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Redefining Freedom

by [emwebb17](#)

Summary

After nearly being defeated in battle by a forty pound box, Misha decides he needs to do something about his lax fitness. Fortunately for him there is a new gym that has opened up the down street from the yoga studio he owns and is running a special on sessions with personal trainers. Unfortunately for him is that his trainer manifests in the form of one Jensen Ackles--and now a whole 'nother kind of exercise is on his mind.

Notes

This fic was written for the Cockles Week Prompt "Jensen as a trainer in a gym and Misha as new member who wants to build up some more muscels. They could work out together, maybe shower, sauna and hot sex :)" submitted by super-harkness

"Misha, this is pathetic."

Misha would have told Rob to go fuck himself, but he didn't have enough breath and he was concentrating way too hard on not dropping the boxes of books in his arms. He'd barely managed to lift them off the floor, and now he couldn't raise them over his head to put them on the top shelf in the inventory closet. His legs quivered and he took a flailing step back, the boxes wobbling perilously.

"Those books can't weigh more than forty or fifty pounds," Rob said, watching unhelpfully from

where he leaned against the door jamb. "You should be able to lift that over your head."

Misha barely managed to catch his balance and swayed into the shelf to keep the boxes from falling to the floor.

"A little help here?" he grunted.

Rob finally moved, very slowly, and helped him raise the boxes over their heads and slide them onto the top shelf. Misha shook his arms out when the weight was finally off his overtaxed muscles. Rob was shaking his head at him.

"What? Those boxes were heavy."

"Not really."

"Heavy enough."

"You're out of shape, Misha."

"Out of shape?" Misha replied incredulously. "I teach yoga classes every day; I eat healthy, most of the time, and I jog—"

"When's the last time you jogged anywhere?"

"Okay, I don't run anymore, but I do bike almost everywhere."

"Not since you broke down and bought that car."

"Alright, fine. So my stamina is probably down a little so what?"

"The yoga you teach is mostly about flexibility and balance. You don't really do anything that builds muscles."

"That's because the extreme yoga didn't have enough people to fill the class this past session. Or three."

Rob raised an eyebrow.

"I'm not out of shape, dude. Just because I'm not some muscle-bound meathead jock doesn't mean that I'm a weakling or something."

"Okay. Do this."

Rob squatted down with his knees directly in front of him. Misha scoffed and easily copied him.

"Okay, now stand up without touching anything."

Rob kept his arms in front of himself and pushed up using only the strength in his thighs and calves. Misha rolled his eyes and did the same—except he had to abort the movement partway. He tried again and struggled to push himself to a standing position, barely refraining from grabbing onto the metal shelves for assistance. He exhaled, trying to disguise the slight hitch in his breathing. He looked up at Rob who had his arms crossed and an eyebrow raised.

"Okay," Misha conceded grudgingly. "You may have a point."

"You should do something about it."

“Like what?”

“Well, start running again maybe. Or do something to build up a little muscle mass.”

“Why? I’m happy the way I am.”

“Why? So I don’t have to come looking for you one day and find you crushed underneath the weight of a box of butterflies.”

Misha made a face at him and led him out of the storage closet and into his shop. He owned a small yoga and health supply store with a studio in the back for the yoga classes he taught on weeknights and weekends. Saying it was a modest business would be generous, but Misha wasn’t in it for the riches. He got to spend most of his time doing something he liked and socializing with a variety of interesting people. Occasionally he had to do a little accounting to make sure he wasn’t living beyond his means, such as they were, but for the most part he got to do what he wanted, when he wanted, the way he wanted. It was a good way to live, and up until his friend had quite rudely pointed out he had the strength of a chubby toddler, he’d been content.

“Okay, so I’ll buy a Bowflex machine or something,” Misha said, straightening several *Yoga for Beginners* books on a shelf.

“Can you afford one?”

“I don’t think they’re that much.”

“Will you use it?”

“Yes.”

Rob glanced at him over his shoulder as he turned all the bottles of herbal supplements to face label out.

“Okay, I’d use it like once or twice. But if you keep coming back and giving me those self-righteous looks, I’m sure I’d use it more.”

“Oh, hey there’s an idea.”

“No thank you,” Misha said dryly and watered the potted spider fern in the storefront window.

“No, not me, but having someone to keep you motivated. Or force you into working out.”

“Should I put out an ad in Craigslist? Looking for workout companion with slightly dominating tendencies with plenty of extra time on their hands. Must love turtles.”

“I suppose that’s an option, but I’d rather not get a call at three in the morning to identify the body.”

Misha chuckled. “What do you suggest then?”

“That new gym that’s opened down the street on the corner is having a grand opening kind of sale. Discounts on memberships and stuff. I also saw a sign that they’re offering a free session with a personal trainer to try it out to see if you like it. That’s kind of the best scenario for you. You can try it out without having to commit.”

“I heard that tone in your voice.”

“What tone?”

“The tone you used with 'commit.'”

“Well, you are a little flighty.”

“I like to travel, so what?”

“For six months at a time?”

“Hey, I haven’t gone anywhere since I opened this place.”

“That’s true. I guess one year is a record for you.”

Misha sighed and leaned on the counter next to the register. “There’s just so much to see and do. Why would anyone want to stay in one place forever?”

Rob shrugged. “Some people get satisfaction from having roots.”

“Hn. Not me.”

“I know. Oh, hey my lunch break is almost over; I gotta get back. But, seriously, go check out that gym.”

Misha pouted.

“It’s not just a gym—it has a sauna and a pool...”

Misha scowled.

“And a smoothie bar.”

Misha made a face.

“Saw one of the employees through the window and he was really hot.”

Misha raised his eyebrows. “I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to just pop my head in.”

“Atta boy,” Rob said as he exited the store.

The rest of the afternoon dragged on slowly. He had two customers and one more delivery of books. It was the *Cooking Vegan Without Being a Dick About It* cookbooks he’d ordered so long ago he’d practically forgotten about them. The box was heavy, so he just nudged it into the storage room and shut the door.

As he was watching dust motes spiral in a beam of late evening summer sun, Misha decided he’d close early and go to the gym. If Rob came by tomorrow and he hadn’t at least gotten some information about it, he’d go into full lecture mode. He easily recognized when Rob had entered his “I’ve Found a Project” phase. It always sucked when he was the target of one of those phases, but he’d learned the hard way it was better to capitulate early than to fight an inevitable losing battle against his good will.

He had an intermediate yoga class later, but it wouldn’t start until seven and it was barely six now. That was plenty of time to go have a chat and would be a good excuse to leave if the owners were a little pushy in their sales tactics. Halfway down the sidewalk he turned around and scooted back to his store to lock the doors. He was going to so get robbed one day. Well, he supposed his merchandise wasn’t exactly high on a thief’s list of priority items to steal nor would one think his kind of store had much cash on hand. They’d be right on both counts. But, still, he

should look his doors.

A few minutes later found him standing outside the Lone Star Gym. Either they were new age hippies or Texans, and Misha wasn't sure which one might be worse. Inside the front lobby it was white and pristine with bright pops of primary colors and a pleasant smell vaguely reminiscent of clean laundry. It was probably a good cover for the sweaty gym sock smell the rest of the facility must have. Behind the front desk was a cute brunette with a cheeky smile. Misha instantly liked her.

"Hi. Welcome to Lone Star Gym. You're new, right?" the woman asked. "I would remember you."

Misha laughed and leaned against the chest-high desk. He noticed that the woman's nametag read, "Gen."

"Well, this is my first visit here. I thought I'd see what the place was about."

"Well, we have all state of the art gym equipment, spin bikes, an Olympic sized pool, two saunas, a steam room, a juice bar, and we offer classes focusing on cardio, strength training, and nutrition."

"That sounds very impressive."

"Isn't it?" Gen laughed. "Of course, what you need from the gym all depends on what you want to get out of it. What's your goal in joining a gym?"

"Well, my friend says I'm a ninety-eight pound weakling. So, I guess a little strength training would be good for me. I actually teach yoga, so I'm—" he paused as Gen's eyes lit up.

"You teach yoga?"

"Ye—ah. I own Anada Yoga down the street. I teach classes there afterhours."

"You don't say. We're actually thinking about adding some yoga classes here. Well, we're 'having a discussion about it,' but I think it would be stupid for us not to but you know how some guys can be. But, if we had an instructor on hand, they might be more willing to consider it."

Misha could tell his expression was one of mild disbelief, but he didn't attempt to temper it. He also wasn't entirely thrilled to hear that the owners were probably of the Texas variety and looked down on men doing something so girly as yoga.

"Um. Why would I work for my competition?"

"To keep up from being competition, sweetie. If we're paying you, we're not paying somebody else to take your business. And if you direct your class to go check out the yoga shop down the street, I'm sure we won't mind."

Misha considered the scenario. It might not be such a bad idea, but he'd probably have to cancel some of the classes he taught to teach here, which would require his students to purchase a costly gym membership.

"Well, it's a thought," Misha said. "Although, so long as you don't currently offer yoga classes, do you think I could leave some flyers here for your members to see?"

"I can certainly ask the owners how they feel about that."

“Okay, great. Well, I better get going—“

“Get going? I thought you wanted to do some strength training? Or was that a ruse to pimp your flyers?”

Gen was smiling and didn’t seem to be upset if Misha had had ulterior motives, and that was a good excuse to cut and run, but he still had some time to kill. He might as well hear the pitch.

“Ah, no, you’re right. I am interested in...a gym membership.”

Gen laughed again. “I can see you’re a skeptic. Let me give you a short tour and explain a little bit about how we operate and our membership plans, and then we’ll go from there.”

Misha nodded. “Okay, that sounds fair.”

Gen grinned and picked up the phone on the desk. “One second, let me call someone to cover for me.”

After a short conversation someone named Christian was apparently on his or her way up front.

Gen hopped off her chair and walked around the desk to meet him by the middle door in the wall to his right. He was a little shocked to see how short she was; the high seat she’d been perched on disguised that quite well.

“So, you see we have entrances to both the men’s and women’s locker rooms here, so once you join you can go directly in to change if you need to. For now, we’ll go through the main entrance.”

“Okay.”

“Oh, I’m Gen by the way,” she said, sticking out her hand.

Misha shook it and replied, “Misha.”

“Misha? That does sound very yoga-y.” She laughed and pulled open the door for him.

He smiled, walked through, and refrained from mentioning that Russia wasn’t really known for its yoga masters.

The tour lasted about twenty minutes and against his will Misha found himself impressed with the open spaces, clean, well-maintained equipment, and extreme lack of nasty gym smell. The locker room had had just a hint of it, but clearly the owners were careful to keep the place clean and pleasant to be in. The pool was amazing and Misha was considering joining just to have access to it in the winter. The amenities the gym offered—towels for use while working out and after showering, free admittance to all beginner level classes, one free drink at the juice bar a month—were pretty enticing. Especially with the reasonable prices for membership and wide variety of options from weekends only to bare bones access to deluxe packages that included access to the saunas and steam rooms and personal trainers who were also trained in massage therapy.

Gen didn’t take him back to the lobby, but to a small room with a table and chairs with a laptop set up on it. She went to a filing cabinet and pulled out a packet of information in colorful folder with a picture of happy, healthy-looking men and women of varying ethnicities on the cover.

“Nice stock photo,” Misha commented dryly.

“Hush. We’re a new business. Have a seat, please.”

Misha sat down across from Gen and she opened the packet to a page with the types of memberships available with their prices listed next to them.

“Why don’t you look over that while I put some information into our system?”

“Oh, um—“ Misha stopped from saying he didn’t want to be in the system, but he was pretty sure he was going to buy the pool pass.

Misha glanced over the prices. They weren’t terrible, but even the barebones version of membership was pretty pricy if you never planned on using the gym. He wished spending money was motivation enough to get him to come, but it probably wouldn’t be.

“Okay,” Gen said, focusing on him again, “is there anything that interests you?”

“Uh, you know...I’m just really bad about being motivated, but I would like to get the season pass to use the pool.”

“Sure, we can do that. But, there are some plans that include pool access and give you a chance to use some of our other facilities.”

“I know, but...”

“I know it can be daunting to think about joining a gym at first—it’s a lot of money for something you might not use as often as you would like, or to get a membership at a place you might feel a little intimidated to go to if you’re just starting out. But as you saw we have a very relaxed atmosphere here and don’t cater to the steroid crowd. Also, since we’re brand new, we’re offering some incentives to join early. If you get the Platinum membership—“

“Let’s start lower than that,” Misha interrupted gently.

Gen laughed. “Okay. How about the lowest level that still has pool access?”

Misha nodded.

“Okay, that’s our Silver Plan. You get all the amenities offered to every gym member, seasonal pool access, and use of our standard sauna. For joining early, you’ll get the first month free and six months after that at half price. Plus, we’ll offer one free session with a personal trainer who can help you personalize a routine that will be most beneficial to your goals.”

Misha bobbed his head. “That does sound like a good deal.”

“Mm-hmm. And if you go the Gold plan, you get all that’s in the silver plan, plus year round access to the pool and use of both saunas.”

“But not the steam room,” Misha said with amusement.

“Gotta go Platinum for that. You’ll also get two free sessions with a personal trainer.”

“What else is in the Platinum Plan besides the steam room?”

“Well, you get complimentary drinks at the juice bar every time you work out, all intermediate and advanced level classes are included, and you get a session with a personal trainer once a week as long as you’re a member.”

“Ah. That explains that huge jump in price.”

“Yes, the Platinum Plan is a bit pricy, but you get a lot out of it. Are you interested in it?”

“Oh, no. Let’s go back to Silver. So, when you say seasonal access to the pool, that means?”

“From Memorial Day to Labor Day.”

“Ah. So if I want to go in the winter…”

“You need to buy the year round pool pass or go with the Gold Plan.”

Misha strummed his fingers on the table. “Does the Gold Plan have the same offer as the Silver?”

“Yep. First month is free and the next six will be half price. You can cancel your membership at anytime without penalty.”

Misha hesitated and he realized Gen was seeing him for the gimpy gazelle he was.

“The Gold Plan really is a good deal. Especially for someone looking for pool access and a chance to get some strength training in. You can attend the beginner level classes for free with Gold, but just a pool pass doesn’t get you access to the gym or the classes. Also, with this introductory deal, you’ll get two sessions with a private trainer with an option to extend the lessons at a discounted price for the first couple of months.”

Misha gnawed on his lower lip as he looked over all the amenities listed with the Gold Plan.

“And I can cancel at any time?”

“At any time without penalty.”

Misha looked up and Gen smiled brightly at him.

Fifteen minutes later Misha left the gym with a plastic card that gave him twenty-four hour access to the gym, a laminated card declaring he had year round pool access, a coupon to try out the super antioxidant immune system boost shake at the juice bar, and an appointment with a personal trainer set up for Monday at ten in the morning. He’d also been billed the prorated price for July since his free month would be August.

Misha sighed as he looked down at his new gym membership card: Misha Collins, Gold Member since 2014. Well. Wasn’t he special. He wondered if he should go buy some athletic shorts to wear for his first session. He actually wore women’s yoga pants so that his students could easily see the position of his limbs without baggy cloth getting in the way. As such, they were quite formfitting and did little to hide the contours of his anatomy. He scowled as he unlocked the door to his shop. He knew joining a gym was going to be more trouble than it was worth.

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Monday found Misha locking his street clothes into one of the spacious lockers provided by the gym and shifting uncomfortably as he wished he hadn’t been lazy and gone out to buy the damn shorts. He’d worn a large T-shirt, but it didn’t quite cover his ass, which to be fair looked nice and perky in his yoga pants, but was definitely not what anyone else in the locker room was wearing. He got one raised eyebrow from a guy, and a wink from another. Okay then. He’d definitely gotten worse before—especially that time he’d been in full drag with stiletto heels and had to step into a biker bar to use the phone because his car had broken down on a dusty road somewhere in Nevada. They hadn’t turned out to be such bad guys in the end, though he was kind of against his will made an honorary member of the Fallen Angels Bike Club. And he had the wings tattooed on his hip to prove it.

Misha decided he didn’t care if everyone saw exactly how tight and perky his ass was or how



prominent his package was, and strode out of the locker room. He walked over to the corner sectioned off for stretching and did his best not to stare at the ass of a cute blonde who was bent directly at the waist and touching her toes. He should ask her if she was interested in yoga. He forced his eyes to the clock on the wall and saw that it was striking exactly ten o'clock. As if waiting for that cue, a man walked through the employee entrance and made his way toward the warm-up area. Several people, both men and women, paused in their workouts to watch him. Misha could feel that his own jaw was slightly dropped.

The man was tall, very tall, with broad muscled shoulders and a solid torso that tapered to a narrow waist. His thighs were powerful as they moved under loose-fitting blue nylon shorts that matched a sleeveless, formfitting blue and white shirt. His skin had a nice bronze color and his eyes flashed hazel-green in the sunlight. He stopped in front of Misha and tossed his luscious, mane of chestnut hair. He grinned and it almost outshone the sun.

"You're Misha?" the guy asked.

Misha nodded dumbly.

"I'm Jared Padalecki. I'll be your personal trainer today."

"M-M..." Misha paused as he tried to remember his own name. "Misha Collins."

"Great! So, let's do some stretching to get the muscles warmed up, and while we do that we can discuss what you're looking to get out of this session and from your gym membership."

"Okay."

The warm up was all kinds of awkward as they stretched and Misha tried to stammer out what he wanted accomplish while several people stared at both of them. He really should have gone with shorts today. After that they had started off deceptively easily, going through the various machines so that Jared could teach him how to use them properly and so they could see what his current abilities were. Jared was pretty easy going and didn't shout at him to just try "five more, you maggot!" like he'd feared might happen, but Misha did feel like he might have strained a little too hard on some of the machines. He also never wanted to hear the word "planking" ever again.

By the time they got to cardio—the true face of his personal trainer shown through. He made him do lunges and jumping jacks and stepping and the elliptical machine and a stationary bike and finally they ended on the treadmill. Misha had been soaked from hairline to ankle in sweat, crying as Jared pushed the speed button another couple of clicks and his eyes caught on the number that said he'd already run three miles. He hadn't run three miles in months. Possibly over a year. Just before he was certain he was going to lose his footing and go flying off the treadmill and into the free weights, Jared pushed the "cool down" button, which lowered the machine to a slow walk. Misha grasped the railings and gasped for breath as he forced his heavy feet to keep moving so he wouldn't fall off the back end.

"That was great, Misha!" Jared said, still totally peppy. "You really pushed through that last mile. You cool down and I'll go get you a towel, okay?"

Misha wheezed a response and Jared thumped him on the back. It nearly sent him sprawling to the moving belt. He watched Jared as he walked away and as soon as he disappeared into the locker room, Misha hit the stop button and allowed himself to roll back to the end. He stepped off on unsteady feet, the ground feeling like it was still moving, and then collapsed on the ground. He panted in a most undignified manner, but was too exhausted to care that he was sprawled in the middle of the floor of a fairly crowded gym.

After a minute his breathing became less labored, but his body still felt like it had just received a beating from a pack of angry Lollipop Guild members. He could sense a body standing over him when the sunlight disappeared from his face. He cracked his eyes open and saw a vision in white—a beautiful angel with a golden halo of sun around his short, brownish hair. His eyes were a clear green like the Gulf of Mexico at mid-morning. He knelt down next to him and used a hand to lift his head so that he could take a sip from the glass of greenish liquid he offered him.

“You need to rehydrate,” the angel said in a surprisingly deep voice. “And your blood sugar is probably down too. This will help.”

Misha took a sip through the straw, and then sucked down several more sips of the cool, refreshing liquid. The angel pulled it back slightly.

“Careful, not too fast.”

Misha nodded and took another sip, enjoying the slightly sweetened cucumber-apple water—those were the two flavors he could definitely discern—and enjoying the slight bite of ginger as well. He felt better almost immediately; his blood sugar must have been pretty low.

“You okay to sit up?”

Misha nodded and blushed slightly as the angel—well, it was probably a man—put an arm under his shoulders and helped him sit upright. He still felt exhausted, but the drink definitely made him believe he wasn’t about to die.

The man smiled and didn’t pull away and Misha did nothing to encourage him to do so.

“So. How was your first training session?” the man asked.

Misha didn’t know whether to burst out laughing or into tears. So, he opted for a smile that would cover his breaking spirit.

“Jared Padalecki. Is a monster.”

The man grinned and Misha felt his heart skip a beat—and then seize up with the effort, the poor thing.

“I won’t disagree, but he does get results.”

“Yay me,” Misha said weakly.

“Here,” the man handed Misha the drink to hold and then used his now free hand to pick up a towel from the floor—rather than removing his arm from Misha’s back he couldn’t help but notice. He handed Misha the towel and he wiped off his face and neck before taking another few sips of the drink.

“Ready to try standing?”

Misha made a face. “Not really.”

“Come on,” the man laughed. “You can do it.”

Misha allowed the man to pull most of his weight up and grudgingly got his feet to support him. With an arm still around his waist, the man led him toward the locker room.

“You should rinse off in the showers, and then got sit in the sauna for about fifteen minutes, and

then shower again. If your muscles feel tight after that, come find me and we can do some exercises to loosen them up.”

Misha nodded. Of course he already knew what exercises and stretches he could do to ease tension in overexerted muscles, but Angel Guy didn’t need to know that. He was also feeling loopy from the endorphins and the lactic acid so he spoke without consulting what little filter he had between his brain and his mouth.

“Even if I feel okay, can I still come find you?”

The man actually looked startled, he tried to hide it, but it was pretty apparent he was surprised by the poorly executed flirtation. Though his cheeks did turn a lovely shade of pink. Looks like this might be a possibility in reality after all.

“Um. Sure, of course. I have an appointment at two, but until then I should be in the office. Just ask any employee you see for Jason.”

“Okay.”

“You think you got it from here or need help undressing?”

Jason said it like it was a joke and he laughed like it was a joke, but he cut off too soon and swallowed thickly, his eyes dropping to Misha’s lips.

Misha smiled at his fumbling shyness. He wasn’t just beautiful, he was adorable.

“No, I think I can manage it.”

Jason nodded, still blushing, and stepped back from Misha. He held the door to the locker room open for him.

“Okay then. Good workout today,” he said, voice suddenly gruffer and deeper.

“Thanks,” he said as he walked inside.

Jason turned to leave and Misha mumbled softly, “Wouldn’t mind having someone help me wash my back though.”

Behind him Misha heard the sharp squeaks of gym shoes stumbling on the wood floor that lined gym space. Misha grinned and tilted his head side to side to ease the building tightness in his neck. Maybe joining the gym would prove to be fruitful in more ways than one.

After taking Jason’s advice, though he only spent ten minutes in the sauna because it reminded him too much of a sweat lodge he’d been in with his mother and thirty naked people when he’d been six, he was feeling pretty good. He knew he would be sore tomorrow, but the good kind of sore the resulted from a good workout. In fact, that first mile and a half of running had felt great. He realized he missed running. He wondered what Jared would think if he told him he wanted to try to train for a marathon. Maybe he could start with a half marathon.

Once he was dressed, Misha couldn’t help but go in search of Jason. He wanted to make sure the guy was as gorgeous as he remembered or if he’d hallucinated the whole encounter. The empty juice glass he’d thrown away gave him hope he had been real.

The gym was a little less crowded in the midday hours and Misha scanned the room for a man in white. Apparently the gym didn’t have a set uniform for their employees as they all seemed to just be required to wear some kind of athletic clothes—just like everybody else who came to the gym.

Finally he went up to the juice bar since he knew the guy behind the counter definitely had to work there.

“Hi,” Misha said, sliding onto a stool.

“What can I get for you?”

“Oh, just water, please. But I was wondering how I might fight a certain employee.”

“What’s their name?” the man asked, placing a bottle of cool, but not cold, water in front of Misha.

“Jason. I think he might be one of the trainers.”

The man tilted his head. “Mm, I don’t think anyone named Jason works here.”

Misha deflated. “No?”

“Well, one of the owners’ friends is named Jason, but he doesn’t work here.”

“I see.” Had he given him a false name? Had he misread the guy’s blushing? Had it been uncomfortable embarrassment rather than interest? Well, that was humiliating. He needed to find Gen and cancel his membership immediately.

“Or, you know,” the juice man continued, “it could be J—”

“There you are, Misha!”

Misha winced and turned slightly to see Jared standing behind him with his hands on his hips and looking peppy and energetic and like he wanted to put Misha in a giant plastic hamster ball and just watch him run around for his personal amusement.

“Jared.”

“So, today was great. How are you feeling?”

“Exhausted.”

“Great! That means we left everything out there. Next time we’ll be able to tailor your program since we know your limits now.”

Misha narrowed his eyes. This whole thing had been about testing his limits? Jared was about to test the limits of his ability not to punch people in the nads.

“When do you have time to come again? Does Monday at ten work again?”

“Uh, well—”

“Oh, don’t worry. We won’t let the good work we did here today go to waste. You can still come in and workout during the week.”

“Lucky me.”

“Mm-hmm. So, Monday at ten, okay?” Jared clapped his hands and pointed a finger at Misha. “See you then.”

Misha pointed a tired finger back, but Jared was already halfway across the room, clapping his

hands at a tittering group of women waiting by one of the doors to the classrooms. Apparently Jared also taught beginner kickboxing. Misha would **not** be signing up for that class. He gave a tired smile to the juice man, collected his bottle of water, and eased off the stool. He winced as his knees protested the movement. Geez. He wasn't that old. Not yet anyway. He did his best not to limp out of the gym and considered going to his shop to finish documenting his latest inventory, but there was a reason he was closed on Mondays. He was grateful he'd driven his car and parked nearby because the thought of riding his bike the five miles home made his body twinge all over with phantom pain.

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The following week Misha did not return to the gym. He told himself it was because he was too busy and a little bitter from being too sore to teach his Tuesday yoga class. It was definitely not because he was nervous about running into the non-Jason. He considered not showing up for his second training session with Jared, but he'd never not done something or gone somewhere because it might be embarrassing. That was no way to live life. Besides, he might not even see the guy. Even though he wanted to. He really was just curious to know if he was actually as hot as his fatigued brain had thought he was.

Jared greeted him promptly at ten, chipper as ever. He'd given Misha a disappointed look when he'd confessed to not having been back to the gym. Perhaps that was why he took it a little easier on him, so as not to discourage him from returning. This time they don't go to all the machines, just the ones that Jared said would help him build the muscles he wanted. The cardio was still a bitch and Jared only cut out the lunges and jumping jacks combination. He started him at a nine minute mile and made him run four of them. When he was left alone to cool down, Misha did feel a little embarrassment at his own deterioration. In his heyday of running he'd been able to knock out ten six minute miles easily. Now he was struggling with four nine minute miles. He had a lot of work to do to get back into good shape. He'd probably never reach a six minute mile again, he was over thirty after all, but he could certainly get close to seven minute miles.

Misha actually went through the cool down this time and was a little surprised when the machine turned itself off. He sighed, feeling like he wanted to walk a little more, but he really did need to go to his shop and work on that inventory he'd been putting off. He turned around started in surprise, knocking his hip against a railing. His angel stood at the end of the treadmill with a juice bar drink in hand.

"You okay?" not-Jason asked.

"Um, yes." He rubbed his hip. "You just startled me."

"Sorry. Here." He offered up the drink that was more orange colored this time. It tasted like tangerine and carrot.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

They stood awkwardly for a moment. Misha cleared his throat, and not-Jason raised his eyebrows expectantly.

"Um. It's good. Do, uh, does everybody get such personalized treatment here?"

"No. Just the ones we're worried might sue us if they pass out on the floor after a training session."

Misha laughed softly. "I see. What's the reason this time?"

"I wanted to make sure you found me."

"Oh." Misha felt a little tingle prance along his skin. "Well. It would help if you told people your real name."

Not-Jason's brow creased in confusion. "What do you mean? I told you my name."

"The juice guy said no one named Jason worked at the gym. Is he new? Or are you new?"

The man smiled and suddenly Misha remembered he'd wanted to see if he was really as beautiful as what his imagination had cooked up. He wasn't. The real thing was better.

"*Jen-sen*," the man enunciated each sound carefully. "My name is Jensen."

"Oh. I like that name. Are you Scandinavian?"

"No."

"Oh."

They stood awkwardly again. It was weird. Misha knew they had had some sort of instant connection ping between them, but they probably couldn't be more awkward around each other if they tried.

"So, um, you should shower, sauna, shower. And then come find me. Or Jared. So we can discuss your progress and your plan."

"Oh, okay."

"Yeah, so...just look for Jensen this time."

"Well, technically I was looking for Jensen last time."

"Yeah, but you said the wrong name, so—"

"Yeah, no I know, I meant—"

They accidentally cut each other off and stared.

"So, showers are in the locker room, right?" Misha asked.

"Yep. Right over there."

They walked in opposite directions. Misha felt a twinge of embarrassment, but mostly he was amused. He smiled to himself and wondered what Rob would say about his appalling lack of game. In his own defense he hadn't really been on the dating scene since returning to Huntersville over a year ago. He wasn't sure why he had abstained for so long. His last relationship, with a woman, hadn't ended badly, so it wasn't like he was afraid to try again. Maybe he was just out of practice with men. When was the last time he'd been with a man?

"I don't know, honey, but I can tell you when your next time will be."

Misha whipped his head around and saw a ripped, handsome man taking off his shirt and flexing his muscles. Apparently Misha had been mumbling out loud. He gave the peacock a smile.

“Thanks, but unless you can tell me when I’m going to hook up with that hot trainer, I don’t think you know.”

“Oh, hon,” the man replied sympathetically, and a little condescendingly. “That boy is straight. He’s dating that cutie who works the front desk. Jan, Gem, something...”

“It’s Gen,” another man said, tossing a towel at the first one.

“I guess, I don’t know. All straight people look the same to me.”

“You’re such an idiot,” the other responded with a grin.

Misha left them to their squabble, and trudged despairingly to the showers, grabbing a freshly laundered towel from a bin on the way. Straight? Not even a little bi-curious? He could work with heteroflexible if he needed to. Had he really read the signs so wrong? Then it occurred to him that people had probably seen him working with Jared for the last two hours. Maybe Jared was dating Gen, though with that height difference he wasn’t exactly sure how that worked.

Hope renewed, Misha showered and decided to skip the sauna. He could work out any kinks in his muscles on his own later. He was happy to find that he wasn’t quite as beaten down as the first session. Maybe there was hope that this little experiment would work. On his own though of course. He was certain he couldn’t afford weekly sessions with a private trainer. Even monthly would probably be out of the question. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t take their currently still free advice and apply it himself—now that he was motivated to get back to his fighting weight.

He’d only been scanning the gym for a couple of seconds when Jared found him. With a friendly though powerful thwack on the back, Jared got him moving in the direction he wanted as well as probably breaking his spine in half. He led them through the employee entrance which opened onto a hallway with several closed doors lining it. They went into the second door on the left and the room inside was bigger than the one that Gen had snookered him into getting a Gold membership, but not by much. There was a table and chairs, but also a desk with a desktop computer and printer set up. Misha was pleasantly surprised and only mildly flustered to see Jensen sitting at the desk.

“You get that thing to work?” Jared asked Jensen while pulling out a seat at the table for Misha.

“There was nothing wrong with it, dude, except an intermittent operator error.”

Misha chuckled.

“What?” Jared asked. “Is that one of those turn it off and turn it back on scenarios?”

Misha laughed again and Jensen grinned and gave him a wink. Jared scowled slightly as he looked between the two. Then he shrugged it off and took the small stack of papers from the printer. He sat down across from Misha.

“Well, whatever it was, thanks for your help.”

“Sure.”

Jensen stood up and walked around the desk, but rather than leaving he sat down at the table with them. Misha sat up a little straighter, though he had no idea why. Jared didn’t seem to think it strange that Jensen was staying. Jared spread out the pages on the table and Misha tried to concentrate on what Jared was saying and not the fact that Jensen’s knee was pressed against his. Then his foot bumped into Jensen’s. Then Jensen’s knee nudged his thigh. Then Misha looked up and realized that Jared was agreeing that once a week sessions would be a good idea.

Misha blinked. “Um. What?”

“I’m glad you like the plan I came up with. I know it’s a little strenuous…”

Misha gulped. What did the plan involve?

“...but I know you can handle it. And don’t worry about the money. We can work out a payment plan. Also, we’re giving you a discount because you’re one of the first to sign on for long term training.”

“I...” Misha paused. He did what now? Jensen moved his leg and Misha’s mind cleared. He looked down at the contract in front of him and the drying ink on the dotted line. He shot his eyes over to Jensen. This felt like a scam. Send in the pretty angel to distract people from what they were doing. He smiled at him again, his eyes still green even under fluorescent lights. Misha knew he’d sign a hundred more contracts. Damn. Maybe if he’d gotten laid recently he’d be less pathetic. Probably not.

“There’s only one problem,” Jared said. “I was covering for someone this month, but they’re back now. I don’t usually work Mondays. Is there another day we can schedule our sessions for?”

Misha saw his light at the end of the tunnel. “Oh, I’m sorry, no. I run my own business and teach classes at night every day except Mondays. It’s the only day I’m available. So, I guess we should probably cancel this then...”

“If you need to stay on Mondays, I can do it.”

Misha whipped his head to Jensen.

“I work Mondays. And after looking over Jared’s proposed regimen, I think I’d be able to step in easily enough. I also currently don’t have any regular appointments for Monday—“

“What about—“ Jared started and then he suddenly cut off with a soft, “ow.”

“I don’t have any regular appointments for Monday mornings, so I’m sure I can—slide you in.”

Misha nodded vaguely. Oh. That light was a freight train.

“Sounds good.”

“I’m looking forward to working with you, Misha.”

Jared snorted a laugh. “I’ll bet. Ow! Quit it!”

Jensen and Jared glared at each other and Misha was polite enough to pretend that he hadn’t noticed Jensen kicking Jared under the table for the second time. They all stood and there were some awkward handshakes and goodbyes and a promise that he would be billed to the credit card they already had on file.

Jensen walked him to the lobby and described in detail the kind of gym shoes he needed to purchase because apparently the ones he currently owned were not only worn out but they were also the wrong kind for his planned workouts. Misha was grateful for the conversation that had kept the walk from being awkward, but the price tag on this endeavor just kept going up. Just to poke at him because he was draining his wallet, Misha turned back as he opened the exterior door.

“So, the shoes. Got it. Is there anything else equipment wise I need? Or should I change my

workout outfit? I mean, what I've been wearing are yoga pants, so I don't know if I should just switch to shorts or something?"

He watched as Jensen's eyes flicked down. A small frown appeared on his lips—possibly because Misha had changed out of his yoga pants into his oldest, baggiest pair of jeans. Jensen looked back up, cleared his throat, and then crossed his arms.

"They're fine. I mean, really, they're probably better than loose fitting gym shorts because they won't get caught in any equipment."

"Hmm."

"You should definitely continue to wear them."

"You're the expert," Misha said.

Jensen smiled and looked away. Then he looked back at him. "That's right. So, you better be prepared to follow my instruction."

"I tend to be more of a do what I want kind of person, but there's an exception to everything."

Jensen nodded. "Also be aware that I'm—very hands on."

"God I hope so."

"What?"

"What?"

Misha felt his face erupt into flames.

"Um, I gotta run. See you next Monday at eleven, right?"

"If not sooner," Jensen called after him as he hurried down the sidewalk. "You should be using your membership and working out on your own!"

Misha didn't turn back but waved a hand to acknowledge he'd heard him. Forty-five minutes later he was still feeling the wash of embarrassment as he sat cross-legged on the floor and counted boxes of incense in his inventory closet. He couldn't believe he'd let that slip out of his mouth. Jensen's eyes had gone wide with shock. Yeah the guy had been flirting a little, but that could have easily been sales flirting. Now he'd gone and made an inappropriate comment—hell, suggestion. Hopefully a week would be long enough for them to kind of forget about the whole thing otherwise their first session would be awkward as fuck. And he hadn't even read the damn contract—he had no idea if he could cancel the sessions without some kind of penalty.

Misha raised his head as he heard the bells on the door jingle. He could have sworn he'd locked the door after him.

"Misha?"

Misha relaxed when he recognized Rob's voice. He'd given him a set of keys to the store so that if—when—he lost his own keys, he'd still be able to get in to work. It was also convenient that Rob could let himself in if he visited on Mondays and Misha was not up front to see him.

"I'm in the closet!" Misha called out.

Rob laughed. "You haven't been in the closet—"

—since sixth grade. Yeah, you make the same joke every time.”

Rob poked his head around the corner and cut off his next comment as he looked around the mess Misha had created.

“What are you doing?”

“Inventory,” Misha cried softly.

“I thought you were going to hire someone part time so that you could start taking some breaks and, you know, make them deal with this mess.”

Misha flopped back on to the floor, tilted slightly to the left because of the rolled up yoga mat under his right shoulder.

“I know, I was,” he groaned. “But I can’t afford to now.”

“What? Why not? I thought you’d actually turned a profit last quarter.”

“I did. But now it’s going to that stupid gym.”

Rob laughed. “It’s just a gym membership; it can’t cost that much.”

“Weekly sessions with a personal trainer do.”

“Weekly—you what? Misha! Hey, I didn’t suggest that. That’s all on you.”

“Oh, I know it’s not your fault. It’s all on me.”

“Can you cancel them? Did they coerce you? You might have a legal case on your hands. I could call Speight and see what he thinks.”

“No, no. It’s my fault. Well, partially his fault.”

“Whose?”

Misha sighed and turned his head to look at Rob. “You don’t understand man, he is so hot. Like, not just hot, but like the kind of hot that it hurts to look at him. I mean, you don’t even know the kinds things I want to do to him.”

“I agree with that last sentence wholeheartedly. Please don’t tell me.”

“Hnn,” Misha looked at the ceiling. “I mean—he’s so hot he’s gotta be a dick. Or really dumb. Or twisted and psychotic. Something. No one is that good looking without something else being wrong.”

“Please, just tell me he’s not straight. I can’t go through that again.”

Misha smiled. “He wasn’t so straight when I was through with him.”

“Misha. He’s still in therapy.”

Misha chuckled softly remembering darling Matt. “I don’t know for sure, but I doubt he’s completely straight. He was flirting with me. I think.”

“Well, that sounds definitive.”

Misha sat up. “He has to be at least bi. I can’t go through life thinking I don’t at least have a shot.”

“With the psychotically twisted guy? Sounds like a real catch.”

“Hey, he could just be a dick. And besides, I’m not looking to raise genetically engineered kids with the guy.”

“Genetically engineered?”

“Yeah, it can’t be that far off in the future. And it’s more romantic that way—they’ll have his eyes and—his hair and teeth. The cheekbones and jaw are nice too.”

“Okay. I’m getting lunch at the taco place next door. You coming?”

“Yeah, I’m coming.”

Misha stood up and dusted off his backside. He didn’t bother closing the closet door as that would have required moving several boxes out of the way and followed Rob to the front of the store.

“So, you know I’m going to be checking in with you every Monday to find out if you’re going to need Rich to represent you in court when you’re charged with sexual harassment.”

Misha laughed and locked the door on the outside. “It’s only harassment if it’s unwelcome.”

“Honestly I’m not even going to try to discourage you. You need to get laid.”

“Says the man who hasn’t had sex in—how many years you been married now?”

Rob shoved him playfully. “Shut up.”

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Not surprisingly, Misha didn’t make it back to the gym before his scheduled appointment at ten o’clock on Monday morning. He was anxious getting ready at his apartment, antsy as he drove to the gym, and nervous as he put his change of clothes in the locker room. He was wearing the yoga pants, but he’d also found his very old and stretched out AC/DC T-shirt that covered most of his ass. He didn’t want to come off as one of those guys that presented himself up for mating like a baboon or something.

The gym was fairly quiet, which made Misha even more nervous. There would be no distractions and their awkward silences would be even more awkward in the large, empty space. So maybe he just needed to make sure their silences weren’t awkward. Misha was good at talking. He could be quiet, but when he wanted to he could wax poetic about the finer points of the tax code.

Jensen was waiting for him in the stretching area, and there was no cool way to approach when the guy he wanted to think he was cool was watching him cross the room. Especially when he was wearing new gym shoes and stumbled when the very efficient tread caught on the slightly rubbery floor. Jensen was grinning at him when he looked up from regaining his balance. Asshole.

“New shoes?” Jensen asked.

Misha glared at him.

“Okay. Let’s make sure we get nice and loose and limber and our muscles all warmed up before we begin our workout. I can teach you some basic stretches if you like. Unless, you have your own routine?”

Of course Misha knew how to stretch his muscles in a healthy, safe way; he had studied yoga for over a decade after all.

“Ah, the yoga pants are just for show. Could you teach me the best way to warm up?”

Jensen repressed a laugh. “‘Just for show,’ you ain’t lying.”

Misha smiled back because he knew he was being teased and not flirted with, but he tugged down on the back of his T-shirt anyway.

“I actually prefer teaching stretches because I like to make sure my clients do it right. It’s the most important thing you do when it comes to exercise. Never exercise cold.”

Misha nodded solemnly, being the good student. Jensen narrowed an eye at him.

“Believe it or not what you learned in high school gym class isn’t that far from the best way to start. Start with rolling your shoulders and arching your back. Then lace your fingers together and stretch your arms both in front of you and behind you.”

Misha copied Jensen through a series of simple stretches for the arms, legs, and back, and wished he hadn’t been so quick to play dumb because they were really too simple to properly stretch out his already very stretched muscles. It did only take a couple of minutes for Jensen to realize that Misha was keeping up, so he started pushing the stretches a little bit. Although the simplicity of the exercises did allow Misha to appreciate the aesthetic fluidity of Jensen’s movements. He wore a black sleeveless exercise shirt made of material that wicked away sweat and a pair of loose fitting black gym shorts that went almost to his knees. He had nice knees.

“Okay. One last thing,” Jensen said, making Misha snap his eyes up from Jensen’s bent knees that showed off exactly how bowlegged he was. “We want to make sure your back is nice and stretched because people tend to forget about that and it can make for some very unpleasant mornings.”

“Okay. So, some more twisting?”

“No, we’re going to bend over,” Jensen said, demonstrating and giving Misha a nice view of his firm ass through the clingy fabric of his shorts, “and if you can put your hands flat on the floor like this. Then drop one shoulder for three seconds...and then the other shoulder for three seconds...and then very slowly, very slowly, roll up an inch at a time. Don’t just stand straight back up.”

Misha watched his teacher with rapt attention. He just got his eyes up in time for Jensen to turn around and face him.

“Wanna give it a try?”

Misha nodded and bent part way, not sure how much flexibility he should show off right at the start. His eyes went wide when he felt a hand at his hip.

“If you want to be able to bend over as far as possible, bend from the hips, not the waist.”

Misha felt another hand sneak around his other hip and flatten over his pelvis.

“Bend here,” Jensen said.

Misha certainly knew how to bend over, and he dropped completely forward, putting his hands behind his ankles and nearly folding in half. He felt Jensen's hands pull back to the sides of his hips and could see his feet planted just behind and on either side of his. Jensen was directly behind him while he was bent over and grabbing his ankles. It was more funny than anything else. If only Jensen's hands weren't burning their presence onto his skin through his clothes. He worked his feet apart just enough to peek his head through and looked at an upside down Jensen.

"How's this?" he asked.

Jensen immediately released his lower lip from the torture his teeth had been inflicting on it and cleared his throat.

"Well. I guess that explains why Jared's training plan didn't have anything about improving flexibility."

Misha laughed and carefully rolled up, keeping the strain off his spine. When he was standing upright he could sense that Jensen was still directly behind him. He hadn't moved his hands. Misha didn't move either, deciding he was going to let Jensen take the lead so there wouldn't be any more potentially embarrassing misunderstandings. Jensen removed his hands, but slowly, letting his fingers trail over the thin fabric of his pants as he had reached under Misha's T-shirt to get a grip on him. Misha turned around slowly and saw a nice pink blush on Jensen's cheeks and a wide, deer in headlights look in his eyes.

"Great." Jensen cleared his voice after the slight squeak that word came out as. "Um, good. We're all hot now. I mean warm. Warmed up actually. So, we should get started."

"Okay. You're the boss."

"Don't call me boss."

"Yes, sir."

Jensen went more red than pink this time and opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He turned around and walked away.

"Follow me!"

Misha jogged after him and when he was directly behind him said with a slight growl, "Coming."

"Jesus Chr—"

Jensen stopped at a bench press and turned a look on Misha. He did his best not to smile and give away exactly how much of a smartass he knew he was being. Jensen shook his head slightly, full aware of exactly how much of a smartass he was being.

"On your back, Collins."

"Yes, sir."

Misha positioned himself on the bench and slid to the proper place Jared had showed him. He watched as Jensen easily gathered a couple of round weights in his hands and began putting them on the end of the bar on the rack over Misha's head.

"Now, Jared didn't have bench pressing on your plan as he intended on building up your muscles on the other machines first, but I think using low weight totals can be beneficial even in the beginning because it not only works your arms, but your pectorals and core muscles."

“I have complete faith in your recommendations.”

“Hnn. Okay. Let’s start with fifty pounds just so you can get comfortable with the correct motions and grip of your hands, and then we’ll see about adding more weight. Now, I’ll be spotting you and watching to see if you need help, but if you feel you need help, ask immediately if you can, okay?”

Misha nodded. He waited until Jensen was positioned behind his head and stared at the bar that was slightly in front of his eyes rather than trying to get a peek up Jensen’s shorts. He raised his arms and let Jensen place his hands in the correct positions, and then flexed his fingers a couple of times to ensure his grip. He gave a nod to Jensen and Jensen told him to lift straight up first before trying to bring the bar forward and down. Misha lifted straight up, positioned his arms, and—

“Help!” Misha squeaked as the bar came crashing down as his arms offered no resistance. Jensen easily caught the bar one handed and raised it back to the rack. Misha removed his hands and shook out his wrists. He glanced embarrassedly up at Jensen.

“It, uh, was heavier than I expected. It surprised me,” he said.

“Mm-hmm. Ready to try again? We can also lower the weight...I think there are some ten pound ones around here somewhere...”

“No, it’s fine,” Misha said testily. “I can do it now that I know what to expect.”

Jensen smiled. “Okay. But don’t strain yourself.”

Misha positioned his hands again. “How much can you bench press?” he asked.

“It’s not really important.”

Misha tilted his head to make eye contact.

“Two twenty,” Jensen said.

“Hunh. Must make sex interesting.”

Jensen snorted. “Just lift the weights, will ya?”

Misha got the weight off the rack and this time managed to let it fall toward his chest in a somewhat controlled manner.

“Don’t let it touch your chest,” Jensen said, even though his hand was in between Misha’s chest and the bar. “That’s too far; don’t let your arms fold all the way. You need the resistance.”

“Okay,” Misha huffed and he struggled to push the bar back up. This was harder than that damn box of books.

Jensen partially took some of the weight off Misha’s arms as he held the bar. “Do you want to try another or do you need a break?”

Misha did not embarrass easy when it came to things like physical abilities, but he would be damned if he quit after one.

“I can do more.”

“Okay.”

Jensen moved his hand and Misha gritted his teeth as the weight hit his arms again.

*This is pathetic, this is pathetic.*

He kept that mantra in his head as motivation to struggle through one more rep, but then he nodded when Jensen raised a questioning eyebrow at him. Together they put the bar back on the rack.

“Shit,” Misha breathed out.

Jensen smiled. “Let’s drop down to the twenty pound weights. It will only be ten pounds lighter, but I think it’s important that you get more repetitions in than how much the weight is. I’ll be right back.”

Jensen pulled the stoppers off the ends of the bar and removed the weights like they were made of Styrofoam. Misha closed his eyes and shook out his arms. As humiliating as it was to have Jensen see him in all his puny glory, it was galling to know that Rob had been so utterly right about his fitness. He heard Jensen applying the new weights, and opened his eyes.

After putting on the weights and stopping them at the ends, he had moved behind Misha again and leaned forward to double check their stability. It seemed to be an unconscious movement as he looked totally focused on the weights, but the result was that Misha had a clear shot up his shorts. Misha had kind of wanted this because pervert that he was he was curious what a pair of briefs or a jockstrap would tell him about the endowments of his new trainer. Turns out—whether wisely or unwisely—Jensen went commando when he trained.

It was only a glimpse, but Misha now knew that while Jensen certainly didn’t wax there was definite manscaping that took place, and he had not been imagining that large roll of fabric he’d seen last Monday. Hung like a horse, hung like a bear—really, Jensen had his pick of similes. Misha had never been a size queen; he thought size wasn’t as important as knowing what to do with it. But, damn. Jensen was a monster and he’d started salivating.

“Okay. Ready for forty?”

Misha shook himself and had to swallow before he could talk.

“Yes. Forty. Let’s do this.”

Misha managed to do five reps fairly easily as his adrenaline was kicked up a notch, but he struggled through the second five even with Jensen’s gentle and motivating encouragement. Misha groaned softly when his arms were free from the crushing weight of six sumo wrestlers and let them fall limply to his chest.

“Where’s your water?” Jensen asked.

“Wha?” Misha grunted, opening his eyes and being met with the stunning clear green of Jensen’s eyes as he leaned over the bar.

“Yes, water,” Jensen repeated.

“I didn’t, um. I didn’t bring one.”

Jensen sighed in a slightly exaggerated manner.

“Okay, sit up, scoot to the end of the bench, and put your head between your knees. I’ll be right

back.”

Misha was pretty well mortified at this point. He sat up but didn’t put his head between his legs; he didn’t feel that bad. Not yet anyway. Jensen returned with a bottle of water from the juice bar and only let Misha take a single sip from it.

“You’re doing well,” Jensen said and Misha gave him his best stink eye. Jensen laughed and picked a string off Misha’s shoulder. The small contact made his skin tingle. “I mean it. You pushed through those last five reps. If you keep doing it, you’ll be able to do ten easily. And then we’ll increase the weight and forty pounds will feel like nothing. Now, don’t try this alone. If you can find someone to spot you go ahead, otherwise save bench pressing for our sessions. Let’s move on to some of the machines you’ll be able to use on your own, okay?”

Misha nodded and meekly followed Jensen to a machine that would work his triceps. Jensen wasn’t a meathead nor did he seem like he looked down on people who were weak, pathetic beginners—but surely seeing Misha struggle under such an easy weight had to be a bit of a turn off.

Jensen talked him through several exercises on several machines, and he started feeling a little better as he managed those without nearly expiring at the end. Plus he did manage to do some that had some serious weights attached to it. Especially the leg ones; his thighs were still pretty powerful and he’d surprised Jensen by being able to easily work the machines at a hundred and fifty pounds or more. Then they moved on to some core exercises, which due to his years of practicing yoga he was much better at. Until Jensen wanted him to do that damn planking again. He knew he was actually doing the easiest form of planking—forearms flat on the floor in an L shape and propped up on both toes. He’d struggled with it in his sessions with Jared and knew today wasn’t going to be any easier. He considered adding it to his intermediate and advanced yoga classes—apparently he wasn’t shaping everyone’s cores as well as he could.

“Okay, thirty seconds, that’s all,” Jensen said. “Ready?”

“Yep.”

“Okay, up.”

Misha lifted up and immediately felt his abs protest. Damn it. He choked on a squeak when Jensen put a hand on his butt and pushed it down.

“Don’t stick it up in the air.”

“I’m not.”

“You are. And the thirty seconds doesn’t start until you get it down.”

Misha growled and allowed the pressure from Jensen’s wide palm to push him flat.

“Okay, time starts now.”

Misha held the pose and held it and held it and felt his abs tremble with exertion.

“How long is it?” Misha bit out.

“Seven seconds. Butt down.”

“Oh my God. I can’t do this.”



“Sure you can, you’re at ten seconds now.”

Misha dropped his head. He hated this. He didn’t want to do it. But he should try, right? Why, for some guy he knew nothing about?

“Distract me,” Misha got out between clenched teeth.

“What?” Jensen’s hand was still on his ass even though he was being good about his posture.

“Don’t let me think about the time.”

“Oh. Well. Hmm. I don’t know what I would talk about...”

“*Jensen.*”

“Let’s see...how about...I’m from Texas. I have a brother and a sister. Oh, I used to model when I was kid.”

“Model what?” Misha grunted.

“Clothes. My mom took me to one of those child modeling agencies. I hated it. I used to get pulled out of class so I could go to a shoot, and then when the ad or whatever came out I’d see pictures of me in ridiculous tube socks plastered all over my locker.”

“So, you modeled as a teen too.”

“Only a couple of years. I think I finally managed to convince my mom to let me stop after a particularly humiliating Spider-Man pajama incident.”

Misha laughed and it made him incapable of staying up a moment more. He collapsed to the mat and exhaled exhaustedly.

“Good work. Thirty-one seconds,” Jensen said.

“Were you going to stop me at thirty?” Misha grouched.

“Well, we want to build up to an eventual minute, so if you can go longer now you might as well.” Jensen gave his butt a pat as he stood up. “We’ll skip the side planks for now, but we’ve got a little agility training to do before I set you loose on the treadmill.”

“Agility? Pass.”

“On your feet, Collins.”

Misha grumbled at being ordered around but pushed himself to his feet, his abs protesting the whole way up. He faced his personal trainer and found that he wasn’t quite as pretty when he was trying to kill him. Jensen led him over to the empty stretching corner—Misha noticed there were only two women on elliptical machines at the moment—and raised a dubious eyebrow as Jensen set up mini orange cones in a decent sized square and then dropped one in the middle.

“Okay, so this is what you’re going to do.”

Jensen stood next to the center cone and then darted out to a side cone, taking about five or six steps. Then he immediately turned back and ran to the center cone before darting out to the next side cone. He repeated this until he had hit all four corners. When he trotted back over to Misha he wasn’t even winded. Asshole.

“Get the idea?”

“Yeah, but why do I need to work on agility? I’m not planning on trying out for the Panthers.”

Jensen smiled. “Not unless you’re trying out for the kicker.”

Misha made a face at him.

“But the reason we’re doing agility is because it’s good for your balance and your reaction times —“

“I have excellent balance.”

“Says the guy who tripped walking across a flat floor.”

“It was the shoes!”

“Humor me, Misha.”

Misha snarled, but kind of the way a kitten does so it was cute and not scary, and moved to stand by the cone. Jensen crossed his arms and looked at him.

“Whenever you’re ready.”

Misha moved, but he felt a little silly doing it, so he moved slowly. Even still he had a little trouble making the turns. When he was finished he put his hands on his hips and glared at Jensen. Jensen put a finger in the air and circled it around.

“Again. A little faster this time.”

Misha sighed and knew if he didn’t put real effort into it Jensen wouldn’t let him stop. So the second time he put more effort into it. The third time he put real effort into it. The fourth time Jensen timed him. The fifth time he was actually trying to beat his first time. Unfortunately on the second turn, he rolled his ankle and went flying toward the ground. Jensen reacted lightning fast and grabbed his wrist, which caused him to turn face up and then Jensen slid an arm under his back. He kept waiting for the impact of the floor, but it never came. He opened his eyes and found himself staring into Jensen’s eyes from about six inches away. He licked his lips and dropped his eyes to Jensen’s lips. They were so full and pink and slightly shiny from when he had licked his lips in response to Misha’s action.

Loud applauding startled them and made them struggle to right themselves and stand up. The two ladies on the elliptical machine and a couple of employees were clapping and one even whistled. Misha realized that Jensen had caught him in a perfect laid out dip. So, Misha did the only thing he could do: he bowed. Jensen didn’t. He just looked embarrassed. He rubbed the back of his head as he looked at Misha and their audience returned to minding their own business.

“Um, why don’t you get on the treadmill and set a pace that’s comfortable for you to jog for at least twenty minutes, if not longer. Jogging only though, no running.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll, um, I need to um—I’ll check on you in about thirty minutes. Stop if you need to, but try to go the whole time.”

“Okay.”

Jensen turned and hurried away. Misha clucked his tongue and turned to walk toward the treadmill, taking a larger gulp from his water bottle now that Jensen wasn't around to regulate his sips. He set the treadmill at a fast walk to warm up, realized he was already quite warmed up and bumped up the pace to an eight minute mile. It was pushing his limits, but he felt energetic and his mind was preoccupied with imagining the way light glinted off the dozens of natural highlights in Jensen's hair and how he sometimes turned away from him when he laughed and the way he gave encouragement with a soft though commanding voice and how he didn't wear underwear under those shorts—

Misha swayed and stumbled a little with the thought, but righted himself quickly. He was already a quarter into his second mile and felt great. He put Jensen at the end of the stretch of road in his mind's eye and ran toward him, feeling only marginally ridiculous for doing so.

He stumbled again when the machine suddenly slowed to a slow jog when a hand hit the cool down button. He turned his head and saw Jensen looking at him with an arched brow. He looked back at the readout on his treadmill's dash. He'd run almost four miles as Jensen had come to check on him in exactly thirty minutes like he'd promised. He looked back at Jensen again as the machine slowed down to a brisk walk.

"Thought I told you not to push yourself," Jensen said.

"Didn't," Misha said with his limited breath. "Felt good."

Jensen didn't reply, but kept his eyes on him. Misha stared right back, feeling the heat grow in his body from feeling sweaty and exhilarated and out of breath while looking at this man. He was quite certain Jensen could get him into this state without the treadmill. The treadmill slowed again. He completely missed the change since he was currently wandering somewhere in the depth of Jensen's eyes, and walked into the dashboard. He grabbed the sides and stopped walking, but the machine drew his legs back. He let go of the machine to try to ride it safely out and Jensen hit the emergency stop and caught him with an arm as he teetered on the very edge of the stopped belt. And why would he do a silly thing like that? He let himself tip off and Jensen supported his weight in one arm and swung him around to the safety of the floor. And if Misha was living out some bizarre dancing princess fantasy, well, that was his own business.

"Drink this," Jensen said, offering up the glass of juice he had managed to keep from spilling while "saving" Misha.

It was tart lime and kiwi with what was definitely a punch of wheatgrass. He made all his beginner level yoga students try a glass of the stuff. Mainly just for laughs.

"You are the best personal trainer I've ever had," Misha blurted out.

Jensen smiled a little sardonically. "I'm the only personal trainer you've ever had."

"Well, technically I did a couple of sessions with Jared."

"Number one of two. I'm horny."

"You're what?" Misha squeaked.

Jensen raised an eyebrow. "Honored."

"Oh. Oh, right. Ha. Um. So. Today was a great workout."

"Yes, it was. But I want to see you in here working out on your own during the rest of the week, okay?"

Misha nodded mutely.

“Okay, finish that, and then hit the showers. We’ll meet again next Monday.”

“Next Monday. Definitely. See you then.”

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Jensen hurried across the gym, through the employee entrance, and into the office he shared with Jared. Jared sat at the computer, squinting at it like that would help him understand it better. Jensen leaned onto the empty table and groaned in deep frustration.

“Soooo,” Jared said, not looking away from the monitor. “How was your first session with Mi~sha?”

“Oh my God. Three times. Three times, Jared. I nearly ripped a hole in those goddamned yoga pants and fucked him senseless.”

Jared sighed in an “I told you so” manner. “Didn’t I tell you training him would be a bad idea?”

“Yes,” Jensen grouched. “But he’s so hot. He’s so slim, but muscular—how can he not bench press fifty pounds? And his eyes and those lips. Fuck. Even you couldn’t say no to having them wrapped around your cock.”

Jared wrinkled his nose. “Well, let’s hope I’m never presented with that challenge. Are you behaving?”

“Absolutely.”

“Good. Because we are in debt up to our ears and if we have a law suit on our hands we’ll lose more than just the gym.”

“You make it sound like we’re irresponsible. It’s just a loan.”

“A loan *is* a debt.”

“And he wants it too. I think.”

“Best not to test the theory though, don’t you think?”

Jensen grumbled.

“I can take over for you.”

“Fuck no. I’m going to go take a shower.”

“You know, jerking off in a public shower is no better than peeing in one.”

“It’s not a public shower, you shit head. Shut up.”

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Misha stared at the heavy box of books sitting on his storage room floor. He was still feeling pretty good from his workout, but if he tried to lift it and couldn’t, it would ruin his good mood. Better not try it. He picked up a box of yoga mat straps instead and took them out front to put on display. Rob came in the door just as he was pulling out the blue ones to put on the rack.

“Hey, Rob.”

“Hey, Misha. So, how did your first session with Hotty McSunshine DreamAngel go?”

Misha smiled and rolled his eyes. “Great. Well, actually, parts of it were humiliating. But, man, does he have a nice ass. And oh! Got a look up his shorts.”

“Misha!”

“It was his fault! Heck, he might have done it on purpose for all I know. All I *do* know is that I’m pretty sure he’s bigger soft than I am hard.”

“Jesus. Did not want any of that in my mind’s eye.”

“No apologies. The man is a work of art.”

“Mm-hmm. So what’s wrong with him?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said he’s too pretty for there not to be something wrong with him.”

“Oh, right.” Misha frowned as he lined up the black straps. “I don’t know yet. Nothing is immediately presenting.”

Rob chuckled softly. “Well, be careful then.”

“Careful of what? He’s not straight whatever he is. I’m sure of that. He wouldn’t hurt me for flirting.”

“Didn’t mean that. I meant—don’t go falling in love. Nothing ties you down like love.”

Misha glanced at Rob. He’d been ready to leave Huntersville to pursue a career in the music industry after college, but had remained at home when his girlfriend, now wife, had gotten pregnant. He didn’t seem unhappy though. And his warning didn’t really sound like much of a warning. But Misha wasn’t worried anyway. Jensen Ackles was a hot piece of ass, but he wasn’t going to fall in love with the guy. He was certain they had nothing in common—nor were they the kind of opposites that attracted. Although he did have a nice smile, and he was kind of funny. Misha shook himself.

“Have you eaten lunch yet?”

“Nope. Came by for food and gossip.”

“Well, there’s no gossip unless you want to hear in detail what my personal trainer’s nether regions look like.”

“Pass.”

“So, let’s go to Fatty Ass Burgers.”

“Dude. You just came from the gym.”

“Which means I have earned myself a Fatty Ass Bacon Cheeseburger. You coming?”

“Uh. Yeah. Screw eating healthy.”

“Whatever would Mollie say?”

“Mollie doesn’t need to know.”

Misha grinned. “See? This is why I am more than happy to steer clear of relationships.”

“Yes, but will relationships steer clear of you?”

“That is so deep, man.”

They laughed as they exited the store, and Rob had to turn him around to remind him to lock the door.

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Misha was good. Not wanting a repeat humiliation of his first bench pressing session with Jensen, he made it to the gym on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday to work on the machines that built upper body strength and to get a good run on the treadmill. Friday he had to go out. No one should go to a gym on a Friday. Or Saturday. Or Sunday...well, all days thought of as “weekend” should just not be gym days.

Monday morning he was faced with Jensen in white gym clothes with lime green accents that really made his eyes pop from hazel green to full on spring grass green. It was actually a shame when he bent over and Misha lost sight of his eyes. As much as he appreciated that ass—there was something about his eyes. They were beautiful yes, but they were mischievous and thoughtful and also wary. He could probably stare into his eyes forever and not get bored with the shifting emotions and thoughts.

Misha was stretched out in a split and bent over at the waist, stretching out his arms. He let his forehead hit the floor when that last thought crossed his mind. That was a little—not lusty. He really shouldn’t be having anything but lustful thoughts about his trainer. Anything more was asking for confusion and trouble and he had spent too much of his adult life avoiding those things for a reason.

He raised his head and saw Jensen sitting cross-legged in front of him, with an elbow on his leg and his chin on his fist. He was staring at him. Misha sat up straight, but his legs remained splayed.

“You’re awfully flexible.”

“Birth defect, actually.”

Jensen raised his brows, but didn’t comment on that. “You should probably give yoga a try.”

“Uh, yeah, um. Well, actually—“

“Okay.” Jensen hopped to his feet. “Let’s go. We’re here to work, not sleep face down on the mat.”

Misha got to his feet and followed Jensen to the bench press.

“Did you work out last week?” Jensen asked with a scolding tone.

“Yes,” Misha responded testily. “I came three days.”

Jensen smiled and Misha forgot he’d been irked by the mild accusation.

“How did your muscles feel?”

“Ah. Really sore actually. I had to take my workout on Tuesday pretty easy. But the next couple of days were better.”

“Good. That’s a good thing. That means you’re building muscle. After your sessions you might want to drink some fat free chocolate milk. It’s the best thing to encourage muscle growth and recovery.”

“Then why are you always bringing me juice?” Misha asked, settling himself on the bench.

“Because you finish on the treadmill. At that point rehydration is more important.”

“Isn’t the sugar bad for rehydration? I thought that drinking juice was the worst thing because it’s like eating ten pieces of fruit.”

“When a drink is one hundred percent juice, yes. Our concoctions are mostly water.”

“You swindler.”

“Hey, the ingredient breakdowns are right there on the menus. Okay, ready? Forty pounds. Lift.”

Misha managed to do ten reps, only three struggling, at forty pounds and tried not to think about how their eyes kept meeting around the bar, darting away, and then back and holding each other’s gaze. It probably wasn’t safe for the spotter to be looking at him rather than the weights, but he didn’t want him to look away.

“That’s good. Good work, Misha. You’re already doing better.”

“Should I try fifty?” Misha asked, hoping to see him lean over the bench again and give him an up-the-shorts shot.

“Nah. We don’t need to go crazy on the bench press just yet. We can move on.”

“Okay.” Misha got up and started for the first machine they had used in the first session.

“Oh, this way. We’re going to use the free weights today.”

Misha narrowed his eyes suspiciously and followed Jensen to the section of wall lined with free weights ranging from one pound to fifty pounds.

“Why the change?” Misha asked.

“Because we should—“ Jensen cut off as he turned around and got a look at Misha’s face. He burst out laughing. “Why do you look so suspicious?”

“Maybe you’re downgrading me because I was so pathetic last time.”

Jensen shook his head and pulled a fifteen pound weight off the rack. “You’re not pathetic. I have seen pathetic, trust me. You are very middle of the pack.”

“Why thank you,” Misha replied, reining in the sarcasm just a little bit.

Jensen grinned and handed him the weight.

“That is a compliment. Most people the first time they work out with a personal trainer are either

totally out of shape or totally fit and just want someone to push them through increasing their workouts. You fall into the rare ‘I’m fine, but I could be better’ category. Those are the people who rarely do anything about their health, so it’s quite commendable that you’ve decided to be proactive.”

Misha glanced down. “Yeah, well...” Why was he blushing? It wasn’t like Jensen had given him such a great, personalized compliment.

“The reason we’re switching to free weights is because we want to utilize the muscle confusion theory.”

“What’s that?” Misha asked, taking the weight in one hand and trying not to show how off balance it put him.

“It’s the idea that if you do the same exercises over and over, you’re not getting a complete work out. Muscle confusion is basically changing up your workouts so that you exercise different muscle groups every time and it doesn’t allow your body to become complacent.”

“That sounds taxing.”

“Well, we’re not going to be doing that P90 nonsense, but I do think there is merit to the basic theory. So, we’re going to use free weights today that are going to focus on your triceps, deltoids, and trapezius.”

“Um, back of arms, shoulders, and...back. Right?”

“Yep. You been studying? You know, we don’t give you quizzes or anything.”

Misha smiled and put a knee on a bench like Jensen directed him to do. “No, I took figure drawing in college and was very interested by the shape and movement of muscles. But, I wanted to see more—like how they worked and moved. So, my art teacher directed me to human anatomy. I took that class and learned the names of some of the muscles. I’ve forgotten most of them, but a few stuck.”

“Was it just book study?” Jensen asked with a slightly perturbed look.

“No. There was a lab.”

“Oh. Wow. How was that?”

“Very interesting. A little smelly. We were all a little uncomfortable the first time we walked into the room and saw the white sheets and everything, but after the TA told us to start—well, we all just kind of put it out of our minds and went to work.”

“Unh-hunh.”

“It’s actually not as weird as people would expect.”

“I’m just going to take your word for it. Okay, now, lean slightly forward—no, I mean, bend. There you go. Now put your free arm on your bent leg. Like that. And...”

Misha eyebrows shot up as he felt Jensen slide in behind him and grip his shoulder with one hand. The other hand he placed lightly as his elbow, and then bent over, covering Misha’s body with his, but not touching—just barely—not touching. Misha wanted to stretch his neck or limbs or back or something to dispel the itching energy prickling along his skin, but any sort of movement would put him in contact with Jensen. He glanced around the gym. The two ladies

were on the elliptical machines again, otherwise they were alone. He had to wonder if Jensen would be giving him this level of hands on instruction if more people were in the gym.

“Misha?”

Misha wondered how long he had zoned out for.

“Yeah?”

“Okay, now pull your arm up to a ninety degree angle behind you, like this. That’s it. Now, lower it—slowly! What have Jared and I both told you about resistance?”

Misha grumbled under his breath.

“Okay, now raise it slowly.”

Misha moved his arm very slowly, feeling the muscles in his arms and back working, and then lowered it again just as slowly.

“Great. Now do it again, but you don’t need to do it *that* slow.”

Still on edge from Jensen’s proximity and his own penchant for getting irrationally irritated at being ordered around, he jerked his arm up and the momentum pushed his body backward. Just slightly. But between Misha’s tight pants and Jensen’s lack of underwear, the movement put Jensen’s cock quite squarely between Misha’s cheeks. They both froze and then Jensen leapt back.

“Not that fast either. Find the happy medium.”

He walked over to the free weights and pretended to examine them. Misha bit on his lip and wondered why he was smiling. That was highly awkward and inappropriate and yet...it hadn’t felt wrong. Misha did a couple of reps, and then Jensen appeared in front of him, taking up the same position on the bench and doing the same exercise with a thirty pound weight. Show off. Misha raised his head and looked in Jensen’s eyes for a few more reps, but it was too hard to keep his head up, so he dropped it back down and concentrated on his workout. If he was going to perv on Jensen’s body that was fine, but he certainly didn’t need to be gazing into his eyes while exerting himself.

After a few more positions with the free weights—which Jensen was careful to give instruction for from a distance—they moved on to the machines that would build his leg muscles. Then Jensen led him back over to the stretching area. Misha whined the whole way.

“Come onnnnnn, Jensen. Not the planking.”

“Yes, the planking. Have you been practicing?”

“No,” Misha grouched.

“Well, then that’s your own fault. You got thirty-one seconds last time, so we have to get to at least thirty-two today. Now, down you go.”

Misha made a face but got onto his stomach. Jensen lay down on his side beside him and waited patiently for Misha to stop grumbling and get into position.

“Whenever you’re ready,” Jensen said.

Misha lifted himself up and Jensen's hand went immediately to his ass to push it flat.

"Damn it," Misha hissed.

"I told you about sticking your butt up."

"Alright, alright. It's level. Now distract me. Isn't that what I pay you for?"

"No...but I'll do it anyway. Let's see...what would you like to talk about?"

"What happened after modeling?"

"Oh, lacrosse happened. And baseball. Injured my knee stealing a base in the final game of the season senior year. Put a damper on the whole going to college to play baseball thing. So, I studied kinesiology and met Jared. He was my freshmen roommate and we pretty much hit it off right away."

"If you majored in kinesiology why didn't you have a gross anatomy lab?"

"We did, but it was virtual."

"That's not the same," Misha grunted. "Time?!"

"Twenty-eight seconds. Hold it just a little bit longer..."

Misha struggled to comply and then gave up and fell down.

"Great job. You got to thirty-five seconds. Should we do some side planks today?"

"No, please, not yet."

Jensen chuckled. "The longer you put it off—"

"Can it, pretty boy."

Jensen bit his lip and looked down. When he looked up again there was a slight blush on his cheeks and his smile filled his eyes.

"I honestly think you can do it. It's just a mental block."

"You're hilarious."

"That could work too. Laughing is actually a great workout for your abs."

"Really? We should go see a romcom or something."

Jensen made a face. "I don't do romcoms. Not unless I'm on a date."

Misha kind of tilted his head in a shrug. That wasn't really a deal breaker for him. Jensen cleared his throat and looked away again. Misha wished he'd stop doing that. Then he got onto his feet in a graceful and impressive display of stomach and leg muscles as he didn't use his hands at all.

"Come on. Agility and then treadmill. Let's go."

Misha sighed, but pushed himself to his feet. He stood to the side while Jensen set up his mini cones in a zig-zagging line. He watched Jensen run the line in demonstration and then lifted an eyebrow when the trainer jogged over to him.

“Is this the escape from crocodiles exercise?”

Jensen threw his head back and laughed, which was a little surprising since it was an incredibly lame joke, but he really didn't mind because the way he looked when he laughed was amazingly affecting. Misha felt the flutter-flutter of some kind of wings dancing around in his stomach. Jensen smiled at him, looked him over once, and then slapped his shoulder.

“Get to it. And no half-assing the first try.”

Misha objected to that assumption, but only three-quarter-assed the first attempt. Jensen made him zig and zag until he was out of breath and his ankles kind of hurt. He was bent over with his hands on his knees, panting, when Jensen said that was enough for the day.

“Okay, go take a jog on the treadmill, but don't overexert yourself. I'll be around in twenty minutes.”

“But I've been running for thirty. Or longer.”

“I know, but we've taxed your muscles enough. And this was cardio as well as agility. So, take it easy, okay? Trust me. I'm a professional.”

“Okay.”

Jensen walked away and Misha straightened, his arms hanging tiredly at his sides and his head falling back and a little to the side as he watched Jensen walk away. He was curious now. About more than just how good he was in bed. He kept thinking about what Jensen had said about injuring his knee before college. He hadn't sounded upset as he'd told the story, but how devastating must it have been to have a dream crushed like that? How strong in character must he be to be able to pull himself together enough to continue with college and find a new direction?

Misha tried to run the curiosity out of himself. Since he was only getting twenty minutes on the treadmill, he increased the pace to six and a half minute miles and relished the feeling of being almost back to his old pace. While the speed and strenuous run felt good—amazing in fact—he couldn't outrun his thoughts. He was consumed with the thought of Jensen and the question marks that still surrounded him. It had been a long time since he'd wanted to know more about a person—platonic, romantic, or otherwise.

After three miles he hit the cool down button so that Jensen wouldn't catch him running at such a fast pace. After the belt eased to a stop after the five minute cool down, Misha wiped the sweat off his brow with his upper arm and turned around. He started when he saw Jensen standing at the end of the treadmill.

“H-hey, Jensen.”

“Are you always this disobedient?”

“What?”

“I saw how hard you were running.”

“It wasn't that fast.”

Jensen pulled the cup of juice away from Misha's grasp and raised an eyebrow.

“It wasn't. Come on.”

Jensen handed him the drink and this time Misha tasted mango, peach, and a hint of açai berry. And water, of course. Since it was all water.

Jensen put a towel around Misha's neck and held onto the ends, kind of keeping Misha under his control.

"I know you want to get that feeling back—of running hard and fast and far, but you've got to build up to it. You can't just expect to pick up where you left off however long ago it was you stopped running."

Misha licked the juice off his lips and tilted his head.

"How did you know I used to run?"

A smile curled one corner of Jensen's full lips. "You think I don't know a runner when I see one? But take it easy, huh?"

Misha nodded. Jensen returned the gesture and reluctantly dropped his hands from the towel. He took a couple of steps back and then turned to walk away.

"Jensen."

He turned back. "Yeah?"

"Um. How did you handle it?"

"Handle what?"

"Having your dream kind of taken away from you like that. About baseball I mean."

"Oh. About not playing in college?" Jensen shrugged a shoulder. "You know, I wasn't really that upset when it happened. I think me becoming a pro baseball player was my father's dream, not mine."

"Oh. So what was your dream? It couldn't possibly be pushing down on people's asses while they whine about planking."

Jensen laughed, loudly again. It was a little bizarre. Cute, but bizarre.

"My dream...my dream keeps changing. Always has. Every year since elementary school when someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up—the story always changed. Even now I'm not sure what my dream is. Except maybe to be happy with whatever it is I decide to do."

Misha felt very warm and knew he was blushing and staring at Jensen. They were more alike than he had thought. And Jensen was more intriguing than he had given him credit for.

"You have a dream, Mish? Sha."

"Um. Freedom, I think."

Jensen smiled a little wistfully. "You seem like you've always had it for the most part."

Misha nodded numbly. "For the most part."

They stood still, staring. Misha didn't feel uncomfortable, and he suspected Jensen didn't either. At last Jensen took a step back.

“Showers, sauna, shower. I’ll see you on Monday.”

“If not sooner.”

Jensen nodded and turned and walked away.

Jensen flopped into the chair at the table in the shared office. Jared sat across from him, making notes in the file of one of his clients. He stopped what he was doing and looked at Jensen.

“Don’t tell me. This time you actually did rip his pants off and fuck him.”

“No. But it was a near thing. I did find out that I would fit really well between his—“

“Cutting you off there,” Jared said. He tapped his pen on the table. “So, what is it? You look stressed, not frustrated.”

“He’s just—he’s—I don’t know. I mean, he’s still hot. Inhumanly so. But, like, he’s funny. Like, really funny. And I feel like I’ve had a more in depth conversation with him in the thirty seconds he was struggling to plank than I’ve ever had with anybody I’ve ever dated.”

Jared slowly tilted his head down so that he could raise his eyebrows with emphasis at Jensen.

“Dude.”

“I know,” Jensen replied and dropped his head into the cradle of his arms where they rested on the table.

“Hola, Mishamigo,” Rob announced himself as he walked through the front door of the store.

“How was the training today?”

“An exercise in restraint.” Misha looked at the box of incense he’d been holding in his hand for—hell, maybe since he’d returned to the store half an hour ago.

“You okay, buddy?”

“Not really. He’s making me think. More specifically, he’s making me reevaluate.”

“Reevaluate what?”

What freedom means.

Misha glanced at Rob. “Nothing really. Just how my finances are going to look at the end of the month and the first bill comes through.”

“Well, at least the membership will be free, right?”

“Yeah. At least that. I’m hungry.”

“How about that new pita place two streets over?”

“Ugh. How about a steak?”

“For lunch?”

“I’m starving!”

“Man. I can’t imagine what your appetite will be like if you actually do the guy.”

“When,” Misha sighed. “It’s definitely a when. For better or worse.”

“Don’t be so melodramatic. I’m not eating steak in the middle of the day.”

Misha tsked at him.

“How about we go to All Wrapped Up and you can get a steak wrap?”

Misha sighed long and loud. “*Fine.*”

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Misha made it to the stretching area early and started doing a light warm-up while he waited for Jensen. He’d been to the gym three more times the previous week and he’d introduced planking to his intermediate and advanced classes. After demonstrating, briefly, he’d gotten up and walked around the room, correcting his students’ positions. They didn’t need to know the teacher couldn’t actually do it.

After a few minutes, Misha got on his back and lifted his legs into the air, supporting his back with his hands. Then he put his arms flat on the floor and lifted up onto just his upper back, tilting his legs over his head to put himself in the plough position. He kept his feet flat and planted his toes on the floor, allowing the pull and stretch and strain to clear his mind. He didn’t teach this pose even in his advanced classes due to the high risk of injury, but he was always careful with his balance and never tried to stretch too far. He moved into a variation on plough by slowly spreading his legs apart into a wide V.

He heard someone cough. Or maybe choke. He opened his eyes and saw Jensen standing in front him, well, technically behind him. His lips were parted and his eyes looked a little glazed as he stared—not at Misha’s face. Misha felt his groin tingle. The thought occurred to him that he could flip over and rise up into cat pose (which for the more urban dictionary inclined was just doggy style) and let Jensen go to town on him. Instead he drew his legs together and carefully unfolded from his position. He got to his feet and turned around to face his trainer. The man was not making eye contact and probably wishing he had decided to wear a jock strap today as Misha politely ignored the clear interest he was trying to hide with a hand.

“So, uh. Misha. You sure you’ve never done yoga before?”

“Oh. Well.” Misha felt stupid for his earlier lie. “I have taken a class or two.” Which was true. He had only taken two actual yoga classes in his life. He’d learned all the yoga he knew from a guru in the mountains of the Himalayas when he’d spent three months living in silence at a monastery.

“Right. Um. Well, do you feel warmed up? We can start with the bench press now. Unless you’d like to attempt the Pretzel Position.”

“That’s alright, I’m good. Though I do wonder what the 'pretzel position' entails in your mind.”

Jensen smiled and looked away so Misha couldn’t see what other reaction he might have. They got to the bench press and Misha waited until Jensen had gotten the forty pound weight on the end of the bar before he lay down on the bench. Then he said, “You know, I want to try fifty, I think.”

“It might be a little soon to start stepping up the weight total.”

“Please? I just want to try it.”

Jensen didn’t say anything but his face clearly expressed that he didn’t think it was a good idea. Misha settled himself comfortably on the bench and waited for Jensen to change the weights. He walked around to both sides of the bar rather than leaning over him. Misha tried to hide his disappointment.

“Okay. Fifty pounds, let’s give it a try. But do not strain yourself. If you can’t do it, put it back up.”

Misha nodded and adjusted his grip on the bar. Then he lifted and was surprised that the difference wasn’t as much as he’d feared it might be. He managed to do ten reps with the extra weight, only struggling with the last few. He got to his feet feeling pretty proud of himself.

“Good work. I guess you weren’t lying about your extra workouts.”

“Of course I wasn’t lying!” Misha said in exaggerated offense.

Jensen chuckled, and then reached for Misha’s hands. Misha sucked in a breath as his trainer held his hands palms up and rubbed his thumbs lightly over the reddened skin.

“How are your hands doing? Any blisters?”

“No. They just get a little sore toward the end of my workout.”

“Hm. The more you use the machines and add more weights, the more your hands will probably tear up. Which can be a good thing because then you’ll develop calluses, but it hurts to get there. You might consider buying some gloves to use to protect your hands.”

Jensen looked up and Misha nodded, trying to pretend like he had heard a word of what Jensen had just said. He was still holding his hands, and intimately stroking his thumbs over Misha’s sensitive skin. He stopped. And then dropped Misha’s hands.

“Okay. So, gloves for next week. Let’s, um. Let’s do some strength training using your own body as the weight.”

Still a little flustered, Misha followed Jensen across the gym and asked, “What do you mean my own body?”

“I mean we’re going to be doing pull-ups and pushups.”

“Oh, no, please no!”

Jensen laughed. “Come on. It’s important to work your way up to being able to lift your own weight. What if you find yourself dangling from a ledge one day?”

“I think if I avoid tall buildings then I’ll be fine.”

“Come on. It’s easier than you think. We’ll start with pull-ups.”

Jensen positioned Misha against a wall and underneath a pull-up bar.

“You need help getting up?” Jensen asked.

Misha shook his head, knowing the last thing he needed was Jensen’s hands on his waist. He

jumped and grabbed the bar, and already felt worn out just dangling there. He flipped his hands around one at a time and managed to pull himself up one time.

“Those are chin-ups, not pull-ups. Put your hands back the other way.”

Misha grumbled, but turned his hands around. He strained his arms, gritted his teeth, and closed his eyes. At last he could feel that his arms were bent and he opened his eyes. His chin was just barely above the bar. He dropped down and let go with his hands. He leaned against the wall and put his hands on his knees.

“Okay. That was exactly as hard as I thought it would be.”

Jensen just smiled at him. “Okay. Let’s try an arm hang first then. When you get on the bar I’m going to help you until your chin is above the bar. Just hang there as long as you can, keeping your chin above the bar.”

Misha nodded. He stood up straight and raised his hands up, looking at the bar. Just before he was about to jump he felt Jensen’s hands on his waist. He seized up like he’d been tickled, thought that was not the feeling he’d gotten from the contact. Jensen took a step back and put his hands in the air.

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to startle you. Are you okay with me helping you up?”

“Oh, yes, sorry. Like you said, you just startled me.”

Jensen nodded and stepped close again. He put his hands on Misha’s waist.

“Well, this time you’ve seen it coming, so we should be good.”

“Yeah...” Misha trailed off a little uncomfortably. Jensen was standing so close, with his hands on his body...really, all Misha had to do was lean forward a little bit and raise up on his toes a bit and he could kiss him. He looked up instead and raised his arms. Jensen gave him a three count and with the combination of his jump and Jensen lifting him, he easily got his chin over the bar. It actually wasn’t too bad.

“Okay, I’m going to let go now.”

Jensen let go and suddenly it was bad. Misha squeaked and struggled to keep himself up. He could see Jensen counting the seconds on his wristwatch.

“How long should I go?” he puffed.

“As long as you can,” Jensen replied.

Misha hated that answer. He crossed his legs at the ankle to help keep his body from swinging and squeezed his eyes shut tight. He was not going to puss out on this. And why not? If he couldn’t do it, he couldn’t do it. Why did he really care so much about impressing Jensen? The guy was clearly already interested in him physically, and that was after having seen his embarrassing first try at the bench press. So if he didn’t need to have a super hot body to sleep with Jensen, what was the point of working so hard to impress him? Just because he was his trainer and he wanted to—make him proud? Or make Jensen feel like he was doing a good job? Since when did he care about some stranger’s feelings?

Misha’s arms gave out on him and he let out a noise of surprise as his hands yanked off the bar and he fell to the floor. Only he didn’t collapse completely. His feet hit the floor, but the rest of him didn’t follow as Jensen had stepped in and caught him underneath the arms. They were



pressed chest to chest against the wall and there was no way of pretending like they were slightly out of breath just because Misha had fallen a foot and a half. Would it really be such a bad thing to just hop up into Jensen's arms, wrap his legs around his waist, and tongue fuck the hell out of him?

"Um." Jensen swallowed and licked his lips. "We should move on to pushups."

"Actually, my arms are feeling a little weak right now. Can we switch to legs?"

"Sure."

Jensen stepped back and Misha wobbled. Jensen steadied him with a hand to the shoulder.

"Looks like you're a little weak in the knees too."

Misha shot him an amused glare and Jensen lightly bit his lip as he let his hand slide from his shoulder and then turned around. Misha followed him, shaking out his poor arms, and stopped at a machine he hadn't used before.

"Okay, so, you sit here and lie back against the back rest and then raise your legs and put your feet flat against the press. I'll put some weight on the ends, and then release the catch. Once the weight is on your legs, slowly lower them and then push back up. It's like a bench press for your legs."

"Okay."

Misha was more than happy to sit down and lean back. It was a fairly comfortable position. Jensen put some weights on the end of the contraption and he positioned his feet.

"Ready?" Jensen asked.

Misha adjusted his feet one last time and then nodded. Jensen released the catch and Misha was surprised that it didn't feel heavy at all. Either he had assumed it would be as hard as the bench press, or Jensen hadn't put on enough weights. He did the exercise with ease, though after a few reps did begin to feel his leg muscles put a little effort into it.

"How's that feel?" Jensen asked from where he stood by the end of the machine so he could engage the lock if Misha needed him to.

"Fine. Good. I could probably do this with more weight."

Jensen nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah, I didn't put on very much. I don't think people should use this machine with too much weight or too often. Just like doing squats with a dumbbell. It's bad for the knees. Especially for a runner who already puts enough strain on his knees."

"I see. Well, we definitely don't want that. I'd hate to think that one day I wouldn't be able to get down on my knees when I need to."

Jensen's eyes slid over to him and Misha smiled.

"Yes, you never know when you might have to look under a couch for the remote."

Misha laughed softly. "Yeah, wouldn't want that. Haven't watched TV in ten years, but I do own other devices that require remotes."

Jensen's cheeks went pink. It was good to know that his brain went first to something perverted.

It meant he had a kinky side to him. And who didn't like a little kink in their partner?

“Okay. Push up.” Jensen locked the machine. “Let's move on to the machines you've been using on your own. I want to see how much weight you're using and what position you're sitting in. It'll be best to break bad habits early.”

They moved through the series of machines he'd started using for his arms and legs, and Jensen only made minor corrections. Except for one machine which he was actually using completely wrong. It was only as they were walking toward the warm up section that Misha remembered what was next. He'd started doing the planking on his own during his classes and it was getting easier, but he still didn't like it. He did find that some of his yoga positions were getting easier to hold. But hell if he was going to admit to Jensen that the planking was worthwhile.

“Okay,” Jensen said, lying down on his side and patting the mat. “You know what's next.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Misha got into position. “And you know what's next too. We've passed your father's crushed dreams of an All-Star in the family, what'd you do with your kinesiology degree?”

“Well, I—get up.”

Misha raised himself into position and Jensen's hand landed on his ass.

“I graduated with a BS and went to PT school. I focused on physical therapy and massage therapy, things you need for sports medicine. But I also took some courses for occupational therapy. It's a tough thing to do though. You have to have the right constitution and attitude. I had this one patient I wanted to throttle every time we were in the room together—he was just so negative. But then, I'd probably be negative too if someone had to re-teach me how to tie my shoelaces or brush my teeth when I'm thirty years old.”

“Yeah,” Misha said, struggling a little with talking. “I get that. I worked with the Peace Corps for a few years. Most of the time people welcomed the help, but sometimes they resented it.”

“You were in the Peace Corps? Where all did you serve?”

“Uganda for a couple years. Then I did some stints in Central America. Time?”

“What was Uganda like?”

“Life changing. Time?”

“How so?”

“It just made me appreciate what I had more. Time?!”

“Oh. Almost forty-five seconds. You can do—or not.”

Misha lay on his stomach and groaned softly. Not really from the effort, but from frustration that he found the exercise so difficult. He tensed when he felt Jensen's warm hand on his back. His T-shirt was really too thin for this kind of contact.

“You okay?”

Misha nodded. “Yeah. I'm fine. So, agility, right?”

“Unless you want to do some side planking.”

Misha sighed. "Alright, let's do it."

Jensen patted his back and then waited for Misha to face him on his side.

"Okay, so for this it's basically the same thing. Lift up on your bent elbow with your palm on the floor for balance and create a straight line from your feet all the way to your head."

Misha followed Jensen's example and found that it was a little easier to hold the pose than regular planking, but being forced to look in Jensen's eyes negated any of that.

"Do you travel a lot?" Jensen asked.

"Um. Some. Well, I used to travel a lot. I wanted to see a lot of the world."

"Have you seen a lot?"

"My fair share."

"What's your favorite place?"

"Not sure I've been there yet."

"Okay, of the places you've been to, what is your favorite?"

"Well, I did like Tibet. I spent three months there in a monastery. No one was allowed to speak, but it was a great mental exercise and really taught me how to listen to people."

"When nobody was talking."

"People actually speak volumes with their bodies."

"I suppose that's true. So was that your favorite place?"

"Mm, no, I wouldn't say that."

"So...you really had no place that you liked better than the others?"

"Ah, well, you know there's no place like home."

Jensen's brow creased, but not with anger or annoyance. Misha couldn't quite decipher it, and then Jensen told him to switch sides. The trainer remained on his other side, so he was able to concentrate on his position better when he didn't have those intelligent, shining eyes staring back at him. Misha closed his eyes and swallowed. He'd found the bad thing about him, right? He'd been a physical therapist, poised to help people, and he'd traded it in to work as a professional trainer at a gym. He was shallow. Misha opened his eyes and stared at the stationary bikes across the room. He had a feeling that wasn't accurate at all.

"Okay," he heard Jensen say as he began to wobble in his pose. "I'm going to get some equipment for today's agility exercise. You take a moment to rest."

Misha flopped onto his back and watched Jensen walk over to the service counter where gym members could check out yoga mats, ankle weights, and various other gym paraphernalia. Misha let his eyes wander over his form as the man moved with, not exactly grace—but definitely confidence which made him elegant. He was also just so...big and strong in appearance, and yet there was a softness to him, a gentleness. He was pretty certain the man would object to those adjectives, but Misha found them to be apt. He really needed to focus on his shallowness. That

would help him stop getting those stupid butterfly versus Mothra fights in his stomach when he thought about him.

When Jensen returned from the counter he stood over Misha and offered one hand, the other held suspiciously behind his back. Misha accepted the help up and rolled his shoulders.

“So, you decided to leave physical therapy to be a personal trainer?”

“Well, yes and no. I graduated and did it for three years. Then Jared, who was still my roommate, got laid off from some crap job he was doing just to have income. It was dangerous for him to have so much free time on his hands because then he started to think.”

Misha laughed. “Is he not known for his thinking skills?”

“No, it’s not that. He’s really smart. He just—sometimes thinks too big. Or doesn’t think about the consequences of some of his brilliant ideas. One time when we were initiating some pledges—he thought it would be a good idea to douse them all in cat urine. Not realizing that they would all have to get cleaned up in the frat house because if they got caught in their dorm showers we would all get expelled for hazing.”

“You were in a frat?” Misha asked with a judgmentally raised eyebrow.

“It was Texas. Everybody was in a frat.”

“Where did he get that much cat pee?”

“You know...I never asked him.”

Misha grinned and kind of giggled, but that was okay because it made Jensen grin back. He had such a beautiful smile. Misha shook himself and tried to remember that he was shallow and a member of a frat. Nothing worth falling for.

“So, what does Jared’s brilliant idea have to do with changing careers?”

“I’ll tell you after you get this drill done.” Jensen pulled his hand from behind his back and displayed two jump ropes. Misha turned tail and ran. Unfortunately he only got half a step before a powerful arm wrapped around his middle and hauled him back.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“I am not jump roping,” Misha grunted and squirmed in Jensen’s inescapable hold and tried to ignore the feeling of the man’s warm breath tickling the hairs at the nape of his neck.

“I know it’s girly, but it’s good for agility.”

Misha stopped struggling to get away and turned to look over his shoulder at Jensen.

“How can a jump rope be girly?”

“Because. It’s what girls do on the playground.”

“I jumped rope when I was in school.”

“Then why are you so afraid to do it now?”

“Allow me to amend that to I tripped over rope while attempting to jump it in school.”

Jensen laughed and released him, and Misha wished he hadn't. He felt good.

"Well, that's why we're going to practice and build up more agility and before you know it you'll be jumping rope like a pro."

"You know, there *are* pro jump ropers."

"Are there?"

"Well, probably. And I'm sure some of them are men."

"Okay, okay. Jump ropes are unisex. Take this."

Misha made a distrustful face he took the two thin, plastic handles in his hands. The rope itself was nothing more than a thin plastic cord that would probably hurt like a bitch if he hit his shins with it. Which was very likely to happen.

"Okay. So, just start out easy," Jensen said as he swirled the jump rope around and around with light flicks of his wrists and hopped quickly from foot to foot as the rope somehow skidded under the small space between his shoes and the floor.

"Can't I start out at a less advanced level?" Misha asked, eyes glazing over at the blurring cord, the buzzing whirl lulling him into a trance.

"Sure. Go ahead."

Misha shook off the trance and threw the rope over his head. When it landed on the floor, he stepped over it, and then pulled it back up. He did this twice more before Jensen yelled at him while jumping higher and twirling the rope faster so that it passed under his feet twice. Misha grumbled but moved the rope continuously as he skip-hopped over it one foot at a time. On the third pass the rope was moving so slowly it fell on his shoulders. He untangled himself and looked up when the whirring stopped. Jensen was looking at him with the hand holding the handles of his jump rope on his hip.

"Dude."

Misha inhaled deeply and lined the rope up against the back of his heels. He pulled it over his head and jumped. He made it, so he kept spinning the rope and jumping. And for some reason it kept going faster—probably because he was leaning forward and jumping faster was the only to keep from falling over. He kept leaning farther and farther forward, the rope spinning too fast. He knew his feet couldn't keep up.

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa!" Misha squealed as the rope hit his toes and he fell forward. Sadly, he hit the ground rather than being saved by the strong, muscular arms of his asshole trainer who was laughing manically and bent at the waist, trying not to fall over himself.

"Oh my god," Jensen said as he struggled to breathe around his laughter. "What the hell was that?"

"That was me deciding to stop jump roping and go running instead," Misha grouched and turned over.

Still giggling, Jensen stepped forward and offered him a hand. Misha was surprised when Jensen pulled him up with enough force that he stumbled into the man, his hand landing on his chest like a distressed damsel.

“Okay,” Jensen said, a smirk on his sinfully plump lips, his voice low and soft. “I’ll let you go run. But don’t push too hard.”

Misha swallowed and nodded, not trusting his voice.

“I know the phrase ‘no pain, no gain’ is popular, but pain is your body’s way of telling you that you need to stop—that you’re pushing it beyond its limits. There’s a difference between exerting yourself and hurting yourself.”

Misha nodded again. “Got it.”

“Alright. I’ll see you in half an hour.”

Jensen stepped back and suddenly the rest of the world existed again. The trainer picked up the jump ropes and headed back toward the equipment counter.

“Hey, Jensen...?”

“Yeah?” he turned back, smiling softly.

“What did Jared’s idea have to do with you?”

“He wanted to open a gym and needed a business partner.”

Jensen turned and continued walking and Misha let that sink in. When it did, he started and felt his jaw drop. Jensen was one of the guys from Texas that *owned* the gym. Misha hurried to the treadmill and set it to a warm up pace. He refused to allow himself to be impressed by Jensen. So what if he’d opened a business? Misha had done that half a dozen times at least. Granted only once had it ever worked out, but it wasn’t like Jensen’s success had made him especially awesome. Except for the fact that he was beautiful and smart and brave and funny and a good friend...

Misha kicked up the treadmill’s pace and ran as hard as he could. He didn’t want to think about Jensen. Not like this. He’d obsessed over people before. Both men and women had caught his eye and he’d been intrigued by them and challenged by them and attracted to them. But he’d never felt—in awe of them. Misha put his head down and ran harder. He barely knew the guy. He wasn’t in awe of him. He was just attracted to him. He wasn’t impressed by him, he was just interested in him. And he most certainly was not in love with him.

Misha’s steps faltered. He hissed a curse as he lost his balance and hit the emergency stop. He stumbled off the back end of the belt and felt his legs trying to understand why the floor wasn’t moving anymore. He gave up and sat down hard, and then lay back. He panted heavily and put his hands to his forehead. In a matter of moments his angel was there, lit up from behind by that damn skylight that allowed in the noon sunlight that haloed Jensen’s head.

“Misha? Are you okay? Did you fall off?”

Misha shook his head. “No. I stopped it. Just tired.”

“Okay, stay there. I’ll get your water bottle.”

Jensen disappeared from his view and then returned with the water bottle. He sat down next to Misha so that when he sat up they were facing each other. Misha took a sip of water and watched Jensen’s face as a gamut of thoughts passed over his handsome features.

“You know, I’m starting to think there’s something more going on than a desire to run again. I

don't know any therapists in the area, but maybe you should look into it."

Misha's smile had little humor in it, but he'd dropped his head so it wasn't directed at Jensen.

"You only need a therapist when you don't know what's wrong with you."

"No, you need a therapist when you don't know how to fix it."

Misha raised his head and met Jensen's eyes. "Who says it needs to be fixed?"

"Well, something needs to be done because I don't want you breaking your neck. Especially not in my gym. Do you have any idea what that would do to our insurance premiums?"

Misha stared at him for a moment. And then Jensen grinned. Misha laughed and shook his head. Jensen got to his feet and pulled Misha's to his.

"Okay, show—"

"Shower, sauna, shower. Got it."

Jensen nodded and patted him on the shoulder.

"Um, one second."

Jensen tilted his head slightly in question.

"Since you're the owner, I suppose I can ask you. Um, I got my bill for this month, but the balance was zero."

"Well, yeah we prorated last month. Your free month is this month."

"Yeah, but the training sessions weren't included."

"Oh. We um, bill for those at the end of the month. You know, so that you only pay for the sessions you attend. So this month will appear on next month's bill."

"Oh, okay. I thought Jared had explained it differently, but I must have misunderstood."

"Yup. So, uh, any other questions?"

"Yeah, actually, why here?"

"What do you mean?"

"You and Jared are from Texas. How did you end up in Huntersville, North Carolina?"

Jensen smiled. "Why else? A girl."

Misha tried not to let his disappointment show. "Oh."

"Jared's girl. Gen. She got into the master's of education program at UNC Charlotte. He followed her here and asked me to come with. I didn't have much holding me to Texas, so..."

"Just your family, friends, and job."

Jensen laughed softly. "Yeah, well. Jared couldn't do it alone."

“You’re a good friend.”

“Jared’s a good friend.” Jensen’s eyes swept over Misha’s body and returned to his eyes. “But I have a feeling I’m going to owe him for getting me to move out here.”

Misha felt his cheeks heat up and he dropped his gaze. “I should probably send him a fruit basket myself.”

Jensen laughed, and it sounded nervous and a little giddy. “Yeah. Um. Shower—you know the drill. See you around.”

Jensen turned and jogged—almost ran—to the employee entrance to the offices. Misha massaged a temple with his middle and index fingers and wondered if he’d completely freaked Jensen out with that not so subtle declaration of his interest. Well, Jensen had started it, so he only had himself to blame.

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“Fuck.”

Jensen’s head hit the table and Jared clicked the mouse a couple of times and frowned at the computer.

“Just ask him out already.”

“I thought you said that would be inappropriate.”

“Better that than the two of you giving into your raging passion and doing it on the gym floor.”

“We wouldn’t—do you really think he’s actually interested too?”

Jared looked away from the computer. “Jensen. The guy has been drooling over you from the second he first saw you. And vice versa I might add. Just get it over and done with and maybe the two of you can interact like normal human beings. Three different employees have told me that they blush and feel uncomfortable when they see the two of you together.”

“We’re not doing anything inappropriate!”

“No, not like that. Like, they feel like they’re intruding on some personal, intimate moment. They stay out of the gym to give you privacy. You want privacy, take him home.”

Jensen’s heart flipped at the very thought. Misha—at his apartment—on his bed—in his arms. Jensen put his head back on the table in an effort to dispel the sudden dizziness that had come upon him.

“Hey, Jensen, I’m having trouble with this thing again. Like, I’m getting a zero balance on some of the accounts, but I don’t see any payments.”

Jensen raised his head. “Is it Misha’s account?”

Jared’s eyes jumped around the screen and then he said, “Yeah.”

“Yeah. I might not have exactly charged him. Per se. For this month. Exactly.”

Jared turned his head and Jensen smiled pathetically at him.

“Before you bankrupt us. Just ask the guy out.”



“Okay. Next time. I mean, what’s the worst that can happen? He’ll say no?”

“He’ll say no and feel uncomfortable and never come back. He’ll say yes and the sex will be so awful that he’ll feel uncomfortable and never come back? He’ll say yes and you’ll get caught in bed together by his wife?”

“Jared!”

“I’m just saying any number of things could happen.”

“You are the best friend a guy could have, you know that?”

“Hey. He could say yes and you’ll go out and fall in love and get a house and a dog and adopt an adorable little girl from Cambodia.”

“How about we just stop at the he’ll say ‘yes,’ part, okay?”

Jared grinned even as he clicked pointlessly away at the computer. “Believe it or not I’m rooting for you two. I don’t know him that well, or at all really, but I haven’t seen you get as excited as you do for Monday mornings about anything since we moved out here.”

“He’s just—interesting. Did you know that he lived in Uganda for two years doing volunteer work? He’s, like, an actual good person.”

“So are you, Jensen,” Jared said with an amused huff.

“It’s not the same. He’s really worldly. And spiritual. He lived in a freaking monastery without speaking for three months.”

“Sounds crazy to me.”

Jensen smiled. “He’s that too. I’m not like him. I don’t deserve—“

“Jensen,” Jared cut him off sharply and turned to face him. “I’m going to stop you right there. Because if anyone is going to be lacking, it’s going to be him. You are loyal and generous and when it comes to the people you really care about, completely selfless.”

Jensen flushed a little at the praise from his friend. That wasn’t really the type of thing two men shared with each other. Jared seemed to sense his discomfort, so he smiled cheekily.

“Plus. You are a hot piece of ass, Jensen Ackles. He would be a fool to say no to you.”

Jensen rolled his eyes. “Thanks, man.”

“You’re welcome.”

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Misha waited for Rob in his store. He wasn’t even pretending to be doing inventory or restocking the shelves. He just twirled a pen around in his hand and occasionally tapped it on the counter next to the register. Around one o’clock his friend showed up. Before he could even get out a greeting, Misha confessed.

“I love him.”

Rob stopped dead in his tracks. “What?”

Misha raised his eyes and looked at his friend's confused and slightly disturbed face.

"I'm in love with him, Rob."

Rob's jaw dropped. And then he physically shook himself. "You've talked to him like four times!"

Misha shrugged. "That apparently was all it took."

Rob kind of smiled, and then he looked stern. "Well, if you decide to pursue this, you keep those sentiments to yourself."

"Why?"

"Because that's not fair to him, Misha. He'll think you mean something more."

Misha stood up straight, feeling a little angry about his friend's dismissive words. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I just mean, love for him is probably different than it is for you."

"That's—"

"Misha. I've known you since we were kids. You're restless. You're always looking for the next adventure. Love is just another adventure for you. And then you're going to feel the need to leave again and leave everyone behind without a word about whether you're okay or alive or dead for three years!"

Misha swallowed his anger. Rob had said he'd gotten over Misha's disappearance when he was twenty-one and decided to sneak into China and travel through the remote countryside until he hit Mongolia and eventually Russia—where he was promptly picked up and deported back to the States. Apparently it was still a sore subject for his friend. But he understood now why Rob doubted his sincerity.

"I know," Misha agreed. "I know exactly what you mean. Restless—is the exact word for it. I've felt it all my life. Maybe I picked it up from living with my mom, and always traveling around and never having a place to call 'home.' Even when I'm content to stay somewhere for a while, I still feel that itch under my skin. The need to see what else is out there."

Rob nodded. None of this appeared to be news to him.

"It's not something I've just become aware of. I've always known it. I mean, I *feel* it. Every day that I stay in one place. Hell, even when I'm moving I sometimes wonder if I'm not moving fast enough."

Misha paused as he thought about how slowly those seconds felt while he was planking, but that as long as Jensen was talking—he wanted it to last longer.

"I know I haven't spent a lot of time with him, but when I do—when I'm around him, with him—that feeling, that restlessness—for the first time in my life I've felt it...ease."

Misha's brow creased. He wasn't sure that was the word he wanted to use, though it wasn't incorrect.

"Holy shit."

Misha looked up and Rob looked dumbfounded.

“Okay then. Wow. So, if you’re going to marry this guy I should meet him, right? You want to double with Mollie and me on Friday?”

Misha laughed. “Just because I’m there doesn’t mean Jensen is. And I don’t think I’d like our first date to be a double.”

“Okay. Second date. You can come over to our house and Mollie and I will cook.”

Misha shook his head and smiled. “Let me work up the courage to ask him on the first date before we plan the second.”

Rob smiled back. “Okay. But don’t take too long. You don’t want to lose him to some hot chick in spandex.”

Misha scowled. “That bitch!”

“Who?” Rob asked, utterly confused.

“That chick in the spandex flirting with my man!”

“Is there one? At the gym?”

“I don’t know but there could be!”

Rob burst out laughing. “You are an idiot. Come on. I’m hungry and it is Burrito Monday.”

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"Again, I'm really sorry, Jensen," Misha said as he watched a couple of "construction workers" whose credentials were suspicious at best tear up the wooden floor of his classroom. "Apparently the nail salon next door has been dumping chemicals down a drain that leaked all underneath the foundation and it's forming mustard gas or a really flammable paste or a giant fart bomb or something."

Jensen's laughter was loud even over the phone.

"So, I have to stay here while they tear up my shop. They say they'll be done by seven, but clearly I can't make our session this morning. I'm sorry for the last minute cancelation."

"It's okay. Actually, we've had a heavy influx of potential members this morning, so I can relieve Gen and do some of the tour stuff. And you know, you could always come in tonight for your session. I'd hate for you to miss one."

Misha hesitated for a moment. He really wanted to see Jensen, but he didn't want to put him out that much.

"I—I wouldn't want you to have to stay late on my account."

"I'm staying late tonight anyway because I'm starting the overnight shift this week. We really need to hire some desperate college students."

Misha chuckled. "Definitely. I'd hate to think your evenings aren't free."

"Oh. Um. Well. I'm the owner. So, you know. If I had to. I could. Well, we can't shut down a twenty-four hour gym. Shit. Um."

"Jensen?" Misha interjected before the guy had a total meltdown over the phone.

"Yes."

"How about I'll call you when I get free of these guys, and if you're available, I'll go to the gym tonight for a make out session. Makeup session."

Misha chewed on his lip as he hoped Jensen hadn't caught his Freudian slip.

"Yes. That sounds good. Um. I might be walking around. So, let me give you my cell phone number so you don't have to call the front desk and wait for them to page me."

"Okay."

"It's my personal cell phone number."

Misha grinned and bit his lip to keep from laughing. Then he said, "Okay. I promise I won't put it up on a bathroom stall or anything."

"Appreciated."

"Okay then."

"Yeah, okay."

They went silent. And God it was awkward now, but Misha couldn't stop grinning.

"So, I've gotta go," Jensen finally said.

"Yeah, me too."

"So call me. Whether you can come or not. Um. I just want to make sure I don't miss you or—"

Jensen cut off and Misha heard some sort of rustling sound.

"I'll call tonight, Jensen."

"Okay. Bye then."

"Goodbye." Misha pulled the phone back just to check that he had in fact said goodbye after he'd been hung up on. Jensen was the funniest guy he'd ever met. That probably wasn't his intention, but there was nothing funnier to Misha than a manly man's man getting flustered like a ten year old girl going to Disney World.

By the end of the day his classroom was still a mess, and he'd been informed he would have to close his store until the safety inspectors could verify the foundation underneath it was sound. His inventory was still a mess because he'd been alternately mooning over Jensen and stressing about how to ask him out for the last week. In theory it shouldn't be difficult. He liked Jensen, he had a 90% confidence interval that Jensen liked him, so a yes was expected.

He supposed the problem was how to indicate to Jensen what exactly he was interested in. He didn't want to come off as just wanting a hook up or to establish a fuck buddy to meet up with sometimes, and he really hoped that wasn't what Jensen was interested in. But he also didn't want to scare him by asking him if he wanted to adopt their three children or wait until science caught up enough for them to blend their own DNA together in a hollowed out ovum implanted in a surrogate womb. There were a lot of ways this could go south very quickly.

It was almost nine before Misha was chewing on a pen and waiting for Jensen to answer his cell phone. He was tired and really didn't feel like working out, but he didn't want to wait a whole week before seeing his trainer again. He would ruin his good progress, and that would just be irresponsible.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Jensen, it's Misha."

"Hi. Is this your cell phone?"

"Yep."

"Good. I'll be sure to save it. When we're done talking. Unless I can do it while—but there's no reason to do that because I can always do it after." There was a pause and Misha grinned around the pen in his mouth as he listened with sadistic pleasure at the strained silence on the other end of the line. "Anyway. So, I guess the work ran late?"

"Oh yeah. The place is a mess. And I know it's later than I'd originally told you—"

"You still want to come?" Jensen interjected anxiously—or perhaps happily.

Misha inhaled to calm his scampering heart. "If it's not too late."

"No, come now. We basically have the place to ourselves, so I'll be able to work with you."

"Sounds great. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Good. I'll meet you in the stretching area."

From the time he ended the call all the way through walking the short block to the gym and changing in the locker room, Misha's heart rate stayed elevated. He couldn't do anything to get it to calm down. He'd never felt this excited before; not even during actual sex. All he was going to do tonight was ask out the boy he liked. What the hell had Jensen done to him?

Inexplicably, as Misha crossed the quiet gym and approached the beautiful man who stood waiting for him with his hands on his waist, Misha felt his heart rate calm. The closer he got to Jensen, that feeling of ease and belonging increased. Misha had never really felt like he belonged anywhere, and he wasn't entirely sure Huntersville was where he'd want to spend the rest of his life, but as long as he was with Jensen he knew he'd be in his favorite place. Of course five weeks was probably too short of a time to spring that kind of eternal, all through our next seven reincarnations kind of commitment on someone, so he was going to have to play it cool. At least for another week or two.

Misha stopped in front of Jensen, standing just a little too close, and put his hands on his hips. The soft, slow whoosh of the large fans in the ceiling accentuated how quiet the cavernous room was. They stood in each other's space, eyes locked, a challenge and tension hanging in the air.

Misha deliberately relaxed his shoulders, and the tension between them eased as Jensen also relaxed minutely. A wild make out session on the gym floor, while probably awesome, was not the message he wanted to send. He wanted a date. He wanted to do this right. And that meant repressing the urge to step close, comb his fingers through Jensen's hair, and taste the lips that had been calling to him for over a month.

"So. Start with the bench press?" Misha asked.

Jensen nodded. "Bench press."

Considering their other sessions, this one was relatively free of sexual tension and even innuendo. They worked like a personal trainer and a client should. Except for the fact that every word was spoken in a low voice so as not to disturb the stillness of the empty gym, resulting in a fairly intimate conversation about proper seat height on the leverage chest press. Done with strength training, they returned to the stretching area. As Misha got into the perfect planking position, he smiled because he knew that even though he didn't need it—there it was. Jensen's hand on his ass.

"So. You agreed to start a new life in a town you had no ties to and to risk all your finances on going into business with your friend."

"You now know the story of my life."

"What's the craziest thing you've ever done?"

"Outside of starting a new life in a town I have no ties to and risking all my finances on going into business with my friend?"

"Yup." Misha had now reached the point where talking would be a bad idea.

"Well...I've jumped out of a plane, off a cliff, and seriously considered purchasing one of those flying squirrel suits."

Misha huffed since he couldn't laugh. "Adrenaline junkie?"

"Ah, that's so crass. It's much purer than that. It's like a shot of clarity. Freedom."

"Freedom?" Misha puffed out.

"Yeah," Jensen's voice became a little distant. "In that moment, when you feel nothing but the rush of excitement. And fear. Always a little fear. It makes you—a little crazy. You feel powerful and out of control. And you think about dying. And...you think...fuck it. Take me if you can. And in that moment. You are free of all the shit in your life. Of your hang-ups and doubts and anger and prejudices. And when the bungee tugs at your ankle or the straps of the chute yank on the harness, you come back to yourself. Grateful to be alive and not really so worried about the possibility that you'll fail at everything you try."

Jensen's eyes focused from whatever far away point he had been seeing in his mind and he looked at Misha who was resting on his arms and staring at his trainer.

"Oh. Um. When did you stop? Sorry, I lost count."

"That's fine."

"Or you know," Jensen spoke swiftly, turning away from him and looking embarrassed though Misha had no idea why he would be. "That's just, you know. Something I think sometimes. Most people probably just like the euphoric chemical rush."

Misha could tell Jensen felt uncomfortable having shared something so personal. He decided to give the guy a break.

"Hmm. Seems like it's just taking an unnecessary risk when you can get the same feeling from sex."

Jensen smiled and shook his head. "It's not the same. Different kind of high."

"Or maybe you've just been having sex with the wrong people."

Jensen slid his eyes over to meet Misha's in a clash of green and blue.

"Maybe. Side planks. Go."

Misha sighed and got into position.

"Okay. So, you pulled my life story out of me. Do I get a return of the favor?"

"Not while I'm doing this."

Jensen chuckled and left him alone while he did his side planks. Then the bastard put him on a Pilates machine. He did everything in his power to dissuade his students from turning to Pilates, but he didn't feel like getting into an argument with Jensen. At least not tonight; they could save that for another day.

"Alright. So. Life story. Fifty words or less."

"Are you going to count?"

"No. Okay, lift your leg and talk."

"If I had a nickel for every time I heard that."

Jensen laughed. "You'd have five cents. Come on."

"I was born here, but then we left. And every few years we'd come back for a while. It was just my mom and me and my brother. I saw a lot of the country. I met a lot of people. Never got close to any of them, well, maybe one or two here or there. But, I never minded that we kept moving. And once I graduated high school, I convinced myself that I hated that kind of transient life, so I went to college for four years. I liked it. But I could never settle on a major or a hobby or an intramural sport. Not even a group of friends. Eventually I figured out that I was dying in a cage of my own making. And when I graduated, I left. I traveled around a lot. Then joined the Peace Corps. Then got a job as a midnight DJ on a smooth jazz station."

Misha laughed remembering some of the conversations he'd had when people called in and asked what the heck he was talking about in the middle of the night.

"Then I worked for a senator. And washed dishes in a four star restaurant until I worked my way up to sous chef. Then I traveled some more and started a publishing company and then I spent a month in the hospital after breaking my back when I missed a turn on the Santa Monica freeway going about seventy on my bicycle."

"Jesus Christ."

"And then there was the software company and the farm. Then traveling. Always traveling. Last year I came back here again and opened my store to sell holistic remedies and other new age paraphernalia and teach yoga classes."

"Wow. That's not so much a life as a—wait a minute. You *teach* yoga?"

Misha made a face and glanced at Jensen where he stood at the foot of the machine.

"Uh, yeah. I might know a pose or two about it."

"Yeah, I figured that much out when Gen suggested we look into hiring you to teach some classes the day you signed up for a membership."

Misha blushed and detangled himself from the ropes on the machine. He sat up and looked at Jensen a little ashamedly.

"So, uh, why did you ask if I did yoga?"

"Why did you say you didn't?"

Misha strummed his fingers on the bench and debated his response. Finally he just told the truth.

"I wanted to see you bend over."

Jensen's laughter echoed loudly in the gym and Misha watched in delight as he had to walk away to allow room for his full bodied amusement. When he turned to face him his smile was so big he looked like a little kid. Misha couldn't help smiling back.

"Go get on the treadmill. I gotta do a walk through."

Misha watched Jensen walk away and wondered if his babbling diatribe of a life story had scared the man off. He didn't waste more than a couple of seconds on that unpleasant thought and made his way over to the treadmill. He set a seven minute pace and ran for thirty minutes. As he went through his cool down, he could feel the hot weight of Jensen's gaze on his back. But he didn't turn to look. He continued through the cool down until the treadmill turned itself off. Then he turned around and met Jensen's eyes. Not wanting to risk blowing all the hard work he'd put into not jumping Jensen's bones tonight, he spoke rather than stare intensely into the mesmerizing green of his irises.

"So, shower, sauna, sh—"

"Change of routine," Jensen said evenly. "Rinse off in the shower, and then meet me at the steam room."

Misha swallowed. "Um. My membership doesn't allow me access to the steam room."

"Well. It's a good thing you know one of the owners then, isn't it?"

Jensen gave him a smirk and turned to walk toward the employee entrance. Misha's breathing was a little uneven as he crossed the gym to the locker rooms. He rinsed off quickly—in very cold water—and then grabbed a fresh towel as he made his way to the steam room. Jensen met him outside, a towel wrapped around his waist. Misha hadn't seen him without a shirt on yet. He had definitely earned his credentials as a personal trainer.

Jensen opened the door and held it open for Misha. He walked through the small entrance and pulled open the second door that led into the actual steam room. He was hit with a thick humid wall of air, and it felt good when he inhaled it into his lungs. He immediately began to sweat and walked across the modestly sized space to sit on the heated tile benches that lined the room. He climbed to the second tier and leaned against the wall. He heard a clicking noise which sounded like a lock engaging, but was probably just the door closing. Then he saw Jensen moving through the veil of steam to sit across from him on the second tier with his back against the wall as well.

They watched each other through the warm, white haze and Misha felt his body reacting to the oppressive humidity and Jensen's proximity. He put his hands in his lap to hide the tent he was making out of his towel. Sweat rolled down his back and over his pectoral muscles. When he

tried to take a deep breath to calm down, his arousal was ramped up by the wet heat that reminded him of sloppy, passionate kisses. He closed his eyes, shutting Jensen out, and let his head fall back against the wall.

"You okay, Mish?"

The room was empty, but the steam made Jensen's voice sound like it was close and all around him. Misha licked his lips. And then shook his head no.

"No, I'm not okay."

"Did you hurt something?"

"No, it's nothing like that. I just—I want to ask you on a date. Because I like you. Because I want to do this right. I don't want meaningless fun, I want to take you out and learn more about you and see if we can have the kind of friendship that makes for a good relationship."

He paused.

"But?" Jensen said in a carefully neutral voice.

"But. All I can think about right now is how much I want to walk across this room and suck you off."

Misha heard Jensen suck in a sharp breath. He opened his eyes to see if he'd been reading this situation all wrong from the start and he'd actually surprised and disgusted the man. Jensen sat stock still, his hands white knuckling the side of the bench, the towel at his lap raised in a clear indication of how very much okay he was with Misha's suggestion.

Misha stood up and stepped down to the floor. Halfway across the room, his towel fell from his hips and he did nothing to catch it, unashamed of his bobbing erection. He knelt on the bench below Jensen and put his hands on his thighs. He looked up and met Jensen's eyes in question. He nodded once. Misha took the towel in his hands and parted it, pushing it off the man's legs until it fell onto the bench. He leaned forward and grinned as Jensen gasped and stiffened when he grabbed his huge cock in his right hand. Then all humor was forgotten as he bent forward and licked the underside of the head.

The muggy air had nothing on Jensen. He was hot and slick from sweat and tasted like musky salt. He took the head in his mouth and sucked on it until that first burst of bitter precome fell onto his tongue. He moaned and lowered his head, taking more of Jensen in and *finally* the man put a hand on him, twisting his hair with eager fingers.

Misha slid his free hand up Jensen's thigh until he had a grip on his hip bone, and then lowered his head until his other hand, the one giving quick, sharp pulls down on the base of Jensen's cock, made contact with his lips with every bob of his head. Jensen's breathing was labored and slightly uneven. Deep, guttural groans were dying to be released but Jensen kept biting them back. Misha did his best to make Jensen give in to the urge to abandon propriety.

His jaw already ached with the intense suction he put on the shaft, his lips starting to go numb from vibrating against the turgid flesh as he couldn't stop humming his greedy pleasure at having a fat cock in his mouth. On every fourth or fifth pass he pulled back and allowed the barest hint of teeth to graze the sensitive skin. Jensen's fingers clenched and unclenched in his hair, but he did nothing more than that. Misha wanted him to let loose.

Stilling the hand on Jensen's cock, Misha sank down until his lips touched his fist. A soft choke emanated from Jensen's throat, and Misha swallowed. And swallowed again, several times until

Jensen finally vocalized his pleasure in a string of obscenities. Misha paused and breathed in deeply through his nose, and then he placed his hands on Jensen's hips and dropped his head all the way. Jensen's cockhead hit the back of his throat when his nose touched the baby soft skin just above the base of Jensen's shaft. Misha raised his eyes, straining them a bit, but made sure to make eye contact with Jensen so that he understood that "No, I don't have a gag reflex," and "Yes, please, yes already."

Both of Jensen's hands grabbed a handful of Misha's damp hair and suddenly Misha was getting his face fucked by an enthusiastic dick that had clearly been in some need of interaction outside of Jensen's right hand. Not only could Misha take it, he loved it. Sure he liked to tie his lovers up and make them beg for release until tears fell from their eyes every now and then, but put a cock in his mouth and he was a shameless, submissive slut for it. It was a very confusing dichotomy, but not one he had ever thought needed to be remedied.

"Jesus Christ, Misha, your mouth..."

Jensen's head fell back and Misha closed his eyes and concentrated on keeping his throat relaxed and his mouth open as wide as possible to keep his teeth out of the way. He heard Jensen's tone grow wilder and higher pitched. His muscles began to tense under his hands and somehow his hips punched forward even faster. Misha felt his own cock heavy and throbbing between his legs. At this rate he might not even have to touch himself if Jensen would just—

Jensen suddenly stopped and pulled out. Misha let out a small noise of dismay and looked up. Jensen was furiously pumping his cock, his face scrunched up as he rode the edge of his orgasm.

"Why'd you pull out?" Misha demanded.

"About to come," Jensen forced out through his clenched jaw.

"Yeah, so?"

Misha grabbed Jensen's wrist and yanked his hand away. Jensen's eyes flew open and he let out a breathy shout as Misha grabbed his cock and wrapped his lips around the head. He sucked once, and Jensen came with a scream and a painful twist of Misha's hair.

Misha barely felt the discomfort. He sealed his lips around Jensen and swallowed down the warm, thick come as best he could. Some of it escaped his mouth and slid down his chin, but still Misha lapped at Jensen's slit and sucked and licked his cock until it was clean and spit-shiny. Then he sat back on his heels and wiped his lips and chin with the back of his arm. Jensen stared at him slack-jawed, eyelids heavily hooded with sated lust.

"Damn, Misha."

Misha smiled and stood. He walked forward until he straddled Jensen's lap and then sat on his thighs. He put one arm around his neck, combed his fingers through Jensen's hair, and looked at him expectantly. Jensen's lips collided with his at the same time his powerful hand wrapped around his hard, leaking cock. He was already buzzing near orgasm from pleasuring Jensen and the man definitely knew how to apply just the right amount of pleasure and twist his wrist just so. But it was that kiss, their first, that slowed time and heightened every sensation. Jensen's lips were full and soft, warm and wet, salty and so sweet.

Misha came. He knew it, he felt it. But he was really only aware of how gently Jensen was kissing him and how the hair on the back of his neck stood on end when his new lover brushed his knuckles lightly down his cheek. Their lips came apart as their foreheads touched. They calmed as their bodies came down, breathing in each other's breath, and shyly letting their

fingertips traipse over the other's shoulders, arms, neck, chest, wherever they could reach.

The steam kept their bodies from cooling off so they had no idea how long they stayed together, touching, kissing, learning the feel and texture of each other's bodies. Misha was only half-lucid, so he was only half-certain that he might have whispered to Jensen that he loved him. Jensen hadn't said it back of course, but his lips had curved into a smile against Misha's skin every time he said it.

Misha trembled, fully aware that he was locked in a small room with an opaque, humid cloud closing in all around him, and strong, unyielding arms trapping him in a benevolent though needy embrace. But his heart soared free, liberated from the stifling restlessness that had pursued him all his life. Being still had never felt so much like home.

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Misha walked around on the shiny wood floors of his classroom. He didn't bother to hide his grin as the beginner yoga class struggled and cried and moaned with their first taste of planking. He gently corrected a position or two by placing his fingers on the small of his students' backs (not on their asses like some unprofessional trainers did), but for the most part he let them cheat. He made them go for the full minute even though none could do it and had to drop down and push back up again several times. When the minute was up he sat down in the lotus position and waited for his students to follow suit. He took them through a relaxing, breathing exercise and ended the class with a long stretch of silence.

Everyone, including Misha, jumped a foot when the classroom door swung open and banged against the wall. Jared stuck his head in with a big grin, and then pulled a face as he realized he'd walked in on a class.

"Oh, sorry guys. I guess I'm early. Carry on."

He ducked back out and Misha rolled his eyes as his inner peace was definitely gone for the moment.

"Sorry about that. I'll be sure to finish a little early on the days the kickboxing class is due to use the room after us."

One of the students, a young college woman, raised her hand.

"Yes?" Misha asked, not sure if that was the proper protocol for this kind of informal session.

"Would you recommend kickboxing?"

"Well...it is a completely different discipline so they're hard to compare. But kickboxing is good cardio, it helps with balance, it's empowering, and I do believe there are still slots available in the beginner level class."

"Yeah, all of that," added another girl, "and did you see the guy who teaches the class? I will watch that booty kick boxes all day long."

The class (comprised entirely of young females) giggled.

"Okay," Misha said getting to his feet and trying not to imagine Jared drunkenly wading through emptied gift boxes like he had last Christmas, "we need to clear out for the next class. Good work everybody. I hope to see some of you on Thursday."

"Goodbye, Misha," several girls chorused.

Misha rolled up his mat and shoved his other materials into a small bag. He slung that and the strap holding his mat over his shoulder and followed the stragglers out of the classroom and back into the gym.

"Um, Mr. Collins?"

Misha smiled at the young girl shyly twisting a lock of black hair around her finger.

"Misha is fine."

The girl blushed. "Misha. Um. I had a little trouble with the Warrior pose. I feel like I'm not arching my back right or something. Do you think maybe you could help me with that?"

"Sure." Misha stopped outside the door as the kickboxing class filed in. "I'll have us work on it first thing next time."

"Or...or, you could. You know. Tutor me in private. I have the apartment to myself on Friday evenings. My roommate works."

Misha nodded. "Hmm, this Friday won't work for me because my husband and I have reservations for our anniversary, but maybe we could meet here at the gym on Saturday morning?"

The girl dropped her hair. "Oh. Uh, yeah, that can work. Um. I'll get back to you. Thanks for a good class."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it."

The girl smiled and walked away and Misha finally remembered that her name was Rachel.

"Isn't you guys' anniversary in September?" Jared asked as he paused on his way into the classroom.

"Shh," Misha said with a finger to his lips and shot his friend a smile.

Jared laughed and clapped Misha on the shoulder as he entered the classroom.

"Alright! Who's ready for this?!"

Jared's students cheered loudly and shortly after loud music starting blaring from the sound system built into the walls. Misha quickly shut the door on the soundproofed room. He started for the employee entrance to the locker rooms when he saw his husband across the gym, working with a handsome young man on firming up his glutes. Misha really hated Jensen's Tuesday sessions. Jensen looked up and spotted him. He leaned down and spoke to his client and then jogged over to greet Misha with a brief kiss.

"Hey. How was class?"

"Not bad. Beginner level classes aren't my favorite, but it's nice to see so many fresh faces interested in learning yoga and getting fit."

Jensen smiled sardonically. "Yeah, it could be that or it could be the fact that this gym has a reputation on the nearby college campus of being run by a 'bunch of total studs.'"

Misha grinned. "Am I one? Do I get to be a stud? I've never been called a stud before."

Jensen grinned back and reached around him to grab a handful of ass. "You've always been a stud to me."

Misha laughed and wriggled out of Jensen's grasp. He intercepted his hand as Jensen made another attempt and held it tightly in his own.

"Hey."

"Yes," Jensen said, turning partially serious.

"Are you ready for tonight?"

Jensen inhaled deeply and then let it out slowly. "I think so. I mean, it's just a meeting right, so we can always decide to change our minds."

"Of course."

Jensen squeezed his hand and looked into his eyes. "Mish, I know how much you want this, but I'm just a little nervous about having the egg donor also be the surrogate. I feel like...you know, it'll be too hard on her later. Or on us."

"Well, let's just meet her and see how it goes. It won't hurt to check it out."

"Like it didn't hurt to check out that Indian place on Belafont?" Jensen asked with a sour expression.

Misha laughed and stepped in close. "Didn't hurt me."

Jensen grumbled and leaned in to kiss his cheek.

"Remember," he said pulling back so he could give Misha a stern look. "We're meeting at six o'clock so we should leave at five just to be safe."

"I know."

"So don't be late getting home."

"I won't."

Jensen stepped back into his space for one more kiss. He held him close and rubbed circles on his back with a hand.

"You do realize that if we do this, we can kiss our freedom goodbye."

"Nah, babe," Misha replied softly, kissing his husband. "We'll just have to redefine what freedom means."

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