

Title: Affinity

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Rating: NC-17

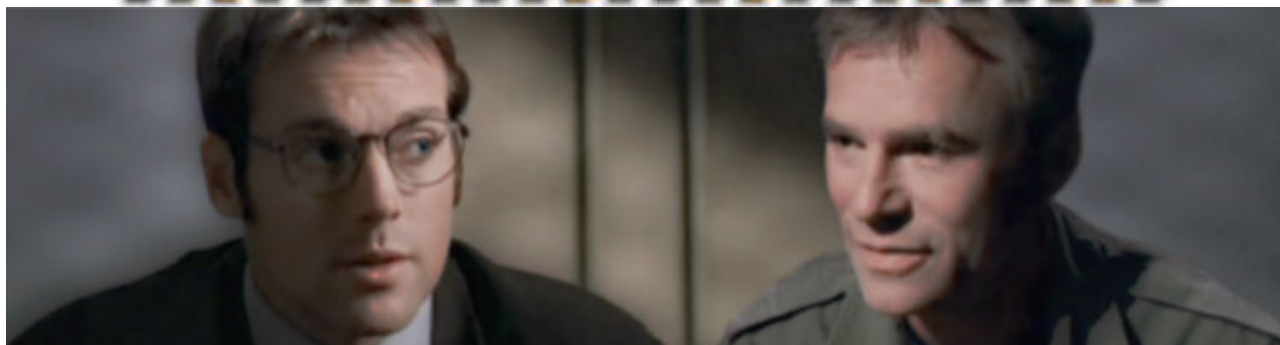
Pairing: Jack and Daniel

Category: Angst. Romance. Humour.

Series: Unity Part Two. Sequel to "Dissonance."

Season/Spoilers: Season 4. Minor spoilers for "Nemesis," "Small Victories," "The Other Side," "Upgrades," "Crossroads," "Divide and Conquer." Major spoilers for "Window of Opportunity."

Synopsis: When two members of SG-1 fall in love they must strive for oneness amidst confusion, conflict and constraint with their fellows.



Affinity

Part Two of Unity

A slash story by Biblio

Teal'c strode into the Commissary and saw his friend, legs sprawled over a table. He bowed. "O'Neill? Should we not be assisting Daniel Jackson with the translation?"

Jack sighed. "I'm taking this loop off." He picked up the ketchup bottle and idly squirted a couple of eyes on the plate.

Teal'c looked at O'Neill's grave face and sat slowly and deliberately to face him. He waited patiently.

"If we don't find a way outta this soon I'm gonna lose it," Jack said seriously. Loop after fucking loop with Daniel playing impossible to get, sniping in briefing after briefing, teasing, tormenting. Saying no. Jack had lost count of how many times and how many ways he'd tried to tell Daniel he was in love with him for Chrissake, and gotten exactly nowhere. Nowhere painfully, goddamn SLOW and over and over and over and over. Ad fucking in fucking fin fucking itum. He loved Daniel. He wanted Daniel. Daniel wanted him to PROVE it, prove which of them Jack really wanted to be with, him or Sam, and a ten hour loop just wasn't time enough to do that. What with briefings, explanations, sciencey stuff to remember, fucking gratuitous medical examinations - he was likely to kill Janet, and not just because she'd been out on the town with Daniel - the whole so near and yet so frigging far TORTURE of the translation sessions, he was going loopy himself.

It wasn't Daniel's fault. It wasn't. That whole miserable conversation where Jack had blown it was fresh in Daniel's mind, like it happened yesterday, and for him it had. Not for Jack. He was trying not to blame Daniel for holding it against him, trying and beginning to fail. He still loved Daniel. He still wanted Daniel. If he didn't get Daniel soon he was going to go insane or he was going to wind up hating Daniel for putting him through this over and over and – God help him.

Jack squirted ketchup wildly, making a 'happy' face filling his plate in huge angry swirls. He saw Teal'c's puzzlement and elaborated, just like Daniel asked him to Elaborate each time when he told Daniel he was in love with him. Elaborate? Crap. He'd 'Elaborate' him alright. "Lose it. It means go crazy. Nuts. Insane." Jack squirted the mustard vindictively, tracing the outline of eyes, nose, mouth, trying not to think of that lovely mouth thinning every time Jack told Daniel he loved him. "Bonzo. No longer in possession of one's faculties. Three fries short of a Happy Meal!" Tried not to think of Daniel not believing Jack loved him, every single FUCKING time he told him. "WHACKO!" he hollered.

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"O'Neill? Should we not be assisting – "

"Don't YOU start!" Jack snarled at Teal'c. One 'loop' too far. One 'no' over the line. One 'who do you really want to be with?' too much. Once too often with 'could you elaborate?'. One too many times he'd told Daniel he loved him and not been believed. Which one did Jack want? Daniel or Carter. Carter or Daniel. All Jack knew right now was Carter at least wanted HIM.

"You are out of uniform, O'Neill." Teal'c stared at the 'colourful' ensemble in mild disbelief. Yellow and red were not colours he associated with O'Neill.

"I'm resigning," Jack said flatly.

Teal'c regarded him curiously. This was a pointless exercise with the loop nearing its completion. An empty gesture. "Could you elaborate?" He was surprised by the howl O'Neill unleashed.

"Careful!" Jack raged. "Be VERY careful!"

"Do you require my assistance?" Teal'c offered. He well understood the depths of frustration O'Neill was experiencing.

"NOT this time," Jack snapped. It was surreal enough thinking about walking right into the gateroom and kissing the shit out of Carter without having Teal'c along for the ride. He couldn't even adequately explain why he was doing it. Maybe because for even a short time, Jack would actually be with someone who believed him. He wouldn't hurt Carter, she'd have no consequences to face, no time for that, and she would never ever

know. It wasn't too much to ask, was it? Just to be with someone who believed him, and cared?

"Very well, O'Neill. I will return to assist Daniel Jackson." Teal'c bowed and left his seething friend. This looping was most difficult. Teal'c found that he had too much time to think and feel. He had spent too much time with Daniel, hour upon hour in every loop, with and without O'Neill. The time spent alone with Daniel was most troubling. Daniel's misery over O'Neill was as fresh in this loop as it had been in the first, but it did not make Teal'c's own feelings any easier to contain. He loved Daniel. He had known that Daniel's place in his life was unique, but until now he had seen his feelings as affection, friendship rather than love. Love was indeed honourable between men, between comrades. It had been more difficult to accept that his feelings were changing. Teal'c's admiration of Daniel's beauty was not as simple as it once was, for he could not see Daniel now without desiring him. This physical need was growing as his feelings of love for Daniel were deepening.

Teal'c entered Daniel's office and greeted him gravely. Daniel looked both harassed and distracted. "Will you not rest for a moment, Daniel Jackson?"

Daniel turned to him, smiled, hesitated, then put down his chalk and came around to take the seat Teal'c proffered. They sat amicably side by side, Daniel seeming to take comfort from Teal'c's presence. Teal'c turned to face Daniel, watching the subtle play of emotions dancing over the expressive face.

"What is your wish, Daniel Jackson?" Teal'c asked quietly.

"Teal'c?" Daniel emerged from his reverie, puzzled.

"I have learned to play golf. O'Neill has learned to make pots. We have both learned to speak Latin and this dialect of the Ancients. What would you wish to experience, Daniel?"

"Anything?" Daniel asked pensively.

Teal'c bowed, returning the soft smile.

"I've always wanted to go up in a hot air balloon, Teal'c," Daniel confided shyly. "I've never been able to do it. I've never really had the time, and I've never been all that comfortable with heights."

"You have combated this fear most successfully," Teal'c praised, delighted when Daniel's smile shyly sweetened.

"It's supposed to be a magical experience," Daniel sighed, leaning forward to prop his chin upon his hands, seeming very far away though he still sat at Teal'c's side. "The clarity and serene stillness of the air you're soaring through and that rush of flame the only thing keeping you up there. Magical and terrifying at the same time."

"That is living, Daniel," Teal'c said softly.

Daniel turned to face Teal'c, his cheek cradled in his palm. "What's your wish, Teal'c? What would you like to do more than anything?"

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Jack handed his papers to Hammond. "Excuse me, George."

Hammond reached for the papers automatically. "Colonel, what are you doing out of uniform?"

"Handing you my resignation," Jack said pleasantly, looking at his watch. Kissing Carter was pushing it, but kissing her when she'd have time to deal with consequences was out and out wrong.

Carter came to stand in front of him. "Resigning? What for?" she asked Jack, clearly shocked.

"So I can do this," Jack said, leaning in to cup her face firmly in both hands and pressing his lips to hers. Carter simply returned the warm pressure of the kiss and Jack surrendered and went with it, determined they'd both enjoy it to the full because it would never, ever happen again. He took Carter in his arms and went with the grand gesture, draping her back over his arm and REALLY giving it some gas; no tongue, he wasn't a total shit. It was nice, very nice, and warm, and here with Carter it was all so easy, so simple, and Carter's arm was slipping up around his neck and -

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Teal'c rose smoothly to his feet and faced a slightly startled Daniel. He bowed formally. "There is one thing I would wish to do, Daniel," Teal'c said softly. "But I would require your permission to do it."

Daniel smiled up at him. "Whatever I can do to help, Teal'c. You know that."

Teal'c leaned in and placed his hands on Daniel's shoulders, gently urged Daniel to his feet, facing him. Daniel was innocently curious, smiling a little. Anticipating. Teal'c reached up his hand and cradled Daniel's jaw reverently, regretting that Daniel stilled beneath his hand, that the summer warmth in the widening blue eyes cooled as Teal'c gently removed Daniel's glasses. Yet Daniel spoke no word of refusal as Teal'c traced a wondering finger across Daniel's lips.

"You are very beautiful, Daniel, and it has been my wish to do this. May I kiss you?" Teal'c smiled. "I will not hold you to a promise given in haste, before you knew what it was I would ask of you."

Daniel stared back at him searchingly, disbelieving. Teal'c thought he had his answer.

"Yes," Daniel said clearly, as Teal'c bowed and backed away, respecting what he thought was a refusal. He looked searchingly at Daniel, finally allowed himself to accept that permission had been granted, and moved slowly again to Daniel's side. Teal'c stood before Daniel, unguarded, drinking in the sight of this man, equally open and fearing a little.

At last Teal'c leaned in and brushed his lips gently over Daniel's. When Daniel flinched, Teal'c was ready to release him, but Daniel's lips softened beneath his, so Teal'c permitted himself to take Daniel in his arms, Daniel tentatively returning the gentle, insistent pressure of his lips. Teal'c thought he had his answer in the sighing of breath against his mouth as Daniel's lips parted beneath his, as Daniel yielded to the deepening kiss, allowed Teal'c to touch, and taste, to learn and to savour. There was a sweetness in the yielding, but there was no sharing and when Teal'c released Daniel and stepped back, he looked into sorrowing, infinitely regretful eyes and he had his answer - and he knew --

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Daniel didn't want to fight with Jack, not again, not after what Malakai's obstinacy had put Jack through on P4X-639, not after Jack had been forced to use Charlie like a bargaining chip in front of all of them. He was fascinated about the time loop, couldn't fathom how Jack and Teal'c had survived three months of loops, if what Sam had just told them was accurate. He was also intensely curious about something, eyeing Jack gloating over his oatmeal, wondering if - this was JACK, after all. "Let me ask you something. In all that time you were - um - looping, were you ever tempted to - um - do something crazy? I mean, uh, you could do anything without worrying about consequences." Daniel wasn't even sure what he wanted the answer to be, he just wanted to know more about Jack. Maybe he just wanted some evidence Jack was at least willing to share a small truth with him.

Jack sat with his loaded spoon poised, staring at his stubborn and not particularly - right now - dearly beloved. The word he'd heard most frequently from Daniel over these past months was 'no'. The biggest thing on Daniel's mind had been whether Jack loved him or Carter. The biggest thing on Jack's mind had been how to get through another loop without killing Daniel right after he asked Jack to do the 'e' word. As in Elaborate. Right after Jack TOLD Daniel he loved him, and Daniel hadn't believed him. In loop after loop after loop. It was a miracle that Jack was still sane and Daniel was still alive.

"You know, it's funny, you've asked me that before," he said quietly to Daniel, glancing at Carter.

"And?" Daniel asked eagerly.

And? And Jack figured it was about goddamn time he got some PAYBACK. All that time he was eaten up with jealousy because Daniel went out with Janet and not ONCE in the

whole goddamn time they were looping had Daniel MENTIONED that Cassie had been along for the ride, because Cassie was the one with the French homework. It had totally slipped Daniel's mind to tell him the evening had ended with hot chocolate and marshmallows. MARSHMALLOWS. And the guest room because ole' Doc Fraiser thought he was too tired to drive. So, Jack figured he would ELABORATE for Daniel. He looked deliberately at Carter.

Daniel stiffened as Jack's eyes lingered on Sam. He turned just in time to meet Sam's gaze, Sam clearly puzzled by Jack's expression, but smiling. God, she was smiling.

Sam turned from Daniel's questioning face to the colonel. He was - well, he was smirking. An 'I know something you don't know' smirk. She couldn't imagine what he'd done, not trapped on base all that time, but she knew it had something to do with her. There was a definite spark there in the colonel's - in Jack's - eyes. She smiled, curious, and if she was being scrupulously honest here, flattered.

Jack's smirk was ear to ear as Daniel looked uncertainly at him and then followed Jack's gaze back to Carter like he couldn't tear his eyes away. Oh, yeah. That should FETCH him. Jack smirked and sucked the oatmeal right off his spoon, relishing every precious taste of something NEW.

Daniel sat frozen in his seat, couldn't bear to actually look at Jack as Jack shit all over him and got off on doing it. Could not in fact have made it more obvious he'd been fooling around with Sam while they were looping. And what was worse, Jack was not only making no effort whatsoever to hide what he'd done, he was pretty damned proud of himself for having done it. Jack was in fact enjoying rubbing Daniel's nose in it. This was the man Daniel had fallen in love with. The man he needed and depended on, and didn't think he could be without. He was in love with an asshole. A totally egotistical, inconsiderate, self-absorbed, lying, cheating asshole. Daniel got up and stumbled away.

"Daniel?" Sam called, shocked. "I'd better - he doesn't -" Sam looked up startled as the colonel jumped to his feet and took off after Daniel, as white as Daniel had been. "Sir?" The colonel didn't even look back. "SIR?" What the hell was going on? Sam hastened to follow the colonel out.

Jack tore after Daniel. Fuck. FUCK. He hadn't thought. Hadn't. Daniel didn't KNOW Jack was royally pissed with him or why. It wasn't Daniel's fault. He didn't KNOW. Didn't know he'd driven Jack demented for three months. Didn't know he'd refused Jack over and over again. He DIDN'T fucking know! Jack knew. He KNEW what Daniel's feelings were. Knew how he felt. Knew it and had just fucked him over. He was well aware all Daniel asked of him was honesty and maybe a little respect if Jack could make the stretch, and he fucked him over right there in front of Carter, just to score a few points in an ongoing argument Daniel didn't even know he'd been having. What the FUCK was he THINKING? STILL trying to blame DANIEL for this?

"DANIEL."

Daniel clamped his hand over his mouth, choking back the salt-sour sickness in his mouth. No way was he going to be any more humiliated in front of Jack than he'd already been. No way was he throwing up out here in the hallway. He slammed open the door of the bathroom, barely made it in time to drop to his knees in a stall and threw his insides up, hating Jack, hating himself for still loving Jack despite it all. He heard Jack come in but was too wracked with nausea to even lift his head, though he managed to shove hard at the hands reaching for him. Jack of course showing as much respect for his wishes as he usually did, crowding him.

"I'm sorry, I'm SO sorry, God, you've no idea," Jack said wildly, hardly able to believe he'd done THIS to Daniel, made him so upset he was sick and so angry he was fighting Jack off as he retched and heaved, deathly white and shaking the whole time. Jack got his arms around Daniel and hung on grimly, shitting bricks 'cause there was no forgiveness here, nothing but dumb, stricken misery and it was HIS fault, all HIS fucking fault. Only the truth could save him now. "I kissed her, I kissed her and I'm so sorry. It's NOT what you think, Danny, not what I MADE you think back there. It was just the once - just a kiss," Jack pleaded, laid it on as thick as he dared.

Daniel struggled up shakily, wiping his mouth. "Get the fuck away from me, Jack," he hissed, refusing to be swayed by the stark fear on Jack's face, pushing past him, dizzy and disoriented, just making for the sink and water. He rinsed his mouth and face and mouth again, compulsively. Jack had kissed him too, he wanted to get that taste out of his mouth as well. He knew Jack was hovering right behind him, but wouldn't look at Jack, wouldn't see. Daniel knew there was no way Jack would let him get out of here without having his say, no way to avoid a scene so best to tackle it head on.

"Just a kiss?" Daniel challenged furiously. "Yeah, right." Jack wasn't the shy, retiring type. The first time he'd walked through Daniel's door with something new on his mind it wasn't love. Quite the opposite. Jack stormed into Daniel's private life wanting to fuck him. Sat on Daniel's couch, teasing, leering just like he had at Sam. Jack claimed to have fallen in love with him, but all their dates, all their time spent together had been skirting around sex. Jack wanted him from that first night, and he hadn't been getting any, and Sam wanted Jack and they could have been boffing their brains out for three months and only Jack would be any the wiser. Jack. "How the fuck can I believe that, Jack? How can I believe a single word that comes out of your mouth after you just sat there smirking at Sam with that exact same 'let's fuck' leer on your face you used on me?"

"Hey! That's NOT fair," Jack hollered. "It was a KISS. That's all. ONE kiss. We're talking about three months, Daniel. Hundreds of time loops. Hundreds of times I tried to get you to talk to me, to give me a chance to explain. I told you I loved you. Hundreds of times," Jack said bleakly. "And every single time you asked me to elaborate. I tried, but you didn't believe me. Not once did you believe me. Not once. Always asked who I really wanted and you never believed me when I said it was you."

"A kiss? In three months? That's all? YOU? No consequences, remember!"

“ME? There were CONSEQUENCES for ME! I remembered, I KNEW, every goddamn loop I knew,” Jack hissed.

“So it was MY fault you ‘kissed’ Sam?” Daniel snarled.

Sam came to a dead stop, hand frozen on the bathroom door. The colonel KISSED her?

“You ASSHOLE. I can’t BELIEVE you’re blaming me,” Daniel raged, turning to face Jack at last. “You LIED to me. You lied about your feelings for Sam.”

Sam took a deep, shaky breath. She would never have chosen to tell Daniel the colonel loved her, he was bound to feel threatened, to wonder if the team would function as well as it had. He’d found out somehow and the colonel had denied it because they’d agreed to keep it between them, and he’d never betray her trust. It hadn’t occurred to her they were both breaking Daniel’s trust. She really ought to get in there and smooth things over.

“You keep insisting you don’t love her, so tell me, Jack? Why DID you ‘kiss’ her?” Daniel demanded. “Curiosity? A cheap thrill? Frustration? I haven’t exactly been cooperative about putting out, have I? Revenge? Did you use Sam to get back at me, Jack? For all those times I said ‘no’? Did you?”

Jack cringed. Put like that, Christ it sounded so frigging PETTY. It was just like that, tangled up in all those other things he’d been feeling and going through, but it was just like that. He was just what Daniel thought he was and his back was against the wall here. “I didn’t lie to you and I didn’t lie to Carter,” Jack said carefully. “Listen to me, Daniel, PLEASE. Just listen to me. I care far more for Carter than I’m supposed to. That’s the literal truth. She’s not just a subordinate to me, not just someone under my command. She’s important to me because she’s CARTER. She’s one of my kids. I’m not as professionally detached as I should be - hell, I care about ALL of you more than I should, and that’s MY problem, not hers, and certainly not yours. But ‘caring more than I should’ and needing to protect is a far cry from being in love. That’s what I said and that’s what I meant. I don’t love Carter. How could I, Danny? How? I’m in love with YOU.”

Sam leaned hard against the door, disbelieving. It couldn’t be. Couldn’t. The colonel was in love with Daniel? DANIEL? No. NO. The colonel had boned his way through the galaxy, no way he was gay. It wasn’t possible.

Jack took a deep breath. He didn’t dare to get a step closer to Daniel than this, not with Daniel looking he’d fly apart at any second. “I was too fucking cowardly to tell her there was no chance. I knew on Apophis’ ship, I knew how she felt and I ignored it, I was hoping like hell it would just go away because I didn’t want to deal with it. I never wanted to hurt Carter, Daniel, but because of that I’ve hurt you. I’m sorry.”

Sam was shaking. Big of him! The colonel was just full of the milk of human kindness, here.

"You cheated on me, Jack," Daniel said flatly.

"Yes," Jack agreed simply. "You asked me to elaborate, over and over. You wanted to know which of you I really wanted. I wanted to kiss her, I wanted to KNOW, so maybe you'd look at me when you asked who I really wanted and you'd know too, you'd know it was you, because I just couldn't find the words you'd believe. And I can't tell you how sorry I am about that now. Or for being such a bastard back there. It's no excuse but I've been through this for three months, Daniel. Maybe more. It - it was wearing on me, you know," he added softly. "I was losing it. I sat there at that table and I remembered that, but I didn't remember you didn't know any of this, every time you said 'no' was the first time to you even if it was the two hundred and thirteenth time for me. Only one loop where I didn't try to tell you, Danny. Only one where I didn't tell you I loved you and got knocked on my ass." Jack was staring at Daniel, willing him to get past the fact Jack had proven himself a liar, willing Daniel to give him trust he didn't deserve. Willing Daniel to just be Daniel.

Daniel was exhausted. He couldn't think straight, couldn't tell if anything Jack told him was the truth, couldn't begin to work out what he was feeling. "I want to believe you, Jack," he began.

"But you don't," Jack interrupted. "I can see that you don't, but I'm asking you to try. I haven't said or done a single thing to prove I love you," he said wryly, "but I'm still asking you to try."

"I don't know if I can, Jack," Daniel said bitterly. "The only thing I asked of you was honesty. That was all. You only had to be straight with me and you couldn't even give me that. I can't trust you." He shrugged helplessly. "Or rather I did, until you looked me right in the eye and lied to me. You've lied to me, and now I don't which is the truth and which is the lie."

"The truth is that I'm in love with you, Daniel. That isn't going to change. I'm not going to change," Jack promised. "And I still don't know how YOU feel about ME."

"Neither do I," Daniel whispered.

Sam turned away blindly, she had to get away, didn't want to hear another word. Instinct took her back to her lab. The colonel - Jack was in love with Daniel. She believed it even if Daniel didn't. How? How could this have happened? It was obvious the colonel was pushing for a sexual relationship with Daniel. He had sex with total strangers, no way would he not want sex with someone he claimed to love. The colonel and Daniel. Two straight men - all the evidence pointed to that - had fallen in love. Sam suspected the colonel was maybe a little more situationally flexible with his sexuality; for all the policy, it was known, it happened in the military, always had and always would. Daniel wasn't flexible at all, quite the opposite. As unbelievable as it had been to hear the colonel

confessing feelings for Daniel, it was even more unbelievable that Daniel would be willing to go to bed with the colonel.

Sam was suddenly furious, angry beyond even the humiliation she felt. How COULD he? He'd known for a while, known as long as she had and said nothing. He'd not said a word, not to her or to Daniel. Sam swallowed hard and faced the truth about Jack O'Neill, the truth Daniel had just faced. How could he? He could because he was a selfish bastard and because she wasn't nearly as important to him as Daniel was. She'd never been, never. She'd let herself lose sight of that. Not like this should come as a total shock. She'd known. Looking back to Vyas, to Ke'ra, she'd known. She'd seen how the colonel had reacted to Daniel's innocent rapport with Ke'ra, had been shocked at the naked jealousy on his face. She knew before the colonel did, and she'd rationalised it away just like he had. Ignored it when it didn't fit what she wanted.

Why Daniel and not her? Why would the colonel want to be with a man? With Daniel? What was the attraction? There was nothing easy about that kind of sexual relationship, and the colonel risked enforced retirement if he was caught with Daniel. He must know that, and still he thought Daniel was worth the risk. Why not her? In those other realities she and the colonel were married, or on their way to being. Two realities, two alternates together. Why not in this one? Why not her and the colonel? The military wasn't the variable, because if the colonel LOVED her like he said he loved Daniel, he'd risk everything for her the way it seemed he was willing to risk his career for Daniel.

The colonel could have had her if he wanted. He would have found a way, if he WANTED to. Nothing would stop him. He wouldn't have let anything stop him. Therefore, she had to face it. He - he didn't want her. Picking Daniel over her wasn't simply a matter of the colonel settling for Daniel because - because she was in the military and therefore 'off limits'. 'Don't ask don't tell' was an even BIGGER barrier than the one between her and the colonel, and yet the colonel was prepared not only to cross it, but to switch hit and bat for the other team - for Daniel. She couldn't rationalise THAT as making do. It wasn't a - whadda they call it? - a buddy fuck deal. Not with Daniel as the buddy. Daniel hadn't put out so far. He'd said so. The colonel wasn't getting laid and still the colonel wasn't walking away, unbelievably he was signing up for more.

What if - what if she wasn't the variable? Hard as it was to think it, the only factor not present in those other realities was Daniel. The logic seemed inescapable. Daniel must be the variable. He'd waltzed into that alternate reality and convinced General O'Neill to trust him. O'Neill had barely known Daniel, and he'd put his life and the fate of the world on the line because Daniel asked him to. Daniel had more impact on Jack O'Neill than anybody except for his son, and she'd naively assumed that was the neat slot into which the colonel had placed Daniel. Surrogate son.

All along SHE was the surrogate, just a pale imitation of Daniel Jackson.

The colonel was prepared to die for her, but even with his life on the line Jack wouldn't say he loved her. Daniel got a little upset and Jack was falling all over himself to make it

up, grovelling with 'I love you'. Colonel Jack NEVER grovelled. Never apologised. Never admitted to a fault, just bulled his way out from under and charmed you into forgiving him. Daniel crooked his finger and Colonel Jack came running to heel. Begged. Panted. Rolled over.

SONOVABITCH.

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Jack trailed Daniel, not daring to get too close and yet reluctant to leave Daniel alone in this state. He pretty much knew Daniel was headed for Teal'c, because he could hardly go to Carter, could he? Jack felt crappy over that too, because the two of them had always been close.

Daniel felt Jack's presence tugging at him every step of the way to Teal'c's quarters, knew Jack was hovering behind him as he knocked on Teal'c's door and wasn't surprised at all that Jack was right beside him when the door opened.

Teal'c took one look at Daniel's face and immediately drew Daniel into his quarters, aware that O'Neill was following, but too concerned with Daniel to deal with the intrusion. This would be rectified the instant Daniel was secure.

Daniel didn't protest as Teal'c steered him over to the bed and urged him gently down.

"You will rest here, DanielJackson, while I speak with O'Neill," Teal'c said kindly. "No one will disturb you. I give you my word."

"Thanks, Teal'c," Daniel said gratefully, refusing to look at Jack.

"O'Neill," Teal'c growled.

Jack took a last, lingering look at Daniel's resolutely shuttered face and reluctantly followed Teal'c out. No way they could talk in the hallway, not about this, his LIFE, so Jack led the way to his office, without a word. He had nothing to say in his defence.

Teal'c closed the office door behind him and glared at O'Neill. "You have grieved DanielJackson," he accused.

"Yes," Jack said flatly. "I've fucked up royally and I don't need you to tell me. You know what's going on between me and Daniel. You've known for a while."

"I have," Teal'c confirmed.

Jack returned the glare with interest. "You don't approve, right?"

"It is not my place to judge."

"I love Daniel," Jack said simply.

"I believe that you do," Teal'c agreed. "But not nearly as well as you love yourself, or you would not have hurt Daniel as deeply as this. Tell me, O'Neill? In your pursuit of Daniel, have you ONCE given more consideration to his needs and desires than to your own?" This was perhaps harsh, but it would do O'Neill no harm to stop and think about his own behaviour.

"Probably not," Jack snapped, "but since I don't know what his needs and desires ARE that's not a shocker."

Regretfully, Teal'c did know. No one knew better than he. Daniel loved O'Neill, so O'Neill he would have. It was not Teal'c's place to be selfish, to pursue his own desires over Daniel's. He was still Daniel's friend. And O'Neill's. O'Neill had tried to do his best for both Daniel and Major Carter, but the consequences could not have been worse for his relationship with Daniel. O'Neill's motives had been honourable, but his actions less so. Teal'c believed that O'Neill loved Daniel, that if anything, he possibly loved Daniel too much. This had led to a mistake, one Teal'c thought Daniel would not fault O'Neill for when he was himself calmer. "I will speak of this to DanielJackson and I will see if I can bring him to listen to you at least."

"You will?" Jack asked suspiciously.

"You doubt my word?"

Jack took one look at Teal'c's face and back-pedalled. Teal'c was trouble he did not need. Not now, not EVER.

"Good," Teal'c said softly as O'Neill acquiesced.

"Make him understand about Carter," Jack said flatly. "That's all I ask. He doesn't believe a goddamn word I say." Jack took a deep, difficult breath and scowled at Teal'c. "He'll believe you," Jack snapped.

"As he should. I have never lied to DanielJackson," Teal'c said smoothly.

"You'll tell him?" Jack demanded.

"I will tell him the truth. It will not be necessary for me to elaborate." Teal'c refused to or reassure O'Neill as to his intentions. O'Neill was frustrated and not able to see a way to make things right between himself and Daniel. O'Neill knew Daniel better than anyone. A period of reflection should distance O'Neill from these fraught emotions and suggest to him the correct course of action to pursue.

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Teal'c indulged himself, stroking soothing, careful fingers lightly over Daniel's silken hair as he watched Daniel's face, gentle and open in sleep.

Teal'c thought it was inevitable that Major Carter would discover the truth, discover that O'Neill's feelings for her were not what she thought they were, and when she did, Teal'c could not predict what she might do or how that realisation would impact on SG-1.

As Daniel stirred sleepily under his hand, Teal'c calmly withdrew to a respectful distance and waited patiently for Daniel to fully awaken.

Daniel stretched, tense muscles a little looser after resting. He smiled wryly. Resting? He'd been dead to the world. He opened his eyes and saw Teal'c, smiled warmly. "Teal'c."

"You are rested," Teal'c approved, "And now you will eat, DanielJackson."

"I'm not hungry," Daniel contradicted.

"You will eat, DanielJackson," Teal'c insisted calmly. "As will I." He placed the tray of food on the floor and sat before it, hiding his smile as Daniel obediently slipped out of bed and joined him. Daniel might refuse food for his own part, but he would not be discourteous enough to refuse to share a meal with another.

Daniel sat across from Teal'c and lifted the lid of the nearest plate without enthusiasm. "Oh. Chicken pie." Surprised, he looked up, brightening a little. "I didn't see that on the menu. I like chicken pie." He picked up his fork. Maybe a little. "And mashed potatoes. And gravy." Daniel pushed his fork into the pie and sniffed appreciatively as the rich, creamy aroma wafted. Maybe a lot.

Teal'c hid a smile. Pie was not on the menu. He had only to say that Dr Jackson would be disappointed by its absence. Teal'c made no attempt to converse with Daniel, rather he enjoyed the companionable silence and the simple pleasure of Daniel savouring the meal Teal'c had procured for him. Smiling at the man, Teal'c made a decision. Such simple acts of kindness gave pleasure to them both. There was one thing he knew Daniel desired, and perhaps he would permit Teal'c to share the gift with him, share the 'clarity and serene stillness of the air you were soaring through' in this hot air balloon he had spoken of so longingly.

"DanielJackson. There is something I wish to do, but I require your assistance."

Daniel glanced up, chewing heroically on the last mouthful of pie, swallowed hard, and grinned. "Anything I can do to help, Teal'c, you know that," he said cheerfully, a little surprised by the momentary tightness of Teal'c face. A moment only, then Teal'c was smiling again.

"I know that," Teal'c said softly. "When the time is right, I will ask you to accompany me on a journey."

"Can I ask where?" Daniel asked, openly curious.

"Not at this time," Teal'c smiled.

"Okay," Daniel said equably. "When the time comes, I'm all yours. I may have to annoy you with persistent questions in the meantime but -" he let the threat tail off, grinning.

"That was to be expected," Teal'c said dryly.

Daniel eyed the smaller covered plates thoughtfully. If there was lemon meringue pie under there, he might have to marry the nice Sergeant who ran the Commissary. Jack thought she was a harridan but then Jack - Daniel bit down hard on thoughts of the asshole of his dreams and snatched up the nearest cover. Cinnamon apple pie. The asshole's favourite. Daniel stabbed vindictively into the pie and levered off a chunk.

"I do not believe it survived your attack, DanielJackson," Teal'c observed gravely after a few moments.

Daniel looked up sharply, then grinned, seeing the answering grin in Teal'c's raised eyebrow. "Touché," he said lightly.

"I wish to speak of O'Neill," Teal'c said calmly.

"I don't," Daniel riposted.

"O'Neill is in love with you."

"What?" Daniel gasped, gaping up at Teal'c. "How can you - how - after -"

"He has made a mistake, DanielJackson, but the fact remains that he does indeed love you, and he is speaking the truth to you."

"He was with Sam!"

"He kissed Major Carter," Teal'c agreed. This was not the time to address his own conduct towards Daniel during that loop. "On a single occasion. He knew that his actions were wrong and he did all he could to ameliorate the consequences for Major Carter, resigning from the military and waiting until the very last moments of the loop."

"That isn't the point," Daniel snapped. It - it really wasn't, not what Jack had been doing with Sam. The point was Jack going all out over it, using Daniel's own insecurities against him, knowing it would hurt Daniel. Hurting Daniel deliberately. "He was gloating over it. Rubbing my nose in it. Blatantly."

“Why?” Teal’c asked simply.

Why? Daniel gaped at Teal’c, completely floored. “Good question,” Daniel admitted reluctantly. So, maybe he WAS getting a little lost in what Jack did. Things had just happened so fast, for both of them. Daniel was still feeling emotions Jack had left behind him months ago, which perhaps explained the fact Jack hadn’t expected the extremity of Daniel’s reaction. Jack’s petty display had been, well, childish wasn’t too strong a word, and it certainly was done with the intent to hurt, but not to hurt the way it had. Jack had realised the mistake he’d made the moment Daniel had walked away from him, and Jack had come after him, tried to apologise, tried to explain, tried to understand. Daniel had been so caught up in what HE was feeling that he hadn’t tried to consider what Jack might be feeling. Hadn’t considered that at all. Jack wasn’t a patient man, yet he’d endured three months of what appeared to be constant fighting and rejections and he was still insisting he loved Daniel. So maybe - maybe it was time Daniel got over this world-class insecurity complex and took Jack at his word, because if he didn’t love the jerk as much as he did, he wouldn’t have gone postal like that in the first place. Given the circumstances, the looping, it wasn’t fair of either of them to blame the other; neither of them had behaved well, both of them overreacted and Daniel thought maybe they should just accept it for what it was, and let it go.

There were far more important things to worry about. Like Sam, who loved Jack too, and couldn’t be blamed for loving him any more than Daniel could. Jack was in love with him, and so they had to do what was best for Sam. Daniel loved Sam, she was as close to him as his own flesh and blood, and he hurt for her being the loser in all this. He didn’t even know how deep her feelings for Jack were, what kind of loss this would be to her. He’d been too busy thinking of himself.

“I think you will find O’Neill to be most diligent in his pursuit of ‘emotional maturity’ and honesty, DanielJackson,” Teal’c offered. “He will take NO risk of betraying your trust again. You have at your disposal an O’Neill who is anxious, insecure, co-operative and desperate to please. I advise you to use this gift wisely and enjoy it while it lasts, if you will deign to accept it. You will not see the like again.” Teal’c allowed his face to relax into a smirk DanielJackson could not fail to see. “O’Neill anxiously awaits your decision.”

“I need some time to think about it,” Daniel said demurely. “So he can just be anxious a little longer.” He spooned up a little more of the decimated pie and nibbled thoughtfully. He was – infuriatingly – just as much in love with Jack as he had been, and simply couldn’t imagine his life without a pushy Jack driving him mad in it. A Jack-free future was just too bleak to contemplate so he wouldn’t. He would do whatever he had to in order to put this behind both of them. However, he wouldn’t have Jack so damn complacent he thought he could get away with anything. Daniel wasn’t prepared to leave this long before he tackled Jack, but he was going to leave it until he was sure they both had enough distance from the fight to be rational. Willing to listen. Compromise.

“Indeed,” Teal’c inclined his head. “I submitted to numerous medical tests this morning, though O’Neill was able to avoid Dr Fraiser. General Hammond wishes to debrief at 15:00 hours, so O’Neill will be forced to submit this afternoon. He will have no free time in which to pursue your answer.” Teal’c would ensure O’Neill did not. He still thought it wise to wait until both men were calmer and had time in which to think of the other, and not of themselves.

“The debriefing would be a good time to tell Jack how he’s going to make it up to me,” Daniel suggested. “Or – maybe – after.” He paused, fighting a grin. “Some time after.”

Teal’c bowed again.

“Jack will go nuts,” Daniel grinned, finally admitting to himself he was strongly drawn to seeing just how far he could push Jack before Jack snapped back.

“That is not our concern.”

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George suppressed another sigh. He had a weary feeling settling in his bones that this briefing had lasted longer than the damn time loops apparently had. All was not well with his flagship team. Colonel O’Neill was as subdued as George had ever seen him, Teal’c looked like some kind of avenging angel, hovering at Dr Jackson’s side, and Major Carter looked like she was about to go off in someone’s face. Like a claymore. Dr Fraiser had taken one look and gotten between the Major and everyone else and somehow they were limping through this briefing, more or less in one piece.

As for Dr Jackson, well, Daniel was being as provocative as George had ever seen him in a briefing. Not that this was a bad thing, per se, he could always rely on Daniel to challenge assumptions and offer alternatives, and his people were usually the safer – and the better – for it. A mischievous Daniel was something new and the wonder of it was that Colonel O’Neill hadn’t bitten back once, though Major Carter had. Several times. SG-1 was stressed and combative. This usually meant they needed to be out and DOING, and George didn’t think he’d ever seen them need it THIS badly. There had to be SOMETHING on the books. Some place remote, and for the safety of an unsuspecting indigenous population, preferably uninhabited.

Janet watched the colonel, concerned by the dark shadows under his eyes and his passivity. It just wasn’t like him. The emotional impact of the interminable looping had yet to be determined, and the colonel was good at weaselling out of facing up to the emotional impact of everything. “General, I’m recommending stress counselling for Colonel O’Neill in particular.”

“Gimme a break,” Jack snarled. “I’m NOT whacko! Stress counselling stresses me out, you KNOW that.”

“I didn’t suggest you were ‘whacko’, Sir,” Janet said coldly, “Merely that you’ve been through a traumatic experience, and put stress on your body and mind we can’t even begin to assess without proper – “

“Ah, here we go,” Jack snapped, interrupting. “If you think for a SECOND I’m going to – “

“I think that’s an excellent idea,” Daniel said softly, smiling at Janet. “I think Jack should acknowledge the emotional consequences of the looping, for his own sake.”

“You’d be absolutely right,” Jack said bitterly, deflating.

“That’s a wise decision, Jack,” Daniel praised gently, hugely enjoying Jack meekly doing his bidding.

Janet realised everyone at the table except Daniel was waiting for the shoe to drop. The punchline. Nuclear meltdown. Something. Not meek acquiescence. Meek was unprecedented. “It’s been a while since your last fitness evaluation, Sir, if I recall correctly,” Janet suggested wickedly, ready, willing and able to take full advantage.

“Are you KIDDING me?” Jack growled. “I’ve already had objects stuffed into every orifice I possess today, and I’m damned if I’m going to let you tie me to a treadmill!” He scowled at Janet and felt his blood freeze as Daniel emitted a soft, disappointed sigh and made with the sympathetic eyes. At Janet. Aah, Jeez, he thought wearily. Just shoot me. Shoot me now. “Why don’t you just strap me to a spit and roast me over the fire?” Even to his ears it lacked conviction.

“It can be arranged, Sir,” Janet snapped, smiling sweetly at Daniel.

Sam couldn’t take her eyes off Daniel. After thinking about nothing else all day, she’d finally decided that she couldn’t admit she knew the truth to either the colonel or Daniel. She was not about to humiliate herself any further than she had already. She would do her duty, no question of that, but she had to know. Had to see for herself what it was the colonel saw in Daniel that he didn’t see in her, or in any woman. What was it about Daniel that could make a man like the colonel - someone she had always respected and maybe even admired - not only want to climb into Daniel’s bed but fall in love with Daniel. Want it so much he would take all the crap Daniel could dish out and come back for more.

Sam loved Daniel; he’d been there for her when no one else had, when her own family had left her high and dry. He would always be here for her. She would never hurt him intentionally, she just had to know. She had to know what this difference between them was, because it was eating her - and their friendship - alive.

Jack sighed as silence fell heavily across the briefing table. “I’m throwing a party,” he said abruptly, thinking that maybe if he got everyone together at his place, Daniel couldn’t get

out of it, and once he got Daniel onto neutral turf he might be able to get him alone long enough to talk some sense into him. Handcuff him to the observation platform or something. Yeah. A party. "A post-loop sanity party. Tonight, my place. Hell, it might just be enough to undo all the stress of the stress counselling I got looming up at me. You're all invited." Jack glanced at the glum faces. "Don't all leap to accept at once," he grouched, hurt. "I'll cook," he offered, hoping the novelty value would help. It didn't. Jack glared at the general.

George sighed and prayed for the strength to endure. "I'd be glad to, Jack," he perjured himself with barely a moment's hesitation. There had to be some unsuspecting planet out there, somewhere he could send them. For a week or so. A month.

"Thank you, Sir," Sam agreed at once. "My pleasure." It wasn't, but away from the base, both the colonel and Daniel would have their guard down and Sam would be there to observe and assess the dynamics of this, whatever this thing was between the two of them. It would also give her an opportunity to show the colonel just what he was passing up.

Janet rolled her eyes and figured the colonel had already been through enough. If he needed a peace-keeping force, she'd be there for him. "That would be lovely, Sir. Thank you." She noted that the colonel brightened visibly. Still didn't mean he was getting out of those tests, and if he didn't stop whining, she WOULD have one of her nurses use the phrase 'porky' in his hearing.

Teal'c exchanged a brief, guarded look with Daniel. "Very well, O'Neill. I too accept," he said graciously.

"Daniel?" Jack asked casually, finally daring to look Daniel in the eye. Whoa. He'd fallen down glaciers warmer than Daniel was right now. He tried a tentative smile, which seemed to make things worse.

"Sure, Jack," Daniel said lightly, knowing perfectly well Jack was going to cull him from the party-herd and chase him all over the house until he got an answer, or rather until he got the answer he wanted. Which meant it was the perfect time to establish the ground rules of the new relationship and see just how much Jack would take before he GAVE. "Can't wait," he bared his teeth at Jack, who could take that as a smile if he wanted to.

Jack could only be grateful when the general took pity and dismissed them. Tough room.

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After three months of Elaborate hell, it had finally dawned on Jack what he should have done in the first place to prove to Daniel that he was telling the truth about his feelings for Carter. Could have saved him a hell of a lot of grief if he'd thought of it sooner. Daniel would trust the evidence of his own eyes. It had taken some work to get his hands on the tape of his second run through the Zatarc detector, but Jack wasn't 2IC around these parts

for nothing. He'd just had to abuse his rank and position shamelessly for his own personal gain.

Jack had thought long and hard about doing this and in the end he decided it was worth the risk that Daniel would decide Jack was betraying Carter's confidence too. He'd managed to edit the tape to remove anything that would embarrass Carter and left only his own miserable confession. It made him feel sick to view it, to see the misery in his own eyes as he spoke. He could only hope that Daniel could see it too, and would understand, and forgive.

Worst case scenario, well, Daniel wouldn't forgive Jack, but Daniel would still know exactly what Jack had said and how he had said it. It would be one less thing Daniel had to keep him awake at night.

Taking a deep breath, Jack tapped on Daniel's door, hating that he wasn't sure of his welcome even here, where they had to work together.

Daniel was engrossed, poring over a manuscript with his magnifying glass, making careful notes. Jack perfectly understood the patience and discipline it took, they were necessities of his job too, and he'd learned his lessons in ambush after ambush. So they were different, but they were equal too. And together. Soon. He hoped.

"Daniel," he said softly.

Daniel took a deep breath and lowered his magnifying glass slowly. "Jack," he acknowledged. "Um - how did the fitness tests go?" And by the way, Jack, get your ass over here and KISS me before I explode. I'm sorry and I love you too and did I mention I love you too? And I'm sorry?

"One of the nurses said I was - er - never mind," Jack said hurriedly, no reason to tell the gorgeous and above all slender guy he was still hoping to lure into his bed that the SGC nursing staff apparently thought he was, quote, 'porky', whatever bull they'd tried to get him to swallow about Looney Tunes. Speaking of which - "Thanks so MUCH for the hour of word association games I had to put up with after the briefing. Janet hustled me right out the Infirmary door."

"An hour?" Daniel echoed incredulously.

"It did not go well," Jack snapped. "Not well at all." Loop. Froot. Went downhill from then on, because every single goddamn word associated itself with 'Daniel' and Jack had to scabble wildly to edit for blatant sexual obsession. He eyed Daniel sourly. "I'm now signed up for an anger management course," he admitted bitterly. One Froot Loop too far.

Leaning back in his chair, Daniel eyed Jack speculatively, not missing the slight flush. "Why?" he asked crisply.

"I think I'm on the books as a stressed out sex-fiend," Jack hesitated. He had a little dialogue going here and so far Daniel hadn't spit in his eye, might as well just go with the flow, "Especially after the ink blots. The whole damn session was like some surreal Freudian nightmare."

"Freudian? Oh?" Daniel said lightly, not bothering to hide his grin.

"Yeah, well, any more of that attitude and I'm signing us up for couples therapy," Jack teased, regretting it the moment the words were out of his mouth, a little surprised when Daniel's face didn't close down on him but hurrying on regardless. "I brought something for you to look at. The true life confessions of Jack O'Neill." He placed the tape in front of Daniel, right on the manuscript.

"C-confessions?" Daniel stammered. "This is the tape of your session in the Zatarc detector?" he asked incredulously.

"There's nothing from Carter on there," Jack assured Daniel earnestly. "No way I was going to let you see anything Carter said or did, that's private, that's hers. Okay?"

"Jack - "

"Look, Daniel," Jack began patiently. "This isn't top secret. Janet did us a favour with the confidentiality thing but this was just me and Carter agreeing to keep it in that room because neither of us wanted to embarrass the other. That was all," Jack grimaced. Look where it got him. "There's nothing here to embarrass Carter. Just me."

"Jack, I - "

"I want you to watch it, for me," Jack insisted. "I know you think you should be able to just trust me without a word said or a single thing done for proof but you can't, and that's not your fault, it's mine. Just this once, Daniel, look at the evidence and make a rational choice to believe me or not based on the evidence alone. Don't cut me any slack because I'm your - " Jack hesitated. "Friend. Just look and decide and get back to me. Seeing this doesn't fix what I've done, but at least you'll know." Jack laughed bitterly. "Hell, it'll probably make things worse, but I want you to watch it anyway." He nodded briskly and marched over to the door. "I hope you come over tonight," he said softly, staring out into the corridor. "I miss you."

"Jack! Get back here," Daniel yelled, jumping up from behind his desk. "JACK!"

What now? Jack sighed and turned back. He couldn't have fucked up with the tape ALREADY. Daniel hadn't even had time to hit the play button on the VCR. He sauntered back into the office and frankly wasn't in any way prepared for Daniel to try to climb him like a tree the moment he was in reach. Jack was kinda glad he was porky, though, 'cause when Daniel slammed into him, he slammed into the door and the door just slammed. Resoundingly. Jack was feeling no pain at all, despite a probable concussion, mostly

because the slamming was at lip height, and he had Daniel plastered to him and Daniel's tongue plunging towards his tonsils and Jack was seeing stars from the hellacious friction, and even the fact the OTHER office door was wide open wasn't nearly so terrifying as the prospect of coming in his pants, right NOW, and hell, what a way to go. Come. Whatever.

Jack clamped his hands to Daniel's ass and returned the suction with interest. Daniel put up a fight, but persistence and a thigh rubbed against Daniel's raging erection won the day, so Jack was able to plunge his tongue into Daniel's mouth and go mental, thrusting hard, going deep, tongues jostling for possession, stabbing and lunging wildly as teeth clashed and lips ground painfully. Daniel's hug segued into a desperate chokehold and the stars in front of Jack's eyes turned to spots. He eventually had to admit Daniel's lung capacity was bigger than his and shove Daniel off him, making him stagger, but the dopey disbelief on Daniel's face reassured him it wasn't being held against him. Literally and figuratively.

"Door," Jack wheezed painfully. "OTHER door."

"Oh? Oh!" Daniel darted over to slam the other door shut, then dove onto Jack again, Jack not seeming to mind at all, particularly when Daniel started licking that spot right under Jack's jawline.

"Er, yeah, just there, just - CHRIST - " Jack groaned as Daniel's tongue roamed into his ear, "There. Er, we okay? Don't stop, just nod," he said emphatically. "The tape?"

Daniel nibbled Jack's lobe just to keep him going until Daniel could get going again, and backed off reluctantly. "I don't need to see it," Daniel said warmly, deciding a little tactile reassurance wouldn't go amiss. Just for emphasis. He aimed straight down.

Jack obligingly hitched away from the door to give Daniel's questing hands access to his ass and returned the compliment. "You don't?" he asked cautiously.

"No. I believe you. I trust you. I love you," Daniel said rapidly.

"I'm glad you - what?" Jack demanded.

Daniel smiled. "I love you."

"What?"

"I love you."

"Me?"

"You."

"Thought that was just me."

"It was me too."

"Oh. So. Er - I gotta say it? The 's' word?" Jack asked hopefully.

"Only if I do."

"Thought THAT was just me."

"No-o, it was me too."

"I was a jerk," Jack suggested.

"I overreacted."

"You drove me nuts."

"I don't plan to stop."

Jack grinned. "Show me what you've got," he invited.

"Tonight. After you've shown me what you've got," Daniel challenged.

"Got company," Jack said ruefully.

"Got to go home some time."

"Got a point."

"Got your key. Want mine?" Daniel asked hopefully. "And I've got your tape. Take it back."

"I do," Jack said seriously.

Daniel sighed and leaned in to nuzzle his cheek against Jack's, smiling when Jack got with the programme and nuzzled right back. "You were trying to help Sam and I'm sorry I gave you such a hard time over it."

"You just HAD to go and do that, didn't you? Had to spoil the whole damn thing. We were doin' great with the touchy and now we gotta get feely too," Jack grouched. "I'm SORRY I kissed her and gave YOU such a hard time over it."

"I'm over it," Daniel said emphatically.

"Yeah?" Jack asked eagerly.

“Yeah.”

“I’m over it too.” Jack paused, thought about belief, trust and love, put two and two together and made Daniel. “You were making me sweat!” he accused indignantly.

“Not as much as I plan to,” Daniel promised huskily.

“See! See! This is EXACTLY why I was having such a goddamn hard time with the word association!” Jack snarled.

Daniel slid a hand between them and checked out the lay of the land. “You seem to be having a pretty hard time now,” he said placidly.

Jack smirked and slid his hand over Daniel’s. “Gettin’ harder every minute.”

“You’ve got that look on your face,” Daniel accused softly.

“Oh,” Jack hesitated, eyeing Daniel cautiously. “Then you were right. It is my ‘let’s fuck’ game face. You know this isn’t about that, right?”

“It isn’t?” Daniel tried a little gentle massage while he was in the neighbourhood and Jack’s hand threatened to cut off his blood supply.

“Not just about that,” Jack amended. Jack had this hand just lounging around on Daniel’s ass, looking for a little action, easiest thing in the world to just sidle it around and try a gentle massage of his own. “Or this. Can you NOT arch like that? Not where I can’t do anything about it, okay? Have some pity,” he instructed. “I do love you.”

“I know, and I love you too, and we need to talk about Sam,” Daniel suggested gently. “Decide what’s best, what’s easiest for Sam. I don’t want to hurt her, Jack.”

“No argument here, Daniel,” Jack agreed wryly. “What are you thinking?”

“That we should keep our distance at work, be professional.”

“We are,” Jack was insulted.

“You hug the crap out of me every time I turn round,” Daniel said tartly.

“You love it,” Jack insisted smugly.

“Of course I - that’s not the point,” Daniel snapped.

“You love it,” Jack gloated.

"Sam won't," Daniel said firmly.

"I wasn't planning to hold your hand and skip through the Stargate, although --" Jack let it trail off temptingly.

"Although?" Daniel asked weakly, mesmerised by the predatory look in Jack's eyes.

"I have been wondering lately if anyone's ever done it in a wormhole."

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Jack had George and Teal'c, pretty much looking like George and Teal'c, blatantly and uncomfortably 'out of uniform'. He had Carter, in heels and a stunning little burgundy mantrap that had made Janet blink hard the moment she walked through the door. He had Janet, in what he thought was a really nice copper coloured evening skirt and cream silk blouse. He was himself looking fairly spiffy in cream chinos and a pale green shirt. He had eatables. He had booze up the wazoo. He had everything but the only thing he actually wanted.

"I see Daniel is going for fashionably late again," Jack carped, scowling at the clock.

"I don't think the invitation said twenty hundred hours prompt," Janet grinned, accepting a generous glass of sherry. "Eight-ish was what you said." She eyed the hors d'œuvres dubiously.

"It's eight-fifteen-ish and the peppers are caramelised, not burned," Jack said crisply.

"If you say so, Sir," Janet said placidly, pointedly taking a slice of the un-caramelised baked Brie and apple instead.

"It was deliberate," Jack insisted.

"Let it go, son," Hammond grinned.

Jack maintained his 'hurt' manner as he offered up the tray to Carter and Teal'c.

Sam managed a grin and went for the Brie too. The show wouldn't start until Daniel got here, and the small talk was pinching as much as these shoes. She was more the jeans and Doc Martens type.

Teal'c carefully inspected the contents of the tray. He looked at O'Neill. "No."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Jack snapped indignantly. A tentative tap at the door heralded the guest of honour and Jack let it go. For now. Couldn't care less, in fact, not when he had Danny and the promise of his jammies at the door.

“Saved by the archaeologist,” Janet murmured as the colonel indignantly shoved the tray at Teal’c and looped over to throw open the door, grinning like a fiend.

“Jack,” Daniel’s smile didn’t really take off. He was desperately nervous and Jack standing there looking like THAT didn’t help. Jack was drop-dead gorgeous, particularly in that celadon – the glaze was popular in Sung Dynasty China porcelain if memory served and he was babbling here – shirt, and Jack seemed to have no idea of the effect he had on the susceptible. It was the eyes, the fathomless warm brown eyes. And the hair. That helped. Helped keep Daniel awake at night. Daniel tried again with the smile and more or less made it this time.

“Hel-lo.” Jack leaned against the door and took his own sweet time looking Daniel over from head to foot. And back. O-OH, momma. Skin tight, charcoal chinos and a silvery-grey shirt, baring the hollow of Daniel’s throat and the sleeves casually rolled above the elbows. The colour did extraordinary things for Daniel’s eyes and Jack’s hormones. “Jammies?” Daniel nodded, jerking his thumb towards his car. Daniel had that same mongoose-cobra look he wore back on base when Jack was speculating about the logistics of sex in wormholes.

Jack grinned, stepped back and let Daniel precede him into the house so he could get a good look at Daniel’s ass under that clinging grey cloth. Just a little something on account until he got hands, lips and teeth on Daniel’s ass under the sheets, which he sincerely hoped would be in the midnight hour that very night. With only two very uncertain smiles to go on, Jack was taking no risks. Daniel’s ass was on the line, here.

A chorus of welcoming ‘Daniels’ rang out and Jack hid his own grin as Daniel blushed and treated them all to his sweet little smile. Better.

Janet sidled over to Sam and craned up. Sam obligingly dropped her head. “Woof!” Janet murmured, eyeing Daniel appreciatively, tilting her sherry glass in silent toast. “I’m feeling no pain.”

Sam chuckled at her friend, eyes steady on Daniel. “Janet!” It was unbelievable to Sam just how many women Daniel had bowled over completely with his near-legendary ‘beauty’ and all that devastating innocent, sweet tempered charm, mostly because Daniel was not only impervious to the lures thrown out to him so blatantly, he was totally unconscious of the lust rippling through the halls of the SGC every time he emerged from the safety of his books. Which rather begged the question. How could Daniel, who lived unheeding in that ivory tower of his, not only attract the colonel but keep him as he had? The colonel was the total opposite to Daniel, earthy, and from all Sam had seen of him, sensual and demanding. The colonel - Jack and Daniel just did not compute.

Jack retrieved his tray from a stoic Teal’c and presented it with a flourish to Daniel.

“YOU caramelize?” Daniel asked incredulously, reaching cautiously for a stuffed pepper. “I thought you kept Domino’s Pizza on speed dial.”

“Don’t encourage him, son,” Hammond chuckled as Jack gloated. “Teal’c had just succeeded in crushing the colonel’s culinary pretensions nicely.”

Daniel wandered towards the fire, away from Jack. And Sam. He wanted to keep a careful distance from both of them. He was horribly self-conscious about being with Jack right under Sam’s nose. Not that she knew anything, but still, Daniel didn’t want to take the risk of upsetting her in any way. There were still too many unknowns. Daniel wasn’t at all comfortable with just leaving Sam hanging, and though Jack had reluctantly given ground on Daniel’s request that they keep a professional distance at work, he still had no idea how Jack really wanted to deal with the situation. Daniel also realised he couldn’t make that decision for Jack, because Jack was the one whose career was on the line.

Naturally, Jack immediately had to abandon his duties as host, drop the tray where everyone could reach it and wander over to join him. Daniel busied himself with the pepper. “Oh! This is good,” Daniel waited a beat. “You had the party catered, right?”

“Hey, I can burn food with the best of them,” Jack contradicted, grinning. “Want something to drink? I got a perky blueberry or a robust grape,” he tempted.

“Blueberry?” Daniel queried cautiously.

“Kool Aid,” Jack said dulcetly. “Nothing but the best for the cheapest date in town.”

Daniel bared his teeth at Jack.

“Lighten up, Danny, that was a joke.”

“Very nearly,” Daniel snapped.

“Tough room,” Jack griped to the room at large as he sauntered off toward the kitchen, pausing just inside the doorway. “Oh yeah, about dinner, check with me BEFORE you call 911, okay? It’s supposed to smell like that.”

“He’s in a good mood,” Sam observed, keeping her eyes fixed on the cause, heroically chewing his way through the burned pepper. Daniel glanced up suddenly and smiled tentatively at her. Sam smiled back and waved the Brie meaningfully. Daniel relaxed and his whole face warmed.

“I’m not surprised,” Janet smiled at Teal’c. “I can’t imagine what it must have been like for you to experience the same time over and over again.”

“It was most difficult,” Teal’c said mildly, looking at Daniel. He was a little saddened to see that Daniel and O’Neill seemed to have reached an understanding of sorts. Honour was only easy in the abstract.

"Yeah," Jack agreed, emerging from the kitchen with one wineglass and a beer. "You came close to death on a number of occasions, Janet."

"Sir?" Janet choked at the poker-faced delivery.

"If you shone that dinky little torch in my eyes once you must have done it a hundred times," Jack said flatly.

"I'm sensing that's meant literally, Sir," Sam commented, shuddering.

"Sorry," Janet apologised weakly.

"Don't sweat it, it's not your fault," Jack said easily, crossing over to Daniel's side again, noting how quiet and withdrawn Daniel was, "And anyway, I got time off for bad behaviour," he said casually, refusing to rise to the bait of Janet's muttered 'I'm afraid to ask'. "Here, try this," he offered Daniel the glass. "It's that Leflaive Chassagne Chardonnay you like so much."

"Thanks, Jack," Daniel said softly, touched that Jack was making so much effort on his behalf.

"Grape flavoured, obviously." Jack toasted Daniel with his beer. "Corona," he grinned. "NOT the sun, Daniel."

Daniel chuckled and touched his glass lightly to Jack's. "May you never eat Froot Loops again," he said gravely.

Jack shuddered violently. "I'll second that," he grimaced.

Janet bit into the warm Brie, watching the colonel lingering solicitously at Daniel's side, thinking idly that gentlemen were supposed to prefer blondes, not archaeologists. But it seemed colonels didn't, well this one didn't, and she'd better stop thinking idly now, it was making her head hurt, 'cause this colonel was certainly supposed to prefer the blonde. On record, in point of fact. Janet glanced to Sam. The blonde with the face like a wet Friday, watching the colonel doing the mein genial host thing with the archaeologist until she saw Janet was watching her, and then she was just Sam again. Janet took a hasty gulp of sherry that brought tears to her eyes as the alcohol burned a path straight down. Oh, boy. Still waters running WAY too deep, here, and Janet didn't have her flippers, so she was keeping out of it. Right the way over here on the couch behind the general out of it.

Teal'c was sniffing. "O'Neill!"

"Hmm?" Jack said vaguely, focused on the fact Daniel had stopped taking a step away every time Jack took a step towards. He'd thought they were gonna wind up on the porch for a while there.

“The smell is becoming distressing.”

Sam sniffed. “What IS that, Sir?” she shuddered.

“Salad.” Jack became the cynosure of all incredulous eyes. “The DRESSING,” he said witheringly. “Gorgonzola.”

“Is this smell customary?” Teal’c’s survival instincts were warring with his duty towards accepting O’Neill’s hospitality. It seemed likely this evening would end in his death. And possibly Teal’c’s.

“YES,” Jack snapped, sniffing disdainfully. “No! Dammit!” He thrust the beer at a sniggering Daniel and bolted, cursing.

George chuckled. “Ladies and gentlemen, I guess that means dinner is served.” A slight ripple ran through the guests as everyone prudently stepped away from the dining-come-disaster area. “Don’t make me make that an order, people. He’ll make us suffer forever if we bolt out that door, tempting as it seems right now.”

Janet rose smoothly to her feet and winked at Sam. They both ripped off textbook salutes, grinning.

“We who are about to die, Sir,” Sam chuckled, heading purposefully into the kitchen to help before Daniel could. The colonel was mourning over the smouldering contents of a large pan. He held it up solemnly for her inspection.

“How does it look?”

“Sir, I have to tell you. It doesn’t look good,” Sam said gravely, angry with herself for just going with flow of all this warmth and charm, all of it false, totally false, and even that wasn’t stopping her.

“Carter?” Jack prompted, hoping she’d lie, let him down easy.

“Looks caramelised to me, Sir.”

“Aah, crap.”

“I’ll take the wine, Sir,” Sam suggested, turning to take the open wine bottle.

“Not that one,” Jack said idly, “the other one.”

Sam stiffened. We don’t get to share Daniel’s wine, huh? She lifted the other bottle and did a double take when she read the label. “Frog’s Leap?” she asked incredulously. She was bristling a little. Daniel got to have the really expensive wine, the wine he likes, the one the colonel knows he likes, and has obviously gone out of his way to get for him, and

it's just for Daniel, no one else, and the rest of them got the Frog's Leap? They weren't talking subtle here. Don't tell? Don't shout it from the rooftops or take out a full page ad in the Gazette, more like!

"It's good wine," Jack said defensively. Thirty bucks a bottle good. "Get outta here! Gimme room to work. We're talking disaster recovery, not dressing."

"Don't worry, Sir, just stir it up. If people don't ask, I won't tell," Sam said sweetly. "None of this has to leave this room." She left the colonel before he could react, taking the wine to the table and pouring for everyone except Teal'c, who had the carafe of water near to hand. Sam hid a grin. The general had gone unthinkingly to the head of the table, with Teal'c on one side and Janet on the other. Which left the colonel with the seat nearest the kitchen, Daniel on one side of him and her on the other. Social briefing?

Daniel's sweet smile and murmured thanks softened Sam and she touched his shoulder for a moment before reaching around him to pour for Janet. Duties as hostess discharged, Sam took her seat next to Teal'c and they all awaited the colonel's pleasure, trying not to wince at the desperate clashing or the salty language.

Jack emerged from the kitchen with three plates carefully balanced. He presented them with a flourish and dove back into the kitchen for the rest.

Daniel looked doubtfully at Janet's plate. Then his own as it was placed carefully before him. Then he looked at Jack. "Um - hot dogs, Jack?"

"Hot dogs and hot gorgonzola. Yum," Janet whimpered. Maybe she should stick with water instead of wine. People might need medical attention, here.

Jack sagged in his seat, cut to the quick. "Frankfurters. From Germany. Got them from the deli over on The Place of the Gods. Sheesh. This is a classic salad. Frankfurters, mushrooms - "

"Shrubbery," Daniel murmured dulcetly.

"I've got movement," Sam yelped, rearing theatrically back from her plate.

Jack scowled as they all dissolved into laughter, even Teal'c's eyebrow making a break for the top of his head. "I made the vinaigrette," he said sadly. "And the warm cheese dressing. Glad to know two hours sweating over the cook books and artistically drizzled dressings paid off in the entertainment value alone."

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"Beef and ale. It's a classic," Jack insisted, very conscious of Daniel sitting curled almost at his feet, and extremely grateful to the general for spreading out all over the couch and making this possible.

“Beef and Bud,” Daniel said cheekily. “I saw the can in the kitchen.”

“Arrogant Bastard,” Jack said lightly. There was a shocked silence. “The ALE,” Jack drawled witheringly.

“I must say, Sir, you do a mean defrost. Hardly any ice chips in this cheesecake at all,” Janet marvelled.

“That’s because he got it from the deli over on The Place of the Gods,” Daniel grinned. “Along with the hot dogs and the beer.”

“And the gorgonzola,” George said sourly.

“Well, strangely enough,” Jack leaned back because his fingers were itching to tangle in Daniel’s hair. “I was going to offer you all a doggie bag for the leftovers but I can’t because there ain’t no dog left to put in the bags. And I’m not making any accusations here, but I know I had a bag of chips right there on the worktop, and just because they’re gone and Carter was the only one alone in the kitchen - “

“I barely touched them!” Sam insisted, defiantly scooping up the last slice of caramel pecan cheesecake, glaring Janet down. “Sore loser.”

“I’ll make sure you get a copy of my diet plan first thing, Sam,” Janet said brightly. “Can’t have you getting porky, can we?” she suggested innocently.

“Porky?” Daniel and Jack said together.

Sam ground her teeth.

“Looney Tunes?” Jack enunciated crisply.

Janet took the time to savour the rich aroma of the premium Colombian roast. Took the time to sip slowly. Only then did she make eye contact with her simmering superior officer. “Got you on the treadmill without a whimper, Sir,” she grinned unrepentantly. “I’m sorry, Colonel. I didn’t quite catch whatever it was you just muttered. Something about Napoleon?”

“Brandy,” Daniel said dulcetly.

Janet was watching the colonel. Primarily watching the colonel’s fingers, which were going to be IN Daniel’s hair if she didn’t do something. Nobody was ready to go home, not with the fire, the good food, the good conversation and the company. They needed a distraction and they needed it fast. Fortunately she knew exactly what would appeal to Daniel, and she also knew from the colonel’s last New Year’s party, and some very persuasive arguments about the entertainment value of Strip Scrabble, that he had the

game somewhere in the house. Even the colonel wouldn't have tried for Strip Scrabble without being able to cough up the Scrabble part, no matter how much eggnog they'd scarfed down. "I have a yen for Scrabble. Anybody care to join me?" she ruthlessly asked Daniel. Daniel's face lit up, the colonel's face softened and Scrabble it was. The mad scramble to find the game, get the board set up, nominate the score person, Sam by universal acclaim, and organise into two pretty unequal teams got the colonel safely away from Daniel and probable early retirement.

Janet didn't know what the hell was going on between the colonel and Daniel, but with what she knew of the colonel's personality and recalling various embarrassing après mission confessions, from which she had deduced the colonel's version of safe sex was both partners carrying guns, she was damned sure she'd be the first to know come Daniel's next physical. And he'd better be A-OK, because if he wasn't, Janet might not ask but she would sure as hell TELL the first time she got the colonel alone.

Daniel sat on the floor at the end of the coffee table, the fire warm on his back and his letter tiles neatly stacked in front of him. He folded his arms and glared. "You've got to be kidding, right?"

The opposing team glared right back. All five of them.

"General?" Jack asked coolly, menacingly staring Daniel down.

"I've got the Webster's on standby," George assured him gravely.

"Let's kick linguist butt," Sam said briskly.

"Indeed," Teal'c agreed.

Daniel smiled softly and looked thoughtfully at his letters.

"Stop trying to psyche us out," Jack snarled.

"Why?" Daniel asked gently.

"Because it's working," Janet snapped.

"So-o competitive," Daniel mourned, shaking his head sorrowfully as he placed each letter tile neatly onto the board. "E-R-I-S-T-I-C. Eristic," he beamed at them and sat back.

All eyes turned to the general. George turn to the 'E's. "Eristic."

"Should be right above erk," Daniel said brightly. "Which is another word for what the four of you are."

"Erks?" Jack demanded suspiciously. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Airmen," George announced.

"I prefer erk," Daniel smiled sweetly at Jack.

"Eristic?" Jack let it go, for now. He'd pick it up later, AFTER what he hoped wouldn't be so much happy as fucking ecstatic hour. No pun.

"Pertaining to controversy or disputatious reasoning," George announced, disappointed.

Daniel selected another seven tiles at random.

"Could you at least make it LOOK as if you're trying?" Jack complained as Daniel glanced at his tiles for about a nanosecond and started merrily laying them on the board.

"R already on the board, O-G-A-T-I-O-N. Rogation," Daniel said smoothly. He glanced up at five identical expressions. "I can feel the love," he said whimsically.

"Just give me a minute," George snapped in response to a chorus of indignant 'sirs', thumbing rapidly through the Rs. "Pleading or supplication."

"Like the colonel on the treadmill," Janet noted meanly, ignoring the colonel's scorching look.

Daniel smiled beneficently upon them all and dove back into the tiles. He stared at his letters for several seconds, milking it for Jack's sake. "Q-U-A-T already on the board, R-A-I-N. Quatrain."

"A stanza of four lines usually rhyming alternately," George admitted after a short, depressed pause.

Daniel beamed at them and delved into the tiles, fingers roaming far and wide. He was aware of five hostile gazes watching his every move. Daniel looked slightly uncertain, then sorrowfully held up the X and the Y tiles. Five faces were instantly wreathed in smiles. Daniel grinned wickedly and slid the first tiles into place on the board. The smiles congealed. "X-Y-L-O-C already on the board A-R-P. Xylocarp."

"He's making that up, right?" Jack demanded of the general. "That's not a real word."

"A hard and woody fruit, like a coconut," George said bitterly.

"Nuts," Jack snarled.

"Are you keeping score, Major Carter?" Teal'c asked.

"What's the point?" Sam griped.

"May I?" Jack asked the general with exquisite politeness, reaching for the dictionary. He made a great show of perusing the pages. "Ah, yes. Here we go. S-M-A-R-T-A-S-S."

"I believe that is pronounced 'DanielJackson', O'Neill," Teal'c suggested sourly.

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Sam saw the pass the colonel made at Daniel. Some inane joke about Daniel being good at clearing up debris, but she noted carefully that a held breath was released and the soft brown eyes lit up when Daniel joked back about his rubber glove fetish getting out. Sam knew then that Daniel was staying the night, knew that while she was being driven home, the colonel would be taking Daniel to bed, would be making love to him for the first time.

She had to laugh at her own naïveté. The colonel hadn't even noticed her too short, too tight, too bright dress or the heels, although she was going to have some explaining to do to Janet tomorrow. The colonel had admired Janet's 'classy' evening skirt, though, and he hadn't been able to tear his eyes off Daniel all night unless you were speaking directly to him and even then he was THINKING about Daniel.

They'd talked about so many things during dinner, argued, teased, laughed together. She'd had a wonderful evening with her dearest friends, and it would have been perfect if the man she loved wasn't about to seduce just about her best friend in the world. Was so impatient to get to it he couldn't wait to get her out the door, because she was the last to go.

Sam leaned against the freezer and watched the colonel watch Daniel wash the crystal goblets and the porcelain dinner service that had belonged to his grandmother. Not a chance Daniel would break anything, his own china was mostly seventeenth century, every piece unique and chosen because he loved it. Daniel didn't buy antiques to sell, he bought to keep. Daniel was a keeper. Watching the colonel follow every move Daniel made, Sam was pretty sure he'd be keeping Jack too.

The toot of a horn caught her attention. Sam smiled. "Sounds like my ride," she said cheerfully. "I had a lovely time, Sir. Thank you."

"I still want to know what you did with those chips," the colonel said, grinning.

"You'll die wondering," Sam winked at Daniel. "Good night."

"No, wait. Wait," Daniel said anxiously. "I don't like to think of you going home alone this late. I could go back with you."

He meant it too. Meant every word, even though the colonel and bed - were waiting for him. Sam wasn't sure what Daniel thought he could do that she couldn't, but the

instinctive kindness of the gesture softened her. "I'll be fine, Daniel," she said softly, leaning in to kiss his cheek.

"I'll talk to the driver," the colonel warned. "Make sure he walks you right to your door, and then you call us, okay?"

Sam ignored that betraying 'us' and blithely agreed that she would call, just a couple of rings to let them know she was safe, no need to pick up, etcetera, etcetera. She waited patiently while the colonel gave the driver explicit instructions for the care of his precious cargo, accepting that as Carter she was special to him, that he did care a lot more than he was supposed to. She would just never be any more than this. The colonel didn't see her absence in his personal life as a lack; he probably wondered what the hell his alternates saw that he didn't. Sam thought it was down to WHO he saw that his alternates never got the chance to. Namely the sweet, generous man hovering in the open doorway, waving as she turned to get in the cab.

"Goodnight, Carter."

"Goodnight, Sir."

"Sweet dreams?"

"After the gorgonzola?" she asked wryly, pulling the door shut. He'd already turned away as the cab pulled out.

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Jack staggered into the hallway and kicked the door shut behind him. He dropped the bag and was in no way surprised when the bastard landed on his foot.

"DAN-iel? Could you come here for a moment?" he called politely.

Daniel trotted out of the kitchen. "Jack?"

"What's in the bag, Daniel?" Jack asked softly.

"A few essential items," Daniel said cheerfully. "Just like you asked."

"A few essential items. Let's just see, shall we?" Jack said grimly, unzipping rapidly to rifle through the contents. Put it this way, unless Daniel had 'The Ins and Outs of Gay Sex' in here, he wouldn't be doing much reading. Jack held up the first item that came to hand. "The Book of the Dead?" he accused.

"Well, that's a classic reference, Jack."

Jack nodded and let that one go. "Ancient images: the iconography of human origins?"

“Moser analyses the close relationship between representations of the past and theories about human evolution. She postulates this relationship existed even before a scientific understanding of human origins developed. How did mythological, religious, and historically inspired visions of the past, in existence for centuries, shape this understanding?”

Jack remained pointedly silent.

“That was a rhetorical question, Jack,” Daniel said carefully, aware he was skating on some unexpectedly thin ice here.

“Anthropological archaeology?”

“They don’t do textbooks for xenological archaeology. That’s the best I can do. The methodology is sound.”

“Do you have one single article of clothing in this bag?” Jack demanded, prodding the contents of the bag in disbelief.

“Does a toothbrush count?” Daniel asked hopefully.

“No.”

“Oh. Then I guess one. I still think it’s downright weird, but you asked, so I brought them,” Daniel explained awkwardly.

Jack took fresh heart and delved down into the very depths of the bag. He emerged triumphant and thrust the ‘by request’ item at Daniel. “Put them on.”

“I’m not in bed,” Daniel said flatly.

“You won’t NEED them in bed,” Jack said firmly.

“I’m not running around in these just so you can get some weird-ass sexual kicks out of seeing me in them,” Daniel snapped. “In fact, I’m starting to wonder what other bizarre fetishes will be revealed.”

“The night is young,” Jack drawled. He eyed the bag sourly. “Hernia permitting. Just put the jammies on, Daniel. Please. I’ll be back in a minute. We’re going to need a tape measure.”

Daniel was slightly alarmed. “What for?”

Jack shot him an evil grin. “Better start measuring up for shelves.”

"It could have been worse," Daniel said coldly.

"How?"

"I could have brought my fish."

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"Jack, I swear to God, if you do that one more time I'm going home," Daniel snapped.

"What?" Jack asked innocently.

"THAT!" Daniel smacked Jack's hand away. "It's a TOOTHBRUSH, Jack. Jeez, you have got to put a lid on these territorial impulses."

"Not JUST a toothbrush," Jack observed dispassionately. "Toothpaste, mouthwash, FLOSS, soap, the other different colour soap for - for what? For when you drop the first soap?"

"For face and body," Daniel snapped.

"Because you don't want soap on your face that's been on your ass?"

"Because I have ALLERGIES."

Jack gave Daniel a hard look. He softened slightly. Daniel was pouting and bright-eyed with temper and completely delicious in his navy jammies and T-shirt. The jammies were the cute kind of baggy, slung low on Daniel's hips, had a subtle burgundy check, and definitely leaned to the fuzzy. The T-shirt seemed to have been through the hot-rinse once too often and a lot of sleek, flat creamy abdomen was on display. Daniel's navel was in Jack's sights right this minute and the whole of Daniel would be in Jack's bed any minute. Mmm.

Daniel curled his lip as Jack's eyes roamed appreciatively. "Look all you want. You made me put them on, but you can't make me take them off again."

"No problem," Jack said easily. "Makes our first foray into friction fuzzier than I'm used to, but at least this way I get custody of the jammies after."

"Used to'?" Daniel enunciated crisply.

"Shampoo. You even brought your own shampoo. And conditioner," Jack said rapidly, refusing to skirmish.

Daniel pointedly opened the bathroom cabinet and displayed incriminating evidence. "When I have four different flavours of lip balm in MY bathroom, get back to me about the shampoo."

Jack strenuously ignored the damning contents of his cabinet, concentrating instead on the more fruitful topic of all the stuff Daniel now had strewn over every available surface of his bathroom. "And your own razor, and the shaving foam, and let us not forget the hair brush, the nail brush, the other, bigger brush, the natural sponge loofah and last but not least, the unpronounceable cologne. It's wasteful, Daniel. You could use my stuff."

"Or I could just wear a T-shirt saying 'colonels and archaeologists do it in wormholes'," Daniel suggested perkily, "If we're going to blithely ignore 'don't ask, don't tell' and go all out for in your face and up your ass blatant."

"Shut up."

"Used to'?" Daniel queried coldly.

"If you ask me to 'elaborate', I swear to God they won't even find the body. I'll make you dig your own grave," Jack promised faithfully. He eyed Daniel thoughtfully. "You're nervous about the sex."

"I certainly am," Daniel said briskly, trotting out of the bathroom. "I'm nervous that if I lie still too long, you'll try to dust me or something."

"I BEG your pardon?"

"You should," Daniel said equably, accelerating towards the - for now - relative safety of the bed. "The thing you have for me in my jammies is as nothing to the thing you have for cleaning. You LIKE to clean. You like to clean NAKED. I can tell."

"This from the man who pressed each individual pleat in his pants?" Jack sneered to his Weeping Ficus. Actually, she looked like she was outgrowing this spot by the door. Might be time to cut the apron strings.

"I'm not the one with top of the line turbo glide sure shot steam iron, about which I have a question. DO the stripes make it go faster?" Daniel hopped into bed and yanked up the comforter emphatically, eyeing his colonel with flat dislike. "You snarled?"

"I sleep there."

"Good," Daniel beamed, stretching out and doing a lot of pointedly possessive sprawling and snuggling.

"Danny?" Jack's lips twitched as Daniel pulled a pillow over his head. "We don't have to do anything," he said gently.

“For the LAST time, I am NOT nervous,” a muffled voice snarled. “Maybe I’m NOT used to it - unlike some people round here who kept it goddamn quiet - “

Jack started shucking his clothes, losing the battle with his attempt to look supportive, and settling on just being outrageously horny.

“But I do happen to be the cultural expert. I know all about ancient customs.”

Jack kicked off his shoes. “Plato and shit?” he suggested encouragingly.

“Exactly!”

“Did Plato have much to say about the prostate?” Jack asked pleasantly, unzipping his pants as loudly as possible, choking back a laugh as the indignant heap under the covers went very still. Even Jack could tell Daniel was annoyed with himself for reacting, and that was through a crisp cotton sheet, a comforter, a pillow and two emphatically crossed arms.

“The what?”

“The prostate.”

“From the Greek we have prostates, someone who stands in front, the prostate, from pro, meaning before, and sta, the root of histanai, to cause to stand.”

Jack pulled off his shorts and started folding. “What does that mean?”

“I have no idea,” Daniel snapped, ostentatiously smoothing his pillow.

“I know I’m going to regret asking this, but do you know about the, er, RECREATIONAL uses of the prostate?” Jack asked cautiously, edging carefully towards the bed. Two things were likely to happen if he touched Daniel. Daniel would belt him one or Daniel would bolt. In one of Jack’s fondest fantasies, Daniel tore his clothes off and hurled himself at Jack slavering with lust, but, realistically, Jack was expecting a combination of belting and bolting.

“I’m not naive,” the pillow sneered. “Or nervous.”

“I can tell,” Jack said soothingly and just went for it, swooping up the covers and pouncing on Daniel. Jack smoothly shifted the pillow and settled the covers back over both their heads. Then he propped himself on his elbows and smiled gently at Daniel. Daniel’s hand crept cautiously down, patted, verified and snatched away as his eyes widened and he gulped. Hard.

“Shit,” Daniel bleated.

“No need to get personal. A simple ‘no’ will suffice,” Jack said lightly. He stared deep into those wide, dazed blue eyes. “I’m not saying Early Christian Martyr isn’t a good look on you but – “

“I’m not nervous,” Daniel insisted, scowling at all the tender-hearted concern.

Jack decided to take things slow, given Daniel’s pallor, amongst other things. “O-kay, you’re not nervous, we’ve established that. I’m going to cut you some slack and chalk the hyperventilating up to excitement.”

“I’m not hyper – hyperventilating,” Daniel gasped.

“Danny, you’ve got heaving bosoms right now, not that it’s unpleasant, don’t get me wrong, but you’re a guy and technically you don’t have a bosom.”

“Bastard.”

“I love you too. If I try to kiss you, will you knee me in the balls?”

Daniel gaped up at Jack’s wicked, laughing face. Daniel wasn’t nervous, he was equal parts aroused, terrified and disbelieving. He was going to have sex with a man. Not just any man. With Jack. His best friend. His lover. His huge, heavy, horny – “It’s possible,” he gasped, “So I’d better kiss you.” With that he reached up to cup Jack’s face and drew him down into a serious cataloguing. Tastes, the rich bitterness of coffee lingering in Jack’s mouth and mingling with his own mint taste. Textures. Firm, straight lips moulding to his, pliant, not pushing. The warm silkiness of the inside of Jack’s mouth. Teeth both smooth and sharp, sleek and straight, rough and nipping. Touch. Jack’s warm, bristled skin rubbing over his. The softness of Jack’s hair tangled between his fingertips. The constantly shifting pressure of lip on lip as they angled, sought, strove. Tongues rasping in a rough, deepening caress, pushing hard. Curling close and resting. Easy gliding strokes that heated again to lunging jabs and harsh panting, Jack’s brusque hands suddenly pushing hard at Daniel’s legs, splaying them wide as Jack’s urgent weight settled, powerful thighs flexing eagerly between his. Hard, he’d never imagined how hard and sharp another man’s body was, how rough and alien, how wrong and how right it would feel, heavy, insistent; strength and weight pinning him flat, helpless, nothing held back from him, his own strength accepted and revelled in.

Deepening kiss, darkening mood, Jack fumbling now at Daniel’s clothing, wanting, needing, taking skin, releasing Daniel’s mouth to wrench the T-shirt free, plunging back into the kiss, weight lifting a little, balancing to allow Jack to yank down the bottoms, get them gone and tumble back down onto skin. Hot, sweaty skin slipping and sliding as Jack rocked them, still kissing. Just kissing, arms tight around one another, rocking and kissing in this growing heat, the heavy musk of this heat and the heady pleasure of friction jolting into him. Achingly hard erections slick and stroking over and over as Jack’s thighs drove him relentlessly against Daniel, Jack flushed and grunting with effort, flinching as Daniel’s

fingers clawed into his butt and dug deep, held him just THERE as Daniel thrust up to meet Jack, not enough, not nearly enough, legs hooking hard around Jack now, crossed at the ankles, crushing Jack close, Daniel reaching above his head, scrabbling for the headboard, for leverage to plunge him down into this pleasure stabbing wildly through him, exploding white behind his eyes.

Just kissing, kissing and rocking. With Jack. His tongue pulsing deep in Jack's mouth, stifling the ragged breath sounds and wrenching groans as they heaved and laboured, violent tremors in every clenching limb as Jack slammed into Daniel, Daniel arching off the bed to meet him, slammed again, tensed, back arching, face contorted in ecstasy as he came and they came HARD, together, kissing still.

Jack thought he kinda greyed out for a while there, gasping into Daniel's sweat-sheened shoulder, too far gone to even shift his weight even though Daniel was struggling for every stuttering breath. Jack fought leaden limbs and numbing satiation to roll them side by side, Daniel tight in his arms, Jack's leg draped heavy and holding over him, sweat and semen cooling everywhere they touched.

"I love you," he whispered into the damp tendrils at Daniel's brow.

"Love you too," Daniel sighed, clinging closer. "Jack?"

"Yeah?" Jack worked his fingers into Daniel's hair, soothing.

"I'm nervous," Daniel said gravely.

"I noticed," Jack grinned.

"You'll have to be patient."

"I will? Fuck!" Jack mock-growled.

"I'm not ready for sex," Daniel announced sententiously to the Weeping Ficus, just visible over Jack's shoulder. The shoulder he was licking.

"Aah. I noticed how ready you weren't," Jack agreed gravely. "And that's a trick question, right?" he smirked. "I'm supposed to be supportive here and say it's okay, I can wait, but I won't 'cause I promised to tell you the truth, and I'd be lying my nuts off."

"Can we stick with just kissing? Like this?" Daniel stroked the thigh draped over him, exploring every ridge and contour of the taut, heavy muscles, fascinated by the smooth, sensitive skin and the fine hairs feathering beneath his palm.

"Kissing? Like this?" Jack cupped Daniel's nape, massaging gently. "If you want to take things slow, I could go for this. For your sake. You're a GREAT kisser. The BEST." Jack's

grin broadened as Daniel blushed rosily, and threatened to hit both ears at once as Daniel's hand roamed possessively all over Jack's ass.

Daniel leaned up to nip and tug at Jack's lobe. "Mmm." He curled his hand gently around Jack's shaft, hot and heavy in his palm, simply let it rest there as he closed his eyes and settled for sleep, deliciously hot and sticky and sated, clinging contentedly. "Mmm," he sighed again. "'Night."

"'Night." Jack pressed a kiss into Daniel's hair and let him drift, happy to just lie here, to let hands and mind wander freely over Daniel. A drowsy murmur eventually caught his attention. "Hmm?"

"I think I'm ready for a little foreplay. So-o?" Daniel prompted. "You up for it?"

Jack grinned, arching into the persuasive hand stroking him lingeringly, luxuriously. "That's flattering, Danny, really, but the old grey mare just ain't what she used to be."

Daniel decided maybe a little oral stimulation would help firm up Jack's flagging interest. Daniel leaned in close and blew softly in Jack's ear, ready to talk dirty. "Wanna wax my floor?" he breathed.

"Sonovabitch," Jack yelled, feeling a treacherous twitch of interest as his blood galloped down the home straight. And another. More of a jerk than a twitch. Crap, CRAP, crap; the betraying little bastard was champing at the bit for the carrot, Danny was dangling. Perfect goddamn timing as usual. "It was the stroking," he snarled to his smirking beloved. "Not the - not - fuck!"

"Pervert," Daniel purred.

**FINIS**