growled, eyes narrowed, before he caught himself and forced himself to relax. "He ain't no fuckin' pretty boy. Don't talk about him that way or I'ma gonna smash in your face, dickbreath." At Chad's arched eyebrow in response, Jared sighed realizing he'd fallen into his friend's carefully placed trap once again and mentally kicked himself. The disadvantage of surviving with only your best friend for support, was well... you had only your best friend for support, and thus he knew you way too well for you to be able to pull anything over on him. "He's just..." Jared sighed and huffed blowing his hair out of his face before continuing. "I don't know what he is, but I like him. A lot. He has this... off and on thing with Chris, and I'm trying not to think about where that could lead right now, 'cause... just... I mean it could be bad."

"Could be better than anything, too." Chad pointed out, and then shrugged. "But, you're right. You probably shouldn't think about Chris right this second. Probably best to focus on one steaming hot guy at a time." Jared couldn't help but snort and laugh out

loud letting his head fall back as the tension eased and suddenly tomorrow didn't seem too scary after all.

Turning his attention away from Randy again at the outburst of laughter, Steve had to suppress the urge to bounce as he looked at Jared once more. Jesus God, Jason had failed to mention the part about him being smoking hot! There wasn't anything about Jared physically that didn't push a button of Steve's, and that voice just about did him in. Then to top it all off, Steve was aware that beneath that nearly perfect body was a scarily smart man, who was fiercely loyal to those he cared about, and just an all round amazing human being. "So, that's lover boy huh?" Steve turned back to grin at Randy who, despite his teasing, was matching a big grin of his own, obviously happy for his friend. "Looks like Jas really hooked you up this time buddy boy."

"No shit," Steve murmured taking a sip of the drink Randy had set in front of him, and once he set it back down on the counter he finally gave into the urge to bounce, making his friend laugh at him. "Jesus man, you're vibratin'."

"Can't help it Rand, he's just... Jesus." Steve swore happily feeling like a teenage girl ready to scribble Jared's name on all his homework papers, and stay up late at night painting his toenails and giggling about his muscles. "I really like him Randy. I mean... I REALLY *really* like him. He's smart and funny and honestly listens when I talk no matter what it is. He takes an interest in cooking just because I do and doesn't give a shit that I don't like sports. He teases me, but he's never mean about it, and he knows that sometimes I've acted like a slut puppy, but doesn't care even though he never has done that shit. I really want this, Rand. I mean... I don't think I can breathe if I don't get a shot at this."

"So, I take it you and Chris are done then?" Randy asked soft and concerned. He liked Chris, he was good to him, and gave him a shot when most people wouldn't, believed in him when no one but Shannon had been willing to, and frankly Randy had his own opinions on what he and Shannon privately called "Chris' mythical whorish ways". Randy's boyfriend Shannon Moore knew what it was like to grow up and live most of your life with people who looked at you and just didn't see you, not because they were shallow or bad people, but just because you'd been playing a part so long that no one realized it *was* a part and most days that included you.

Randy knew when people looked at Chris they say just some ignorant redneck, just like they looked at Shannon and saw some dingy blonde, and looked at Randy and saw some hothead tattoo freak. They didn't know Shannon owned four businesses in the town where they lived and where Randy attended college. They didn't know Randy was a criminal justice major who would graduate a year ahead of schedule with a minor in psychology. Randy would bet that Chris' friends didn't know how much money they were making off the investments he'd made for them all, or just how fucking well the business was doing because of Christian's sharp eye for detail.

He only knew because Shannon didn't keep anything from him, and rarely when Chris' friends thought the two of them were talking about blondes and boobs, were they talking about anything other than new tax laws, risky investments, and dreams for future expansion. That was ok though. Randy also knew that guys like the three of them learned long ago to appreciate being underestimated. It was amazing what you could accomplish right under people's noses when they thought you weren't smart enough to understand what they were saying.

Looking back to the new object of Steve's affection though, Randy couldn't help but feel a little bit of stiffness toward the guy. Something else Randy knew about Chris was just how much he fuckin' loved Steve. The problem was Randy suspected that it was Chris' past that was interfering with his chances for future happiness. He looked at Chris and saw something similar to the man he used to see in the mirror before Shannon came along and called his bullshit.

"I love Chris." Randy jerked back to the present and turned his eyes away from the new guy and back to his boss, wanting to hear what he had to say. "I love him more than just about anything. Hell I've only known Jensen longer and that's only because he showed up the first day of kindergarten and Christian didn't get there 'til the second week. I just can't handle being one of many anymore. Maybe with Jared here, it'll be easier to handle not being Chris' only one."

Frowning Randy tried to process what it was that his boss was saying without actually coming out and saying it. "Does this new guy know you don't really intend to break things off with Chris?"

"Of course!" Steve shot back scowling at the very thought that he would mislead Jared, and Randy held his hands up playing the dumb thug card. "Sorry man, you know me. I don't get all this complicated relationship crap."

Huffing Steve nodded and looked down at the bar as a soft smile grew. "Jared knows all about Chris. He even said that if they can at least get along maybe the three of us can work something out."

Arching an eyebrow, Randy resisted the urge to growl, surprised at the direction this conversation was taking, hoping he was missing something. "So, what... you'll have two men and they'll just..." Randy waved his hands in the air vaguely and Steve huffed again. "No! Jesus, Randy. I'm not some slut player! I was just thinking maybe..." Shrugging and sighing Steve took another drink turning away from the bartender. Watching Steve pick up the three beers, Randy thought he was gonna walk away without finishing his thought, but at the last second he turned his head to look at Randy over his shoulder. "I just thought maybe if the three of us were together, then maybe it wouldn't hurt so much that I wasn't enough to make Chris happy."

Picking up a rag, Randy wiped down the bar watching Steve walk off, and shook his head sadly. The thing was that there was no bad guy in this situation and the truth was

that Steve had no reason to believe anything but what Chris was showing him, both of them were good guys. However even if Randy's suspicions about Chris' many women were correct, he was still the one in the wrong and Steve, while maybe not as observant as he should be where one of his best friends and his now and then boyfriend was concerned, should be able to trust that what he saw was what he was getting. More than once, Chris had hurt Steve with his stupidity and while Randy understood, he certainly didn't condone it.

Turning his gaze toward the new guy again, he was surprised to see he was being watched himself, and had the feeling that he was going to have another name to add to that underestimated list. He knew intelligence when he saw it in someone's eyes, and wondered if maybe instead of being the road bump on the road to Chris and Steve's happiness, maybe this guy would be the one to keep them on course.

Rubbing his chin Randy wondered if maybe this new guy wouldn't be so bad after all. Pulling out his phone, he headed to the other end of the bar where he could call Shannon and fill him in without the whole world overhearing.



Chapter Two: *Getting to know each other a little better*

Jared sat on the couch in his new living room, legs stretched out in front of him, crossed at the ankle, watching Steve talk quietly to Jensen in the kitchen, and honestly trying not to eavesdrop. Every once in awhile he would hear his own name or Chris' and assumed Jensen was trying to smooth over things while trying to make sure his friend wasn't going to end up hurt. Jared was trying to corral his impatience, but it was creeping in on him. Chad and Genevieve were downstairs with Randy helping run things and get used to the place before the two of them worked that evening. Jared wouldn't be starting 'til tomorrow since Steve had the night off too.

Apparently Jared wasn't the only one who was anxious for alone time.

Closing his eyes, Jared scrunched down a little more so that his head could comfortably rest on the back of the couch and forced himself to think about something other than how damn much he just wanted to bury himself balls deep in Steve's ass. After some deep breaths, Jared forced his head to clear, letting it wander to something else and found himself contemplating more recently, JD and Agent Morrow.

JD Morgan was a bad motherfucker. Rebel Sons was one of the most dangerous biker gangs in the south, always at the very top of that one percent category. They had their hands into everything guns, drugs, girls both of age and not so much, and definitely murder for hire. The government wanted JD to go down hard. They knew if they could take him out, the rest of the gang would eventually implode without his leadership. He was a tyrannical bastard and Jared was of the opinion that he had little to no conscience. His own son was treated as nothing more than a bargaining chip or someone to be manipulated and abused. Jared would feel sorry for Misha if it wasn't the fact that he himself was a manipulative little bitch.

Jared had only Misha to thank for his and Chad's stints in prison. If he hadn't been so worried that they'd have ended up dead before the month was out if they'd told the truth, Jared would have confessed then and there. However, at the time he didn't see the sense in sticking his neck out for a society who had basically turned their backs on him, even to put away a sociopath like JD. There wasn't anything JD wouldn't do. Poor Genevieve was proof positive of that, but Jared hadn't been itching to die and no incentive to risk all their lives.

Now though... now things were different. Now there was Steve and a possible future and someone he didn't want to let down. As crazy as it sounded, Steve was his reasoning for maybe finally giving Agent Morrow what he wanted. Even though Jared knew a possible future here would be the very thing that most would use NOT to talk, Jared saw it different. He believed that good was only received when earned. He lived by the nothing good comes for free creed, and felt that if he was going to get to keep this amazing man and maybe Chris too, then he'd have to do something big to earn the right.

The thing was JD honestly scared the crap out of Jared. He wasn't an idiot, just the opposite in fact. When he'd actually been in school he'd been always at the top of his class, never pulling anything lower than an A- and that was only once. His GED was earned in those 8 months in prison with Jason and college was a dream that he hadn't quite yet been able to get rid of. So, Jared knew without a doubt what telling what he knew about a man like JD Morgan would do for his future, knew what *JD Morgan* could do to him for telling what he knew.

He knew though what Steve would want him to do. He knew about the Rosary Steve always wore around his neck, and where it came from and why it was always there. Letting Steve down, seeing Steve disappointed in him was enough to make Jared break out into a cold sweat. He'd waited more than the almost a year to have someone like Steve in his life. Someone who looked for the good in people, someone who believed the world was still filled with people who loved each other, someone whose soul wasn't filled with fear and distrust.

The only way to honor a man like that would be to do the right thing, to talk to Agent Morrow and tell him what he'd seen JD do. He was gonna have to be smart about it though, because Steve had a life here in this middle of nowhere place. Steve had a life

that couldn't be packed up and taken on the run like Jared was used to. That meant no witness protection, that meant putting himself and the people he loved in serious danger with little protection, and that meant risking everything just for Steve.

Feeling something settling over him, straddling his legs, Jared opened his eyes to see only blue orbs of happiness staring back at him. Smiling softly Jared wrapped his arms around Steve's waist pulling the smaller man closer as he heard someone exiting out into the bar downstairs. "You and Jensen done with your pow-wow?" Jared asked softly and Steve nodded settling himself over Jared's legs. He knew he was a little big to be sitting like this, he'd probably put Jared's legs to sleep, but he just couldn't bear to be as far away as the couch cushion next to him when all he wanted was to finally be in his arms.

Looking down at this gorgeous man in front of him, Steve thought about the first time Jason mentioned anything about Jared other than casual chit chat. They'd been half way through a fairly lengthy conversation, Jason having gotten extra phone time... somehow Steve didn't really wanna know about. Steve had been getting frustrated with Chris and his ways again and he had begun wondering if he didn't need to get on another horse track all together, because the one he was currently circling just wasn't getting him anywhere.

"So, it sounds like things between you and Christian are getting rough again, huh? Jenny says you've been more frustrated than normal lately." Jason had started quietly and Steve had sighed settling further back into the bed he'd at the time still been sharing with Christian, getting more comfortable.

"I'm just gettin' so tired of all of this, Jas." Steve started closing his eyes not wanting to see all the objects around him that shouted his perceived faithlessness for doubting his and Chris' longevity. "I need more than what I'm getting'. I want something that'll last forever. I want someone who isn't ashamed of me, isn't ashamed to show what I mean to him."

"I wanna walk out into the bar and be able to touch someone casually, but with the knowledge that we both understand what's behind it. I wanna lie in my bed at night and not have to smell some fuckin' bar fly all over him while he humps me in his drunken sleep. I need to feel like the person I'm with is on the same page I'm on and shit, Jas, most of the time I don't think Chris and I are even readin' the same goddamned book! It hurts so fuckin' much all the fuckin' time and I just... I'm tired. I wanna love and be loved and feel loved and know that tomorrow when I wake up it'll all still be the same. Not this day to day guessing game I play when I wake up in the morning as to what fuckin' relationship am I gonna be in today. I want someone to love me as much as I love them and be able to put everything I got into it heart, mind and soul and feel all of it fuckin' returned."

"I just don't think Chris and I are it anymore."

Jason had been quiet for long enough Steve was beginning to wonder if he'd lost him when his friend finally spoke. "Look Steve, Chris' my buddy same as you, an' maybe in some ways more 'cause I think I get where he's comin' from most times. So, I hate to hear you thinkin' 'bout grazin' in another pasture, but... if you are. I gotta suggestion. I know right off it ain't gonna sound like it's one of my better ideas, but I been thinkin' 'bout this for awhile actually, and I really think this could be a solution to this fuckin' merry go round you an' Chris been travelin' on."

"You know I still talk to my ol' cell buddy Jared almos' as much as I talk t' y'all. He's been tryin' to find some place permanent to lay roots down at for he an' his best buddy an' this girl they picked up awhile back. I think Jay'd do you wonders man."

Steve frowned wrinkling his nose at first trying to figure out if he and Jason were even discussing the same thing. "You talkin' for the bar or a relationship... 'cause you know I ain't ever held the shit you've done against you man, but..."

"He's a good guy, Steve, an' frankly speakin' he's probably a better man than me. He's loyal to the bone an' would fight to the death for his friends. Guy's been on his own for a long time, an' been aware of his sexuality for jus' as long. Jay ain't the kinda guy to hide who he is. If you don't like who he is that ain't no matter to him, but he ain't gonna 'pologize or pretend to be somethin' else just to make some person he don't know comfortable."

"I think you an' him would be really good together Steve, an' maybe even more 'portant than all of that, I think he'd be even better for Chris. I'd try to set the two of them up instead if I didn't know Chris' gonna be an asshole about Jared's history. Look, like I said I know it don't sound great, but like I said I been thinkin' 'bout this for awhile. Jared would love you jus' like you deserve man, an' he'd give you all of them things you jus' said you wanted, the bonus being I think he'd also help settle Chris down."

"So... I mean..." Steve stopped and tried to take a moment to focus his thoughts not having even entertained the notion that Jason would have another ready solution to his relationship problem. "Tell me about him." Steve finally settled on and Jason knew as soon as he heard the words his friend had decided to give Jared a shot.

"Well, like I said he's been on his own a long time... since he was practically a kid really. He left home early an' took his buddy Chad with him. They got mixed up with some bad dudes and got into a bit of trouble, which is how I met him, but he'd never intentionally put you in danger. He's real smart, Steve! Got his GED while he was here and scored the highes' score they ever had! Fact is they made him take it twice 'cause they didn' b'leve he hadn' cheated. He loves cycles and has two arms covered in tats. Last I heard he was workin' on his back and legs."

"Some day he an Chad want their own cycle shop, but for the moment he just wants some place that's really home. Guy deserves a break, Steve. I ain't sayin' you should jus' jump into somethin' with him right this secon'. All I'm askin is that you think about it."

Then when you're ready lemme know an' I'll give you ol' Jay's number an' you two can chat an' see if'n you think I'm right. You're better 'an blood man, an' I hate seein' you hurtin' like this."

Steve had thought about it. But it had taken a breaking up, getting back together, and realizing they were gonna break up again before he'd been ready. Since the first time he'd talked to Jared though, Steve had known somewhere deep down that Jason had been right. Now finally it seemed as if everything he'd been wanting was within his grasp.

Leaning forward, Steve rested his forehead against Jared's breathing in his air, letting himself relax, and praying to every god there was that Chris' migraine meds would keep working like normal, and he'd stay out 'til morning. Steve needed this time with Jared, badly. He needed to know that he hadn't caused all this drama with Chris, upsetting everyone for nothing. He needed to feel all that love that he'd imagined he'd heard in Jared's voice over the last 10 months three weeks and six days that they'd been talking. He needed to feel again. He needed happiness and love and that sense of belonging that he'd been missing for so goddamned long.

Letting Jared pull him closer until their chests touched, Steve relaxed further, resting his head on Jared's shoulder, feeling Jared's lips on his forehead and his hands running over the bottom of his back. This, more than anything sexual they could do, was what he needed. The touching, and the cuddling, and the affection was what he'd been starved of. He needed to feel like he could walk up to Jared anywhere in the world and let everyone know how he felt and not have to worry that he was gonna set off Jared's temper. It wasn't until Jared's arms wrapped around him tightly that Steve realized he was crying. Not big heaving sobs, but quiet tears as his body shook in Jared's arms, feeling like the end of some horrific experience was past him, and maybe finally he could see the sunshine again.

He could hear Jared speaking softly in his ear, words of love, promises of forever, commitments to things that Steve's soul needed to have. It was everything Steve needed, and nothing he'd been getting from Chris, and Steve refused to be anything other than ecstatic that finally someone wanted him the same way he wanted them.

Slowly his tears stopped and his body began to react to Jared's touch and just to his very presence. Lifting his head, Steve moved to return Jared's kisses with his own, his lips finally touching what he'd so far only dreamed of. Moaning low and soft in the back of his throat, Steve let himself go feeling Jared's hands move up his back letting his shirt be pulled up and over his head.

For a moment he sat red faced as Jared held him away from himself looking at him, and Steve couldn't help but be embarrassed. He knew he didn't have Jared's body. He worked out occasionally on the equipment in the basement, but nothing serious. He was soft around the middle and always would be, but when Jared whispered;

“gorgeous”, Steve believed him and leaned in for another kiss, this one more passionate and more demanding, Jared making him feel like some male supermodel.

Jared’s shirt was soon to follow and this time it was Steve’s turn to watch, and the grin on Jared’s face told him the other man knew Steve liked what he saw. Large hands ran down his back, cupping his buttocks, and Steve leaned forward again, rubbing himself against the obvious bulge in Jared’s jeans. For so long he’d imagined this first meeting going so many ways, most of them long and drawn out nights of passion and sex, but now that the reality was before him, his needs were too great. He wanted too much, Chris was too close, and his patience was too far gone to hold out for something so fantasy filled.

Soon his hands were undoing Jared’s jeans as Jared returned the favor. The mechanics of getting two sets of jeans over their hips was fumbled through and made more difficult by the fact that Steve was reluctant to be far enough away from Jared to make the process easy. By the time they were done, they were each laughing, at least until Jared wrapped a huge hand around each of their dicks, and suddenly—the laughter turned into a strangled moan.

Steve knew he should be quiet. Chances were a tornado couldn’t wake Chris from his drug induced sleep, but still... Feeling Jared’s hand on him though was too much and Steve found himself unable to hold back letting his cries of pleasure be heard by anyone who wanted to listen.

When it was over, Steve found himself once more slumped against Jared, his boyfriend’s arms wrapped tightly around his waist, and Steve shivered at the thought of the word boyfriend in his head. It felt a little weird to be calling someone he had technically just met his boyfriend, but it felt more right, especially with how long they’d been talking on the phone. Steve knew outside of Jensen, Chris, and Jason there wasn’t anyone he knew better than Jared. “Shower?” Jared’s deep voice rumbled in his ear and Steve nodded then after yawning added, “and a nap.” For several more moments though he cuddled close letting his eyes close, enjoying what he had, knowing in his heart it was what he always wanted.

~JRA~DH~JRA~DH~JRA~DH~JRA~DH~ JRA~DH~JRA~DH~JRA~DH~

Jensen stood in the stockroom moving boxes onto the cart to take out front to fill everything for that night’s crowd. He’d stopped to wipe sweat off his forehead, when he felt arms wrap around his waist and smiled as a chin rested on his shoulder. “Ooooooooooh sweaty.” Jensen chuckled softly and turned to give his girlfriend Danneel a kiss then happily accepted the bottle of water she offered. “Randy said you were in here hiding and thought you might need this.” Frowning Danneel rubbed Jensen’s arm as he sighed. “What’s wrong baby? Randy said those new guys showed up. Did the one you were worried about turn out to be trouble after all?”

Snorting Jensen wiped his face off with his shirt before answering. “Truthfully, no. In fact he saved your BFF Sophia over there at the diner from JD. He managed to almost instantly make Steve happier than I swear I have seen him in years Danni. He’s got this fuckin’ permanent grin on his face and looks just like the guy I remember.”

“But?” She asked knowing something was troubling her boyfriend. She’d known him too long now not to be able to read him like a book.

“Chris, predictably, didn’t react well.” Jensen finally admitted pulling her close, needing to feel her soft curves in his arms, knowing she wouldn’t mind a little sweat. His girl might like to look good and wear nice clothes, but she always knew what he needed and never shied away from giving comfort. “First he and I got into it. Then he and Steve got into it. Then we came back here and he and Steve got into it again. Then I went in to talk to him a second time only to find him on the floor practically curled in a ball crying. Damn it Danni, he was crying for fuck’s sake! Do you have any idea what it takes it make him cry?”

Sighing, Danneel turned her face up to kiss the exposed flesh of Jensen’s neck, running her hands over his back quietly just letting Jensen talk. “The thing that sucks is I can’t even dislike Jared and blame him. He honestly seems like a nice guy. I mean Jesus... Do you know he got kicked out when he was 15? Just because he was gay, and Chad followed... just because he’s Jared’s friend. They stood up for Sophia and protected her and the girls from that biker asshole, even though they don’t know her. At some point they rescued that new girl that’s gonna be workin with you and Michaela from that biker guy. I just... this all sucks and Chris is hurt and damn it there isn’t even a bad guy to blame, ‘cause mostly he just did it to himself.”

“And I just...” Jensen stopped huffing and it was Danneel who finished for him. “And he’s one of your oldest friends and you can’t stand to see him in pain.” Tilting her head back she looked up at Jensen reading the worry clearly evident on his face. “Look, I know this sucks, but it’ll work out. I mean Jason knows how things are with Steve and Chris right? He loves them as much as you do. Just step back and wait, baby. I know patience isn’t one of your virtues, but things will work out. You’ll see.”

~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~

Jared lay in Steve’s bed, the thudding music from down on the bar coming through the floor. He wasn’t sure if Steve was sleeping or just being quiet, lost in his own thoughts. This time it was Christian who was on his mind. He wasn’t what Jared would call tall, which fit just fine for Jared. Steve wasn’t any taller than Chris and look how well that was turning out. Jared preferred guys who fit comfortably under his arm, one too tall guy in a relationship was enough in his opinion. Chris’ long brown hair hit his shoulders and those blue eyes of his practically beamed out of his skull like a laser beam pinning Jared down wherever he was at. His body appeared to be compact and lean, but Jared had no doubt that the man could hold his own in any fight he was in.

It was the man inside the pretty package though that had his mind working overtime, while his boyfriend dozed on his shoulder. “You’re thinkin’ awfully damned hard,” Steve grumbled and Jared found himself smiling into the other man’s hair, inhaling deep before pressing his lips to the top of Steve’s head.

“Tell me about Chris,” Jared requested softly and slowly ran a hand up and down Steve’s back while he waited for the answer to come. He appreciated that Steve wasn’t just spouting off the first thing that came to mind and most likely would be filled with hurt feelings and arguments and bad history filled hate. He wanted to know who really hid beneath those beautiful blue eyes shrouded in anger and distrust.

“Chris is...” Steve started and stopped shifting restlessly curling up slightly more wishing he could hide inside Jared where the hurt wouldn’t be so painful. He could feel Jared’s hand in his hair and his other arm wrapped around his waist holding him tightly up against Jared’s body.

“Chris is a redneck, good ol’ boy, argumentative fucker with a bad temper and a taste for blonde hair and big boobs.”

“Come on,” Jared sighed slightly irritated at the answer he’d been given, not having expected it and mad at himself for expecting Steve to be able to see through his current situation and be fair. “Don’t give me the ‘I’m pissed at him so I don’t see a damned good thing about him’ version. You know what I want. I know you’re pissed off and upset, but I also know you love the guy. So, I’ll ask once more. Tell me about Chris.”

Scoffing angrily Steve pulled away and got up to glare down at Jared. “Just ‘cause you don’t like the fuckin’ answer don’t mean it ain’t the truth!”

Sighing Jared watched Steve then held up a hand in surrender. “Fine, Steve, it’s the truth, now can you tell me the rest of the truth? Three days ago on the phone you were trying to convince me Jason was right about this big gay threesome y’all think we should have singing Chris’ praises, and you didn’t sound much happier with him then. So, come on.”

“I’ve told you about Chris a million times! Weren’t you listening?” Steve threw up his hands and paced around the room agitated. Fortunately Jared knew where Steve’s irritation lay and didn’t take his tone personally. “He’s an irritating motherfucker who can’t be satisfied with one goddamned person. He seems to need about twenty or thirty of his fuckin’ chicks in a night and then expects me to just crawl up into bed with him when none of the customer’s can see us and pretend it didn’t happen.”

“He’s a fuckin’ hothead who punches a wall like a three year old throwing a temper tantrum instead of talking something out like a reasonable adult. He thinks he’s perfect and the king of the world. God forbid he should be forced to admit I’m better than him at anything.” Steve paced back and forth in front of the bed waving his arms in the air, and Jared simply pulled himself up to a seated position, resting his back against the

headboard watching him. This wasn't exactly what he'd been looking for, but Jared was a damned smart guy, and he knew how to read between the lines.

So far what he'd really heard is that Chris' women hurt Steve deeply and made him incredibly self conscious wondering what he was missing that was keeping him from satisfying his man. The fact that Chris always came back to Steve said a lot to Jared and made him think there was more to these women than Steve was letting on. Whether it was because he didn't realize it or because he was too hurt to care Jared didn't know, but Chris' women were definitely moved up to spot number one on the things he needed to figure out.

The whole hothead thing was also an eye opener. Not because he had a temper, because everyone had a temper of some kind, no it was the hothead who punches walls that Jared found also particularly interesting. As pissed off as he was, Jared had no doubt that if Chris was also prone to punching Steve or Jensen or one of the waitresses or patrons he'd be hearing about it. The fact that he was turning his anger inward and only harming himself and inanimate objects made Jared wonder if there wasn't a good reason for that. Chris definitely had a temper, Jared had seen that for himself, but he suspected from what he'd heard about Chris and seen for himself that it was hiding insecurity and vulnerability.

The perfect and King of the World thing just made Jared want to roll his eyes. It sounded like a grade school argument, but he resisted the urge and decided to just forget that one for now. It made him wonder though how much these people really knew about each other. Jared knew that he and Chad were lucky. They were all they'd had for the last 10 plus years, so they had to know everything about each other, but it never failed to amaze him how people could know so many details about someone and never take the time to connect the dots and really figure them out. Sighing he settled down a bit more to make himself more comfortable and waited for Steve to speak again.

"He's... He's a jerk!" Steve complained and Jared quietly wondered where the foot stomp was after the statement that would have made the picture perfect. Realizing he wasn't going to get where he wanted to go, Jared decided to switch topics.

"What's Chris' favorite thing in the world... and don't tell me fuckin' girls in the back room, Steve." Jared asked pinning his boyfriend down with a look when the other man paused to glare. "Come on, tell me the real answer. What is the one thing, and I said thing not person, what is the one thing whether it's an object or something he does, or someplace he goes... what's Chris' favorite thing in the world?"

Huffing Steve crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against his bedroom wall staring at his bare feet when he got tired of seeing that closed off expression on Jared's face. "Music... his guitar... being on stage... it's kinda all one and the same I guess. Sometimes I think music is the only thing that gets Chris through the day. He lives for that moment when he can just wrap himself up in it an' it don't matter if he's on stage in

front of a bar full of people singin' his lyrics, or locked up here with his guitar on the couch and no one to listen but the mice in the walls."

"He gets this... calm that he doesn't really have at any other time. It's like... it's almost like he becomes another person. He's so... he's so happy an' it don't matter what you do, he'll be as patient as a saint. He laughs and grins this huge geeky grin that you can't help but smile along with. He bounces and dances and sings and gets so wrapped up in a song. He's just this big music dork, and you can't help but love him."

Jared wanted to punch the air and shout in victory having finally gotten down to the things he wanted to hear. Instead he smiled softly and offered a suggestion he wasn't sure how well it would be received, but he had to try. Fortunately for Jared, Steve did talk about his friends and his life during their phone conversations, and Jared suspected he'd said things he didn't even realize he was saying. It had been so easy earlier in the day to relax around Jensen because he felt like someone Jared had been friends with his whole life thanks to the stories he'd heard.

Chris though was this big puzzle. The pieces he was being given to put together did not match the picture on the outside of the box and Jared again wondered what Steve really knew about his friend. "Maybe it isn't someone else he's becoming." Jared suggested only to have Steve scoff at him. Holding up his hands, Jared smiled softly letting all the good things he felt for this man come out in his eyes. "Just hear me out, babe, ok? Maybe Chris doesn't become a different person when he's on stage or wrapped up in his music and thinks no one is watching, maybe, it's himself that he becomes. Maybe it's the only time when he really feels like he fits in his skin, maybe it's all the rest of the time when he's putting on a show, playing the part that he thinks the rest of the world needs to see."

"Look, I ain't saying that I know Chris better than you. I'm just listening to all the things that you've told me over the last ten almost eleven months and trying to form a picture. Jensen makes sense. Hell Jason makes sense. Chris... not so much. Tell me about Chris' daddy."

Frowning Steve looked up at Jared and pushed off of the wall slowly making his way over toward an outstretched hand until he felt the bed with his legs and crawled up until he could be pulled into Jared's arms his back to Jared's chest. "Tell me about Chris," Jared whispered in his ear hugging him tight and Steve closed his eyes feeling twitchy and torn up inside like the end of the world was about to come.

"Chris' daddy is a mean son of a bitch. I wish the fucker was dead, but all that hate in him will probably keep him alive forever." Pausing, Steve let his head fall forward, his chin touching his chest, Jared's lips touching the back of his head. "Chris was always coming to school with a new bruise or injury and the things he'd say to him were even worse. I mean Chris is a tough motherfucker, and he can take a punch, but damn the shit that old fucker would tell him. He'd call him worthless, tell him he'd never be anything, tell him he was a pansy ass, tell him he might as well have had a girl 'cause a

faggot was just 'bout the same and this was way before any of us even understood what our dicks were for let alone know who we wanted to stick them into."

Steve let Jared pull him backwards further, and finally let his head fall to rest on Jared's shoulder staring at the wall in his room, letting his mind go back to times that weren't so happy. "I lived around the corner, so Chris would come over at night and slip in the back door and up the stairs. Mamma never locked it, I think 'cause she knew our house was really the only safe haven Chris had. His daddy was... well Mamma told me once that some people were just born mean, and I figure that Chris' daddy was one of them."

"Chris always said he'd never be like that old bastard, but I guess you can't help some things." Taking a steadying breath, Jared forced himself not to comment right away, because he didn't think Steve would understand having his head taken off, but the urge was definitely there. "Don't say shit like that," Jared scolded and from the way Steve stiffened in his arms, Jared guessed that he hadn't done as good of a job at calming himself as he'd liked to have done. "It ain't right to compare Chris to that man you're tellin' me was his daddy. Unless you're holding some serious shit back, Chris ain't nothing like that bastard."

"They both had raging tempers. They both fuck anything that moves, hell even when Chris' mamma was still around Chris' daddy fucked anything that didn't have a dick. Neither one of them graduated high school..."

"Chris has a GED and has taken classes online to get a business degree," Jared interrupted silently apologizing to both Chris and Jason for betraying secrets that weren't his to spill, but he really couldn't resist any longer. It honestly wasn't that he thought he knew more about Chris than Steve did, he just didn't think Steve was looking at all the pieces in front of him and making them into the right picture. Instead he was forcing shit into spots they didn't really fit making some abstract image that wasn't even close to reality.

"Chris doesn't..." Steve started indignant and Jared squeezed him hard to shut him up then corrected him. "Yes he does. Only Jason was supposed to know because Chris didn't want you and Jensen to know. He thought you'd laugh. He got his GED years ago when he did his stint for that fight he broke up that according to Jason he didn't even start, but didn't want you and Jensen goin' to jail for."

"We tried to speak up," Steve argued weakly and Jared once more kissed the top of his head understanding. For someone like Chris, it would have been worse to hear them tell the truth and end up in jail unable to protect themselves, than to just do the time and take the punishment he knew he was strong enough to survive. Jensen and Steve were his world... they were Chris' proof that good honest loving people really did exist and tarnishing that image by them ending up in prison would have been worse for Chris than just getting through the ordeal himself.

“I know... I ain't laying blame. I'm just explaining. They offer GED classes in prison. That's how I got mine. That's how Chad got his. Hell Jason is working on a college degree. He'll have to finish his courses after he gets out of prison cause he can't do them all inside, but once he's done he'll have a music management degree so he can watch out for you and Chris if you ever decide to go big time. Once he got out, and you guys got internet hooked up in this place he enrolled in the college where Randy goes. He's working on a business degree and according to Jason he's gets almost straight A's.”

“Why didn't he ever tell us?” Steve whispered feeling like his world had been tilted on its axis. “Why... I don't... Does Jensen know?”

“No baby, I don't think so.” Jared whispered softly. “And, this isn't something for you to tear yourself up about. I probably shouldn't have told you. I'm sure Jason will be pissed, and God only knows how Chris will feel. I just... damnit Steve you love this guy and yet the picture you draw of him doesn't make sense. I mean... I can't imagine what it was like for y'all.”

Shaking his head, Jared wished he could get his hands on Daddy Kane and show him what it's like to pick on someone smaller than himself, but in the back of his mind a voice whispered that Daddy Kane probably already knows the same way Christian does. “I can't imagine being so young and knowing that your best friends are being hurt every night. I can't imagine how kids so young held up the weight of the world, and goddamn the adults in your lives who didn't protect all of you.”

“I'm not saying that all the things you think about Chris aren't true 'cause you very well could be 100% true and I could be just talking out my ass. I just... I wish you and Jensen would take a step back for a moment and reconsider all the things you think you know about Chris and Jason and even yourselves and see if maybe as adults you come up with a different end product than what you came up with as kids. Ain't a one of you that's a bad person. Ain't no one here to blame 'cept adults who didn't take care of their kids, but baby if you want us to be three instead of two... you're gonna have to do some soul searching and take off those blinders that are keeping you from seeing the whole picture.”

Instead of answering, Steve just nodded curling himself around Jared until he fell into an uneasy sleep. Jared however sat up well after the bar beneath him fell silent wondering if he wasn't the lucky one in the place. He'd never imagined that being homeless at 15 could be the better of two worlds, but suddenly it was looking more and more appealing all the time.

~CMM~CMK~CMM~CMK~CMM~CMK~CMM~CMK~CMM~CMK~

Yawning Chad wandered down the stairs from the living area and into the bar, scratching his stomach lazily contemplating going over to the diner to check up on Sophia and see if she was fairing alright that morning after her ordeal with JD the

previous day. Quietly as possible he closed the door to the upstairs area behind him and made his way across the empty bar. Halfway to the door though he heard a crash followed by what sounded like swearing coming from the office. Frowning, Chad hurried to the bar and grabbed the base ball bat from under the counter then rushed to the door, not stopping to worry about who could be behind before throwing it open and almost scaring Chris half to death.

“Jesus Christ, son,” Chris cursed and Chad blushed lowering the bat taking in the broken coffee mug on the floor and the dark liquid slowly making its way toward the pile of papers Chris was valiantly trying to save. “A little help here?”

Calling himself an idiot, Chad rushed back to the bar throwing the bat on top and grabbing some towels piled up on the end before running back to Chris.

After helping Chris save his invoices, Chad stepped back and leaned against the door jam forgetting about the lovely Sophia in favor of studying his new boss. Last night had not been, at least according to Randy, busy for the bar, and the younger man had found plenty of time to gossip about his bosses, providing Chad with a version of the man before him that he definitely had not gotten from their first meeting. If Randy was to be believed, Chris was not the irritating Redneck that he had portrayed himself as, but instead was more of a misunderstood cowboy more broken hearted than a Cassanova.

Of course, Chad wasn't sure that he *did* believe Randy, and in fact was more inclined to believe that the guy had something close to hero worship for Chris, but to be fair hadn't ruled anything out. Chad was well aware that he himself did not always make the best first impression on a person, and was willing to give Chris the benefit of the doubt especially when you factored in the minor detail of Jared mostly stealing Chris' long time boyfriend practically out from under his nose. Steve's willingness to be stolen was really not a minor detail either.

“You're up early,” Chad offered when Chris was once more settled in front of his desk and if the jerk he got in response from Chris as he looked to be trying not to jump out of his skin at the sound of someone else's voice was any indication, Chris had already gone back into his own little world. Chad had to wonder if Chris was really as with it as he appeared, remembering Jensen telling him how the drugs they gave him knocked him out so bad anytime he took them.

“Slept too much,” Chris muttered then leaned back sighing as he pushed the papers away. “Not sure I should be doing paperwork yet though,” Chris admitted turning to study Chad. “You're up pretty early yourself.”

Shrugging Chad looked at the floor a moment before looking back to into Chris' curious blue eyes. “Don't sleep too well the first few days in a new place.” Chad admitted and Chris nodded as if he understood.

"I was just about to go across to Sophia's for breakfast," Chad heard himself admitting and was a little surprised to hear the invitation that was to follow coming from his lips. "You wanna come with?"

If the look on Chris' face was any indication, the other man was as surprised to hear the offer as Chad had been to find himself making it, but apparently he had decided to take it as a peace offering. Soon Chad found himself crossing the two lane highway toward the diner breakfast companion following along behind sleepily.

Smiling at Sophia as he entered behind Chris, Chad followed the other man to a booth instead of the counter where they'd sat the day before, and he found himself curious to find out what the other man planned on discussing that required privacy.

"I uhh... I know Jared's the one I need to talk to," Chris started, and Chad lifted an eyebrow not having expected what appeared to be an apology coming so quickly and without the threats of head bashing on Chad's part that he'd expected to need to throw out. Chad was beginning to wonder if maybe he was going to have to just throw out that first impression all together because the man in front of him was quickly becoming a mystery, "but I wanna 'poligize for my behavior yesterday." Chris started looking down at the table, playing with some packets of Sugar as Sophia came over filling their coffee cups and leaving menu's before heading off silently. "I know I was out of line. I jus..."

"You're madly in love with Steve, and never really expected someone like Jared to come along and take him from under you?" Chad guessed when the other man stalled and fought back the urge to smirk when Chris looked up at him startled.

"You aren't the mystery you think you are, cowboy," Chad offered sipping his coffee pretending he had more figured out than he really did as Chris glared and Chad sighed shrugging hoping that the ideas forming inside his brain were closer to target than the shot in the dark that they really were. "Look man. I've seen a lot of life, and I have a feeling you've seen more than your fair share of the ugly yourself. You gotta look in your eye that doesn't come from good little boys from good boy homes like your boy Jenny. Nah, you got that look that JT gets... that one that says the world has chewed you up and spit you out. Not to mention your boy Randy talks highly of you. After we compared notes about the two of you, he seemed to think you and my boy would get along real nice."

"But to be fair I can see how you'd be pretty damned hostile about Steve's mooning over him." Shrugging Chad offered a half smile sipping his coffee again, not taking his eyes off the now defensive looking Chris, before continuing. "God only knows what Jared would do right now if some strange fucker tried to come between him and your boy. Thing is man, I ain't sure you got all that much to be jealous of. I mean, yeah, on the surface it looks bad for you, but I think if you chill out, things will be ok. Jay ain't no damned home wrecker. Hell, to be honest I think the only reason he didn't take off yesterday was 'cause you asked him not to. Normally Jay'd cut off his own damned

arm before he'd cause trouble for other people, no matter how much it'd break his own heart."

"What the hell is it with you people that seem to think me an' Steve are gonna have some damned orgy with that boy of yours?" Chris spat, but Chad just smirked seeing through his annoyance, recognizing the desperation beneath it. "Well I was thinking something a little more... long term than an orgy, but whatever floats your boat man."

"Your attempt at deflection is pretty good, so I'll let you get away with it for the moment, and instead I'll just point out that you didn't argue that you and Jay might have something in common where your pasts are concerned."

"Yeah, my Daddy didn't really give two fucks about me; s'long as I wasn't under foot, kept my damned mouth shut, and was available to act as his punching bag whenever he felt the urge," Chris snarled, "so fuckin' what?"

"Nothin'," Chad offered in return seeming unexcited about Chris' mood swings. "Just that I know Jared would understand. Jay's pretty good with people. He's got a knack for seeing to the heart a person, an' I gotta feeling you ain't gonna be much different no matter how many masks you put on. I also know that he'd never steal something that meant as much to you as Steve does."

"What the fuck do you know 'bout me an' Steve?" Chris spat back angrily and defensive and hating it, especially since Chad didn't seem all that bothered by Chris' attitude this morning.

"Me? I don't know shit about you and Steve. Your friends though are another matter, an' every fuckin' one of them says you are head over heels for that boy, only you're scared shitless to admit it. Course I can't say as I blame you. S'hard to believe anything good's gonna come when all the world wants to do is take a dump on your head all the time. An', it ain't like I'm asking you to trust Jay right this second jus' that you give it a chance"

Looking at the table top Chad played with his mug before looking up at Chris with serious eyes. "I ain't followin' him around for the hell of it. I wouldn't be doin' it if I didn't believe in him, an' I wouldn't be sitting here trying to smooth things out between the two of you if your friends hadn't convinced me that maybe you're someone who deserves a second and even third chance if need be."

Chad felt for a moment like he was watching a balloon deflate as he watched the anger slowly ease from Chris leaving the man looking broken and empty. "I just don't... I can't lose him." Chris admitted and leaning back in his seat, Chad nodded glad he'd had this talk with Chris, feeling much better about trusting Jay's heart in this man's hands. "Then don't fuck up by picking more fights with Jay. You give him a fair shot and I guarantee you ain't gonna lose a thing."

When Chris looked up with a glimmer of hope in his eyes, Chad knew he'd accomplished what he set out to do that morning, glad he'd had taken the time to listen to Randy the night before. The boy was definitely a lot like Jay, and Chad was even more glad Jay'd brought them there.



Chapter Three: *When the past comes creeping on in, confession is good for the soul*

A month later, Jared was leaning against the end of the bar watching the room. Things were jumpin' like they always were on a Friday night. Jensen and Randy were behind the bar. Randy only worked on the weekend now that there were enough people to help out during the week if they got a surprise rush.

Jared learned that the rest of the week he took classes at a college about 50 miles away where his boyfriend had a tattoo parlor and a couple of other business'. Randy was a pretty good guy, and Jared wondered if in a different life maybe he could have been as happy and carefree as Randy was. His boyfriend Shannon was a trip and a half. It scared Jared more than a little how well he and Chad got along. Jared was pretty sure they were making his hair grey.

Things were calming down, and Steve and Chris had actually started talking civilly again. Jared himself had actually had a real conversation or two with the man that hadn't ended up in insults. Actually Chris seemed to be a pretty good guy once he packed away his attitude, and surprisingly enough hadn't even taken a swing at Jared for spilling the beans about his GED and college career, although Jensen and Steve had made him promise no more keeping secrets like that from them.

Chris and Jared still had their moments, and Jared figured that was to be expected until they got this Jared and Steve, Chris and Steve, Jared and Chris, and maybe eventually Jared and Chris and Steve thing figured out. So far it was the connection between himself and Chris that was holding things up, but apparently the only people who were worried about it was himself and Chris. Everyone else seemed to think it was as unstoppable as lava from a volcano.

Once he and Chad and Genevieve had gotten things down, Jared had ordered the three men off to have a friends night out on what he knew would be a slow night, promising he'd call if someone tried to burn down the bar. When he'd finally dragged his ass upstairs, wondering how the others did this every night because bouncing and running

bar had just about killed him, he found his boyfriend happy and passed out drunk on the living room floor with Chris and Jensen curled up with him. Quietly he and Chad had just tried to make them comfortable, and then left them alone, not wanting to break the fragile bond that was reforming between them.

Jensen was a trip himself, and Jared had found a second best friend in the man. He never failed to crack Jared the hell up and the two of them had engaged in a hellacious prank war until poor Genevieve got caught in the middle. They'd called a truce once she'd glued the zippers shut on their last pairs of clean jeans for the week while hiding their dirty pairs. He'd actually had to sit Chad down and reassure him that he wasn't being replaced at one point, but that seemed to be working itself out too, much to Jared's relief. The last thing he wanted to do while making new friends was lose the one that meant the most to him.

Things with Steve were so good it was scary. So far everything had been fairly easy managing their moods and avoiding much more than a temper flare here and there. Jared had yet to sleep in his own bed, but wasn't too broken hearted about it, because Sophia had started spending the occasional night with Chad, and Jared couldn't be happier for his friend.

Even Genevieve had flourished here having caught the eye of one of the girls who worked tables on the weekend, Michaela Conlin, an artist who used the tips she made from the drunks to keep her in art supplies. The two made a striking pair and Jared was relieved to see something good finally coming from the woman who had suffered so much at the hands of Jeffrey Dean.

He hadn't talked to her as much as maybe he should, but Chad assured him that she understood and seemed almost relieved to be moving on to something unconnected to the biker who had made her life hell. If things were really going as well as Chad thought, Jared wouldn't be surprised if Gen didn't eventually move out of the room upstairs and in with her new artist girlfriend. As long as she was happy, Jared was all for it.

They'd gotten word a couple days before from Jason's lawyer that there was a chance he'd get out earlier than expected due to overcrowding and they were all cautiously excited. For his part, Jared was terribly excited to see his old friend again, so he could thank him for what he'd done for them. Jared was feeling more and more every day, like he'd finally found his little roving band of outcasts a home.

The situation with JD was eerily quiet. Steve, after Jared had confessed every small detail one lone and very dark night, had told him not to rush into calling Agent Morrow, instead somewhat surprisingly asking him to wait 'til they were all home and that included Jason, so they all could talk about it being as it would affect all of them. Jared being no idiot had been more than happy to concede to his wishes.

“Jay! Need more Jack and a case of Coronas!” Jensen shouted and Jared acknowledged with a nod before scanning the room for Chad. Spotting him flirting with a table of co-eds Jared sighed and let out a whistle, grunting with satisfaction with Chad’s head shot up, his cheeks flushed red with embarrassment. In puppy love with Sophia he might be, but some things would never change, and Jared hoped Soph wasn’t the jealous type. Jerking his head towards the stockroom Jared was satisfied when Chad nodded and stepped away from the table. Maybe if he hurried Chad would still be paying attention when he got back.

~JTP~CMM~MC~JTP~CMM~MC~JTP~CMM~MC~JTP~CMM~MC~

Heading out of the stockroom, Jared immediately looked for Chad and was a little surprised to see him glaring at someone. Following his gaze, Jared’s steps stuttered when he saw a familiar dark head at the bar fingering what looked to be a long island ice tea. Carefully making his way over, Jared placed the boxes on the end of the bar before moving to where the other man was sitting, leaning a hip against the hard wood.

“Misha,” Jared greeted softly, unsurprised when the brunette’s head didn’t move so much as an inch sure he was fully aware of Jared the second he’d stepped out of the stockroom. “What are you doing here, Misha?” Jared asked his soft drawl underlined with steel that he knew the other man would recognize.

“I heard you were in the area,” Misha admitted, shoulders slumped as if being crushed by the weight of the world.

“An’ I heard you’re hidin’ from your mommy an’ step-daddy,” Jared countered. “But you can’t do it here.”

“No room for an old friend?” Misha asked sounding hurt and Jared sighed letting his eyes close for a moment before seeking out Steve’s comforting presence at the other end of the bar. He didn’t even need to look to know Chad was making his way slowly toward them just in case.

“Were we friends Misha?” Jared threw back equal amounts of hurt in his own voice. “Fuck buddies, a convenient, hell maybe even so far as a regular lay, but never friends Misha. Friends have each other’s back when shit hits the fan. They don’t duck out and run, leaving you holding the bag, or worse yet sell you out to save their own ass.”

“I’m sorry Jay,” Misha whined softly turning his eyes finally toward Jared. “You don’t understand.”

“What the FUCK DON’T I UNDERSTAND MISHA?” Jared asked ending up in a shout that quieted the immediate area surrounding him moving out like a wave until the entire bar was eerily silent. “You’re a FUCKIN’ TRAITOR! You CERTAINLY ain’t ANYONE’S FRIEND! NOW GET YOUR SORRY ASS OUT OF HERE BEFORE I PUT YOU IN A

BED NEXT TO YOUR SORRY STEP-DADDY! STRINGS AND STUDS IS CLOSED TO YOU!"

"I'm in trouble, Jay," Misha begged eyes wide and scared.

"You shoulda thought about that before you stuck a knife in my goddamned back, now MOVE!" Jay spat unforgiving, yanking Misha out of his seat, practically dragging him to the door where he tossed him out to land in the dirt and gravel in a heap.

"Jay he'll fuckin' kill me." Misha begged again lunging forward toward Jay who just stepped backward, checking his impulse to kick the other man in the face.

"Been there, done that, almost died thanks to you." Jared sneered, feeling Chad push around him, his fists clenched at his sides.

"Get the fuck out of here," Chad spat, "fore your step-daddy's the least of your worries. You wanna turn rat that's your business. When you set Jayman up to be your fall guy, then it's mine. I suggest you leave before I put a bullet in your head."

Standing Misha cast one last look of longing toward Jay before running into the darkness. Several moments later a motorcycle engine could be heard roaring to life before speeding off. "He's not worth it, Jay." Chad said softly watching his friend stare toward where Misha had run off.

"I know that," Jared replied angrily then rubbed a hand over his face. "Sorry."

Chad shrugged having gotten worse from Jared's temper and was well beyond getting excited over a crossword or two. Taking out his cigarettes, Chad shook out two lighting them both before handing one to Jared. "We gonna have to leave?" Chad asked after filling his lungs letting the smoke ease out taking his tension and anger with it.

"I hope not," Jared said looking into the darkness worried. "I hope to God not."

~JTP~CMM~CMK~SPC~JRA~JTP~CMM~CMK~SPC~ JRA~

When Jared and Chad walked into the bar, they were met not far into the room by Christian who had a dark look on his face. "You wanna 'splain that?"

"Not at the moment," Jared offered unapologetically and Chad shouldered his way past his friend again while Jared checked on Genevieve, seeing her talking quietly to Michaela and was relieved when she flashed him a confident smile knowing she'd take care of not just keeping Michaela out of it but the other two girls on the floor. "Not now Chris."

"I fuckin' decide when now is around here!" Chris spat back and unafraid Chad just stepped up into his space standing nose to nose with the irritating redneck.

“You are the last thing in this world that scares me Christian Fuckin’ Kane. I’ve seen shit that would send your scrawny Middle America ass runnin’ home crying to your Mommy. I’ve seen things blown to bits close enough to where I was standin’ that I was blown so far back I thought I was in another state. I’ve seen people die in front of my fuckin eyes for **nothin’** and been scared to death I was gonna be next an’ known the only thing stopping it was not lookin’ like I gave a shit. I’ve sowed my best friend shut when he was bleedin’ so goddamned bad through my fingers I was sure there was more blood on the outside of his body than on the inside. So back the fuck up, or put the fuck up. Either way, we ain’t **talkin’** about this right now. When JT’s ready is when it’ll happen.”

Jared decided he’d been quiet long enough and stepped up so his quiet voice could be heard by only Chad and Chris. “You want answers, Chris, you’ll get answers, but not here and not now. We all got things we ain’t proud of, an’ people that we’d rather never show up again in our lives. You want me gone, Chris, you say the word and Chad an’ me are outta here. Otherwise step off so we can go back to work. Regardless of what you **think** you know about what just happened, I was trying to do my job. But hey, you wanna punk like Misha Collins hanging around here, by all means. Knowin’ Misha as well as I do I’m quite sure we’ll see him again. Maybe if you’re really lucky he’ll have step-daddy with him the next time.”

“An’ just how well is it that you know this punk, Jared?” Chris snapped only it came out sounding more like ‘Jaayreed’ all long vowel and southern sounding in his anger.

“Intimately,” Jared snapped his last bit of patience long gone. “You can’t exactly claim that Steve’s the only person you’ve fucked in your life either, so don’t throw stones at glass houses, bitch! Now **STEP BACK AND STEP OFF** or fire my ass because either way I ain’t standin’ here listenin’ to your full of shit mouth anymore.”

Not waiting for an answer, confident Chad would take care of things, or not take care of anything, either of which Jared didn’t much care about one way or the other. “Jensen I’mma goin’ to get your booze now. Corona an’ Jack?” Jared called out storming past before stomping into the stock room slamming the door behind him. Jensen frowned from the door to the booze still on his counter from earlier and back before turning to Randy and Steve who was hovering just over Randy’s shoulder.

Steve’d wanted to rush out the second Jared’d started to haul that guy out, but Randy the overgrown bastard he was, held him back and told him to stay put. It was Jensen’s reassurances though that Chad would have Jared’s back and that his boyfriend would surely fill him in later that finally kept him safely behind the bar. Now though there wasn’t anything that would keep him out of that stockroom and didn’t much care of that was Chris’ glare he felt on his back or not. “I’ll be back,” he called before hurrying after Jared closing the stockroom door again behind him.

“Jay?” He called seeing not much but Jared’s broad back all hunched over like it had broken under the weight of the world. “D’y’all need something more?” Jared asked, his voice soft and rumbly from the emotion clogging his throat.

“What’s goin on Jay? Who was that guy?” Steve asked ignoring the question. Moving forward, he laid a hand on Jared’s shoulder feeling the quiver running through those powerful muscles, wondering what could affect his thus far patient and strong lover this way.

“His name’s Misha. You could call him a lapse in judgment. Chad may come off as a douche, but if you ever needed an example of why you should listen when he speaks its Misha. Chad hated him on sight. Me, I was dumb enough to trust the fucker and nearly got myself killed for it, then sent to prison for my trouble.”

“Were you two...?” Steve started to ask not sure what words to use, but Jared’s short humorless laugh cut him off. “Not nearly as important as I wanted to believe we were. He wasn’t anything like you, even if I wanted him to be.”

Steve couldn’t help but smile as a warmth filled his heart at the statement. It wasn’t the first time Jared had hinted that he was something of value to him, but each and every time meant a lot to Steve. “I’m sorry he hurt you.” he said softly, the worlds feeling inadequate even as they left his mouth, but he felt that they needed said anyway.

Turning Jared snorted softly, a sad smile spreading his lips. “That’s what makes you, well you. You are way too good for a bastard like me, baby. Seriously, you should stay away from me. I ain’t the nice guy in this story. I smoke too much, I’ve been known to drink too much although I try not to do that as much anymore as I used to, and I’ve done really bad things to people who didn’t deserve them all in the name of being included and being safe. Hell my own relatives realized I wasn’t worth good people’s time.”

Reaching out, Jared wrapped a hand around the ever present rosary around Steve’s neck studying it, wishing he believed it held the answers to the world like other people did. “You’re a good guy Steve, you care about people, and hell I doubt you’ve ever broken a law in your life. I am NOT the guy you wanna hang on to. You’d be best off listening to Chris and letting him kick my dumb ass outta here.”

Steve hated being told what to do, almost as much as he hated having people try to make up his mind for him, like he was some delicate flower too fragile to have a mind of his own. So, when he didn’t so much as get irritated, that was his first clue that he’d fallen way harder for this mystery biker than he’d realized. “I think I’m old enough to know what and who I want in my life Jared,” Steve said softly before moving around to Jared’s side so he could see his face. “And frankly the good boy scene hasn’t been very good for me or my heart. Hell why do you think I ended up on this circle track with Chris?”

“Someone hurt you other than Chris?” Jared asked turning to face him, and Steve had to blink at the unexpected question, then realized it was probably one of the reason’s he’d fallen for the guy. Most of the people, employees and regulars alike, treated him like the walking wounded, mostly thanks to Christian who felt the need to warn and threaten people away while not exactly airing all of Steve’s dirty laundry, but often tending to give them the Cliff’s Notes Version.

He’d guessed that Jensen had threatened Chris with removing his dick from his body because he hadn’t had *‘the talk’* with Jared and Chad yet surprisingly, and somehow Jared hadn’t taken one look at him and seen the flashing neon *‘heartbroken and foolish’* sign that normally hung over his head. Either that meant he’d gotten over it, or maybe the bulbs just burned out, but Steve was certainly not gonna complain, because it was nice to have someone like Jared in his little universe, which made answering Jared’s question tricky.

He obviously couldn’t just not answer because well really there were only two of them here and Steve had never been a good enough of a liar to come up with a good one at the spur of the moment. Which also meant **lying** was out of the question. But telling the truth risked ruining the very thing that meant so much.

“If I tell you, are you gonna like...”

“Become one of the other idiots around here that think you’re made of porcelain?” Jared finished for him, his lips quirking into a small smile. “My momma, when I was a little kid and she was still alive, had a whole fuckin’ display case of these god-awful porcelain dogs. The things were ugly and creepy and I swear to god would chip if you so much as sneezed too close to them. I think of them damned porcelain dogs whenever I meet some whimpering sap who’s so goddamned *‘oh poor me’* that he don’t have the brains or the will to pick himself up outta the pig shit. Makes me wanna punch the crap outta them every time, just put my hands around their necks and squeeze ‘til they **really** got somethin’ to bitch about.”

“Trust me man, the last thing you remind me of is one of my momma’s porcelain dogs.”

“So you know then?” Steve asked confused only to get Jared looking back at him with what Steve guessed was a matching look of confusion.

“I know they’re all fools. Me an’ Chad’ve been tryin’ to figure out why they treat you like you’re gonna break if they so much as show some damned weepy tampon commercial or somethin’. Didn’t know why though, certainly didn’t know it was because more than one person was stupid enough to break your heart.”

Steve nodded and touched Jared’s chest almost reverently, before heaving himself up on top of a case of whiskey to begin his tale. “First guy I ever dated was James Van Der Beek. We were in high school together, an’ he was a year ahead of me but like, on the complete opposite end of the popularity scale. He was one of the ‘IN’ kids, but I was

just some outcast, a poor kid with poor kid friends, no Daddy and a Mamma who couldn't keep it together long enough to really support us. But, his brother and my brother who is older than me were buddies so sometimes he'd be at the house when they were hanging out. He was the star athlete you know. I was just his dirty little secret. He informed me he was gonna marry the little cheerleader he'd sworn he wasn't dating by showing me her engagement ring the day before he proposed to her."

"Then there was Tommy. He was all tall and beautiful and boy next door, a model I met on summer vacation before I started college, I'd gotten accepted to culinary school. Told me I was beautiful and beautiful people were meant to be together forever. Only he didn't explain that he meant every beautiful person he ever saw, in like... his whole life, guess I know how to pick 'em huh? After I caught him fucking some bald freak in our bed, I packed up my shit and went to college. Of course I was a year late and had lost my scholarship, but hey... beauty can't be caged you know."

When Jared snorted Steve flicked his gaze to him. "He didn't really say that, did he?"

Steve nodded smirking back at Jared's incredulous expression. "Oh yeah."

"There last but certainly not least there was Ashton." It was more the way Steve said the name than anything else that propelled Jared to Steve's side, the mixture of pain, love and great soul deep hatred that could only come from a heart shattered by realizing the person you loved was everything you hated, and nothing like what you imagined them to be, something Jared himself was very familiar with.

"Ashton was everything. " Steve started turning his face slightly into Jared's touch as he laid a hand on Steve's cheek. "I met him in college. He was out and open and quirky and this huge breath of fresh air. The four of us didn't have the bar yet, and somehow had all gotten kinda scattered into the wind so I was on my own and didn't really know what to do with myself."

"Ashton and I were that couple that everyone would say *'I want something just like you two'*, and I would just grin because I just **knew** what they meant, ya know? I mean we talked about everything. We had a million plans for the future, must haves and variations and variations on our variations. Then one day it was just... done. *'I'm sorry babe I just need something new. This has all gotten too normal and boring for me.'* And then the fucker was out the door and never came back."

"I just... I wanted to die Jay. To say I didn't see it coming was a **MASSIVE** understatement. Ashton leaving wasn't even on my horizon! He'll I'd practically picked out the china for our big Vermont wedding. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't get out of bed, I didn't eat, I hardly slept even though I never got out of bed, I just... existed, barely and completely without my own permission. Christ if Chris hadn't finally gotten tired of not knowing where I was and dragged me back here after picking up all my little pieces, I'd probably be dead or still hiding in that fucking bed."

“I had no idea something could hurt so badly, and I just knew man, I fuckin’ **knew** I would never get over him. But of course I was wrong, not that Chris made trying to re-enter the dating scene easy. Then he and I started in on our little routine of boy gets horny. Boy fucks boy. Boy declares mad love for boy. Other boy runs off and fucks a blonde skank from the bar, and then tries to crawl back into the first boy’s bed all the while scaring off anyone who even so much as looks in the first boy’s direction. Not that you seem to listen to Chris much. You really don’t follow the script much do ya, buddy?”

Jared snorted again and half grinned shrugging a shoulder. “Not so much no, and I think we both know now that Chris does what he does because he’s scared. If it helps though, I know how it feels, what Ashton did to you I mean.”

“That Misha guy?” Steve asked softly and Jared nodded taking a deep shuddering breath. “I don’t,” Jared started, clearing his throat before trying again. “I don’t really wanna tell the story twice. I mean, I know you deserve to know the truth before everyone else, Steve, but... I just...”

Steve put a finger over Jared’s lips. “I can wait Babe.” Leaning in Steve took a kiss, feeling lighter when Jared gathered him up in his arms, chasing all thoughts of Ashton away back into their cell.

~JTP~CMM~CMK~SPC~JRA~JTP~CMM~CMK~SPC~JRA~

The bar was finally closed. Jared had no idea what time it was, and didn’t want to think about it. He was tired at least physically, but his brain was buzzing with snippets of everything that had happened tonight, and everything he’d learned from. He had his cigarette in one hand and a bottle of Jack Daniels in the other as he wandered aimlessly through the room taking a puff one second and a swig the other.

Hidden away in the corner of the bar forgotten except for the rare occasion Steve used it to write some new song, and otherwise collecting dust was a piano. Normally, Jared wouldn’t divulge his musical talents, because really he’d never used them beyond piano lessons he hated (although not really, he just hadn’t wanted to admit the truth to his Aunt), but he had a song stuck in his head and needed to let it free.

The others were finishing up their closing duties. Steve was at the door letting out Randy and Shannon and the girls, Genevieve leaving to spend the night with Michaela. Jared figured she probably knew things were gonna be deep and didn’t much want a part of it, not that he blamed her. Then he wondered if he was really getting to be that much of an emo bitch. Chris was wandering around putting chairs on tables and Jared would bet money that he was glaring at his back while doing it. Jensen was attempting to get the bar back together while Chad finished sweeping. Jared supposed that there was something he should be doing, but he just didn’t have it in him at the moment, too worried about a past that just wouldn’t go away.

Jared ran his hands over the wood covering the keys, protecting them from time and neglect. After wiping the dust off on his pants and placing his cigarette pack and the bottle on the top of the piano, Jared tested its sound, trying a few notes, then chords.

“You play Jay?” He heard Steve call surprised, but ignored him as his fingers settled over the right keys letting the song and the words flow out of him, his voice deep and strong carrying the words above the closing noise.

*In every heart there is a room
A sanctuary safe and strong
To heal the wounds from lovers past
Until a new one comes along*

He thought about Misha, feeling the pain that always came rushing out finding the wounds that never seemed to heal and making them ache once again. Then he thought about Steve and his story. He couldn't help but wonder if this thing happening between them wasn't possibly the worst idea in the history of ideas. It didn't seem that either of them had much luck in the love and relationship department.

*I spoke to you in cautious tones
You answered me with no pretense
And still I feel I said too much
My silence is my self defense*

Closing his eyes, Jared let the music carry him wherever it pleased, his fingers finding the necessary keys without trouble, the song was like an old friend you loved even though they brought you nothing but pain. It seemed fitting though, for his mood and his... whatever that was happening with Steve and maybe Chris if he could figure out how to pull them all together. As much as he doubted it was a good idea for them to follow this course they had chosen, he knew there was no way he could stop and pick another path.

*And every time I've held a rose
It seems I only felt the thorns
And so it goes, and so it goes
And so will you soon I suppose*

There was no doubt in Jared's mind that once Steve knew of his past, all the gory details laid out for them to pick and prod as distasteful as they are not just the highlights and low points that he had so far, that he'd lose the other man. No one other than Chad had ever stayed by his side. His parents died leaving him with people who saw him more of a burden than a child and had turned him out for something as simple as the sex of the people he was attracted to, although he supposed to be fair given that they'd never really cared for him to begin with so he guessed it possibly had just been the

excuse they used.

*But if my silence made you leave
Then that would be my worst mistake
So I will share this room with you
And you can have this heart to break*

Lying wasn't an option for Jared though, even a lie by omission. That just wasn't the kind of man Jared was. He'd feel worse he knew if he led Steve on, only for the other man to discover his past after he was in too deep. At least now, Jared figured he could minimize the effect on Steve's heart.

*And this is why my eyes are closed
It's just as well for all I've seen
And so it goes, and so it goes
And you're the only one who knows*

Feeling a presence next to him, Jared opened his eyes and glanced over to see Chad leaning against the piano back watching him with eyes that had seen everything Jared had and paid the price for being his friend. Not strong enough to see the evidence of what he'd done to his friend, Jared closed his eyes and let his mind wander once more as his fingers wandered aimlessly from one song right into another sometimes coming back to this song that seemed to reflect everything he wanted and was afraid of, no longer singing, but letting the notes express his pain and desperation. No matter what he said here, Chad would always be the witness to Jared's life, the only man who would ever hold the entire script to the show that is Jared Tristan Padalecki.

For that Jared's heart ached and wished it could make up for the damage he'd done, but knew his friend would never allow an attempt at reparations saying there was no other place he'd be.

*So I would choose to be with you
That's if the choice were mine to make
But you can make decisions too
And you can have this heart to break*

If only wishes really did come true, Jared knew this place was where he could be happy. He had Chad, the best friend ever in the history of the world, he had a job with people he liked, even if Christian needed to learn to lay off the watch dog routine and the judging others routine, and learn that Jared held no intention of hurting Steve or Chris himself as the others had done to them both.

And, Steve ... even without anything else he was the ultimate reason to make a life here. Somehow he had made his way into Jared's heart, like liquid steel, trying to fill up all the places that were cracked or missing, damaged by the people who had come before him. The fact that Steve wanted him in return, looking at him as if Jared were the one that was the savior, when Jared knew it was the other way around, was the only reason Jared would ever need to lay himself out once more. As long as those breathtaking eyes looked at him with such devotion and trust, Jared knew he would endeavor to live up to Steve's expectations.

*And so it goes, and so it goes
And you're the only one who knows*

Then suddenly the song stopped and the story started, not giving anyone the time to prepare themselves for what was to come. "I was fifteen when Chad an' I left home. Chad was sixteen, but not any less clueless than I was. Neither of us knew jack about life on our own. We were Richie Riches. Chad was waiting on a trust fund; I was just trying to survive Hell. The original plan had been to make it through 'til I could leave for college then take off and never come back. Guess if I had kept my big mouth shut and my dick on my pants it probably would have worked."

"You didn't know," Chad said softly and Jared snorted unimpressed. "I should have! Come on, Chad. When the hell were they ever supportive of anything I did? I fuckin' should have known and if I didn't I was a fuckin' idiot."

"Know what?" Chris asked inserting himself in for the first time and Chad gave him the stink eye as Jared paused to take a drag on his cigarette. "That they would kick my ass out when they found out I was gay." Jared reminded sarcastically.

"Course my Uncle had to beat the livin' hell outta me first. I showed up on Chad's doorstep with a fat lip, one eye swollen shut and probl'y more than one cracked rib. Tol' him I was leavin'. Didn't have any clothes, didn't have any money, hell didn't have any mode of transportation 'cept my feet. Chad dragged me into the house, got me cleaned up, and told his parents we were leavin' in the morning and didn't know if we'd be back."

"An' I haven't regretted it since." Chad insisted and Jared smiled a little rolling his eyes, but Chris, always the nosy one, butted in once more asking, "Not once?" Chad shook his head seriously stealing a drag from Jared before answering. "Wishing we'd eventually gone home, a few times yeah when things were really bad. Wishing we'd gone somewhere else first? More than once of course, but never regretted coming with. Jared's my buddy. He's been my best friend since I was in first grade and he was in kindergarten getting his ass kicked by Richard Havard Ackerson III. Ain't no way I was gonna just turn my back on him then an' let him leave everything he'd ever known behind on his own."

“And your parents just... let you go?” Jensen asked frowning, and Chad shrugged confused. “Yeah, of course. I mean, why should they care?” Steve shook his head then lit his own cigarette passing an extra to Chris before pulling up a few chairs and settling in. Jensen muttered something under his breath about chimneys before watching Steve stubbornly drag his chair over to sit next to Jared who smiled weakly at him before continuing.

“My first thought was to find my other Uncle, but I didn’t really know much about him. Still don’t. I knew he traveled around a lot on a motorcycle. I knew he lived down here in Texas somewhere, but didn’t know where. Hell I still don’t know that either. S’been eleven years and I’m still lookin’ for the bastard. He’s my Momma’s brother. They didn’t really talk much since Mamma was all high on the hog and my Uncle’s jus’ an embarrassment bein’ a poor slob on a bike, or at least that’s what my Aunt says. My Uncle’s the younger of the three of them, an’ according to my Aunt he was always the bad seed. I figured if that was the case we should fit together pretty damned well.”

“Jay thought if we could find him he’d take Jay in then I would go home an’ finish school. We just... never found him.” Chad explained matter of factly, not seeming the least bit upset or angry that his life had been derailed right alongside Jared’s.

“Found trouble though,” Jared sneered lazily after taking a drink then passing the bottle. “The bright idea was that if we were gonna look for my Uncle we needed to be on motorcycles like he was. **Bright** idea, I gotta tell you.”

“Jay,” Chad started, but paused at the dark look from Jared before continuing. “I’ve said it more than once already and I will KEEP saying ‘til it gets through your thick skull. We were KIDS! You were a kid! Hell Jay you didn’t even have your learner’s permit yet! You’d only been fifteen for 3 days! You didn’t know, and you definitely couldn’t have known, and for fuck sake you **shouldn’t** have known! Your fuckin’ guardians shoulda been taking care of you not kicking a fifteen year old confused and neglected kid out on the streets!”

“Anyway...” Jared drawled changing the subject they would never agree on. “So we met this guy who built cycles. He said he’d teach us in exchange for working at his shop. Turns out he’s a member of the Rebel Sons.”

“Are you fuckin me?!” Chris exclaimed almost choking on the whiskey he’d been drinking. “You’re a one-percenter? Get the fuck out! Right goddamned now! Get the fuck outta my bar!”

“Shut the fuck up Chris!” Jensen shouted jumping up. “I’m sick of your goddamned mouth! You’re the reason he’s tellin this story out here for everyone, and you ain’t the only person who has a say in this bar an’ I don’t want him to leave!”

“I wanna hear what he has to say,” Steve inserted quietly standing himself, putting his body between Jared and Chris, afraid Jared would just bolt of the argument went on very much longer.

“Steve, you can’t mean...” Chris whined only to be cut off, by a viscous glare from Jensen and slowly he sat finally beginning to come to the realization that they were all right all along. Whatever plans he’d had for himself and Steve would need to be altered to include one six foot seven inch of an angry and forgotten Rottweiler puppy named Jared Padalecki.

“I want to hear what he has to say, Christian,” Steve shot back growing irritated with his currently off again and soon to be never again boyfriend if he didn’t shut his yap. “Now sit down, shut up, and don’t interrupt again or YOU will never see my bed again.”

Sitting hard, Steve gritted his teeth, and made a show of taking Jared’s hand. “How old were you when you met this guy?” Jensen asked softly trying to get the conversation started again, before taking a drag on Chris’ cigarette to try and calm his nerves.

“Fuck, it wasn’t more than two months after we left!” Chad spat out itching to get his hands on Chris. “We were eventually full members, but it wasn’t ‘til we were each eighteen, an’ we’ve paid for our fuckin’ crimes! I hate to tell you princess, but there are worse places than jail.”

Exhaling the smoke he’d been holding, Jared finally took his tale back up as if the outburst and everything after hadn’t happened, his attention focused on Steve’s hand in his own. “He was a grumpy old bastard, but Manners taught us a lot about cycles and hell, life in general. I’m pretty sure its thanks to him that we didn’t get in further over our heads than we did. He did a pretty good job of keeping us out of the heavy shit. Like Chad said, we weren’t even in it ‘til we turned eighteen. I’m pretty sure that was thanks to Manners, ‘cause Misha has been in it pretty much his whole fuckin’ life.”

“Our job was pretty much to keep the cycles running, build new ones. Chad an’ me make a pretty good team. I’m real good at the mechanical, and Chad does most of the artistic side, so we got to be the club’s cycle guys, sometimes even for the other chapters.”

“We were in it for three years before things blew up. Misha hung out with us a lot, we were the only ones close to his age. Me an’ Misha just... hell it wasn’t like we were boyfriends or anythin’. We just fucked... a lot. ‘Course Misha fucked everything a lot. Me... I for awhile there though that it was somethin’ more than it was, but Misha corrected that notion real quick once he set me up.”

“He’d known we were planning to leave. Hell that was always the plan from day one. It was never meant to be a permanent position. Shoulda left a lot sooner than we did, but I got comfortable, didn’t think and got us drug into some shit we didn’t know how to get out of. I mean, we never killed anyone or anything, but we’ve each seen a few people

killed. Beat up a few more that I wasn't sure would live. Helped burn down some buildings, helped give some people warnings. Helped Misha move guns a time or two, but mostly helped with the protection of the cargo an' built cycles."

"Misha though, Misha saw everything. His real daddy was one of the original creators of the group, an' from the time his daddy died there was no gettin' around the fact that it would be his one day. Misha though, somethin' happened, I don't know what really, but somethin' did an' he started lookin' at things different. I didn't even realize what he was doing 'til me an' Chad got pulled in by the FBI and ATF and DEA an' any other damned initial agency you could think of."

Pausing, Jared bowed his head for a moment needing a second before he could go on, wondering what he'd do without Steve, until he felt the other man's fingers on his cheek and turning his head saw love still there behind the tears in his boyfriend's eyes. Amazed and awed, Jared took a deep breath and finished his tale.

"They knew a lot. So much I knew there had to be someone inside, but I had no idea who at first. They caught us after we ran. Old man Manners had left 'bout six months before, just took off one night an' left me a note to tell us if we were smart we'd run too. 'Course I wasn't smart fast enough."

"Once we heard everything they knew, it was pretty obvious there wasn' more'n one way to go. Chad and I weren't willing to roll over though. They wanted us bad, but we just didn't see reason to turn over on fuckin' Jeffrey Dean Morgan just because, so naturally they were pissed and spittin' nails. The prosecutor said he was gonna show us and busted us on some fuckin' possession of an unlicensed fire arm charge 'cause they didn't really have much else on us that was hard proof."

"Naturally we got sent in, but someone must have been looking out for us because in the end they let us do our time together. Of course JD found out. Fucker was pissed once he found out we only did 8 months on a 3 year sentence because the new agent in charge had convinced the new prosecutor to get us out. JD was sure we'd squealed. He'd heard there was a mole, don't know how he found out but he did, an' he was sure it was me."

"We weren't out of jail for a month before JD'd gotten to us. Put us both in the hospital. We were supposed to be under the government's protection, which is a joke I gotta tell you. Those fuckers couldn't protect a pregnant elephant, let alone us. So, once we got out of the hospital we split. Told one the agent who'd been fairly cool that we'd call him and check in, but we weren't gonna sit around and get killed for the government."

"An' that was..." Jared paused thinking, before shrugging. "Well with the jail time we've been running from JD for about 5 years. He gets close, we skirmish, and I run. Last time we met up, I put him in the hospital. Don't know how long he was down, but he got the idea. I ain't exactly a scrawny fifteen year old anymore an' I ain't gonna just stand around any longer and take his beatings."

“What do you mean?” Jensen asked his voice rough with emotion. “I thought you weren’t in ‘til you were eighteen?”

“We weren’t,” Chad offered sighing, “But we were still in JD’s radar, and Jared was an angry kid. JD is quick to temper and quicker to beat the hell out of you when he feels like it. JD would come ‘round, make some remark, piss Jay off who would snap back, and before you know it, Jay would be layin’ on the ground with a busted lip, or black eye, or hell any combination of wounds. He wouldn’t ever let me step in either.”

“Because there wasn’t any sense in both of our asses getting kicked by him, Chad. One of us had to be in decent shape if shit hit the fan.” Jared sighed back tired of the conversation and the past. “So, you’re not active in this... group anymore?” Steve asked after the group had sat in silence for several moments.

“No,” Jared answered, but felt honor bound to further explain. “But that don’t mean that JD won’t come sniffin’ around. I mean, there’s a real grudge there, and they never officially kicked us out. Neither of us are big fans of the fire or knife ceremony so we just had our tat covered up and called it a day. Now Misha is sniffing around. I am guessing step-daddy has finally found out who the real rat is. So far Chad and I haven’t said shit about anything.”

“You would just let them get away with it?” Jensen asked shocked and Chad snorted at him. “Smart men don’t rat on a one-percenter gang man. Not if they wanna live. Unless the government takes down the Rebel Sons we’ll always have to be on the lookout. They ain’t gonna forget us, trust me. The only way to leave and survive is to sneak out in the middle of the night and keep your fool mouth shut. It may not be how anyone wants to do it, certainly not us, but if you wanna live it’s what you do. You know how many times Jay’s almost died because of fuckin’ Misha Collins tryin’ to make us talk?”

“Let him be, Chad,” Jared said cutting off Chad’s rant before his friend could really get himself worked up. “He has a point. Savin’ our own asses isn’t really a valid reason to keep lettin’ JD get away with his crap.”

“But you didn’t **have** to talk to the feds, right?” Steve prompted quietly. “I mean you wouldn’t be the first, and yet you’re still considering doing it.”

Jared looked at Steve quietly before continuing. “I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but I’m not some brave hero here. I’m not the good guy in this story.”

“You ain’t the bad guy either!” Chad snapped right before Steve replied calmly saying, “no, you’re the victim.”

Jared opened his mouth, and then snapped it shut huffing as Steve continued on. “Chad’s right. You were a kid. You were a kid whose parents died and the rest of his

family turned their backs on, and you didn't have any options other than take shelter with the only people offering it. No, you weren't the one who ran to the feds, and you've so far kept your mouth shut. But you want to do the right thing and tell them what you know. Even though I have no doubt you know exactly what you're setting yourself up for. You're the victim in that story Jared, a victim who got himself out, pulled his friend out with him, and now wants to do the right thing."

"As far as I am concerned you and Chad are welcomed here as long as you wanna be here, and I'm not turning my back on you just because everything in your past doesn't smell like fuckin' roses."

"And what happens when these fuckers burn down our bar because of him?" Chris snapped and Steve looks at him unconcerned. "We rebuild, that's what insurance is for. I think our friends are more important than this bar, Chris."

Jay watched worried as Chris got up and stomped off angrily, but Jensen just waved a hand in the air unconcerned. "Don't sweat him. He'll come around."

"Thanks, Jensen," Steve said standing and pulling Jensen up and into a hug, who shrugged unimpressed by himself. "They're my friends too, bitch."

"I'll call Agent Morrow on Monday," Jared promised then explained seeing Steve and Jensen's confused looks. "He's the agent who's been good to us. He'll tell us what we can do."

Nodding Jensen pulled a startled Jared into a hug whispering in his ear. "This is your home now Jared, same as the rest of us. I trust you man." Then after giving Chad his own hug, followed after his stubborn friend after asking Chad to come help him, wondering if the night would be filled with more fighting or more tears.

~JRA~CMK~CMM~JRA~CMK~CMM~JRA~CMK~CMM~ JRA~CMK~CMM~

Chad made his way up the stairs carefully following Jensen unsure of the reception he was going to get once he got to Chris' room. Pushing the door open cautiously, Jensen was relieved to see Chris had stripped down to his boxers and was sitting on the bed with his legs crossed at the ankle flipping through a country music mag he'd been reading for awhile. They four of them had a sort of unspoken policy to never go to bed while fighting, but he'd been worried that it would be different that night because it had been broken so much lately with all this shit between Chris and Steve.

"You're still up," he offered not knowing what else to say as he came through the door, motioning Chad in, and shutting it tight behind him. "Why wouldn't I be?" Chris asked sharply frowning at Chad's presence. "I ain't goin' to bed with this between us. You really lettin' them stay? Put our bar at risk? You really willing to risk everything we've fuckin' worked our asses off for, Chad?"

“You really don’t think it’s time these guys got a break?” Jensen shot back sighing taking a seat on the edge of Chris’ bed while Chad leaned against the door knowing he wasn’t exactly welcome in this room. “You’re really willing to break Steve’s heart? This time, have it be OUR faults because we threw Jared out? Hell, are you so sure Steve would STAY if we threw Jared out?”

“Steve’ll be fine.” Chris threw out, but didn’t look as sure of that as he was trying to sound. “It can’t have been long enough for him to be...”

“They’ve been sleeping together since the day they got here.” Jensen informed quietly, effectively shutting Chris up. “Jared stays all night, and Steve won’t even go IN the bedroom if Jared isn’t with him because he says he can’t sleep anymore without him there. So, if you still think Steve can get outta this without getting all torn up again by all means, you go throw Jared out.”

Chris sighed and let his head fall back against the wall with a painful sounding thud. “I just don’t wanna lose all this.” He admitted quietly and Jensen wrapped a hand around Chris’ ankle feeling the need to make contact with his friend.

It wasn’t as if he wanted to lose the bar either, it held too many memories for him, but he wanted to lose Steve even less and in his heart knew they’d never keep him with them if Jared wasn’t there too. Not to mention, Jared had genuinely become one of Jensen’s best friends. The man was more brother than buddy and Jensen couldn’t imagine what he’d do without him there to crack jokes with or stare down some stupid drunk insistent on causing trouble. “We don’t know that we will, Chris. But we owe these guys a chance at something real and permanent and good.”

Sighing Chad pushed his weight off the door, but didn’t step forward more than needed to get Chris’ attention. “Look Chris, we don’t want to fuck your shit up either. We certainly didn’t wanna bring all this drama about NOW. You and Jared were finally starting to get along. You and Steve looked like you actually were real friends and not frienemies. Hell I even liked your grumpy ass, and I’ve told you before that Jared is the last person who would want to bring drama to someone else. I meant it when I told you that the first time a month ago, and I mean it now.”

“Jared and I will do whatever we have to do to keep y’all safe. Jared will call Agent Morrow Monday if not sooner knowing my boy and he’ll get shit rolling. There’s no way JD won’t go down once Jared and I tell what we know. Just keep it together a little while longer. You’re almost at the home stretch, so this ain’t the time to lose your shit.”

Eventually Chris nodded and Chad sighed a breath of relief slipping out of the room to head to his own where hopefully Sophia was waiting for him. Jensen lay down next to Chris, the two friends getting comfort from each other as they fell into sleep filled with dreams of fires and murder.

~CMM~SAB~CMM~SAB~CMM~SAB~CMM~SAB~CMM~SAB~

Chad lay staring at the ceiling, Sophia's naked body pressed up against his side. When she shifted, he loosened his grip on her enough for her to be able to move around, but not enough so that she could roll out of his arms. Sophia was easily the most beautiful woman he'd seen ever. He was smart, funny, and seriously did not take any of his crap, all the things that really attracted Chad to her. It wasn't a stretch for him to picture her by his side at any future point in his life, the only question was could she understand and accept the role Jared would always play in his life.

"I can hear you thinking, Chad," Sophia murmured softly and dipping his head, Chad kissed the top of her head which was tucked under his chin, as his free hand ran through her hair. "What's so important that you aren't sleeping?"

"I'm just wondering how fast you'll leave me once you realize Jared will always come first." Chad answered honestly feeling Sophia still in his arms, before lifting herself up to look down at him frowning.

"You know Jared always makes a big deal about how I left with him, how I stuck by his side though everything, but that isn't a one way street. To be honest leaving my parents to go with Jayman wasn't really all that hard of a decision. I wasn't a child in my house, I was an accessory. I wasn't any different than the expensive paintings or the fancy crystal chandelier."

Sighing Chad bit his lip and turned his head away so he didn't have to look into Sophia's eyes to see that look he interpreted as pity. "When I broke my arm, Jared was the one who walked with me to the ER. When I got my first crush, Jared was the one who listened to me go on for hours. When I said I wanted to play pro-basketball some day, Jared was the one who encouraged me. I may have walked out that door following him, but Jayman has had my back my whole life. He's been more family than my family ever was."

"But," Sophia started sighing, "he's the one that got the two of you into that gang right?"

"It wasn't his fault!" Chad snapped looking at her with eyes full of hot flashing anger, but sighed when he saw her flinch. Forcing himself to not keep going until he was calm, Chad didn't speak for a few moments. "You don't understand, you can't. He didn't have a choice. He had no way of knowing, and he ALWAYS took the brunt of the bad shit, ALWAYS. He took the beatings, he took the put downs, he took blame when shit didn't pan out right. Jared has always had my back. So, no matter what happens here, no matter how tight this gets, Jared will always come first. I know enough about chicks to know that you ain't gonna put up with that."

"So, like I said, I was just wondering how fast you'll take off once you figure out you'll never come first. Jared will always be my top priority above everything else in my life. He and I have walked through hell together, ain't no fuckin' way I'm turning my back on him over some girl, not even for love and forever."

“There won’t be any moving away from him. There won’t be any nights spent at your place. IF you wanna be a part of my life, you’ll have to accept what that means Jared, this bar, and whatever road Jared takes me down both literally and figuratively. I’m sorry. I know that’s probably not what every girl wants to hear, but it’s what I have to offer you. I don’t come with a lot of baggage, but what I have is very large and very steadfast. It just won’t be changing.”

Sophia’s first impulse was to rage. She wanted to scream and throw a fit and slap the shit out of him, but then she paused. She tried to imagine having to live their lives. She tried to imagine what it would be like to grow up and know you could only rely on one person, who was of no blood relation to you, surviving with the knowledge that the people who were related to you just didn’t give a fuck. She tried to imagine being afraid for your life and know the only thing that stood between yourself and death was your best friend, who always stepped up and took the pain. She tried to imagine loving anyone so much she’d be willing to die for then, then tried to imagine what she’d do if some other random person came along and expected her to just toss all that aside.

Truth was, she knew without a doubt that the sheets wouldn’t even be cold before she’d replaced them. “I’m not leaving,” she finally replied, forcing Chad to look at her. “I’m not throwing some diva fit. I’m not asking to replace Jared’s place in your life. I’m not asking to be more important than anyone. I just want my own place. I don’t mind Jared, and I don’t mind this place. I don’t wanna change you or take you away. I can’t say I understand your devotion to Jared, but that doesn’t mean I think it needs to be severed. Honestly, I think I’m a little jealous, because there’s no one in my life that would do anything near that for me.”

Chad smirked and pulled Sophia back down wrapping his arms around her again, feeling sleep finally coming. “Sure you do, you have me, which means you have Jay. No need for a replacement, when you have the original.”

An hour later, Chad slept like a baby, while Sophia lay with her head on his chest trying to figure out how she’d lucked out.



Chapter Four: *Letting go of the past so you can accept the future*

Jared watched Jensen and Chad head up the stairs, then closed his eyes momentarily feeling Steve’s fingers running through his hair once again, allowing himself to enjoy the moment. He was still struggling to figure out what had just happened. He’d laid himself out open for Steve, waiting for the slice of the blade that would spill his guts all over the

floor to be trampled. Instead he'd been defended by Steve and Jensen who both insisted that this was his home.

Home.

Shaking his head, Jared tried to figure out what twilight zone he was in because surely this couldn't all be real. "What're you shaking your head at, Baby?" Steve asked behind him. His voice was huskier than normal from an evening chatting up customers and smoking more than he would if he wasn't stuck at the bar. Jared knew Steve well enough by now that he recognized the exhaustion in his voice, but feeling his boyfriend's lips on the back of his neck knew he was gearing himself up for a few hours more.

"Is it terrible if I say that I don't wanna..." Jared trailed off and Steve laughed, his lips still pressed against the flesh of Jared's neck. "You don't wanna... play backgammon?" Steve teased loving the fact that his bad assed biker boyfriend was such a good boy he didn't like talking about their sex life... even if he was more than happy to with said sex life. "Steve," Jared huffed and Steve laughed again, happy once more as his teeth came out to nip where lips had been. But then he yawned himself and this time when he laughed Jared joined him.

"Yeah, it's been a long night," Steve admitted. "You good with bed and snuggling, while we talk? I don't think I can sleep, but..."

Nodding, Jared turned and pulled Steve close. "I need to feel you in my arms, and know you're not there because of my dick." Jared admitted red faced and solemn. "My heart knows it isn't the reason, but tonight my head just..."

"Needs the reassurance," Steve finished understanding having been there more than once himself in the last month. "I get it, Jay. You know I do. Tonight has been too long, and too heavy. There's so much going on in my head right now that I don't know if I could give my full attention to anything like that right now. All I wanna do is go upstairs and strip down to my drawers and crawl into bed so you can hold me and tell me that you'll still be there in the morning. I need to hear that you'll do your best to protect me from this asshole and that you'll let me do my best to protect you."

"I don't need your dick up my ass or my dick up yours, I just need to know that every morning when I wake up you'll be there no matter where it is we lay our heads down at to go to sleep." Sighing deep Steve enjoyed just feeling his boyfriend breath in his arms, before Jared turned and pulled them back together chest to chest reminding Steve just where his real home was.

Once they made their way upstairs, the two men worked their way through the kitchen and living area making sure things were shut off before heading down the hall. While Jared headed straight for their room, Steve paused outside Chris' door seeing the light shining out from the crack at the bottom, hearing Jensen and Chris' voices softly talking.

Almost as if drawn by some unseen force, Steve lifted a hand touching the wood, rough under his fingertips missing the days when no one went to bed unless everyone was ok again. Looking up briefly Steve saw Jared watching him from their doorway, and wanted to call out, but the voices from inside the room had stopped drawing his attention away again.

Somewhere inside him Steve knew all he would have to do is turn that knob and all would be forgiven. Chris would take him back, things would be ok again, Jensen would do his best to keep them together and then get them back together once they fell apart again. The bar would be again filled with the tension as familiar and easy to Steve as one of his love songs.

The problem was that Jared would leave and Steve would be lost again, not sure how to survive without his compass, lost in the vast sea of life that he and Chris didn't seem to be able to navigate on their own. The never-ending pain would return leaving Steve lost and crippled without anyone to pull him out of his own head.

Jared would leave.

Just the thought stole his breath and squeezed his chest until he was sure he was having a heart attack because nothing else could be this painful. Jared... gone... no phone calls, no quiet laughs in the middle of the night when he couldn't find his center anymore. No more gentle giants to look forward to in the middle of chaos that the bar could be. No more nights of passion like he'd never imagined possible.

Slowly Steve's hand curled into a fist, fingernails scraping the wood, as he fought to breathe through the vise squeezing his lungs.

Jared... Gone... Jesus.

It was the sound of footsteps coming not down the hallway, but from behind the door that finally got his feet moving again, and taking off Steve ran down the hall stopping only once he was inside his room, wild eyed and searching for the man he was half afraid suddenly was just a figment of his imagination. It didn't take him long to find his boyfriend, standing leaning against the window frame, looking like he'd already given into an inevitable ending that he'd only been waiting to come all along. Steve supposed that to be honest he probably had, and if it were anyone else with any other past, Steve would feel betrayed, but it wasn't.

This was the man who had been tossed out on his ass by a world too self centered and greedy to understand just what it had in its grasp. This was a man used to fighting with everything he had, and yet still always coming up just that bit too short of victory. This was the man who had lost everything he'd ever had with the exception of his best friend, and Steve had no doubt the second Steve paused at Chris' door, Jared hadn't expected to see him again 'til morning and maybe not even then. For this man a month wasn't

enough to erase a life time of abandonment, and Steve mentally kicked himself for forgetting just how fragile his man could be.

“You could have gone in,” Jared said softly, and slowly the knife logged in Steve’s gut twisted, as he cursed himself a fool. “No,” Steve corrected, shutting the door behind himself firmly and crossing the floor to rest his chin on Jared’s arm silently asking forgiveness for his stupidity. “I couldn’t have, because this is where I want to be, need to be. I can’t go back, Jay. Not now when I know how fucking good it can be, not when I know how fucking happy I can be, and not when I know how fuckin’ amazing life can be when you have the right man in it with you.”

“You love Chris,” Jared started and Steve nodded grabbing Jared’s face and turning it toward him. “I do, and I always will,” Steve agreed softly, “but I’d die if I lost you.”

“Jesus Jared, I almost had a panic attack in the hallway just imagining what would happen if I opened that door. I can’t do that again. I can’t go back there when I know how loved I can be. I have to believe this will work out, it will. I know it seems like it won’t tonight, but it will. It has to.”

“But what if it doesn’t,” Jared insisted firmly, unwilling to believe again this soon. “What if Chris doesn’t ever come around? What if he hates me forever? What if some day he makes you chose?”

“What if he’s right? What if I cost you your bar? Your friends? Christ Steve, JD isn’t some misunderstood juvenile. He could kill each and every one of you! What then?”

“Then we leave and never come back,” Steve said softly. “If Chris doesn’t come around then I’ll find a way to deal. If he hates you forever then he’s the one losing out. If he makes me chose then he loses me forever.”

Pressing his lips into the skin of Jared’s bicep, Steve sighed deep. “If he costs us the bar, we’ll rebuild just like I said. The only way he’ll cost me my friends is if he does kill them, and then in that case he won’t be able to run far enough, because I’ll gut the fucker. I am not losing you to Chris or JD or anyone else, Jay. I can’t. I wouldn’t make it. It may sound melodramatic, but it’s just a simple fact. You brought me back to life and made me... well me again. Don’t give up, please, Jay.”

Letting a shattering sigh loose, Jared nodded squeezing his eyes shut. “I’m afraid. I have no idea what the fuck I’m doing, and nothing seems to ever get better. I don’t even know how to fix whatever the fuck is the reason Chris hates me. I can’t get him to stop hating my guts to figure out what he needs from me.”

“Action,” Steve said softly letting go of his anger toward Chris once and for all for the good of his relationship. “Chris isn’t a words guy. He can write a song that will break you into a million pieces, but try and have a conversation with him and you’ll just end up banging your head against the wall.”

Tugging Jared's hand, Steve pulled him away from the window getting them undressed and settled under the covers before continuing. "Chris needs to feel how you feel about him, and he needs to be able to show you and know you understand. He won't feel comfortable if he thinks he has to give you some long flowery speech"

"I trust you, Jay. So go with your instincts. If you need to fuck him, fuck him. If you need to lock him in his room and spend all night showing him how you feel, do it. Don't worry about me, I got your back. Hell I approve even. Truth be told, I need him back, Jay. It breaks my heart to lay here and know he's mad. That ain't us, and before you even say it, I ain't going down there. Just... find a way and fix it. I know that should be my job, but honestly I don't think I'm the one that can. I think he needs something from you I just don't get, but to be honest, Jay, I think you do. I think you've known all along, and you've been holding back for my sake and I want you to know that you don't have to anymore. I'm ok now, I'm here with you, on the same page."

Sighing Jared lay quietly absorbing Steve's words until he decided he couldn't think about it anymore and changed the conversation slightly. "Speaking of Chris and... sex. Umm... I have been watching him and those girls he disappears with and... well... I have a theory I'm not sure you're gonna believe... or like."

Lifting his head Steve frowned down at Jared trying to figure out what he was getting at. "I don't understand. What do you mean? Like why he does it?"

Shaking his head, Jared rubbed his hands up and down Steve's back and took a deep breath before pushing on. "No, more like... I don't think he really is sleeping with them all. I think it's this big illusion. I think he... satisfies them, but gets nothing in return... if you know what I mean."

Steve's lips twitched as he fought not to laugh at the thought, which was definitely cute. "Jay, seriously, that's..."

"I'm serious, Steve," Jared said quietly and Steve stopped frowning again. "I don't think he's sleeping with all of those girls. Hell I don't think he's sleeping with half of them, and maybe not even a quarter. Maybe every once and awhile, but... if they do anything I don't think it's more than getting his dick sucked. I just... I don't know why he's letting everyone think he's some big slut puppy, but I don't think he is."

"So, it's an act?" Steve asked incredulous. "He's caused all this drama, he's hurt me all these years and he isn't even getting more than a deep throat or two?"

"Basically," Jared said sighing. "And I know you're pissed, but stop for a moment and think. If he isn't fucking those girls... something else is going on man. He is seriously fucked up, and I don't mean in a bad 'I'm out to hurt people' way. I mean no confidence, scared of his own needs, scared shitless that his whole world is gonna disappear kinda messed up. If this is true, you're gonna have to just let it go. And

before you get mad, yeah I know what I am asking, but if I am right... he needs us, Steve. He needs all of us.”

Lying back down, this time on his back next to Jared, Steve closed his eyes, as Jared shut off the lights and in the darkness found Jared’s hand holding on for dear life.

~JTP~DE~JTP~DE~JTP~DE~JTP~DE~JTP~DE~JTP~DE~JTP~DE~

Long before the others were even considering waking, Jared was inching out from under Steve and making his way down and into the bar. Rooting around behind the counter, Jared grabbed an ash tray, a beer, and on impulse the cordless phone and snuck out back to sit on the rarely used porch. Steve told him that they’d built it knowing they’d probably never use it, but this morning Jared was glad that they had.

Taking a seat on one of the lounge chairs, Jared grabbed a nearby abandoned pair of sunglasses and tried to relax, watching the surrounding nature while sipping his beer. Chances were he wouldn’t sleep well for a few nights. The higher his stress got, the less he slept. Steve on the other hand seemed to sleep like the dead, and Jared had to smile, glad that at least one of them would get enough rest.

Taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly, Jared forced his mind to clear of all the clutter so that he could focus. He didn’t know why he was doing this, except he always promised he would be brutally honest with himself, and he knew he was panicking terribly. He was scared shitless that just when he had everything he ever wanted within sight, he was going to lose it all to JD. The more he replayed the conversation from the night before in his mind, the more he was convinced Jensen was disappointed in him. So, ok he wasn’t Steve, but he was Jason’s buddy and like a brother to Jared and his disappointment cut him to the bone.

Before he could think about it too much, Jared dialed Don’s number from memory. Agent Don Epps was the closest Jared had to a life line and he believed in him if no one else in the government. He should have used his cell he knew, there was a small, admittedly very small chance Don wouldn’t pick up an unknown number, but his cell was in his room, and he didn’t wanna risk waking Steve he didn’t have to.

“Lo?” Jared heard and sighed relieved closing his eyes from the exhaustion still running through his body.

“Who’s there?” Don asked before Jared finally spoke. “Don? I’m sorry. I know it’s late there. It’s me... it’s Jared.” Sitting up now wide awake, Don swung his feet over the edge of the bed.

“What’s goin’ on Jared? Where do you need me to be?”

“Wait, slow down,” Jared said softly closing his eyes, feeling the tension easing already. “I don’t need you do be anywhere yet... I just...” Jared fell silent wondering how to explain everything.

“Take a deep breath, Jared.” Don said settling back into bed, sitting up against the headboard. “What’s going on.”

“Where do I start,” Jared sighed. “Gotta new job. Gotta new boyfriend, maybe two. So, of course I run into JD, and then Misha shows up. I don’t wanna leave this time, Don.”

Sighing Don let his head fall back as he studied the light on his ceiling. “I saw the new job part. Working in a bar? The Studs and Strings Saloon? Looks to be an ok place. I see the owners are connected to your cellmate Jason Manns though. That a good idea?”

“They’re good guys, Don.” Jared said defensively. “Steve is a good guy.”

Smiling big Don chuckled. “Steve, huh? He the new man?”

“Yeah,” Jared said softly again, “and maybe his boyfriend Christian.”

Thinking back to the report he got when he learned Jared had taken a new on the books job, Don said, “they’re two of the owners right?”

“They’re boyfriends you say? I didn’t think that was your thing... coming between a couple, buddy.”

“It’s kinda complicated,” Jared sighed and Don nodded smiling. “It usually is man. Why don’t you explain it to me?” So Jared did, starting with the call from Jason at their last place with the job offer, through his run in with JD, the tensions with Chris, the easy romance with Steve, and Misha’s appearance and the fall out. When he got done, he found himself nervous again, wondering how the straight laced agent would deal with Jared’s unconventional relationship, even if it was in the building stages.

“Well... two people is hard, three takes a special blend to pull off, but I have a feeling if anyone can do it then it’s you. You sure you don’t want me to come down? I can bring Colby. We can blend for the day.”

Jared couldn’t help but snicker at the thought of two federal agents trying to blend at a roadhouse. “Hey! I gotta bike now you know! I can totally blend.” Don protested, grinning at the good natured teasing. “Lemme talk to Steve about it,” Jared said still laughing. “I’ll let you know soon, ok?”

“Sure thing, Jay, and look... don’t stress about all of this, ok? We’ll find a way to get this done. You decide to go through with this and I promise you we will find a way to make your new place safe if I have to park my ass there every day for the rest of my life. Just

keep in touch, call me every day now so I know you're ok and we'll work the rest of this shit out. You've come too far man, I ain't letting anyone take this away from you, kiddo."

Sighing relieved Jared ended the call and let his eyes close, sleep finally overtaking him.

~CMK~JM~CMK~JM~CMK~JM~CMK~JM~CMK~JM~CMK~JM~

Chris looked up from his spot at the bar and frowned hearing the phone ringing in the office, but didn't see the cordless behind the bar where it belonged. Sighing in frustration, Chris ran to the office and picked up the extension there just before it went to the answering machine.

"This is Texas State Correctional Facility. Will you accept charges for a collect call from a..." Chris heard the automated voice say and sitting down grinned hearing instead of Jason's name "pick up the phone you cocksuckers!"

"Yes," Chris said still chucking when Jason came on the phone. "What would you have done if Jenny had picked up? He hasn't ever sucked cock." Chris replied as soon as he heard Jason come on the line and got a snort back from his friend. "So he claims," Jason drawled smartly. "I got my suspicions though. How's things goin' there? I heard you got your damned head up your ass 'bout my boy, Jay. Do I gotta break outta this fuckin' place and come kick your stupid redneck ass, dickface?"

"I got my reasons!" Christian defended frowning feeling like he was the only person in the world worried about their future. "An' you don't even know the latest! The fucker has a damned biker gang after him! We could lose our whole fuckin' bar!"

"Jesus, Kane," Jason sighed and Chris knew the other man was rolling his eyes. "You act like I don't already know all that shit. I shared a cell with him 'member? I prob'ly know more 'bout that boy than you do. 'Sides, I hear that's what you got that there fancy insurance shit for. Not t'mention all the damned cash you got stashed away. Shit boy, you could use to spend some of that anyway! It ain't like you can take it with you when you croak an' Jay's a good guy. Or do you not trust my judgment anymore?"

"Of course I do!" Christian argued quickly not wanting Jason to seriously think otherwise. "But... damnit Jason, he took Steve away from me!"

Once again, Christian heard a snort on the other end, before Jason's replied his drawl thick with sarcasm. "No, Jackass. You treated Steve like shit with this bullshit girl crap you're doin' and pushed him away. All Jared did were the things you shoulda. Hell even then it ain't like he's takin' Steve all for himself. Boy's perfectly willin' to give you a chance to see if maybe Steve's right an' the three of you could be a part of somethin' pretty damned important together. You on the other hand gotta be a stubborn shit and let your fuckin' daddy who you ain't even seen in years spoil what could be really good for you! "

Chris was quiet and heard Jason sigh on the other end. “Chris... man... look, if you want the honest to God truth, Steve wasn’t even the first one I had in mind when I originally suggested they go work for y’all. It’s just eventually I realized you would pull some stupid fuckin’ shit like you’re pullin’ now, and the only way it’d happen is if Steve was already invested in it first. You gotta loosen up here, Buddy. Jared’s a hell of a guy and frankly you’re gonna lose two of the best things in your life if you don’t let your daddy’s crap be laid in the past where it belongs. I know you’re scared shitless, but I promise brother, Jared would be more than willing to help you with all that shit, if’n you just let him.”

“Yeah, ok.” Chris finally agreed realizing that everyone couldn’t be wrong, and in his heart knew he really, really wanted what Steve and Jared seemed to be offering him. He desperately needed someone like Jared to come in and quiet the demons his daddy had unleashed inside of him years ago.

“Look, Brother, I am outta time. Tell everyone I’m bein good, an’ I can’t wait to be fuckin’ HOME. Give YOURSELF a chance here, Christian. I swear I would never send someone to break up you an’ Steve. Y’all are the only family I got that counts. Love ya, man. Take care!”

Chris quickly said his goodbye’s, but stayed in the office for quite awhile staring at the wall, trying to convince himself his friend were right, and maybe it was ok to let someone help him silence his father’s voice in his head.

~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~

“Found it!”

Jerking awake, Jared blinked in confusion up at Steve who was waving the phone around as Jensen came out rolling his eyes and grabbed the cordless from Steve, then headed back into the bar. “Shit,” Jared yawned stretching his arms high over his head as Steve grinned down at him burying his fingers in his boyfriend’s hair. “Why are you sleeping out here?” Steve asked before settling himself on Jared’s lap.

Once Jared was sure they weren’t gonna collapse, he relaxed wrapping his arms around Steve’s waist before shutting his eyes again. “Couldn’t sleep, decided to call Don, must have fallen asleep after.”

“Hmmm.” Steve said smiling, his lips and teeth traveling over Jared’s neck. “I missed you when I woke up.”

“I’m sorry,” Jared murmured half asleep again, and half growing aroused by the feel of his boyfriend’s teeth nibbling on his skin. “Do you really wanna do this out here where

Chris could walk in on us any second?" Jared asked fighting the urge to lift his hips and grind himself against Steve.

"No, I wanted to do this when I woke up in my warm bed, but someone wasn't there," Steve teased not mentioning the five minute panic he had because Jared wasn't there. Fortunately Chad's big mouth calmed his nerves when he bellowed at Chris this morning. For once Steve supposed that it was a good thing that the boy had no sense of anyone outside himself and Jared. Steve wasn't going to mention that to Jared though, because he seemed to just be really letting Steve in, not pretending, and Steve didn't wanna endanger that. He'd mention it later casually that night when they went to bed instead so that Jared knew, but didn't feel guilty about it all day. Steve after all was more than confident in his ability to wear out Christian that night so his boyfriend would sleep.

"Sorry," Jared murmured again, and Steve could tell he was falling asleep again. So, giving him one last kiss, he settled down, laying his head on Jared's chest, listening to his boyfriend breath until he could get up after Jared was completely asleep deciding to go create something new at the ol' piano.

~JTP~CMK~JTP~CMK~JTP~CMK~JTP~CMK~JTP~CMK~JTP~CMK~

Jared wandered upstairs yawning in search of food. His sleep schedule was officially fucked up, but there wasn't much he could do about it. Wandering toward the kitchen, Jared paused inside the doorway seeing Chris rooting around in the fridge. He didn't really want to have another go around, but nothing would ever be resolved by avoiding the man. Shrugging, Jared headed in leaning in the doorway, waiting 'til Christian straightened to call out in greeting.

"Hey Chris, I don't suppose you're making something to eat?" Jared asked hopefully. While he was ok with simple things like scrambled egg omelets and things you could grill, he was pretty damned helpless otherwise.

Turning Chris eyed Jared carefully before nodding and Jared wandered in to stand next to him. "You umm... you need help?" Jared asked somewhat reluctantly hoping that Chris wouldn't take him up on it. Fortunately Chris resisted the urge to laugh outright in Jared's face offering a simple. "I got it." Sighing relieved, Jared moved to sit at the table to watch Chris work.

"If you want, we'll leave," Jared blurted, surprising both of them and again silently hoped Christian wouldn't take him up on it. He watched Chris stiffen then turning to look at him, the other man seemed to not quite relax, but more like deflate watching him. "I seem to keep needing to apologize to you." Chris offered quietly and Jared shrugged accepting it for what it was not seeing the need to force Chris to say words Jared already knew were there, if somewhat hidden.

“You’re looking out for your friends and your future,” Jared offered equally as quiet. “I would be somewhat shocked if you hadn’t fought it. I know you at least understand just what JD is capable of, which isn’t to say that I don’t think Jensen and Steve do, it’s just...”

Chris nodded smiling again if slightly. “You can’t be in prison without knowing guys like him, but Jenny and Steve are right. This is y’all’s home how. I have no more right to throw you out than I do one of them. I just... I’m tired of fighting.”

Leaning back in his seat, Jared nodded and when Chris put a bottle of orange cream soda in front of him with a glass of ice thanked him. Turning his attention to his glass as he poured his drink, Jared replied, hoping Chris would take his words better if he didn’t feel like he was under a microscope.

“I think everyone is tired of fighting, Chris. I’d like to have a chance to get to know you without feeling like I gotta put on my body armor first. I don’t think you’re a bad guy, and I believe you love Steve a great deal. Of all his friends, Jason talked about you the most when we were in, so I know you can be pretty fuckin’ awesome. I just... I think it’s time for a truce man. I think you gotta let some shit go so we can all move on.”

When Jared looked up finally, Chris’ back was to him, but his shoulders at least were relaxed, so Jared hoped that meant Chris was not responding because he was considering his words, not because he was working himself into a tizzy. “I’d like to see if we could at least try to be friends,” Chris admitted softly before taking two plates out and dishing up the rice and simple stir fry.

Jared was pleased when Chris joined him at the table, his own glass filled with tea and the two ate for several moments in easy silence. “How long do you think we have before that JD guy tries something?” Chris finally asked and Jared sighed running a hand through his hair. “I wish I knew man.” He admitted, shrugging to reinforce his helplessness and cluelessness when it came to JD’s actions.

“Could be today, could be a year from now. It just depends on which way the fuckin’ wind is blowing, and how busy he is with other things. I’ve heard a few rumblings that things are heating up between them and the Roving Outlaws, who have been trying to move in on JD’s territory here in Texas for years. A gang war, while bad for Texas, would be great for us. I guarantee JD will be too busy messing with Ron Pearlman the Roving Outlaw’s president to care what the fuck I do.”

“If that happened and this Pearlman guy took JD out, would anyone else come after you?” Chris asked and Jared wrinkled his nose considering the question then shook his head. “I doubt it. Honestly if JD gets taken out, I think most anyone remaining will be too caught up in the scramble to take his place. There are no second in commands in JD’s group. He’s the only cock in the henhouse.”

“So, who’s your favorite country artist?” Jared asked out of the blue effectively changing the topic and happily enjoyed his first easy conversation with Christian since he’d gotten there, talking about nothing really important, but making good headway in starting to bridge the gap between the two of them.

~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~

Jared was listening to Chris entertain a table of customers with some probably mostly bullshit story about him and Jensen and Jason, when he saw Jensen watching them like they had three heads. Making his excuses, Jared crossed the room and leaned against the counter next to where Jensen was seated. Tonight was his night out from behind the bar while Steve worked his cocktail magic. “What’re you lookin’ at me like that for?” Jared asked after Randy brought him his normal soda.

“Not that I’m not happy to see it, but last night you two were at each other’s throats and now you’re best buds? What have you done with Chris and Jared you pod person?” Jensen snarked and Jared couldn’t help but laugh big and happy drawing smiles from those in the immediate vicinity, including Steve who looked on longingly from the other end of the bar.

“Shut up, ya bastard,” Jared threw back nodding to Chad who was grinning at him from across the room. “We ain’t pod people, we just... called a truce. I can’t handle causing all the tension and Chris misses Steve like he’s missing a limb, so...” Jared shrugs and takes a drink before continuing. “So, we just decided to stop fighting. We actually had lunch together and talked about random shit.”

“Huh.” Was the only reply he got until Jensen shrugged and decided to grace him with further comment. “Just seems weird is all, but like I said I ain’t arguing. I think it’s great to see y’all working things out. I mean God knows I could use with some happy times around here.”

When Jensen stopped talking, Jared followed his gaze to see he was watching Danneel. “How long have you and your girl been together?” Jared asked curious as they hadn’t really discussed his friend’s relationship much.

Jensen turned back to Jared with the smile on his face of a man in love, and Jared was happy to see his friend so at ease with it. “Well we’ve known each other for awhile. We met while I was in college, well while we were in college. She was friends with my roommate’s girlfriend. We’ve lasted much longer than they have.” Jensen joked and Jared grinned with him, watching Chris again as he worked the room.

“You think you’ll ever get married?” Jared asked and Jensen blushed brightly. “Hope so. Been thinkin’ about it for awhile, but the time isn’t right and I don’t think we’re quite there yet. I know we’ve been together a long time, but I just...”

“Getting married doesn’t change all this you know,” Jared offered softly. “It just means you don’t live above the bar anymore. You’re still their best friend. You’re still the one they depend on for opinions and support when they can’t see eye to eye. You’re still that guy they’ve known a million years.”

“I know but,” Jensen started playing with his beer bottle before sighing, “I just don’t feel ready, and I can’t leave them yet.”

Jared nodded understanding. He couldn’t imagine what was gonna happen when Chad and Sophia decided they were tired of sharing their space and decided to stay at her place all the time instead of upstairs. Jared liked to think he was gonna be able to take the advise he was trying to give Jensen, but in his heart he suspected he wasn’t gonna take it well. Chad had been there for every important moment of his live, and to not have him around 24/7 just might kill him.

“Yeah,” Jared finally responded and looking at Jensen he had no doubt his friend knew what he had been thinking about. “I don’t know what I’ll do without Chad.” Jared admitted, the pain clearly evident in his voice. “I know it’s selfish, but even with all of you guys...”

“It’s different for you and Chad,” Jensen offered sighing. “You literally only had each other. Four people make for a completely different dynamic than two do, and at least we all had SOME kind of support. I mean my parents and Steve’s mom did their best to be there for all of us. Jason practically lived at my house most days, and I know Chris was at Steve’s more often than not and Steve’s mom always considered Christian one of her own. You and Chad though... I can’t see him going far, even if he isn’t upstairs.”

“Yeah,” Jared said softly turning his eyes to Chad and smiled softly seeing his best friend watching him, the girls he’d been flirting with completely forgotten. He knew Chad would never leave him.

Chad was the one thing that he knew he’d always be able to depend on, and he was trying to be ok with the idea that someday Chad would move out, like Jensen would, and Genevieve soon would. As much as he loved his new home, and the people around him, a part of him longed to just grab Chad and take off somewhere that the world couldn’t touch them. It was a much less scary notion than staying and dealing with all this complicated multiple relationships crap. Himself and Jen, himself and Steve and Chris, Jensen and Steve and Chris, Chris and Steve, Chris and Chad, Jensen and Danneel, and frankly it all scared the fuck out of him and he didn’t know how to deal.

He didn’t know how to feel like any second the bottom wasn’t gonna drop out from under him.

He didn’t know how to breathe.

~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~JTP~CMM~

“What’s goin on?” Chad asked coming up next to Jared who had moved over to sit on the far end of the stage. Jared arched an eyebrow and shrugged scooting over to give his friend room. “Come on,” Chad huffed, “you’re bein’ all mopey.”

Jared sighed and looked at Chad for a moment before bumping their shoulders together, grateful he had such an awesome best friend who refused to ever let him be in a funk for long. “Jensen and I were talking about him and Danneel getting married and moving out. It got me to thinking about you and Sophia and how I’m sure it won’t be long before she’ll be tired of being here every night and want you to herself. I just...” Jared shrugged again and stole a glance at Chad to see his friend looking at him confused.

“OK, first off... Sophia knows the deal. The first thing we discussed was you and me. She knows any plans we make have to include you. She knows I ain’t stayin’ at her house that’s fuckin’ a million miles away, not because of you, but because I don’t wanna be that far from you. YOU are my entire family JT. If shit happened and her and I don’t make it, yeah I’ll be upset, but I’ll live because I know I’ll have my boy with me. Don’t get me wrong, I love this place, and I don’t ever want to leave. Maybe someday a million years from now we’ll want something other than this dorm room living thing we’re doing, but shit... if we gotta we can build behind the bar.”

“Behind the bar?” Jared repeated confused and Chad nodded lifting an eyebrow. “Yeah, Chris owns all that land back there for like... miles. Didn’t you know?”

Blinking Jared frowned and finally shrugged. “Never came up, I guess. Do Jensen and Steve know?” This time it was Chad who shrugged as Genevieve brought Chad a bottle of root beer and Jared a bottle of his normal before leaving grinning.

“Hell if I know,” Chad said looking around the room. “I figured they did, but fuckin’ knows what they know. Chris told me that he’s gonna give Jensen and Danneel a few acres back there after they get married some day so they’ll be close. He said if things ‘tween me an Soph got that serious he’d do the same for us, but like I told him I ain’t ready for all that. Shit, JT I don’t think I could sleep at night without you at least in the next room. Just thinkin’ about it makes me all panicky and itchy and I feel like my skin is crawlin’ with bugs or somethin’.”

“Guess I’m lucky ‘cause Soph says she understands. ‘Sides she likes staying up there. Her an’ Steve an’ Chris talk new dishes for the diner and apparently she grew up not far from them so they’ve known her for almost as long. ‘Cording to her, her parents moved in when she was like... seventh grade. Chris an’ Jason always looked after her when the other kids teased her an’ shit for bein’ the new girl. I just... how the fuck did we get all’a this JT? I mean for serious! For two homeless bums it’s like we’ve hit the jackpot here.”

"I keep waiting for Rod Sterling to come out and do his little narration. *There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone.*"

Jared laughed feeling more relieved and threw an arm over Chad's shoulder. "Twilight Zone rocks. Maybe we can get the DVD sets now that we're in one place? You think? Steve likes it too. I saw it on Amazon the other day for like only 160 for the complete set!"

"Hey!" Chad said grinning. "We should take a day next week the two of us and go wander around that town where Randy goes to school. Shannon said he would add to our ink for cheap if we came over."

Nodding Jared smiled at the idea feeling better than he had in awhile. "Sounds like a deal. Randy was tellin' me about this awesome barbeque place. Maybe we can make a whole day and do dinner?"

"Sweet!" Steve watched the two friends from the bar and smiled, happy to see Jay and Chad getting a moment together. As much as he loved Jared, he knew none of them would ever take Chad's place in Jared's life and wouldn't have it any other way. He had a feeling part of Jared's uneasiness was because he and Chad hadn't had as much time together as his boyfriend was used to. He'd be happy when they'd all found their groove again things were back to whatever the new normal was gonna pan out to be.

Turning back to his customer who was calling for more beer, Steve let his attention turn away from Jared for the moment. His mind though didn't wander far away from his daydreams, anticipating the upcoming night's events after everyone had gone home and it was just the two of them again alone in their room. It had been way too long since he'd had his man inside of him, and he was determined that situation would be rectified soon.

~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~JTP~SPC~

Later that night, Jared and Steve finally met back up again, in their bedroom. They hadn't had much time to talk once the bar opened for business and Jared couldn't resist taking a moment to pull Steve into his arms. Inhaling deeply he smelled the ever present cigarette smoke and stale beer, but underneath it was that scent that was essentially Steve. He wasn't sure he could explain what it smelled like, he only knew it was what identified his Steve.

Running his hands under Jared's shirt, Steve shivered at the feel of his boyfriend's tight abs pushing the material upward impatiently needing access to bare skin, whimpering softly as Jared's long fingers were buried in his hair. All day he'd been thinking of

nothing but this moment when he could finally have Jared to himself again, when nothing existed beyond the two of them and he could feel his boyfriend buried inside of him.

Steve didn't even have to question Jared's eagerness because he'd barely pulled his own t-shirt up and off tossing it blindly before Steve's shirt was gripped at the bottom and buttons flew as it was ripped open. Steve didn't even care, instead leaned in and grabbed onto the nearest bit of flesh sinking his teeth in and sucking. When Jared growled low and deep Steve shivered again and briefly found himself air born as he was lifted up and away, his teeth torn from Jared's flesh but neither noticed, each too busy removing jeans, underwear and boots, Steve ending up with one sock on and one sock off because Jared was too impatient to let him finish.

The only light in the room came from the moon shining through the window, but neither cared both well familiar with the other's body at this point. Steve closed his eyes, listening to the deep rumble of his boyfriend's voice speaking filth and dirty sex talk he'd never say in the light of day, aching more and more as his cock filled quickly and painfully as Jared outlined all the things he wanted to do to him.

He wanted so bad, needed to feel this connection, a part of his mind scared to death that the world was going to come between them no matter how hard he fought. Somehow though it was this touch, those words, the feel of Jared's thick cock pounding in and out of his ass, filling him up until he was sure he'd rip in two that reassured him when sometimes words failed to do the job. He was vaguely aware of Jared's hand searching the bedding for the tube of lube they'd lost in the sheets a few nights before, and reaching under the pillow pulled it out handing it to Jared, the anticipation making his blood rush faster until he was sure his heart was gonna beat right out of his chest.

When Jared's fingers slipped into him, Steve couldn't hold back a moan, loving the feel of them inside of him, and he'd swear to his dying day Jared's hands were made just to open him up. Long and slender they slipped in stretching him almost painlessly and rubbing against that spot that sent the stars flashing in front of his eyes.

Now it was Steve's own turn to talk, words slipping from his lips without thought or care knowing Jared would never think him less for any of the begs or pleading that came out in moments like this. "Ready Baby?" Jared asked, but Steve could only whimper pulling him down for a kiss, incapable of forming coherent words at that point. All he knew was want and need and please Jared please.

The first thrust hurt, his boyfriend feeling as long and thick as he was tall and muscular, but it was a pain he cherished, looked forward to, dreamed of even during the quiet hours of the day when he had nothing else to do but entertain himself with his thoughts. As always Jared paused, always mindful of his size, always concerned with his partner's safety, and like always Steve found himself growling threatening bodily harm if there wasn't movement soon.

After that, things always got hazy, each man lost in the other. Nothing coming through that didn't involve a touch or a bite or a thrust, Jared's fingers found themselves inside Steve's mouth momentarily and Steve relished the taste, sucking for all he had, imaging it was Jared's cock he was sucking on. Eventually though they slipped free as the sounds came, loud and unfiltered neither conscious or caring about the others, too lost in the cocoon wrapped around them.

Not long after Jared had arrived they'd both gotten tested, and it was moments like this that Steve was the most thankful, because he was sure there was nothing better than the feel of Jared's bare flesh thrusting in and out of him, nothing more intimate than knowing there was absolutely nothing separating them for those few moments in time. Steve came first, always surprised, always missing the feel of Jared's hand stroking him hard and fast to match his thrusts, giving a whimper and a cry his back arched and hands clutching the sheets beneath him. Then it was Jared's turn, head thrown back, a sound of primal possession erupting from inside of him that was somewhere between a shout of victory and a cry of possession.

And then it was quiet.

Neither moving for several long moments, Jared's head thrown back and eyes closed, enjoying the last few tremors of Steve's body around him before pulling out. Steve lay watching Jared, eyes bobbing open and shut as he fought his body's need to sleep, not wanting to miss that moment when Jared would look at him again, and he'd know that they made it through another day.

Eventually that look came, always paired with a smile bright enough to light the darkness before Jared was moving, pulling out, wiping them each down, arranging their bodies so he lay on the bottom and Steve lay nestled up next to him, head on his chest. Looking up, Steve smiled seeing Jared's eyes closed, his breathing evening out already as his body tumbled into sleep, knowing there would be no waking up alone this time.

~JTP~CMK~RKO~JTP~CMK~RKO~JTP~CMK~RKO~JTP~CMK~RKO~

The next evening, Jared stood at his usual place at the bar, but that night instead of watching the room in general, his eyes were on Chris who seemed to be in channeling a yoyo for all his mood was bouncing all over the place. He had a theory about Chris, one that he was chomping at the bit with impatience to put to test, but so far hadn't had the opportunity. Tonight though, tonight would be the night.

When Chris put his hand on the small of a young red head's back, Jared almost smiled and turning his head, called Randy over knowing he was closest. "Wha's up JT?" Randy asked wiping his hands on the towel hanging from his front pocket. "You need another orange cream soda?"

Shaking his head, Jared smiled and tracked Chris' progress across the room and into the stock room. "Tell me your thoughts on that." Jared requested softly, and Randy shrugged. "It's for show." Randy replied simply before deciding to expand on it.

"Chris knows it's expected of him. Someone has to be a lady's man, and he's scared shitless of being labeled as a 'faggot' by all these men who he just knows sees the same things in him his daddy did. Now I don't know a fuckin' thing about his daddy or what happened between him and Chris when he was a kid, but I know what a kid who was abused acts like when he grows up."

"Personal experience, Rand?" Jared asked softly, curious about this rare glimpse into his new friend. Randy thought just shrugged and Jared nodded back not needing words to hear the confirmation. Steve kept telling him Randy was that twin they say everyone has for Jared, and Jared was beginning to believe it was the truth. Finally Randy continued on ignoring the parts about himself.

"Chris is scared shitless of anything happening to this place, and is sure that if two out of the three owners turns out to be queer, no one will show up anymore." Nodding Jared sighed because Randy's assessment was almost right on with what he and Chad came up with. "I'm thinking a guy like that will try to always act like he's in control, even if he secretly wishes someone else would just take all of his choices out of his hands." Jared threw out casually and ignored the raised eyebrow with matching smirk on Randy's face.

"Well now, I don't think we're talkin' about the weekly booze order, but yeah, I would have to agree with you. I think Chris is aching for someone to come in and not force him into anything, but make him do things that he already wants to do and doesn't know how to ask for. Chris' had his will robbed from him most of his life. Is it any wonder that he doesn't know how to let himself have the things he needs?"

Nodding Jared smiled at Randy before turning back to the stockroom. "I'm going in. Don't let anyone follow, ok?"

"You got it Bossman!" Randy called grinning from ear to ear. Seeking out Steve behind the bar tonight, Jared smiled softly at him sending love he hoped that Steve understood, and was happy to see a happy grin in return.

Finding Genevieve in the crowd, Jared motioned her over, explaining when she reached his side. "We're goin' in the stockroom after Chris and the redhead he just disappeared with. Imma try and talk her down, but if I can't I need you to step in and get her out of there. Make sure she doesn't run her mouth all night. When you get her out, tell Randy her drinks are on the house."

"Kay, boss! Finally goin' in after your man huh?" Genevieve said cheekily and Jared rolled his eyes before following Chris and his chick of the moment into the room, hoping that they weren't too far along.

Carefully Jared opened the door feeling Genevieve behind, hearing Chris' whiskey smooth voice, and the high pitched giggle in return, and shared an eye roll with Genevieve before shutting the door behind him. For a moment he watched the pair never having observed Chris in this element, and fought to keep from shaking his head. He had to give Chris credit, the man certainly had his game down, unfortunately Jared just couldn't see anything good happening here, at least not for Chris.

"You need somethin', Jay?" Chris called and Jared could hear a hint of irritation, but it was the hope laying in the dark beneath it that really punched Jared in the gut. He wondered how many times Chris had done this, hoping someone, probably Steve in particular, would walk through that door and make him stop this insanity, only to be left needing in the end with maybe only a very unfulfilling argument instead.

Pulling out his own redneck charm, Jared crossed the room smiling at the woman as Chris waited for an answer. "I'm sorry, darlin', there's been a misunderstanding. Christian won't be able to help you out tonight."

"What the fuck?" Chris spat and Jared admitted if he hadn't had this all figured out already, he would be pretty damned convinced that the guy really wanted to do this. Fortunately Jared did already have it figured out, and saw beneath Chris' well played part. Carefully Jared reached over and pulled the girl's top off a nearby case of Budweiser and handed it to her. "Christian now is the time for you to be quiet," Jared replied softly but firmly and fought from bouncing when Chris followed his orders.

"You go on now, Honey. Put that on an' go tell Randy JT said your drinks are on the house tonight. I 'pologize for the confusion, but I'm sure a gorgeous girl like you can find another fish out there. In fact there's a guy toward the middle of the bar wearin' a John Deere hat and a black t-shirt that says I kissed your mamma that may seem like a moron, but I think you'll find is well worth your time if you give him half a chance."

"What are you his fuckin' boyfriend?" She spat angrily pulling the shirt over her head, and JT fought from growing angry, but only wanting the woman out of her sights. "Now, don't be ugly about this," Jared said and fortunately Genevieve, sensing this wasn't going to get any better, chose that moment in to swoop in work her magic.

"You know men," Genevieve offered sliding up and putting her arm around the redhead's waist. "Don't want anyone else pissin' in the fountain if they can't. These two have been fightin' over a girl for months. Believe you me, you don't wanna get between that shit. She is one jealous bitch!"

Nodding sagely the redhead huffed at Jared and Chris before following Genevieve out spouting off about the evils of men and their green eyed demons. "You think we should tell Steve she called him a girl?" Chris asked and Jared smirked at the wall before turning and grabbing the smaller man, spinning him around and pressing him face first against the wall. Jared rested the weight of his body against him, grabbed Chris' wrists,

pulling them high over his body, and spreading his feet out before Christian had any idea what the hell was going on.

“I said,” Jared growled soft and deep, “not to talk, Christian.”

“Now is the time for you to listen. Do you understand?” Jared felt Chris trying to struggle beneath him, but soon gave in trusting Jared not to really hurt him, even if he was unsure what the hell was going on. “That’s it,” Jared encouraged, letting his weight up momentarily before leaning in again allowing the struggle to work its way out of Chris’ system. “Get all that fightin’ out, baby. Test me now, remember who you’re with, remember that if I wanted to I could force you to do anything right now. That way when I don’t you’ll understand that this isn’t about hurting you or forcing you against your will.”

Renewing his struggle, very much confused not only by what was happening, but to the way his body reacted to what was happening, occasionally whimpering with frustration, as Jared continued to speak quietly in his ear. “Ssh, Baby. It’s ok. JT is here. It’s ok... nothin’ can hurt you now.”

“Please,” Chris whimpered, unable to keep it inside and Jared smiled softly squeezing Chris’ wrists. “It’s alright, Christian,” Jared whispered. “You’re safe.” Jared could almost feel the ball of emotion growing beneath the surface of Chris’ skin and wondered how it was going to manifest itself.

“Sshhh,” Jared soothed moving his hands so he held both of Chris’ wrists in one of his, and wrapping the now free arm to stroke Chris’ belly. “Please,” Chris whimpered again, wishing that he knew what it was he was asking for, but instinctually knowing that Jared would understand and give it to him. “Please... Jay, please.”

“It’s alright,” Jared repeated, rubbing Chris’ belly still as the other man began to squirm, soft sobs coming out in bursts as the dam began to crack. “It’s alright Christian, you are safe here with me. No one touches you from now on without my permission, except Steve. No one hurts you, ever. No one punishes you except for me. You’re mine. This isn’t about sex, this is about giving you what you need. This is about helping you fit into your own skin.”

Chris’ breathing hitched as he began to push against the wall trying to leverage himself away, not wanting to get away from Jared, but not really understanding why either. Endlessly Jared kept whispering in Chris’ ear, words of understanding and comfort, speaking to a part of Chris that he bet the other man didn’t know existed within himself. While he was doing that, the hand that had been stroking Chris’ belly was hard at work undoing his jeans, pushing them down to rest around his thighs before shifting himself.

“I’m gonna move off you,” Jared started only to have Chris cry out in protest. “Ssh... I’m not going far. I just need to get a better position so I can give you what you need. Imma give you what you need, baby, ssh.”

Chris' body heaved, his head turned, eyes tracking Jared, making sure he wasn't tricking him. When Jared's lips found his Chris cried out again, his arms almost buckling. When the first strike to his bare ass by Jared's hand came, he almost swung. When the first stroke to his cock came, Jared's big hand wrapped around it, he almost came. Chris felt like he was being torn in three different directions, not understanding, but needing more as each second went by. He didn't understand how he could be enjoying this after everything his Daddy did to him. He didn't understand how Jared could know he needed it so badly when Christian hadn't known himself. He didn't understand why he suddenly wanted to curl up in Jared's arms, trusting him to make the world safe for him again, all he knew was that all these things were true, and finally it seemed like someone saw past his bullshit to the man hiding underneath.

When they were done, Chris' come running down the stockroom wall, Jared pulled off his shirt cleaning off Chris and then the wall and turned, resting his back against the concrete, and pulled Christian into his arms, happy when he snuggled in without a fight. "How'd you know?" Chris asked softly nuzzling Jared's neck wishing he could stay there all night. He couldn't remember the last time he felt so at peace, so whole and cared for. He couldn't remember the last time his daddy's voice in his head had been so effectively silenced.

"Instinct," Jared said softly. "I don't wanna rush this, Chris, but if you and I are gonna get anywhere I need to give you what you need, which is completely different from what Steve needs."

Chris stiffened slightly at Steve's name, but relaxed as Jared didn't stop kissing him and rubbing his back. He never thought he could feel this good. This ass hurt, burned, and it was gonna be hell sitting in the hard chair in the office for a few days, but Chris had never felt so relaxed. It was like someone had finally taken all the bad out of him. "You gonna tell Steve?"

"Not if you don't want me to," Jared promised, even though it made him feel funny inside to say it, and secretly hoped Chris wouldn't make him do it. "But, I don't think that it is necessary. I think Steve will understand as long as you're happy. He loves you, and misses you. He hates all this fighting the two of you've been doing, as much as you do."

"I just want a piece of you to myself for a minute," Chris admitted quietly and reluctantly and Jared nodded understanding and having already anticipated that. "I know, and I understand. Steve already knows that what happens between you and I will be between us for awhile and not include him. Hell he's the one that suggested it, but like I said you and I are taking this slow. You need to get used to me and I need to know you understand what I expect from you."

"Does this slow thing mean we can't sleep together tonight?" Chris asked feeling more like a girl every second. Fortunately Jared just smiled at him patiently continuing his touching and showing the unsure man affection. "Slow means that sleeping together

means sleeping and isn't code word for other things. It can be just you and me if that's what you want, or you, me, and Steve if that's what you want too. Although you and Steve are gonna have to talk and get some things worked out first if that's what you want."

"I'd like that," Chris admitted. "I miss him too, ya know. It feels like someone's taken a part of me and ripped it out, not havin' Steve there. I know it's my own damned fault, but I just..." When Chris stopped, Jared didn't speak. Instead he just nodded into the smaller man's hair hugging him tight.

~SPC~JRA~JTP~SPC~JRA~JTP~SPC~JRA~JTP~SPC~JRA~JTP~

When Genevieve came out with the redhead Steve had seen Chris take into the stockroom, Steve didn't think much about it. When Jared and Chris didn't immediately follow, Steve actually smirked. When Jared came out alone though, Steve frowned, until his boyfriend winked at him then headed for Jensen who seemed to be trying to calm someone, and only making it worse in the process. Eventually though Chris came out, looking wiped out, but smiling bigger and seeming more genuinely happy than Steve had seen him in awhile. Snorting, his eyes moved to Jared and he couldn't help but wonder what had happened in there.

He'd promised that he wouldn't ask, understood that maybe Chris would need something of Jared that was his and his alone and that he didn't have to share it with him even verbally for a bit. God only knows Steve had needed the same when Jared had finally come to him, still needed it if Steve was honest with himself. So, he knew how Chris must be feeling right now, not wanting Jared out of his sight or out of his reach.

He had to admit though, he was very curious, more so maybe because Jared was so reluctant to talk about it even in the privacy of their bedroom, acting almost self-conscious, but not quite that... maybe something similar to but not quite embarrassment either. Jared'd said that Chris needed something different from him that he himself did, and he'd said it so strangely... quiet, hesitant, not his normal red faced sex talk avoidance thing, but... like maybe he was ... what? Ashamed? No. Afriad? Maybe. Steve was slowly beginning to learn just how many masks and layers his boyfriend had.

He'd never considered himself a violent man, but the more he learned about Jared, the more he wanted to do physical harm to all those jackasses that didn't take care of a scared and lonely kid who had lost most of his family. Lost in his thoughts, Steve startled jumping when Jensen appeared at his side nudging him and holding out two beer bottles. "Your boy is waiting for you on the back porch." Frowning, Steve tracked Jared where he'd been just a moment before crossing the room to talk to Chad apparently and whatever co-eds he was flirting with that night.

"Not that one Jackass!" Jensen snapped, and Steve winced feeling the smack to the back of his head. Turning his eyes to Jensen, Steve sighed to see the tinge of anger in

his friend's eyes. "You know," Jensen said sighing. "There was a time when I said that and Jared wasn't your first thought. I know he's hurt you bad Steve, but I swear to God, if you are messing with Chris and hurt him I will fuckin' kick your pretty ass."

"I would never..." Steve started then huffed and clenched his jaw at Jensen's look of doubt. "When the fuck did I become the asshole here?" Steve shouted forgetting where he was, and frankly not caring. He didn't understand what he'd done to put Jensen's panties in a twist all of a sudden but he didn't appreciate it. He was doing his fucking best here.

"What's goin' on, you two?" Steve heard Jared ask and whipped his head around to find himself staring into worried hazel eyes. Feeling the anger sliding away, Steve took a drink from one of the bottles shrugging. "Fuck if I know." Shoving his way past Jen, not caring that he'd knocked him back into the beer cooler, Steve stomped to the other end not seeing the look Jared gave Jensen, but glad when his boyfriend met him at the end.

"Hey," Jay said stepping inside the bar stopping Steve and pushing him back into a dark spot before he could escape from behind it. "What happened? Two seconds ago you were smiling; now you look like you're gonna kill someone. Jensen was just supposed to get you and Chris a couple of beers and send you outside. He wants to talk to you, work this shit out. He wants to sleep with us tonight, and that isn't code word for fuck like bunnies, by the way. I told him you and he had to talk this shit out before we could."

Leaning forward a bit, Steve rested his head against Jared's shoulder feeling one of his large hands moving up and down his back. "All I know is Jen said my boy was waiting for me out back and I looked at you heading to Chad and he snapped. Jumpin' to Chris' honor like I was some fuckin' playboy messin' with y'all's heads! Damn it! I'm not... Am I?"

"Shh," Jared said sighing making a mental note to talk to Jensen soon, he continued to rub Steve's back before drawing back when he thought Steve was relaxed again. "No, no one here thinks you're playing games. I'll see if something is going on with Jen, I'll talk to him tomorrow if I can, if not as soon as possible. Just forget him for now. Go talk to your boy."

"Your other boy," Jared clarified smiling and signaling Randy for two more bottles, handing them to Steve once they were brought over. "Get things right between you two, the rest of us will wait."

Leaning down, Jared pressed a kiss to Steve's temple then putting his mouth over Steve's ear whispered, "I love you." Suddenly choked up, Steve sniffed, leaning forward again. "Fuck, Jay... love you, too. Love you so much, and Chris too. I'm not playin' I swear. I love you both so much..."

“Go,” Jared whispered again taking a deep breath then firmly pushed Steve back slightly and stepped back before he could lose his resolve. “Talk to Chris. Work this out. I’ll be here or up on the couch when you’re done. Don’t worry I won’t go to bed without you, so no need to rush.” Nodding, feeling nerves bubbling up under the wave of emotions he was riding right then, Steve nodded and headed out to the back patio to get Chris back.

~CMK~SPC~CMK~SPC~CMK~SPC~CMK~SPC~CMK~SPC~CMK~SPC~

“Wow.” Chris had been staring up at the sky trying to work out his words in his head, afraid he’d mess it all up, but too worried and scared of putting the final nail in his and Steve’s coffin to get anything straight. So, focused on trying to find answers in the heavens though, he didn’t hear Steve come out and found himself jumping at the sound of his voice. “Guess we’re both jumpy tonight, huh?” Steve offered without explanation and Chris turned to watch Steve move toward him almost shyly holding out a bottle of beer, putting two others on a table nearby. Seeing Steve’s eyes turn toward the sky, Christian found himself looking again, this time able to appreciate the beauty laid out in front of them. “Beautiful, ain’t it?” Chris said softly, almost afraid of breaking the fragile threads he could almost feel reaching out between himself and Steve.

“Remind me why we don’t come out here more?” Steve said finally reaching his side, and Chris had to close his eyes, feeling Steve’s arm brushing his, having missed even the barest of contact from this man he loved so deeply. “Jus’ don’ make time, I ‘spect.” Christian offered opening his eyes and turning them toward Steve again. “Beautiful,” he repeated, but this time talking about something completely different and was happy to see Steve’s eyes pull toward his, knowing a blush was spreading over his cheeks from the shy smile on his face.

All their lives Steve had believed himself to be the fat ugly one. Jenny was of course always the pretty one. Chris was the bad boy with the boy next door good looks. Jason was their geek drawing girls in with those curls of his, but according to Steve he was the ugly one. He was always the heaviest, and hated his teeth, and always insisted he looked funny. Chris had told him a million times he was the most beautiful man he’d ever seen in his life, and Steve never believed him, probably never would, but Chris wouldn’t ever stop telling him. He had hopes someday Steve would understand how gorgeous he and now Jared too thought he was, even if he didn’t believe it himself.

“I’m sorry,” Steve said out of the blue and for a moment Chris was shocked silent. Steve wasn’t the one that had fucked up, that was Chris, that was always Chris and they all knew it. He was the one that was supposed to be saying sorry, and yet here was Steve apologizing. “I’m sorry I fucked this all up. I’m sorry I handled it wrong. I’m sorry I wasn’t honest with you about Jared from the first, and I’m sorry I let you find out in front of everyone instead of talking to you in private like I should so you could freak and we could discuss it without Jensen there watching.”

“I can’t be sorry for loving him though, Chris, and I can’t be sorry for bringing him into our lives, ‘cause I just... I need him. He’s good for me, he’s good to me, and I think if you give this a chance he’ll be good for you too. He really wants to be a part of your life, Chris.”

Taking a drink from his beer, Steve cleared his throat and Chris knew he wouldn’t be able to speak at that moment if he had to. “I’m sorry I have been a crappy friend. I’m sorry Jensen and I have always expected you and Jason to take the blame for our crap, and I’m sorry I didn’t pay better attention to you. I’m sorry two practical strangers when compared to two people who have known you your whole life, saw what Jensen and I didn’t. I realized last night that I’d never ever asked you why, and I’m sorry for that too. I have come to realize that I’ve been letting you down your whole life, and you just... kept stickin’ by me even though you deserved so fucking much better.”

“You’ve had this crap life, with all the shit your daddy did to you, and said to you, and I shoulda made sure you were ok, but I didn’t. Yeah, I patched you up when needed, but I never took a fuckin’ second to make sure you weren’t bleeding inside, and God, Chris, I am so goddamned ashamed and sorry. I love you so fucking much, and I realize that I don’t fucking deserve you, but I don’t know how to give you up to find that man who does. I jus... I just hope Jared can make it up to you what I’ve not done all these fucking years.”

Chris didn’t even realize he couldn’t breathe until he felt Steve’s arms around his waist and his voice in his ear. “Come on, baby, breathe with me. It’s ok, just breathe with me.” Wrapping his hands around Steve’s arms so tight he knew there would be bruises in the morning, Chris fought to force breath out of his lungs, closing his eyes and taking himself back to panic filled nights in Steve’s room when he felt like the world was sitting on his chest, and Steve patiently held him through every terrifying moment.

Feeling the hysteria building, Chris made himself concentrate on Steve’s voice, the one anchor he could always count on not to give way in whatever storm Chris threw them into. “That’s it, Baby. You’re doing good, just breathe, in and out, just like me. Come on, Chris, you’re almost there.” Letting his head drop back, Chris felt Steve’s lips touch his cheek, feeling the tears on his face for the first time. “It’s alright Baby, everything’s ok, just breathe.”

When it was finally over, Chris stayed in Steve’s arms trembling and concentrating on Steve’s smell and forcing the air to keep moving in and out of his lungs. “Jesus, we haven’t done that in awhile.” Steve whispered tightening his arms around him, and Chris found himself nodding. “Haven’t had one in years. Don’t even know if I have an inhaler or my pills anymore.”

“Upstairs bathroom, behind the bar, in the office, in our... your bedroom, in the kitchen cabinet behind the spice rack, at the diner, and in each of our trucks,” Steve automatically rattled off and Chris snorted. “Yeah, you’ve really dropped the ball there,

Stevie. Not sure you have my inhalers and drugs in enough places. I could have an attack on stage or somethin'."

"I tried to figure out how to hide them up there, but I was afraid a customer would find them," Steve said sighing, and Chris swore knowing he was serious. "That was sarcasm, by the way, but you just made my point. I haven't thought about needing that shit in years, and you've got them anywhere I could possibly go. The diner?"

"Sophia didn't mind," Steve said softly, absentmindedly kissing Chris' neck, not that Chris was going to point it out or anything.

"You an' Jenny can only do so much, Steve," Chris pointed out, knowing his boyfriend would never accept it. One thing they all had in common was their ability to blame themselves for every little thing that happened. "Can we just... can we not do the blame game?" Chris asked truly tired of all the hard times. It felt so damned good there in Steve's arms. He didn't know if it was his time with Jared earlier, or how long this latest fight had lasted, and how sure Christian had been that he'd finally lost Steve forever because of it, but he felt none of his usual need to reassert his spot as alpha male.

"We gotta talk this out though, Chris," Steve insisted not wanting it any more than Chris did. For once he was letting Steve care for him and show him affection, and Steve really just wanted to stand there all night with his arms around Chris, but knew that that wouldn't get things fixed. There would still be hurt between them and walls that shouldn't be there, and secrets that had no place in their lives.

"I've been so damned scared I'd fucked it up for good this time," Chris admitted hesitantly. "I don' know what the fuck I would do if I lost this, lost you. I... I love you, an' I know I don't say it, and I just 'spect you to know it, but I do Steve, on my life I love you. I jus'... I can't.... the thought of all'a them knowin', and somehow that ol' bastard findin' out, an'..."

"Shh," Steve said again feeling Chris' breathing getting choppy again, making a mental note to figure out how to hide an inhaler and some pills out here on the porch. "Your daddy ain't ever comin' here, and if he does I'm shootin' him in the fuckin' head. This is our place, your safe place. HE doesn't get to terrorize you any longer. You belong to me and Jay now. You don't gotta pretend with them girls anymore, Chris. Ain't nobody gonna care. Sure there'll be an asshole or two every now and then, but it won't ever be more than that, and Jay an' Chad an' Randy if necessary can take care of. I jus... I can't share you with them. Jay, yeah, 'cause I know he's only got your best interests at heart, but those bitches don't give two fucks about you but what you do for them an' being able to brag like you're some human vibrator. Damn it, you're worth more than that, WE are worth more than that."

"Promise," Chris said easily, tired of it all and the trouble it caused him, especially now that he knew Jared would be there when he needed something more. "You don't... you sure you're ok with... I mean... Me an' Jay, just..."

“It’s alright, Chris,” Steve assured smiling against Chris’ neck. “I don’t mind. I trust him not to do something you don’t want, and if it helps you... I’m good with it. When you’re ready to tell me, I’ll be ready to listen.”

“Jus’ need it for me an’ him for a little bit,” Chris assured, still able to feel the burn in his ass, and relaxed again. “It’s nice havin’ somethin’ for myself that y’all don’t know every fuckin’ detail of. Guess I understand now why you didn’t wanna talk about Jay for so long. I s’pose I woulda wanted to keep him to myself too if I was you. Can we just... can we have a little bit that’s all three’a us? Jus... Jay said we could all sleep together tonight if’n you didn’t mind. I need you back, babe. Can’t sleep at night without you, without somethin to hold onto, can’t we just... can’t we just move on from all’a this an’ be done with it? I promise no more girls, and you promise to pay more ‘tention, and Jared already promised he’d try not to get us all blown up.”

Smiling, Steve figured he should argue knowing there was more to hash out, but decided maybe picking at all of their scabs maybe wasn’t the best way to go. Maybe this was enough, talking a few things out and just being together. Maybe it was time to just forget all the rest because in the end it didn’t really matter all that much anyway. Maybe it was time to step forward into his future with his two men, and God help anyone who step in their way.

~JTP~CMK~SPC~JTP~CMK~SPC~JTP~CMK~SPC~JTP~CMK~SPC~

When Chris and Steve finally wandered back inside, the bar was quiet and dark, and eventually they found Jared upstairs watching some black and white horror movie on AMC sitting on the couch by himself with a bottle of water and some chips and salsa. “High cuisine there Jay,” Steve teased and Chris grinned yawning. “Bedtime?”

When Jared shook his head, both frowned and started to argue until Jared held up a finger. “Wha...” Steve started to ask before a loud, distinctly feminine moan came from down the hall followed by a shout of dirty sex talk that made Jared’s face turn red.

“Chad and Sophia,” Jared offered as Chris sat down next to him stealing a chip. “Jesus, I thought you an’ Steve were loud.”

“Babe, we still got avocados?” Steve asked wandering into the kitchen without waiting for an answer deciding he needed some guacamole to go with their snack.

Throwing an arm around Chris, Jared pulled him closer and held tightly while Chris tried to fight for a moment or two before he remembered it was ok and relaxed. When Steve came back in he lifted an eyebrow but just smiled before settling on the other side of Jared and arranging all their food on a tray he’d brought out with him, and eventually snuggling into Jared’s other side.

When Jared woke up the next morning, Christian's head was in his lap, Jared's fingers twisted in his hair, Chris' legs hanging off the end of the couch. Steve was slumped over snoring softly into Jared's chest, and Jared's free arm wrapped firmly around his back holding him in place. Jared tried to imagine anything in the world better than that moment, but eventually decided that he couldn't have been happier if he'd tried.



Chapter Five: *When the Dust Settles, the End is only a Beginning*

The day started off unassumingly enough. Jared helped Steve check in the booze delivery because Jensen had gotten into a snit about something and marched off in a huff. The two of them'd had a short conversation about him, each noticing he'd been snappier than normal the last few days. Later he had gone to town by himself to check into some things and stopped into Shannon's tattoo shop to say hi. When Randy showed up unexpectedly, the two had gone off to have lunch together, and Jared was becoming more and more comfortable in the man's presence. He was quickly becoming someone important in Jared's life.

It was nice to have someone to get opinions about things that happened around the bar who hadn't been wrapped up in things since practical birth. Not to mention that Randy had a no bullshit attitude that was very similar to Jared's own so they definitely spoke the same language. There was no having to decipher what the other man really meant. When Randy said something, it was exactly what he had in mind.

Afterwards the two of them did a little browsing at some cycle places around town, so Jared could get some ideas for the future and window shop for some things he needed for his own cycle. Afterwards they went to the college Randy attended, and while they sat in the grass of the commons area he ran an idea past Randy he'd been thinking about. Jared knew Chris and Steve both really liked cycles, but never bought one because the trucks were so much more practical in their minds, and they didn't before Jared knew anyone who knew enough about them to teach them the things they needed to know.

Now that he was around there, Jared was itching to take his boys out on the road, and wanted nothing more than to do it with them on their own Padalecki-Murray custom made cycles. He couldn't imagine how great it would be to race down the road with his boys by his side. Custom cycles were definitely something he could give them that they'd never get for themselves or be able to get from someone else. He'd already talked to Chad who was excited about the idea as long as Jared would then help him make a custom cycle for Sophia. It seemed Chad's new woman wanted to be a biker mamma in her own rights, and Jared had laughed happily, almost as excited as Chad at the idea.

Jensen of course had no interest, and when he'd mentioned it, he and Randy had quite a long and in depth conversation about the man. Jared had left with an insight to Jensen he'd never considered wondering if Jensen didn't have even more masks than Jared himself had. Eventually, Randy needed to run to a class but promised to bring

Shannon to the bar to hang out that night, and Jared had promised they'd do this again. He'd had a fun and relaxing day and was eager to hang out with Randy again.

Once he'd gotten back to the bar, Jared had found Chris in a snit about something minor and nearly senseless. Another quick session in the stockroom calmed him down and mellowed him out so much that Michaela later asked if Chris was purring because he looked like a cat with a belly full of cream. Chris had just laughed and rubbed his cheek against Jared's shoulder not bothering to comment. During a lull before the evening business started coming in, Steve and Chris had gone up and brought down their guitars to entertain everyone, demanding Jared accompany them on the piano.

They'd spent almost a couple hours messing around and having a good time, Chad and the girls even joining in with the exception of Jensen who Jared noticed was once again quiet and withdrawn. Unfortunately he never got a chance to talk to him before people started coming in for the evening, and then things changed so fast he didn't have time 'til much later.

When the end came it was sudden and unexpected and once the dust settled Jared found himself wondering what he was supposed to do next. It was a very slow Tuesday night. Steve had the night off, but decided to hang out in the bar anyway spending most of the night curled up under Jared's arm as they sat on the empty stage and talked to the customers. Christian was behind the bar with Randy apparently amusing themselves by creating the most disgusting drink combinations they could imagine.

Danneel had shown up unexpectedly about half an hour prior. She worked full time at a huge offshore investment company as a personal assistant to one of the big time mucky mucks and only worked at the bar part time, usually on the weekends when she had a fairly good idea her boss wouldn't need her. Jared didn't know much more about it than that, but gathered the people she worked for were the kind he'd left behind when he'd left home, so honestly he'd never made much of an effort to learn about them. He'd never had many good thoughts about people like that, and didn't want to dislike someone who meant so damned much to Jensen because she wanted to be like the people who had turned their backs on him without a second thought.

Danneel'd come in looking all kinds of guilty and Jensen'd followed her in looking anything but happy to see her. Jared had stared at the closed door wishing he knew what was going on behind it until Steve elbowed him in the side. Blushing, Jared looked down at his boyfriend expecting irritation at being ignored, but was relieved to see nothing but understanding. It seemed he wasn't the only one worried about Jensen, but that didn't help matters much. Unfortunately he didn't have much choice but to put things off 'til later when he could talk to Jen. When raised voices were heard, and Danneel left her head held high, a mask of calm covering her face, Jared'd wanted to go to Jensen then and there, but knew the time wasn't right. He'd promised himself though that he was going to speak to Jensen as soon as the time was right.

He and Steve had been sitting on the stage involved in a debate between which was more awesome the Twilight Zone or Mystery Science Theatre 3000, when he heard the signal from Chad telling him there was potential trouble. Jared's head whipped around so fast he was surprised he didn't have whiplash, but it didn't take long to find the issue as Don Epps strode across the bar floor toward Jared with some blonde dude following him. Jared supposed that maybe if you'd never seen a real biker Don could pass as one, but since no one in the room could probably qualify for that category, he settled for thanking his lucky stars there were no more than 20 people in the room.

When Don stopped in front of him, Jared only glanced at him for a moment, before studying the side kick behind him waiting for Chad to make his way over before any conversation started. He wasn't surprised to feel Genevieve suddenly at his side and easily slipped an arm over her shoulders, kissing her temple to calm her, glad that Steve and Chris both understood she was more a sister to him than anything else. Remembering Christian, Jared glanced toward the bar and seeing the worried expression on his face, jerked his head to one side inviting him to join them.

"Jay," Don finally greeted once Christian had joined them placing himself standing next to Genevieve, his arms crossed over his chest. "I have some news I knew you'd want to hear in person."

"I hope it ain't supposed to be confidential because you really don't look like a biker man," Chad griped and Jared didn't even try to hide his smile. "Your little friend there maybe, but you not so much buckaroo."

"Seriously," Don huffed, "what is the deal with you people?"

"A bike does not a biker make, Don," Jared offered softly squeezing Steve's hand feeling the slight tremor in it. "What's going on? I doubt this is a social visit, or at least I hope it isn't since you have everyone on edge all of a sudden."

"I won't beat around the bush then," Don said sounding quite official like. "Two days ago at about eight am one Jeffrey Dean Morgan was found murdered in a roach motel about one hundred and fifty miles from here. The suspect is believed to be one Fredric Lehne the second in command of the Roving Outlaws behind Ron Pearlman."

Hugging Genevieve quickly, Jared jumped off the stage and pulled Chad into a bone crushing hug hearing Chris whooping behind them. "Fuck, Jay," Chad whispered in his ear. "We fuckin' did it man. We fuckin' beat the bastard. No more running, no more hiding, no more leaving our lives behind. Ain't nobody in that group brave enough to fuck with us now. We're fuckin' free Jayman, we're free."

Jared supposed maybe it should be Steve or Chris he should be hugging right at that second, but the only person he wanted in his first moments of freedom from JD's wrath was the only person who'd walked through hell with him. Eventually though, hearing Chris shout, "Drinks are on the house, a round for everyone!" Jared straightened

coming back to reality pulling Steve into his arms, smiling at Chris over his shoulder, and thanked God for the endless possibilities suddenly opening up before him.

~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA~JTP~JRA
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Jared stood at the bar looking around the room feeling as if someone was missing. All around him were people, strangers who didn't even know he and Chad, celebrating but he couldn't help but feel as if someone vital was not there with them. Making another scan of the room, Jared looked specifically to those closest to him. He located Chris and Steve on stage doing an impromptu jam for the crowd. Chad and Sophia were dancing in front of the stage, both looking more than a little tipsy, but Jared couldn't for the life of him find room to blame them. Genevieve was flying around the room looking happier than he'd ever seen her. Jared thought probably that he was happiest for her in all of this. Sure he and Chad had gone through a lot with JD, but she had suffered on a whole different level. Jared only hoped that this would put to rest some of the bigger demons she struggled with.

Turning his head, Jared saw Randy and... Shannon behind the bar? Cocking his head to one side, Jared moved around the end and slid behind to find out why Shannon was serving drinks instead of Jensen. Not that he minded because Shannon was well known and did an amazing job with the customers. Stopping next to Randy, Jared waited somewhat impatiently for him to get done bullshitting with a customer, suddenly impatient and worried about his friend, but didn't want to go looking for him if he was just in the stock room.

Arching an eyebrow, Jared didn't have to even pose his question, and for a moment wondered if Randy had developed psychic powers, because no sooner had he turned away from the customer, than he was answering the question Jared had not yet even voiced. "Jensen took a bottle of Dos Lunas Silver and said if someone fuckin' wanted him they could find his drunken ass out back."

"Jensen said that?" Jared asked surprised that his friend who was by his own admission a good little mamma's boy rarely cursed and even more rarely got drunk by himself at least.

"He's been off since Danni left," Randy confirmed and Jared nodded turning away, a bad feeling settling in the pit of his stomach. Quickly Jared left the back bar area and headed to the back porch, for a moment he considered stopping to let at least Chad know, but that would require explanation and he didn't wanna ruin everyone's night. He figured Randy was smart enough to know Jared would head straight out and know to handle anything that came up himself. Jared had grown to like Randy a lot, and was more than confident that his friend could handle anything that came up.

Slipping out the doors to the back porch, Jared easily spotted Jensen sprawled out on one of the lounge chairs making his way through the bottle of tequila faster than Jared

figured even the 6 of them would together. Making his way to Jensen's side, Jared sat down on the wooden floor of the porch, and looked up at his friend, waiting patiently for Jensen to acknowledge his presence. When he did the first words out of his mouth made Jared's heart bleed for his friend.

"She s'fuckin' goin' to Japan," Jensen slurred taking another swig from the bottle before continuing. "Says we should take a break, says it's too far an' we should use the time t'be sure this' wha' we really wan'."

"S'already fuckin' sure," Jensen cursed angrily looking at Jared for the first time. "Says this' 'portant to her f'kin' career." Jensen sneered the ending looking out across the barren Texas landscape, even though he couldn't see much in the darkness of the night. "Guess I ain' as 'portan' huh?"

"Jen," Jared started and stopped not quite sure what to say. Jensen and Danneel breaking up or "taking a break" as she'd apparently put it was the last thing any of them had ever expected. As far as Jared knew the two of them had been together since Jensen left and decided to come work at the bar after Steve came back home from his own college experience. "I'm sorry man, I don't even know what the hell to say." Jared finally admitted softly and Jensen just shrugged.

"S'nothin' to say." Jensen spat taking another drink ignoring or maybe unaware of the tears making their way down his face. "I ain' stupid. I know wha' that means. She ain' comin' back. If she does it'll be with some fuckin' excuse 'bout how we've grown part. She's 'barrassed of me... known that for months. S'ok to be frien's or fuck buddies with a guy who owns a fucin' bar, but it embarrasses her to introduce her bartender boyfriend to her high power'd frien's from work. She always wan'ed me to go back t'school an' finish m'degree. Guess it'd be less embarrassin' to be involved with a physic'l therapis'."

"Then she's a fuckin' idiot." Jared said speaking honestly. He didn't know much about Jensen's relationship with Danneel. Jensen he had found out was a very private man and kept matters of the heart close, not sharing them sometimes even with Chris and Steve. Because of this he wasn't surprised about his friend's request. "Don' say anythin', kay?" Jensen slurred looking at Jared blurry eyed.

"I don' wanna spoil all their fun, leas' not tonight. Y'can tell 'em tomorrow, but jus' not tonight, please?" Jared paused for a moment, not wanting to make the promise at first. It felt wrong to promise not to tell Chris and Steve something this big, but Jensen had only asked for the night, and honestly Jared didn't wanna spoil their happiness at the moment either.

"Alright man, but I gotta tell 'em tomorrow." Jared agreed and Jensen nodded struggling to stand and Jared quickly rose putting a hand on the unsteady man's shoulder. "S'all I ask. Y'can tell 'em when they wake up in the mornin'. Jus' don' wanna ruin their fun tonight s'all."

“Ok, man, sure thing.” Jared agreed before putting an arm around Jensen’s shoulder and stealing the bottle. “Now, how ‘bout I help you up to bed, huh?”

“Smashin’ idea, Jay.” Jensen nodded his agreement frowning. “Don’ feel so good.”

Snorting Jared looked at the mostly empty bottle not even a little unsure why, then helped Jensen upstairs getting him settled on his stomach in bed with a trash can nearby for when he puked. For several minutes he watched his friend sleep, his own heart hurting for what Jensen was going through. Then quietly, he made his way downstairs and back outside to collect his thoughts, knowing eventually his boys would come looking for him.

~JTP~SPC~CMK~JTP~SPC~CMK~JTP~SPC~CMK~JTP~SPC~CMK~
JTP~SPC~CMK~

Jared was still on the back porch several hours later staring out across the dark expanse of Texas land behind the bar wondering what was out there. He was trying to imagine what tomorrow held for him. He’d had to focus on his past for so long that he wasn’t sure he knew how to plan for the future. There was the shop that he and Chad had always wanted to have, the uncle he still wanted to find. There was Jensen and whatever was going on with him and Danneel, and whatever changes Jason’s homecoming would bring.

There was a future of possible immeasurable happiness with Chris and Steve that he couldn’t even fathom. Arms slipped around his shoulders and Jared smiled pulling Steve closer, feeling the heat from his boyfriend’s body soothe and relax him. Steve.

He was the reason this was all possible. Steve was the one who had pulled him into the light when Jared was sure he was hopelessly lost in the darkness. Chris was like a beacon in the distance calling him toward something he couldn’t quite make out, but Steve... Steve was the boat leading him toward safety. He wasn’t sure how he’d make it from this point out without either of them.

“You ok?” The voice wasn’t Steve’s and the new arms sneaking around his waist, chin resting against a bicep wasn’t his either. Turning his head, Jared smiled at Chris grabbing a kiss before returning his gaze back out over the vast Texas landscape. “I’m ok, just...” Jared shrugs and he feels Chris nod beside him. “Trust me, we understand.” Chris drawls and Steve chuckles behind him. “We’re kinda the experts at the whole ‘*what the fuck are we supposed to do now*’ situations.” Steve confirmed and Jared leaned his head back feeling Steve’s lips on his neck.

“You don’t have to figure everything out tonight. Hell you don’t even have to figure everything out tomorrow or the next day. You have a job. You have a place to sleep. You have friends who care about what happens to you.” Feeling Steve’s arms tighten around him, Jared sighed relaxing again.

“And you get to have really great sex,” Chris added and Steve and Jared snorted, Jared slipping an arm around Chris’ waist and pulling him closer. “Whatever you decide, we’re here. Your place is here, with us. We just... we just want you to stay, Jared. We just want you to stay.”

Sighing Jared let his eyes move back to stare back out into the darkness, hoping he’d never feel it’s pull again.



Epilogue: *Coming Home*

It was early morning. Slipping a key that hadn’t been used in years into the lock; he prayed that it still worked, that the locks hadn’t been changed. That would be the sign that he wasn’t wanted anymore. When the bolt slipped back with ease, he felt guilty as he always did for not trusting them. Quietly, he stepped through the door, breathing deeply feeling the knots inside him begin to ease. He was home, and this time he was determined not to have to leave again.

Crossing the floor, he winced as his boots made more noise than he liked. It was a little strange being in this room and hearing nothing but his own breathing. Stepping behind the bar, he opened the beer cooler, pulling out a bottle and popping off the cap, almost groaning with delight. Taking off the cap he’d been wearing, he ran a hand through his matted curls and leaned back against the doors of the cooler, closing his eyes, and enjoying the quiet.

“Jas.” Opening his eyes, Jason grinned big seeing Christian standing on the other side of the counter. “You’re home.” Smiling Jason nodded and finished his beer setting the empty bottle down. “So, Chris, what have I missed?”

The End