

Title: Dissonance

Author: Biblio

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Pairing: Jack and Daniel

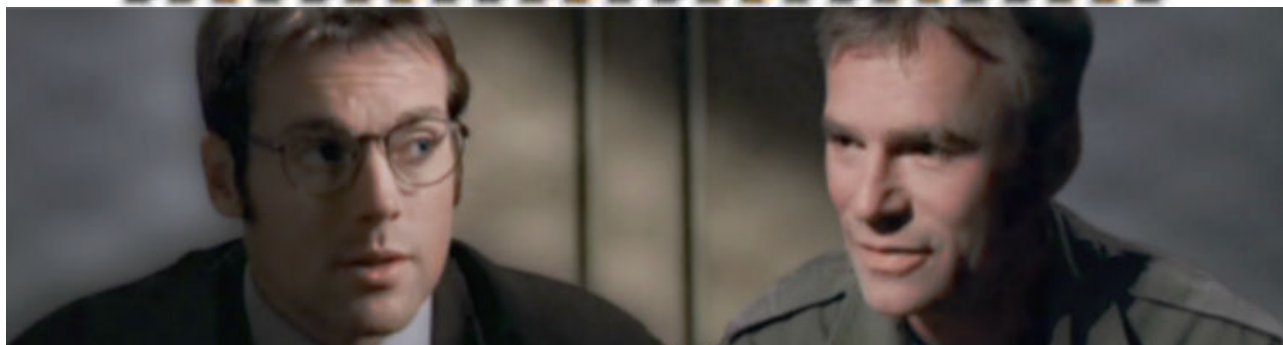
Category: Drama. Angst. Hurt/Comfort.

Series: Unity Part One

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

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

Warnings: Violence and minor character death referenced.



## Dissonance

### Part One of Unity

#### A slash story by Biblio

So. Jack had to admit he was a lost cause. Completely gone. Passionately in love. Never expected to feel this way again, not after losing Sara. Losing? Using her up and walking away? Hard to tell which, even now. And it wasn't like he'd had a choice in the matter. He'd fallen in love without even realising it. His heart skipped the beat and failed to let his mind in on it. Team leader? Friend? Jack had talked the talk so fluently for so long he'd believed his own bull, and he'd almost missed his chance to walk the walk.

Imminent death has a way of clearing away the confusion. Cuts right through the crap.

Jack wasn't the type for epiphanies, and getting one with a thousand technobugs crawling up his ass had been unexpected. Not that he'd even realised it was an epiphany, and maybe it wasn't, because the stunning truth really bit him, bit hard, when they all got back to base and he was in full flow, tearing Major Darling Davis a new one for making Daniel pull the plug on his pals and blow the frigging sub, really goin' at Davis - 'is that a uniform or a costume?', that was a good one, and totally wasted because he'd seen that 'look' on Davis's face, not apology, more like acknowledgement. A single wry, betraying 'who else' glance to Daniel had cut right through Jack's crap like a frigging laser.

Who else?

Jack's life was apparently not Davis's to call, not the property of the Air Force or even his own, come to that, the way they'd all leapt to not carry out his orders. His life was in Daniel's hands, it was Daniel's choice. His life was so obviously Daniel's a room full of serving officers and SFs hadn't even blinked when Daniel, the only civilian in the building, took command and blew the sub, and how fucked was that? Daniel's Jack, not the USAF's Colonel O'Neill and even the USAF seemed to agree.

Just the way it is.

Just what was this, this thing with him and Daniel? 'Just the way it is'? Could it be that simple? Maybe so. Daniel had saved his life in every way that mattered on Abydos, so maybe Daniel pretty much owned him forever and really, did he have to be the only one who didn't know this? Apart from Daniel, obviously. Could you quantify how fucked that was?

Pretty goddamn fucked.

And maybe even that wasn't the stunning revelation. Maybe that had come days later when he was out in the hallway with his ass in a sling, his heart stuttering, Daniel's door slamming in his face and Daniel's 'NO' ringing in his ears. Yeah. Figuring out maybe Daniel was HIS, too, figuring that out a little late in the game, well, that was a total clusterfuck.

Going back to that closed door? That was something else again. He'd actually used the 'S' word, had APOLOGISED for behaving like Colonel Jack O'Neill, USAF, for ALMOST dropping his drawers and crawling into bed with the Eurondan Reich, almost signing up on the quest for genetic purity. He was sorry about trying to crawl into Daniel's bed too. Couldn't BE more sorry for that. Hell, he'd held Daniel's hand over the DHD, could he have been more obvious? Could he have made his intentions plainer?

Daniel's still-closed door was fairly plain spoken too, pithy even, but doors have locks and locks can be picked, and maybe with a nice guy that would have been a metaphor, but the nice guy in this equation was on the other side of the lock-picked door and instead of calling the MPs he laughed. Tried to be mad but he laughed. And Jack got to stay. Got his foot through that door and KEPT it there.

Now? Now Jack was fucked. Probably on a quantum level.

Getting strapped in ready for his second run through the brain drain, and right up to the point Freya started asking the damn questions, his strongest memory was the kiss. The first awkward touch of his lips against Daniel's, a touch where their lips didn't seem to work the way they were supposed to, Daniel's fingers nervously clasping his jaw and right then all the pieces fitting, fitting so well under Daniel's trembling fingers he was IN Daniel's mouth and giving it so much gas he'd been afraid of creaming his pants right there and then.

So there he was, facing the Amazing Technicolor Brain Drain AND a horde of some his nearest, and in some cases not so dearest, and all he could remember coherently was the touch and taste of a lovely mouth and the sweetest kiss he'd ever had, and the tragedy of Daniel being the kind of guy who didn't know they should have been fucking since the third date; Daniel just being Daniel, making Jack wait until after the fifth date for that first kiss. Stealing his soul with that kiss, 'cause fucking was okay, fucking was guys, born to fuck. Kissing was love, intimacy, promises, commitment. Kissing meant more than fucking, and Daniel was strolling right through all Jack's defences like they weren't even there, like he didn't KNOW he had the keys to the city, like he did know Jack could work through all that anally retentive control-freak denial stuff. Jack had to admit Daniel was right so far, so very right they weren't ever likely to fuck, but when the time was right, when they were both ready, they would be making love.

This thing with Daniel was terrifying and wonderful and real, and Jack was exponentially beyond fucked. No word existed for just how fucked he was right now.

Saving Carter's life was instinctual. Looking after his kids was the easiest thing there was. Saving her dignity and his own ass at the same time was that whole other thing. Jack had told the absolute truth, but the words he spoke weren't the words she heard. Carter hadn't heard 'caring', she heard loving. His confession was absolutely true and totally false. His whole damn position was false, couldn't be anything but a lie even when he was telling the truth, because he wasn't telling all of the truth and never could. He was in love with Daniel and he cared more about Carter than he was supposed to, WAY more, and because he felt both of these things, not even the careful words he spoke were enough to make it clear he wasn't in love with Carter, though it was pretty frigging clear she was in love with him.

So what did we learn today, children? Just what gems of wisdom had the Zatarc detector detected? Nothing about Zatarcs, that was for damn sure. What Jack did know was that Carter was in love with him, seemingly without knowing she'd felt that way or even wanting to feel that way for him. Jack also knew he'd been denying the SHIT out of knowing anything about that until it loomed up and publicly booted him in the behind while he was strapped into the brain drain. Jack also knew that Daniel was falling in love with him, and Jack was right there with him on that, coaxing him every step of the way.

Big honkin' mess. Right there. Like that wasn't enough?

Hard on the heels of the great revelation, Carter had to be the one to kill Martouf, had to go into one of those Carter-Jolinar fugues. Jack was perfectly aware that he was a selfish shit. He cared deeply for both Carter and Daniel. He felt for Carter, he was sorry she'd been forced to kill Martouf. He was also sorry that because he cared, he was obliged to stay here with her and offer her what comfort he could. He was sorry about that because he was between a rock and a goddamn hard place. Jack didn't want to sit in Carter's quarters on base all night while she bared her soul, but he was going to have to suck it up and stay put when all he really wanted to do was go home and comfort Daniel. He was in

love with Daniel, he wanted to be with Daniel, not with Carter, and if that made him a complete asshole, well, he'd just have to learn to live with it.

Jack could see that Daniel seemed confused, and worried. Daniel was worried about Carter, and he clearly couldn't understand why out of the blue, Carter didn't want him, she wanted Jack. Plenty of reasons, Daniel; we all know, we just won't tell you. It doesn't have to leave the room? God, let it NEVER leave that room. What a mess. What a godawful fucking mess. Someone was going to get hurt, when it did leave the room, and right now, the odds were it wouldn't be him, because it never was. Easier to keep it in that room. Easier not to deal. Pretend it never happened. Hit Carter with the command structure, hell, just be himself, and she'd get over it. She was far more interested in her career than him anyway, no fuel no fire, no harm no foul. He hoped. And no painful, 'honest' conversations with Daniel, who'd fret himself to pieces over Carter's tender feelings and maybe do something REPREHENSIBLY stupid and sensitive like insist they didn't see each other for a while, you know, just until Carter was over the worst and they'd all done the good friend thing.

Like Jack was gonna let THAT happen.

Jack kept his eyes from Carter's painfully naked ones and focused instead on Daniel as he reluctantly headed out the door, his slender frame rigid with tension, maybe a little hurt. Daniel was as usual trying not to think about what Daniel wanted, being the good friend like always, just casting little longing glances back over his shoulder, glances that Carter didn't see and Jack couldn't help seeing but couldn't do anything about.

"I'll find you," Jack said abruptly, meaningfully.

Daniel was poised, ready to pull the door shut behind him, ready to give them privacy, give them space. Jack wanted to be headed out that door with Daniel, but he had to make do with the slightest of smiles and a softness in the clear blue eyes that made his loins ache.

"If you need me, Sam," Daniel offered one last time before reluctantly leaving, the quick nod from Carter reassuring and dismissive at the same time.

Jack sighed, and got himself set for the good friend come guilt trip long haul, only the knowledge of who he had waiting for him at home to get him through this heartlessly dishonest honesty. There was no way out of it, all because of him, because he was too spineless to kick Carter when she was already this down or ever to risk losing Daniel.

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Daniel gently closed the door to Sam's quarters, somewhat confused, and, if he was being scrupulously honest, a little hurt at the exclusion. He'd - they'd all lived through these days WITH Jack and Sam, and he knew how hard it had been for Jack, had known in that stunning moment when Jack had asked Daniel what he would do. Daniel hadn't known,

still didn't know, though he hoped he would have thought of Sam and put himself through it for her. There hadn't been any time -

"DanielJackson. General Hammond wishes to speak with you."

Daniel turned and returned Teal'c's warm smile. Noted the concerned eyes. "I'm fine, Sam is the one we should be worried about," he said reassuringly.

"I have observed many times that your insistence on being 'fine' is in fact proof you are NOT 'fine'," Teal'c quietly reprovved, noting the pallor and the strain around his friend's eyes. It was not in Teal'c's nature to speak of such matters, but a man would have to be dead not to see and know the beauty of THIS man. Teal'c found himself admiring Daniel anew as he fell into step beside him, Daniel still smiling a little, relaxing, perhaps even comforted by Teal'c's presence, a gift that Teal'c had never sought, but had been granted freely nonetheless. "Jacob Carter will arrive soon. He and Anise will escort Martouf's body back to Vorash after Dr Fraiser assists them with the autopsy."

Daniel called the elevator and leaned against the wall, brightening a little. "Jacob was sent for when Anise diagnosed Sam as a Zatarc. I'm glad he's coming; Sam needs him. She's devastated over Martouf. Jack is with her now, but she really needs Jacob. He cares about Martouf, and Jack tolerated him at best, something that has to be on Sam's mind right now." When the elevator doors opened, Daniel was glad to see the car was empty. Daniel punched twenty-eight and turned again to face Teal'c, feeling the familiar sickening lift in his stomach as the elevator descended. "I don't know how she'll handle this, how much of this is her and how much Jolinar's influence. Jolinar and Martouf were together for hundreds of years, and Martouf called out to Sam at - at the end, called to Jolinar's host to take his life. And to his friend."

"Martouf's loss is a blow to the Tok'ra and to us. He was one of our strongest allies and most active in the war against the Goa'uld. Even in death he did his duty. His sacrifice gives us our best opportunity to study and hopefully in time combat the Zatarc programming," Teal'c said gravely. "His death will not be in vain if it saves one other life."

"What about the others?" Daniel asked quietly. "Major Graham, Lieutenant Astor and Sergeant Silverman? The three Tok'ra guards?"

"They each died doing their duty, DanielJackson. It is a risk we all accept, and the Earth-Tok'ra Alliance is a worthy cause for which to fight."

"And die," Daniel sighed.

Teal'c allowed Daniel to precede him from the elevator and then followed, settling into his accustomed place at Daniel's side. He would not debate acceptable losses with a man who accepted no loss, as such, ever, who raged against every death, every sacrifice except his own. Teal'c had known Daniel was passionate from the first moment he had laid eyes

upon him, he had seen that fire burn brightly, but only time and a difficult, deepening friendship had taught him to see the strength of will and character that fed the passion. He had known no one who FELT as Daniel did. It was at once the source of Daniel's strength as well as his vulnerability.

It was not the Jaffa way to FEEL so; this profundity of passion for others was more exotic and alien to Teal'c than any mere custom or place could be, but it was his way to protect. Though it grieved him to keep his counsel over a matter that affected all the members of SG-1, he would not betray O'Neill and Major Carter's confidence. Teal'c could only accept that withholding the truth was no less a betrayal of Daniel's fearless honesty.

Daniel tapped lightly on the general's door and was at once invited in. Hammond's harried expression softened as he looked up from his paperwork when Daniel walked in, Teal'c hard on his heels.

"Dr Jackson, Teal'c," Hammond acknowledged.

"The Alliance is secure?" Teal'c wasted no time on Tau'ri pleasantries.

"It is," Hammond sighed. He smiled suddenly. "Thanks in no small part to Dr Jackson, here. High Councillor Per'sus was most impressed by the Treaty document Dr Jackson drew up. He commented that it was inspiring."

Teal'c bowed, gratified for his friend, though it was to be expected. "Daniel Jackson worked diligently to overcome the limitations of Tau'ri diplomatic language, a language which says nothing and means less in far too many words."

"Thanks," Daniel said cautiously, "I think." He grinned up at Teal'c, not missing the quirked eyebrow. Jaffa humour. Teal'c always worked a tough room.

"He succeeded," Hammond said warmly. "I've never yet heard any Earth Treaty described as 'inspiring'. Maybe we should get you signed up for the UN?" he asked jovially.

"I fear that would be beyond even Daniel Jackson's capabilities," Teal'c teased, pleased to see the grin return to Daniel's face.

"I've had word from the Tok'ra. Jacob Carter will be with us within the hour." Hammond hesitated. "How is Major Carter?"

"Jack is with her now," Daniel said softly. "She's upset, of course. Martouf was her friend."

"Major Carter proved herself Martouf's friend in acceding to his wish to give his death meaning and purpose," Teal'c approved.

"It doesn't make it any easier on Sam, though," Daniel sighed.

"It does not," Teal'c acknowledged. Bravery is no comfort in loss.

"And how are YOU, Dr Jackson?"

"I'm fine," Daniel said automatically, blushing under the sceptical, kindly scrutiny.

"I think SG-1 has been through enough," Hammond said positively. "I'm ordering three days on light duties for all of you and I'm sending you home, Dr Jackson, right now."

Daniel shifted awkwardly. Jack was coming to find him as soon as he could leave Sam, probably as soon as Jacob got here and took over. He so wanted to talk, to find out how Jack was, if Sam was coping, if she needed him. He didn't want to be at home, out of it. That had happened too much recently for him to take any comfort in being separated from his friends again. George's affection was one he returned, but the paternal care – the special consideration – could be very inconvenient. "I'm fine," Daniel insisted, stubbornly. He was annoyed to see the general's eyes meet Teal'c's in perfect understanding.

"I will escort Daniel Jackson," Teal'c offered at once.

Daniel didn't need anyone holding his hand, except maybe Jack and even then, only in the context of Chardonnay and candlelight. He also knew he wasn't going to win this argument so he gave in with grudging grace. Teal'c would escort him every step of the way to his car if he thought it was necessary. "I need a few things from my office, first."

"Very well," Hammond gave permission. "You have half an hour, and then I expect you to go home, Dr Jackson. We'll debrief at 08:00 tomorrow morning. Teal'c? Could you stay for a moment?"

Daniel recognised that he had been dismissed and trailed out reluctantly, taking the path of least resistance to his office. He wouldn't see Jack until late, if at all, especially if Jack got tied up with Jacob, and a fascinating new book on the Anasazi was no consolation at all. He wanted the book, but what he really needed from his office was a few minutes' peace before he made the long drive home. Home. It was almost alarming, just how far and how fast Jack had become so necessary for his comfort. It didn't even feel like he was going home anymore, more like he was going back to an EMPTY home, like Jack had filled up every available space with himself, spread out and made himself so at one with the place, Daniel was beginning to be lost without him.

Surrendering a little independence, choosing to share, that was one thing. He'd sworn he'd never become dependent on another living soul. He'd never NEED again. He and Jack had only been together a few weeks, were just starting to relax and find some balance with and in each other, and already Daniel was wanting Jack so much it was difficult to bear being apart.

Maybe balance was an illusion. His world was in turmoil, scattering in the wake of Hurricane Jack's relentless need for more, for everything Daniel had to give, and more even than that because Jack wanted to be needed. Wasn't going to rest until Daniel needed him as much as he needed Daniel. Jack pushing, that Daniel could cope with. Jack WOOING was another matter entirely. Pushy Jack could be slapped down. Argued with. Pushed back. A Jack who was kind, careful and loving was just impossible to suppress or rebuff, and well Jack knew it, sliding sweetly through every defence Daniel threw up against him.

Daniel was needing. Depending. Already.

"Dr Jackson?"

Daniel looked up from the book he wasn't reading and smiled at Freya. Encouraged, Freya came into his office and closed the door behind her. Daniel got up and offered her the chair, which she accepted. He was surprised to see she looked a little nervous. "What can I do for you, Freya?"

"I have made Colonel O'Neill uncomfortable," Freya said earnestly, leaning forward.

Daniel bit back a grin. That was the understatement of the year. Jack had insisted Daniel should help him work through the 'trauma' of being subjected to what he described as a hissy kiss, a little therapeutic lip lock 'to take away the taste' and while they were on the subject, how about the condemned man getting his last wish, which turned out to be 'getting some'. Sexual harassment by suggestive yo-yo was an O'Neill talent even Daniel hadn't been aware of.

"He's unfamiliar with the customs of your world," Daniel suggested cautiously.

Freya brightened. "I knew I was right to speak of this with you. You know the custom of your people and you know Colonel O'Neill. What is the custom to share?"

"Share?" Daniel asked blankly.

"Indeed. I asked O'Neill if he was loyal to anyone and he did not answer."

Daniel was annoyed to find himself blushing.

"I see now why he could not. It is not the custom for these feelings to be made known to your fellows," Freya said gravely. "But you are their friend, are you not? You will be able to tell me if they will share."

They? Their? Daniel was groaning silently. What in the world had Jack told Freya that he didn't dare confess to Daniel? What outrageous tale had he spun? Jack and Janet? Jack and -

“Major Carter granted O’Neill permission to reveal his feelings for her, and she reciprocated. They were not Zatarcs. I did not realise their need to keep their feelings private, for the sake of their positions, would have a bearing on the results of the first test. Had I known of this, had I understood they had something legitimate they needed to conceal, I would have framed the questions differently so as to not touch upon it, and they would not have failed the test. It was my error and for that I am sorry. Now that I know I must also take Major Carter if I am to have O’Neill, I must have the custom right. I would not willingly make either of them uncomfortable again.”

Sam.

Daniel couldn’t understand how his skin was so flushed when he felt so cold. “Jack and Sam have feelings for one another?” he asked carefully, striving to understand, to not just react. Think, don’t feel. Think.

Freya sighed. “He would rather have died himself than lose her, for he cares a lot more for her than he is supposed to.”

Daniel hung his head for a moment. Sam wanting Jack, Jack staying with her – Jack knew why. He knew and he said nothing. Jack couldn’t have said anything in front of Sam, but surely he could have snatched a moment in private with Daniel. Just a moment. Warned him. Said – said something. Something. Instead Jack said nothing and he stayed. “The machine doesn’t lie.”

“It does not. Only the literal truth will permit the subject to pass the test.”

Jack loved Sam. Sam loved Jack. Jack and Sam. The literal truth. As true here in this reality as it was everywhere else – they were meant to be together, that was right, and it was just Sam’s bad luck she was military here and – Jack was making do. He couldn’t have Sam so he was making do, and this was wrong. It was wrong. He needed to hear this from Jack. He had to know. Daniel couldn’t need. He couldn’t be the only one who depended, couldn’t depend on a man who was only with him because he couldn’t have – couldn’t –

“Dr Jackson, forgive us. We have distressed you,” Anise apologised. “My host is upset. She has hopes which she now realises may not be fulfilled. It is as I suspected. The custom is not for sharing. O’Neill repudiated us because we share a body, there could be no chance he would share his. He is not the man you are,” Anise said softly, touching a fleeting hand to his. “He judges without understanding. You understand without judging.”

Daniel had to get away. Had to be away from the cold, beautiful face and the soft alien voice, soft for him, for ‘intellectual’ interest in him, from the cool hand touching his, from the sympathy and understanding of wanting and not having. Anise knew all about needing. About depending. Nobody better. It only worked when there were two.

Three was a crowd.

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Sam found it easier to look at her feet than to look at the colonel. Saved him the trouble of looking at his own feet whenever she did look at him. He was here; he was with her, filled with rough kindness and unmistakably uncomfortable. It was enough. It was.

"I didn't ask for this, Sir," she said quietly, "and I didn't provoke it. We had no other choice."

"Sure," the colonel told his boots, tone nice and easy.

Sam sighed. Did he have to make this so difficult? Couldn't he just lower his guard and TALK to her for once? He loved her. Why the heck couldn't he talk to her? "We have to deal with it. Find a way to work together after this."

"I'm sure we'll manage to be professional," the colonel said at once, smiling a little. "It's never been a problem before."

"It's never been in the open before," Sam said a little tartly.

"NOT in the open," the colonel snapped. He paused and seemed to make a conscious effort to relax. "It stays in that room, remember? I don't want to break up my team, Carter. Do you? Do you want to be transferred to another team or to a desk job?"

Me? "Of course not, Sir. I'm committed to SG-1."

The colonel relaxed visibly and smiled again, with real warmth this time. Sam smiled right back, some of the tension easing. Of course the team came first, it had to, that was exactly what got them into this mess in the first place. Easier not to admit to those feelings, growing slowly since the colonel had been separated from them all that time on Edora. Growing from a simple acknowledgement that Sam missed him. Sam hadn't asked to fall in love with the colonel - with Jack - and she'd done nothing to encourage the feelings. She would never have chosen to acknowledge, let alone act on them. Sam sighed. It was too late now for denial. She - they had to deal.

"I'm sorry about Martouf," Jack said softly, just wishing this was over and he could get the hell out of here before he upset Carter any more than he already had. She kept looking at him like he should get off his ass, get over there and hold her. Or something. Longing blue eyes did it for him, God knows they did it for him every damn time, but not these eyes. There was a time he could have given her just that, could have put the regulations aside and hugged her, could have hugged Sam. That time was past, and it wasn't safe to feed her feelings now he knew he was doing it. Crap, he'd known for a while. Suspected while they were stranded off-world for those nine days without Daniel, and Carter had

that attitude he hadn't known how to deal with, like she was pushing him to see beyond the Regs and the uniform, to acknowledge and see a woman.

That spur of the moment fishing invite had been a big mistake. A bad tactical decision. Bad enough to do it the first time, and then he'd had to go and do it again. Trying to put it right, to get her away from the base and remind her of the Regs and the uniform and how little they had in common with another invite was a huge honkin' disaster. A girlie Carter was terrifying to behold and he hadn't been able to back-pedal quick enough to avoid the fall-out on Apophis' ship. Bad enough thinking she was going to die right in front of him and there was fuck-all he could do about that, worse, infinitely worse was seeing that - look - in her eyes. Jack knew that look. It was the exact same fucking look he saw in the mirror every damn time he thought of Daniel, which was most of the time, and that was when he realised Carter's feelings went way beyond attraction and the pissy second in command power games.

Jack could cope with the power games. He'd been kinda expecting them, sooner or later. Everyone who got command had to go through being the 2IC. Everyone tested their limits, tested the guy in charge when they started to feel maybe they should be the guy in charge. To get command, you had to prove you could do more, be more. The C.O. wasn't about to give it to you, so you had to take it, had to push your limits. How the hell else could you prove you were ready for more? Jack had been thinking Carter wanted command, was pushing him, was angling for more responsibility. He'd realised on Apophis' ship how wrong he'd been about that.

Carter wanted what he couldn't and wouldn't give, and the uniform didn't have anything to do with it. He didn't want Carter. He never had, and he'd never understood what his alternates had seen that he didn't. Carter was a good officer and as good a friend as a subordinate could be, but that was the key right there. She was a subordinate. There was no way they could be equals, ever, and he wasn't prepared to give up his career, or allow her to give up hers in order to level the playing field. She was beautiful and warm, but even so, part of her was him ten years ago and part of her reminded him uncomfortably of Sara. Hard to get past what she reminded him of and just see her as herself.

Daniel was Daniel. Pure and never simple. Never a subordinate and always Jack's equal. His superior in many ways, but that kinda balanced out in all the ways they were just different. Jack had never worked at Carter like he worked at Daniel. It had never occurred to him to try.

That sappy look Carter had shot him through the force field had whacked him right between the eyes. He should have dealt with it then. Coulda. Woulda. Shoulda. What he DID was stuff it WAY down deep and try to forget about it because, for God's sake, he had his hands full with Daniel. Daniel innocently flirting, curiously testing the limits of this new hold he had over Jack, turning Jack inside out, turning him on and mercilessly sending him home, home to his own bed to fuck his own hand. Jack was only submitting to it because he was hunting in earnest, wasn't about to put a foot wrong, wasn't about to scare Daniel off with demands for physical intimacy Daniel wasn't ready to meet.

Submitting also because it had been far too long since he last felt this taut anticipation, this compulsive, consuming need that would only be satisfied when he was driving deep into Daniel's open, willing body. Hell, prolonging the agony had Jack feeling more ALIVE than he had in years.

" - because of Jolinar."

Fuck. Jack realised he'd just tuned Carter out. Carter baring her soul shouldn't be white noise. Shouldn't be an inconvenience. What the hell was he supposed to do now? Ask her to take it from the top? He settled for a warm smile and vague, encouraging noises, hoping he'd pick it up as she went along.

Sam wasn't totally sure she had all of the colonel's attention, but the warmth of his smile reassured her. He - Jack - was far better at listening than he was at talking. He seemed to understand that she'd had to do what she did, that it was as much for her sake as for Jolinar's. It was to 'Samantha' that Martouf had called, not to Jolinar or Jolinar's host. There had been a time Sam was overwhelmed by Jolinar's feelings for Martouf, hadn't been able to separate them from her own. She'd always thought Martouf had seen her as a shrine to Jolinar, that his feelings had never been about her. It was so hard to learn that Martouf had finally seen through Jolinar, had finally seen Sam, just as Sam was forced to take his life. She'd done her duty, she'd done what he wanted her to do, she'd willingly accepted the burden of guilt for his sake and in memory of Jolinar. She was going to carry memories of Martouf that would be just as hard to bear as Jolinar, and she was never going to know if what she had felt for Martouf was real. Those feelings had gotten tangled up in so many other things, including the man sitting before her. There was just too much to take in. Sam wanted to close her eyes and drift away, just let it all go until her head was clear, until she could think her way through the grief and the mess she was in.

"You look exhausted," the colonel said softly. "You should rest. I'll -"

"Stay," Sam asked, a little shy, but surely it was excusable, just this once, when she needed someone - needed him so much? When he smiled, she smiled back, sure that sigh she'd heard was regret. He could stay, for a while, and that was all he could do for her. It wasn't enough, but it was all she could allow.

Jack sat in his chair and stared at the bare concrete wall as Carter's breathing evened out. Stared at anything but her and prayed for deliverance. Prayed for Jacob Carter.

And for Daniel.

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Daniel decided drying off from his shower au naturel, sprawled on his bed, was probably a very bad idea when he heard the key turn in the lock. The key he'd had cut for Jack, the one he'd presented with such ceremony, and which Jack had been so pleased to have, joking that picking locks was way more fun, just for the look on Daniel's face. Just for

making Daniel laugh. Daniel had Jack's key, too. They'd never be able to live together – not that he'd been thinking of that, and not like there would ever be much point thinking of that – but they wouldn't. Keys seemed like a small thing but they mattered. They were trust and commitment.

“Daniel?”

Daniel sighed and scrambled up and into his sweats before Jack could come and find him. He didn't want Jack in his bedroom, was in fact pretty shaky about having Jack in his life at all. Daniel didn't waste time, just strode out, still pulling his T-shirt over his head, out into Jack's waiting, gloating arms.

“Allow me,” Jack said with a flourish, ‘assisting’ him to smooth down the T-shirt, mostly from the skin side of things. Daniel's mind might shy away from physical intimacy with his best friend, but his body was aching for it, trembling beneath a coveting, careful hand curved over his abdomen, blood slamming down as the tip of a curious finger dipped into his navel.

One moment Daniel was standing and in the next he was pinned flat to the couch, Jack's weight settling over him, inviting hardness rubbing sensuously against his own, not really pushing it, just letting Daniel know. The one thing Daniel did know was Jack wanted to fuck him, had in fact known from the first time Jack had walked in through his door and PUSHED. Daniel had pushed back, pushed Jack right out the door and slammed it in his face.

He could handle that Jack. Pushy, oh so sure of himself, asking to be taken out at the knees Jack. This Jack, the Jack gazing down at him in dopey disbelief, stroking his face with trembling fingers, cupping his chin and leaning in slow, so slow Daniel could have said ‘no’ a dozen times over, this Jack he couldn't handle at all. How could he say no and stop when the breath caught and burned in his lungs, burned like Jack's eyes burned, when his body was singing from Jack's touch, craving more. Beyond shame, beyond denial, Daniel cupped Jack's head and pulled him close, eagerly parting his lips beneath the onslaught, welcoming Jack in, pushing hard against that probing, possessive tongue rasping and warring with his, drowning as Jack steadied and deepened the kiss.

Daniel had never known, never suspected another man could arouse him like this. Had never known the seductive power of this weight holding him, this hot, hard body straining against his, all planes and angles and ridges of smooth, sleek muscle. Now he knew, and he wanted. God he wanted this, wanted the deep sinuous glide of tongue on tongue, the flickering of tongue over sensitive palette and cool, nipping teeth. Wanted the surprised hiss of pleasure as he parted his thighs and wrapped one leg around Jack. Wanted Jack's greedy hands lifting him, cupping and kneading his buttocks, burning through the soft jersey of the sweats, wanted the steady, insistent rocking that made his blood heat and surge in his veins.

Wanted it. Needed it.

Stopping it.

“Ja - “ he strained against the kiss, against the weight holding him down, “Jack.”

Jack groaned and sullenly released Daniel’s lips. He didn’t have a clue what the reward for virtue was, totally unexplored territory for him, but pushing the envelope pretty much got him a firm no every damn time. He’d never made Daniel lose control, lose himself in the moment, and God knows he’d been trying. Jack propped himself on his elbows, resigned to his fate, thoroughly enjoying resting on Daniel this way, feeling every inch of delectable, slender strength quivering against him. “Hel-lo,” he said gravely.

“Hello,” Daniel responded, just as gravely.

Was it Jack’s imagination or was Daniel a little pale, here? A little tight around the eyes.

“Hungry?” Daniel asked.

Jack smirked. “Always,” he growled.

“I’ll cook,” Daniel offered.

“Hungry for food? Curses,” Jack sighed. “Foiled again.” He thought Daniel’s smile was perfunctory and he didn’t protest when Daniel pushed at his shoulder, he just sat up, let Daniel untangle himself and walk away.

Daniel was waiting. He was giving Jack a chance to explain, to be open and honest. Waiting - hoping - for Jack to tell him he wasn’t just Mr Right Now, that there was more to this than Jack’s desire to fuck his brains out. He thought - he felt there was more, but he didn’t KNOW. Daniel could live with Jack confused, wanting both him and Sam. He might have to, because it would seem the literal truth was that Jack loved Sam. He’d said so. He’d said nothing of the kind to Daniel, and clinging to the fact Jack hadn’t tried to hustle him into bed after that disastrous first pass as proof there was more to this than frustrated hormones was just pathetic. So Daniel was waiting. Waiting for Jack to put him out of his misery.

Jack had held out for exactly three minutes - according to the clock he was watching - before he’d caved and followed Daniel into the kitchen to find him beating the hell out of some eggs which had probably done him no harm when they were alive. He spooned up behind Daniel, hugged him hard to his chest. “Whatcha doin’?”

“I didn’t eat breakfast,” Daniel hated his treacherous body for relaxing into the depths of that comforting embrace. Jack could hug like no one else, threw everything including the kitchen sink at you.

“So we’re having it now?” Breakfast was so far the only meal they hadn’t eaten together. Jack had bought and been cooked a number of dinners, lunches and on a couple of free Sundays, brunch at Poor Richards Bookstore, but breakfast, like Daniel’s bed, was off-limits. “You got Froot Loops?”

“Pancakes, Canadian ham and maple syrup.”

“Nice.” Jack nuzzled the hot spot behind Daniel’s ear, making him shiver. “How ya doin’?”

“I’m fine.”

“That bad, huh?” Jack said softly, tightening his grip. Daniel turned a little, to face him. Jack licked the tip of Daniel’s nose and smirked, trying to lighten things up.

“What happened with Anise and the Zatarc detector, Jack? I know you and Sam were cleared, I just don’t understand how Anise could have made such a mistake in the first place. If you didn’t have false memories, why did you fail the first test?” Daniel asked intently, heart pounding sickeningly. Tell me, Jack. Tell me why you passed the second test. Tell me the truth, that’s all I ask. Meet me half-way. That’s all I want.

Jack gritted his teeth for a moment. Shit. “We made a mistake, that’s all. Didn’t realise how not recalling accurately what we were feeling at the time could throw the test off,” he said easily, sticking with the half-truth for that extra ring of conviction. “Carter figured it out. You know how it goes, combat. Coupla Jaffa, locked and loaded, you’re unarmed, you’re not leaning against the wall analysing the crap outta how it makes you feel. All us military types are anally retentive control freaks, Carter included. Anise took it from the top and we ‘fessed up to the touchy feely crap.”

Daniel was staring at him, blue eyes wide, assessing. Jack looked steadily back.

“With the President’s life and the Tok’ra Alliance at risk it never crossed your mind or Sam’s that your feelings could have any bearing on the outcome of the test? Even after Anise told you it mattered, even after what happened to Lt Astor? You were ready to face an untested, potentially fatal procedure because you were embarrassed to admit you were – what? – upset at the thought of losing Sam?” Daniel asked crisply.

Jack reflected wryly that if only Carter had put it to him THAT way, that he had a problem with being detached when it came to any of his kids so deep he didn't even realise he had a problem, he wouldn't be in this mess right now. Having to be TOLD by Carter he had ‘feelings’ for her – hell, it wasn’t subtle. He’d been ready to have his brain fried because the other stuff had never crossed his mind.

“I don’t believe it,” Daniel said flatly.

Jack let go. Let go and backed off. Took a good hard look at Daniel. "The only reason Carter is alive is we lucked out and the shield came down all on it's lonesome. Yeah, that's 'upsetting'," he said slowly, carefully, eyes searching Daniel's face.

Daniel turned back to his eggs and beat the mess desultorily. He took a calming breath. "And you would have stayed for any of us, wouldn't you?" he prompted. "You would have stayed while those locked and loaded Jaffa closed in? You wouldn't have left any of us behind."

Jack was starting to wonder if Daniel was a little jealous of Carter. Daniel had jumped to the conclusion it was Carter who'd made the pass when Jack had told him about Freya, and Jack staying with Carter to 'talk' hadn't exactly helped. Jack was also starting to relax. A major league insecurity complex he could deal with. Tactile reassurance was the House Speciality. "No, I wouldn't have left any of my kids behind. You know that."

"Do I?" Daniel murmured sotto voce. "You care about us all."

"Yeah," Jack said softly. He cared, but he was only in love with one member of his team, and given Jack's luck, it just had to be the most difficult one, the only one he really had to work at.

"I see," Daniel said flatly.

Jack was starting to feel the first tremors in the sure ground he thought was under his feet 'til this moment. "It doesn't sound like it." What did Daniel think he knew?

Daniel turned abruptly to face Jack again. "You know you can trust me, you know I'd never betray a confidence. Is there anything you want to tell me about that second test? Anything?"

"Yeah, I know, that goes without saying, and no, there isn't, nothing TO say," Jack said confidently and the instant the words were out of his mouth and Daniel flinched back like he'd been slapped Jack knew the magnitude of the mistake he'd just made. He'd just lied to Daniel and Daniel knew he'd lied. Had known all along. Had trusted. Had frigging prompted him, for Chrissake. Blown this, Christ, he'd BLOWN this. Gotta get a lid on it. Contain the damage before -

"You would rather have died than lose Sam because you care about her a lot more than you're supposed to. The literal truth," Daniel said clinically, gripped in some strange, cool calm, aware only of his hammering heart and the biting metallic taste of fear crowding his throat. "You love Sam and Sam loves you and THAT is the literal truth. So forgive me if I don't know what THIS -" Daniel smacked Jack in the chest, hard - "is."

"Who told you?" Jack raged. "That BITCH Anise, right? RIGHT?"

Daniel gave Jack a pitying look. “No,” he said with absolute honesty, flooring Jack completely. Jack couldn’t even see Freya and Anise as individuals, couldn’t even see that as a lack in himself. “Of course it’s easier to go postal over that than it is to deal with the real issue, which is you lying to me, and to yourself. If you’d just told me the truth, Jack,” he said sadly. “I could have taken that. I would have known that you being here is honestly meant, that you were giving me – us – a fair chance. As it is – ” he shrugged helplessly.

“As it is?” Jack parroted, unable to believe it had gone to shit so fast, not able to think a single coherent thought but he was totally screwed here.

“I think the deciding factor for your presence here is availability,” Daniel said gently.

“I don’t want Carter!” Jack snarled, stung. “I want YOU.”

“You made that apparent from the first time you walked through my door,” Daniel snapped back. “Sorry I didn’t put out on demand.”

Jack backed away, out of range, before he did something stupid like grab Daniel and shake him ‘til he turned blue and LISTENED. “I do NOT love Carter.”

“The Zatarc detector and Sam disagree,” Daniel said calmly. He was still feeling way too calm here, he was probably going to shatter into a million pieces but he was riding this eye in the storm while it lasted, grateful for even this small mercy of coherency.

“They’re WRONG. She heard what she wanted to hear, NOT what I said. I never said I loved her,” Jack said desperately, “You have to believe me.”

“I do?” Daniel queried gently. “Why? You stood right here and lied to me. Lied right to my face with a smile on yours. Lied so well I would have swallowed every word if I hadn’t known the truth.”

“The truth in this case is a lie.” Jack groaned. He didn’t know what the hell he was talking about, he just needed to FIX this. Couldn’t fix it if he couldn’t get a fucking word in edgewise.

“Right now I can’t tell one from the other and until I know, I don’t want to see you,” Daniel said flatly.

“What?” Jack gasped.

“I don’t know who and what you want, Jack, and I don’t think you do either. I’m not going to be the one you make do with because you can’t have who you really want. I’m not the remedy for your frustration or loneliness.”

“Can’t we talk about this?” Jack hated the whine in his voice. “You’re not giving me a chance to explain. You’re NOT listening to me.”

“It’s MY fault you lied to me?” Daniel gasped, angry for the first time, more angry than hurt, and maybe that was a mercy too. “Go home, Jack. Go home and get back to me when you’ve grown the hell up.” He stalked out of the kitchen and snatched up Jack’s coat on his way to wrench open the door.

Jack followed Daniel, what choice did he have? Daniel was angry and hurt, and he had a right to be both. Maybe when he was calmer – Jack took his coat, hating that Daniel flinched away from the touch of his fingers, flinched away from him. He backed out, still staring, still hoping Daniel would cut him slack he didn’t deserve.

“Jack?” Daniel said suddenly.

“Yeah?” Jack stiffened, hoping.

“I’d like my key back,” Daniel said steadily, trying not to see the flush raging across Jack’s too pale face, hating himself for almost – ALMOST – caving and letting this go, taking what he could get. He didn’t ask for much, and surely simple honesty wasn’t more than Jack should be able to give? Just an acknowledgement, that’s all he’d asked for.

Jack removed the key ring from his pocket and stripped Daniel’s key from it with swift, jerking movements, pointedly refused to ask for his own key in return. He could fix this. He could. Once Daniel was calmer and they could talk and he could explain –

Daniel carefully closed the door in Jack’s face and locked it. After a moment, he shot the bolts.

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A known, welcomed presence slowly filled Teal’c’s senses, lifting him swiftly and surely to consciousness. “DanielJackson,” he acknowledged confidently, opening his eyes. “You are unwell,” he said at once, carefully noting the pallor, the lines of strain on his friend’s face.

Daniel’s smile was pitiable. Teal’c frowned, and the frown grew as Daniel tried once again to insist he was ‘fine’. “You are not,” Teal’c contradicted sternly.

Daniel sighed. “I’ll be fine,” he offered carefully. He was punchy from lack of sleep and a mind he couldn’t drag away from Jack. He was furious with himself for nursing the phone most of the night, his finger poised on the last digit in Jack’s number, hanging up time after time before he was tempted to press it. Pathetic. Hopeless. His timing was as flawless as ever. The optimal time for Daniel to realise he was irredeemably in love with Jack was of course AFTER he’d broken up with him, booted him out the door and bolted it

for added emphasis. The only appreciable difference this made was that Daniel was sick with misery and fighting himself as hard as he was fighting Jack.

Daniel's life had become so focused on SG-1, his friends, who had become in many ways his family, almost without him realising it. This mess with Jack and Sam was cutting him off from two of the most important people in his life, and maybe it was ridiculous, maybe it was childish, but he felt the need to be with someone who hadn't changed, who didn't have any kind of hidden agenda. Teal'c was always completely straight with Daniel, and even if they didn't have that comfortable familiarity he shared with Jack, and with Sam, they were friends, and Daniel needed that right now, so he'd called in to Teal'c's quarters to collect him for the briefing.

"How may I be of assistance?" Teal'c offered without hesitation, touched when Daniel's face melted to softness.

"You can't help, not this time, Teal'c," Daniel said gently, thawing a little under Teal'c's warm, certain support. Jack could learn a thing or three about maturity and honesty, right here, from this man.

Teal'c rose smoothly to his feet, Daniel following. With two long strides, Teal'c closed the distance between them. He laid his hands on Daniel's shoulders and smiled. "Know that I am your friend, Daniel. It pains me to see you unhappy." Daniel's eyes widened and a flush spread across his cheeks. Teal'c was caught for a moment in admiration of his friend's eyes. The Tau'ri believed that the eyes were the windows to the soul. Looking into Daniel's, Teal'c could not disagree, for Daniel's soul was as bright and true as his eyes. Teal'c stepped away and bowed to his friend. No more needed to be said. Daniel knew now help was here for him if he desired to seek it.

"Thanks, Teal'c," Daniel murmured.

Teal'c felt no thanks were needed. It was as always his pleasure to be with his friend. "It is time to attend the briefing," Teal'c acknowledged, opening the door and urging Daniel to precede him.

Daniel settled into step at Teal'c's side, comforted by the silent, solid support Teal'c unstintingly offered them all. As they walked into the briefing room, he felt insane optimism rise. Maybe things wouldn't be so bad, maybe Jack would – Daniel faltered for a moment, crucified by the unguarded look on Sam's face as she glanced to Jack, and away, and back again as if she couldn't bear anything else in her sight.

Three – three was a crowd.

Jack knew the moment Daniel walked in the room, just knew. He turned away from Jacob almost mid-sentence, screw protocol, he had to see with his own eyes Daniel was okay. A single, swift glance was enough to tell him Daniel was far from okay, was in fact suffering, and Christ, if Jack thought he'd beaten himself up as much as he could for this whole

fucking fiasco, he realised that was NOTHING, nothing to the look he'd put in Daniel's eyes.

Teal'c saw the single betraying glance from O'Neill to Daniel and knew at once the source of his friend's misery. He was stepping between them before he knew what he was about, some instinct overriding the duty he owed O'Neill. O'Neill was also his friend; he was not a threat. Teal'c saw that the moment of connection between Daniel and O'Neill had been broken, and he sat beside Daniel without hesitation. Daniel was safely distant from O'Neill, with Teal'c at his left, and the general at his right.

Teal'c noted that O'Neill was quick to seat himself directly opposite Daniel. Teal'c turned slightly toward Daniel, to observe the effect of this action on his friend. Daniel was obviously distressed by O'Neill's presence and scrutiny and he was trying to conceal this fact. However, Daniel's bowed head and preoccupation with his nervously clasping fingers, his desperate attempts to avoid meeting O'Neill's eyes betrayed his inner turmoil. This was unacceptable. Teal'c decided would speak with O'Neill at the conclusion of the briefing.

As Major Carter was taking her place at O'Neill's side, Teal'c saw Daniel stiffen. Teal'c turned to watch Daniel more closely, saw his friend frowning and looking constantly from O'Neill to Major Carter. Teal'c also noted that Daniel refused to make eye contact with O'Neill, despite O'Neill's scrutiny of Daniel. From this tension between the two men, and from Daniel's reaction to Major Carter's presence at O'Neill's side, Teal'c could only conclude that through some contrivance - his eyes weighed Anise, the only one present in that room whom Teal'c could imagine would discuss those matters - Daniel knew the truth that had been revealed. It also seemed he was hurt by it. That was unfortunate. This was not a hurt Teal'c could heal, but he could and would offer his support to Daniel. It had not occurred to him that Daniel had stronger feelings for O'Neill than friendship. Teal'c considered this at length, and was surprised to realise that this knowledge did not please him. It would please him - less - if O'Neill was to return those feelings. Teal'c felt sorrow for Daniel's pain, but he could not be anything but glad O'Neill's heart was apparently set on Major Carter. Teal'c watched O'Neill watching Daniel with angry, coveting eyes. The sight O'Neill's furious, focused attention on Daniel was neither seemly, nor pleasing.

No. Teal'c was not pleased. If O'Neill thought to have both, he was mistaken. Daniel deserved a lover who was not conflicted in his desires, who would truly know and value all that Daniel was. O'Neill was not that man.

For the first time, Teal'c was moved to wonder if he himself was.

It took a while to sink in, but eventually Sam realised how pale Daniel was, and was conscience-stricken. She'd hustled him out the door last night without so much as a word, let alone a hug. She sighed. Too wrapped up in the colonel and her own needs. She caught Daniel's eye and smiled hopefully. Daniel seemed to hesitate for a moment, then his face softened and he smiled back. A little tentative, sure, but that was nothing out of

the ordinary for Daniel smiling. Sam relaxed. Whatever was bothering him, it wasn't her brusqueness. It was a shame she couldn't talk to Daniel about the colonel – Jack – and what had happened, but they'd promised to keep it between themselves. Teal'c and Janet knew, of course, but Janet had invoked medical confidentiality and since the general respected her opinion, they'd gotten away with it. The positive test results were the important thing, and Anise emphatically cleared them. No sign of Freya this morning for some reason. Sam noted that Anise was managing to keep a pretty close eye on Daniel, even though she was sitting to the right of Dad and as far away from Daniel as she could be and still be at the table. Everyone was watching Daniel, even the colonel.

Sam glanced up at her father, pleased he'd chosen to sit by her side instead of the general's. He and Selmac had mourned Martouf's loss with her, and they'd both understood what it cost her to do it. In the end she was choiceless, she could only do what Martouf had asked of her. The grief was there, was still raw and weighing heavy on her mind, and perhaps the pain would never fully go, but she had been able to gain some semblance of calm, a little perspective, with her father's help.

The debriefing was curiously low-key after all that had happened. Reassured that his personnel were safe, along with the Alliance, the general's only concern was learning all they could from Martouf's autopsy in order to combat the Zatarc threat.

"I'd like to assist on the autopsy," Janet was insisting.

"That will not be necessary," Anise said smoothly. "We have all the necessary equipment on Vorash. Your medical technology is unsophisticated."

Sam suppressed a sigh. Janet had disliked and distrusted Anise from the moment she'd laid eyes on her and the pair of them were beyond hiding this was emphatically mutual. Some their animosity was based on professional rivalry, of course, but a small part was also due to the interest Anise had shown in a certain blue-eyed, gorgeous and wholly adorable expert on ancient cultures. Even the colonel had bristled during that first briefing. Nothing like his reaction to Ke'ra, but – Sam shifted a little, cutting off an uncomfortable train of thought. The colonel was ludicrously over-protective of Daniel. Like – well, like now. Daniel was a little pale and a little upset and Air Force life as they knew it took a time out until the colonel – until they were sure he was okay. This was not new.

Sam eased back in her seat and eyed the colonel cautiously. He was very quiet, almost subdued. Pretty much focused on Daniel, which wasn't doing him much good, because Daniel was focusing anywhere but on the colonel. Ah. So that was it. Daniel wasn't upset with her at all, he was mad at the colonel. They must have been fighting over something, and it was clear now to Sam the colonel obviously had something MAJOR to apologise for, or he'd be bulling his way through it like he usually did.

Damn. Sam jerked upright. She'd missed the decision, wool-gathering. Janet's tight lips told Sam there was going to be an autopsy, but Janet wouldn't be assisting. "Dad? You'll make sure we get all the test results, right?"

"Sure, Sam," Jacob said easily. "We'll send you all the pertinent data."

Sam relaxed, hoping that was enough for Janet. It wasn't and apparently it wasn't enough for the colonel either.

Jack glanced the length of the table to Anise and ground his teeth. Oh, yeah, totally obvious who'd fucked him over and why. Anise wasn't about to 'suffer' while Freya chased Jack, not when she was all hot and intellectual for Daniel, so she'd done her damndest to take Jack out of the equation. "And of course you're the ones who decide exactly what data is 'pertinent'," he said smoothly, smile as sweet as poison. Boned again. He'd like to take that bitch outside and -

"I'm sure you'll do all you can," the general smoothed over the awkward moment, looking daggers at the colonel.

"We will leave immediately," Anise announced. "We must not delay or valuable data will be lost."

Sam gritted her teeth on a sharp reply. It hadn't taken long for Anise to forget about Martouf's noble sacrifice and see just another test subject.

"Sorry, Sam," Jacob said softly, paying a comforting hand over hers. "I've already stayed longer than I should have."

Sam returned the clasp, sighing. "I understand."

"If there's nothing further?" Hammond asked. "Thank you all for doing your duty in the most trying of circumstances. Dismissed. Anise, Jacob, a word in my office if you don't mind."

Jack waited until the general withdrew, Anise and Jacob following, waited just too long to catch Daniel, who was up and off without a backward glance, Teal'c hard on his heels. He stared after them for a moment, not sure what to do. Pushing might just get him even further out in the cold than he already was, but he couldn't sit idly by while Daniel was this miserable. Aah, fuck it. Jack headed off purposefully after Daniel.

"Sir?"

"Later, Carter," he said brusquely. If he picked up the pace he might head Daniel off at the elevator. Jack broke into a not-quite trot and closed the gap rapidly, finally glimpsing Teal'c as he rounded the last corner. Teal'c was looking right back at him, so there was no mistaking the way Teal'c coolly allowed the elevator door to close in Jack's face.

For fuck's sake. What now?

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"We'll TAKE the mission!" Jack yelled. He threw up his hands. "Sir," he said more softly. More - rationally.

Hammond shot him a puzzled look. Jack wasn't surprised. He was proposing the sort of mission where he usually had to be dragged up the ramp screaming. He was already there. Three DAYS of 'light duties'. Three days of unremitting colonel torture. The only view he got of Daniel was Daniel's shapely behind disappearing at impressive speed, or a momentary glimpse of Daniel's face as Teal'c loomed up between them. So he'd cracked. He'd pulled rank and privilege. Jack couldn't get within spitting distance of Daniel, so Colonel O'Neill had summoned Dr Jackson to his office. Fat lot of good it had done him. He got Dr Jackson all right. He got Teal'c too, blandly impassive and immovable.

As a result of that completely brilliant tactical move, Daniel was now in some whole other realm of Not Speaking To Him for shamelessly abusing his authority in order to 'get some'. Jack got the gist of that, even if it was shouted at him through Daniel's resolutely locked apartment door, got that loud and clear on the occasion of his committing major disaster number two while trying to rectify major disaster number one. He was only grateful Teal'c had been back at the ranch for that one. Not that it had made the slightest bit of difference. Daniel still wasn't speaking to him.

Carter was though. Oh, joy. More than that, Carter was perky. Flirty. Truly terrifying. She was SMILING. Every goddamn time she laid eyes on him.

Jack needed a distraction and he needed it NOW. P4X-639 was the answer to his prayers. Science stuff for Carter, the sky was an exciting colour or something, weird-ass Stonehenge look-alike for Daniel to play with. Crowd pleaser.

"Colonel, this is not a high priority mission. SG-15 surveyed that world almost two weeks ago. They returned with digital photographs of some writings on the wall of the structure surrounding the Stargate and reported that an alien archaeologist was investigating the site," Hammond said patiently. "It's not going anywhere."

Kinda like Jack and Daniel. SG-1 was going because Daniel wanted to go. Carter too, but that was unimportant in the grand scheme of Jack 'getting some', and Jack didn't want any from Carter.

"Daniel thinks the alien text is the language of the Ancients," Jack tempted.

Hammond shot him a 'so?' look.

"I'm concerned about plummeting morale," Jack said flatly. He was. His. Daniel's too. "The team needs to get back in the saddle and the kids will have fun in ways not comprehensible to mortal man." Cut me some slack here, Sir. I'll beg if I have to.

"Dr Jackson still seems quiet," Hammond mused.

"Haven't had to tell him to shut up for days, Sir," Jack encouraged. Jack took a deep breath and perjured himself without hesitation. "General, he was seen in the Commissary drinking chamomile tea."

"You have a go."

Sheesh! "I'll brief the team, Sir."

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Ah. Of course. Not like he could catch a BREAK here or anything.

"Daniel. Carter."

They had to be together. They had to be in Daniel's office. Together. Side by side. Two pairs of huge blue eyes fixed on him. One very soft. The other bordering on actively hostile. It was just Jack's frigging luck that Carter was the one making with the doe eyes and what was it with the SMILING? He'd been tickling Daniel's tonsils for several weeks and Daniel had NEVER smiled at him like that. And of course, Daniel wasn't missing the soft eyes or the smile and the edge was coming off the anger, shading back into hurt, which hurt Jack too, because a feisty Daniel giving him hell might be - well, giving him hell, but it also gave him hope that they would get over this. When Jack had 'suffered' enough, and Daniel was sure he was the only tackle in Jack's play book, and maybe Jack should just suffer more OBVIOUSLY.

Or something.

"I've got news," Jack said jovially, shoving his hands in his pockets and his back against the wall. "We have a go for P4X-639."

"Really?" Daniel snapped bolt upright, forgetting his woes for a moment. "Jack, that's great. That's - you arranged this?" he asked softly. That was thoughtful. Nice, even.

Jack inclined his head graciously. "Sure. You wanted to go," he said gently, risking a small smile.

"Thank you, Sir," Carter beamed.

Jack sighed as Daniel's pleasure dimmed. "What was it you were so excited about?" he said absently to Carter, not really caring. "Corona something?"

"Not the beer, Jack," Daniel sniped, trying to make up for the inappropriate amount of gratitude he'd just displayed.

"Stick to translation, Thesaurus Boy. Leave the gratuitous insults to the grown-ups," Jack said equably, happy to see Daniel was in fighting shape.

Sam couldn't understand this odd feeling of exclusion. She was right here, they were talking, but it felt like there was a lot more going on than was actually being said. Things were still tense between the colonel and Daniel. "What kind of time frame are we looking at, Sir?"

"Day after tomorrow," Jack said pleasantly. That should hustle Carter's ass right out the door. She'd die at the stake before she handed in an unverified, un-proofread report for him to not read. Both Carter and Daniel froze, Daniel shooting a panic-stricken look at an over-stuffed manila folder bristling with post-it notes, Carter just looking panic-stricken.

"With your permission, Sir?"

Jack made a sweeping 'be my guest' gesture at Daniel's door. "Please," he said grandly, smirking as Carter exited at something close to a trot. Too easy.

Daniel opened his folder and looked blindly at the nearest photograph, all too aware of Jack lounging quite at his ease against the wall. Panicking slightly as Jack decided he'd be much more comfortable sitting down, and choosing to sit on the workbench next to Daniel. Jack's thigh was touching his arm. It would be chicken to move away too soon, which was what Jack was no doubt counting on. Carefully turning the photograph like he could actually see more than a blur, Daniel risked a cautious peek up. Jack was sitting there playing with his goddamn yo-yo, in what was clearly an act of deliberate provocation. "What do you want, Jack?" Daniel snapped.

"You," Jack said calmly. "You up for a forward pass?" he drawled lasciviously, making the yo-yo dance and quiver. "Or are you still tied in knots over this caring too much business?"

Daniel sat back in his chair and gaped up at Jack incredulously. "You make it sound like - like - " words failed him.

"Daniel, Carter is the one with the problem here, believe me. I do not love her," Jack said emphatically. "I got into this mess because I was trying to let her down easy in my own inimitable way and it blew up in my face."

"Oh?" Daniel asked cautiously, making a great fuss over his photo until Jack plucked it from his grasp and took his hands. "Oh," he said weakly. Jack was holding his hands. Jack was - Jack - oh God. "Stop."

“No,” Jack said pleasantly, lifting each trembling hand in turn to his lips and kissing it lingeringly.

“Please?”

Jack obligingly turned his attentions to the delicate tracery of blue veins at Daniel’s wrists.

Daniel swallowed hard. “W-what – “ His mind was blank. His blood was boiling and his mind was completely blank.

What? Jack wanted to get naked, take it over to the cot, and get sweaty, that’s what.

A tap on the door and a call of ‘DanielJackson’ heralded Teal’c’s inimitable presence. Jack unhurriedly released Daniel’s wrists, as close to angry with Teal’c as he could ever recall being. Was it fucking telepathy or something? It seemed to him Teal’c was every place Daniel was. Every single goddamn place, and it was ticking him off royally.

“O’Neill,” Teal’c acknowledged coolly. “Major Carter has apprised me of our mission to P4X-639. I wish to discuss the threat posed by the alien archaeologist already present at the site.”

“He’s an archaeologist,” Jack said as if that explained everything, threat-wise.

“Re-ally?” His archaeologist sought clarification in a dangerously soft voice.

Jack decided to seek exit. Fast. He hopped up. “Teal’c, you’re with me.” He waved Teal’c out ahead of him and paused for a moment at the door. “LATER, Daniel.”

“MUCH later, Jack,” Daniel snapped, eyes flashing.

“Cool. It’s a date,” Jack glanced out the door, hovering until Teal’c was – he hoped – safely out of earshot.

“It isn’t, and I’ve got bolts on my door,” Daniel said coldly.

“It is, and I’ve got a grenade,” Jack kept a careful eye on Teal’c. “Sooner or later you’ll have to see sense.”

“I’ve already SEEN sense and it’s telling me everything will be fine just so long as I don’t have to see YOU!”

“O’Neill.”

Aah, for God’s sake. “Gimme a minute, here, big guy.” Time. That’s all Jack needed. Time to get through to Daniel. “You can run, kid, but you can’t hide,” he said meaningfully.

"I'm AWED by your technique. Why waste your time on honesty and building trust when you can just go straight for THREATS?"

"I happen to love you, you little shit. GOD alone knows why!" Jack snarled. "Don't know what the fuck I did to deserve this."

"I'll ask Sam, shall I?" Daniel asked sweetly. "Compare notes."

"O'Neill!"

"Give me strength!" Jack howled, "What? WHAT?"

"Your garment is undone."

Jack glanced down automatically.

"Major Carter was correct," Teal'c said smoothly. "The men of the Tau'ri do indeed 'fall for it' every time."

"Aah, for cryin' out loud," Jack groaned, stalking down the hallway after Laughing Boy.

Daniel sat scowling at his door for what felt like hours. He'd been hurt. He'd been mad. Now? Now he wanted to get even. He wasn't going to run and he wasn't going to hide. If Jack needed help to make up his mind, decide who he really wanted, he was damned well going to get it. In spades.

With this mission deadline, they'd all be right here. On base. Simmering.

If Jack wanted Sam, Daniel wished him joy of her. Let him moon round the base after her like a lovesick teenager, if that's what he wanted. If Jack wanted Daniel, well, anything worthwhile had to be worked at. Had to be earned. Jack had a LOT of ground to make up. A LOT. He needed a MAJOR attitude adjustment, he needed a lesson in the evils of complacency, arrogance and dog-in-the manger possessiveness, and Daniel was just the man to teach him.

Daniel demanded honesty, trust and mutual respect and he was going to make Jack SUFFER until he got them.

The base wouldn't be big enough for the both of them.

The three of them.

Something - or someone - would have to give, and no way was it going to be HIM.

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Jack was just enjoying the hell out of his breakfast. The food and décor were just fine and dandy. Froot Loops in the Commissary. What more could any man ask to start his day, if he couldn't start his day with his archaeologist naked and begging for more of what he'd had the night before? The company and the conversation left a lot to be desired. A whole lot. He had his archaeologist. More or less. Daniel definitely had his game face on, and was being friendly. The lines of communication were open. Unfortunately, Jack couldn't do anything about that, because he also had Carter and she was being friendly too. She'd just asked Daniel, in a friendly way, how it went with Janet last night.

How did it go with Janet? With JANET? Jack had sat outside Daniel's building for FOUR hours last night and Daniel had been on a frigging DATE. With JANET? How did it go with Janet? Thanks for tabling the question, Carter. The public has a right to know. Four hours, the first of which was at ten pm. Daniel hadn't just gone out with Janet. He STAYED out. With Janet. HIS Daniel. With Janet. Had he mentioned Daniel was with Janet?

Just like Daniel had been with Teal'c, with Carter, with ROTHMAN, that one had been a joy, a TWO HOUR lecture on what Daniel suspected was the evolution of the Goa'uld, with SLIDES; with the general, and fortunately the calming effect of chamomile tea was something Daniel could discuss with fluency, which got Jack off that hook; with the self-defence instructor, Sergeant Julia Thomas, who had happily put Colonel O'Neill on his ASS a few times at Dr Jackson's request because he hadn't 'quite' got that move and it would help to SEE it, don't you think, Jack? Making with the melting, batting eyes and the soft husky voice and the gentle hand on his forearm that slammed all available blood straight down just before Jack was slammed straight down.

Jack was crazy about this guy who was driving him CRAZY. Look at the two of them side by side. Daniel and Carter. Carter and Daniel. Which one did he want? That wasn't in fucking question. He'd never wanted to yank Carter over his knee and smack some sense into her. It was taking every ounce of willpower he possessed NOT to hurdle over this table and do JUST that to Daniel's lush, inviting ass. Just the thought of having that perfectly pert behind under his hands made the roof of his mouth go dry, and could Daniel NOT lick his lips like THAT? Could Daniel NOT be enthusiastic? Daniel was supposed to be MISERABLE. He was supposed to sit at home and stew, stew until he softened up and Jack could tell him how things were going to be.

Like that was going to happen. This was DANIEL. Too easy. Too frigging easy to just sit there and stew like a good boy and WAIT for Jack. At home. Alone. Why wait at home - ALONE - when you can retaliate? With Janet.

Daniel was with JANET? Doing WHAT? Exactly. APART from driving Jack CRAZY. People were going to DIE if this went on. If he didn't get Daniel naked and sweaty SOON he was going to be sharing the pain, probably some place he could share the pain with an MP5.

Naked. He'd seen Daniel naked. Yesterday. After the sparring. Shy little Dannyboy dropping his towel and sauntering past Jack towards the shower stall totally, gloriously bare-ass naked. Naked and glistening and gorgeous and swaying and asking how Jack's ass was, **PATTING** Jack's ass and giving him hell with those 'you don't get to have me but just look what you're missing' eyes. Jack looked. Put a gun to his head he still couldn't have looked at anything **BUT** Daniel's beautiful behind and did he **HAVE** to think about that **NOW**? Over Froot Loops?

That ass had been out on the town with Janet. Jack scooped randomly into his bowl, eyeing his errant lover vengefully. His lover, in crying need of a lesson Jack would be only too **HAPPY** to teach. No, really, his pleasure. If you play with fire, little boy, you can expect to get **BURNED**.

"Anyway, I'm sorry but that just happens to be the way I feel about it," Daniel said passionately.

Jack zoned back in abruptly. Daniel getting passionate about any old thing was usually enough to capture his attention. He could be dead and he'd still be taking a quiet interest in a passionate Daniel.

"What do you think?" Daniel asked expectantly.

"What?" Jack asked blankly. "What do I think?" I think can take Janet. I think I can take **YOU**. **AND** your ass. Just please, God, let it be **SOON**.

~~FINIS~~