

Title: Sleeping Dogs Part One

Author: Biblio

Rating: PG-13

Pairing: Jack and Daniel

Category: First Time. Friendship. Romance.

Series: Sleeping Dogs

Season/Spoilers: Season 5.

Synopsis: Daniel and Jack fail to let sleeping dogs lie.

Warnings: Kick-Ass Adorability.



## Sleeping Dogs Part One

### A slash story by Biblio

"Did you bring it?" This was Daniel's sole greeting to Jack as he jumped lithely from his truck.

Jack waved a MacDonald's take-out bag in answer. "Any particular reason you needed to eat a burger out here at Chez Nowhere?" he asked curiously.

"It's not for me," Daniel said impatiently as he snatched the bag from Jack. Opening it up to let the meaty smells escape, he walked back up the narrow strip of gravel that bordered the road, aware of Jack prowling along behind him. Naturally, there was no way in hell Jack was going to kick off three days of precious, hard-earned downtime by driving up into Pike National Forest to give Daniel a Big Mac and not stick around to drive him nuts about it. Not that it took much for Jack to make him nuts these days. Breathing would do it.

Jack and he were - well, Daniel wasn't sure what they were. Too close, maybe. Too -- aware. The almost uncomfortable intensity between them made Daniel jumpy whenever he was around him.

"Did you get the chicken burger too?" he asked, striving for a natural tone.

"Even super-sized it for you," Jack promised solemnly.

"I didn't know what he would like," Daniel made excuse as he hunkered down and opened up what he hoped would be appetising enough to tempt the little stray out of the bushes. Not that he was an expert on canine cuisine, or in fact, on canines. They weren't good conversationalists: that he knew.

"He?"

"Or she," Daniel said vaguely as Jack hunkered down too. His attention was fixed on the bushes ahead of them. "I couldn't tell."

"Not your average date, then," Jack commented, his voice rich with amusement.

"I don't think I hit him, but he was limping when he went into the bushes," Daniel explained worriedly. "I couldn't just leave him, Jack." What exactly was he looking to Jack for? Permission? Daniel sighed. It really did matter much too much to him what Jack thought of him. "He looks thin, and he's so little," he appealed directly to Jack's oftentimes buried better side.

"Have you tried calling him?" Jack asked readily, apparently needing nothing more in the way of explanation.

"He'll come so close, almost close enough to touch, then he gets scared and backs off," Daniel admitted, frustrated.

"Tell me about it," Jack said softly, looking right at Daniel.

Daniel's face flamed, his heart thudding painfully as Jack aggravatingly framed feelings he definitely wasn't ready to face, those deep, deep eyes soft with invitation. Before Daniel could come up with any kind of response other than blushing like a schoolgirl, he caught a glimpse of a small face peeping cautiously out from behind the bristling bush straight ahead of them. Daniel opened the Big Mac box, his fingers slow and easy. "I gave him a drink earlier, while I was waiting for you. He's so thin, though."

"You said," Jack reminded him gently.

"I thought the food would help," Daniel rushed on, tearing off a piece of burger to rest on his fingers.

"If he doesn't want the chicken, can I?" Jack hinted hopefully, fingering the warm box.

"No!"

"I don't get anything for coming all this way?"

"You get to go away again."

"Charming."

"He might not come to me if he sees you looming at him, armed to the teeth," Daniel fretted.

"Er, speaking of that," Jack muttered a trifle reluctantly. "Don't hate me."

Daniel glanced up in time to see Jack draw his Beretta, his brows snapping together. "There are times when I really don't like you," he blurted out in a low, heated rush.

"I know," Jack agreed peaceably, giving him a soothing pat on the shoulder. "But I'm not risking exposing you to rabies, either way," he added firmly. "I can't take any chances with you, Daniel. I know it drives you nuts."

Daniel snorted irritably.

"But," Jack went on firmly, "I have to be sure." He backed smoothly off to one side, then froze in position.

A rustle caught Daniel's attention before he could annihilate Jack for his overprotective colonel crap. He called to the dog, making his voice soft and soothing while he rested his hand on the ground, palm up, the burger meat slithering greasily down his fingers.

"Here, boy," Daniel crooned as the little dog ventured tentatively into view. It was brown and white, with big eyes, one ear perked up, the other flopping, while its fur was unkempt and the curly tail looked too big for its body. It seemed gaunt to Daniel's anxious eyes.

"Good boy," Daniel praised it lavishly as it slunk a few steps towards him. "C'mon, boy, just a little closer. Good boy, goood..." He murmured soft, wordless encouragement, coaxing the dog into inching forward, its ridiculous tail beginning to wag as it scented the meat. Hunger winning out, it darted forward, its limp pronounced, to nose at the burger on his fingers. Daniel eased his hand clear as the dog gulped down the meat, turning to slide the open box within its reach.

He slowly, slowly sat on the ground, stretching his legs out either side of the dog, letting it get used to his presence before he dared to delicately touch it. Though it shied nervously from him, it didn't whine or snarl at him. Encouraged he wasn't frightening the dog, Daniel began to pet it gently, feeling choked and angry at the way it shivered beneath his hands.

"He has a collar!" he fired accusingly at Jack as he hunkered down beside him again. The dog cowered from Jack's presence, cuddling against Daniel's leg. He stroked it soothingly as Jack undid the collar, nimbly tweaking it away to let the trembling dog eat in peace.

"No tag," Jack reported, utterly unsurprised by this. "I guess some upstanding citizen tossed him out of his car and left him to die out here." Daniel gaped up at him, his eyes inexpressibly shocked. Grimacing at the impact of yet another life lesson on his all-too sensitive love, Jack scooped up the take-out bag and retrieved the water Daniel had asked

him to fetch. He poured some of it into the lid of the Big Mac box, then sat neatly on the ground to watch Daniel watch the dog drink greedily.

Jack sat patiently, smiling as Daniel petted the ugly, skinny little stray, his soft voice flowing in constant murmuring reassurance. Finally the dog laid its filthy head on Daniel's thigh, heaving a sigh, too exhausted to fight as Daniel picked it up in tender hands and cradled it to his chest.

"Now, you both have fleas," Jack pronounced solemnly.

Brooding, Daniel looked down at the dog. "You think someone really tossed him away, like trash?"

Jack held up the collar in mute evidence. Daniel's vivid face flushed, an anger there Jack had seen a few times, right before someone died. "We'd better get this mutt to the vet," he suggested mildly. This show of canine consideration found immediate favour. Daniel scrambled up and looked expectantly at him. He was, of course, fully justified in his confidence Jack could fix this. For one thing, there was no way Jack was going to miss a moment of this escapade, especially not the moment Daniel realised he had to give up the dog. Or not.

He called the SGC, shamelessly abusing his rank to order a security detail to drive around the mountain and take Daniel's car home for him. Daniel frowned slightly over this high-handed interference, sparing a glance from the dog, who was showing some smarts and making with the cutesy finger-licking. Not that Jack blamed him. He'd be licking too, if Daniel Jackson was holding on to him like that.

It would happen soon, he hoped. He knew Daniel was attracted to him; it seemed as if every word, every look they shared was loaded, layered with too much meaning. Jack was sure Daniel was beginning to understand and accept the deepening feeling between them, that he was coming closer to trusting it. Jack knew his friend; his gut told him if he pushed, he would get Daniel into bed. Sex was only part of what Jack wanted, though, so he was determined to wait until Daniel let him know it was okay to make a move. Or made a move himself.

"I thought you might want to hold the dog," Jack suggested blandly, shepherding Daniel and his fragile passenger towards the truck. "He's scared shitless as it is and some dogs don't like cars on a good day." He gallantly held the truck door open for Daniel to clamber in.

"Especially if his last experience was being tossed out of one," Daniel agreed, biting off the words with an angry snap as he climbed into the passenger seat. Juggling his feebly protesting bundle of scruffy fur, he got his seatbelt fastened and settled the dog on his lap, crooning at him as he stroked him. "What are we waiting for?" he asked in surprise when Jack didn't immediately close the door.

"You ever owned a dog?"

Daniel looked back down at his stray, who yawned cavernously. "No," he said stiffly.

You do now, Jack thought, certain the odds of Daniel being able to let this stubborn little scrap go were somewhere between slim to none. He wouldn't have spent an hour on his knees on the side of the road trying to coax the mutt to him if he could've walked away. "I love dogs," he commented as he closed the truck door and walked around to the driver side, Daniel watching him all the way. Sometimes, Jack knew which buttons to push.

"Do you know a good vet?" Daniel asked him as soon as he opened the door.

"I know an expensive vet," Jack answered placidly. "Laurie Lowandowski. She looks after Ferretti's menagerie."

"I think he's hurt," Daniel pointed out anxiously. "He whines when I touch this leg, this front one."

"There's no obvious wound," Jack replied reassuringly. "Could be an infected cut, something like that. Laurie will check him out thoroughly, get X-Rays, run some tests, give him shots, the works."

"Shots?"

"Rabies and distemper, probably dose him for Bortadella, that's kennel cough, then when the test results come back he'll need meds for Heartworm - that's a killer - Lyme disease, worms and parasites."

"Oh," Daniel said in a flat little voice, his hands cradling protectively over the dog's back.

"Laurie's great," Jack promised. "He's a stray, Daniel. We don't know why he was abandoned, or when, or what he's picked up while he's been alone out here. Laurie will check him for everything and fix him up the best she can."

"Do we need to call ahead to the vet? To Laurie?" Daniel asked after they'd been driving for a while. The exhausted dog was sleeping restlessly, whining each time his injured leg was jarred. It couldn't be helped on the tight winding mountain road and Daniel was grateful when the highway smoothed out, the city sprawling ahead of them. He hated seeing the dog suffering and not be able to do anything for him except hold him and talk to him.

"Her clinic runs until 1900 weekday nights," Jack said casually. "We'll make it. No way she'll turn the ugly little mutt away, not when he's in pain."

"Thanks," Daniel blurted out gratefully.

"My pleasure."

"He's not ugly," Daniel argued distractedly, thrown by Jack's evident sincerity. He found he was staring at Jack at the same moment he realised Jack was well aware it and staring back, a satisfied smile tugging at his lips. Daniel hurriedly dropped his eyes to the sleek head nuzzled against his stomach. "He has character," he decided defiantly.

"And you have sucker written all over you," Jack informed him briskly as he turned off the highway for a short drive to a long, low-slung white building, its lights blazing. The parking lot was near deserted, allowing them to pull up close to the entrance.

Daniel slid out of the truck, carefully carrying the dog. He was encouraged that it seemed to be taking to him, lying quietly in his arms, never showing a hint of aggression, though it was scared and whimpering. He was hard on Jack's heels as he led the way into the building, going ahead to hold the door open for him.

"We're clo--" The receptionist's weary 'don't-you-people-have-homes-to-go-to?!' call was bitten off mid-word as Jack ushered Daniel in. "But we have time for one more patient," she cooed, smoothly changing gear, her eyes lingering appreciatively on the beautiful boy and his dear little doggie.

Jack scowled at her. She smiled blandly back at him.

"Name?" she asked Daniel sweetly, her slut-red painted nails poised over her keyboard.

"I don't know," Daniel answered, looking down interrogatively. He was touched when the dog looked back up at him. Daniel didn't think any part of this dog was a hound, but everything else, even the floppy ears, reminded him irresistibly of the dog in the book, the first book he read without his mother, the only dog of his childhood.

It was Jack's turn to smile. "Dr. Jackson," he supplied, resting a casual arm around Daniel's shoulders. The receptionist looked from his smug face to Daniel's oblivious one and rolled her eyes as Jack reeled off Daniel's address and other inanities for the record.

"Will we have to wait long?" Daniel asked as politely as possible, rapidly growing impatient with proceedings. "He's hurt."

"Some waste of skin abandoned him in Pike National Forest," Jack said coldly.

The receptionist looked suitably shocked and pissed, but Jack sensed she was cranking up her reaction for the benefit of the sensitive, dishevelled, handsome young Dr. Jackson. She buzzed through to the surgery, explained the situation rapidly and seemed disappointed when Laurie opened the door and came straight out.

Daniel found himself eye-to-eye with a fifty-ish woman with a helmet of grey curls, ferocious hazel eyes and the kind of build he associated with Teamsters. She marched him into the surgery, firing questions at him he couldn't answer.

"Jack!"

"Cut him some slack, Laurie," Jack ordered her as he planted a smacker on her cheek. "He's a rookie dog owner."

Laurie's expression changed from one of contempt at Daniel's ignorance to astonished pity. She patted him on the arm and got him to lay his - the - dog down on the table for examination. Daniel hovered where he could be seen and talked quietly to his - the - dog as Laurie took his temperature, listened to his heart and lungs, checked his stomach and glands. Then his mouth, ears, eyes, skin and paws, the whole time firing explanations Daniel didn't understand and questions he still couldn't answer.

Next, Laurie took X-rays, stool samples, urine samples and bloods, leaving the dog looking as dazed as Daniel felt, crying steadily now, begging Daniel with his eyes. Daniel stroked him while Laurie thoroughly checked his leg and began to painstakingly clean the small, infected cut, her hands deft and quick. He felt like a murderer when a pained yelp answered the shots Jack had warned him about. Rabies, distemper, parvo, a good dose of antibiotics to fight the infection.

Finally, Laurie reeled off a terrifying list of instructions. Daniel was to give his dog the pills twice a day, the ointment for his wound four times a day, keep him from licking it off, bathe him, de-flea him, worm him. Unimpressed by Daniel's confusion, Laurie handed him a little book called How to care for your dog, ordered him to study it before he did anything to his dog, then she gave Jack all the pills, ointments and shampoos, apparently deciding he was the one competent to look after both dog and owner. Only then was Daniel allowed to pick up his dog, feeling he was getting in a lot deeper than he'd been prepared for.

"What are you going to call him?" Laurie cheerfully asked him as she led them back to reception.

"I - um..."

"I forgot to mention what a ruthless bitch Laurie is," Jack said dryly. "Don't let her guilt-trip you into keeping that mangy mongrel."

Laurie looked complacently at Daniel. "Honey, when you spend three hundred and fifty bucks on a dog, you own that dog, and the dog knows it too."

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"Elvis?" Jack repeated incredulously as he set down the large bag of canine essentials on Daniel's dining table.

"Elvis," Daniel said defensively. "There was a dog in a book I read when I was young. I've never forgotten him, how - how real he was," he explained inadequately, hopelessly embarrassed at being caught out in childish reminiscence.

"Then Elvis it is," Jack agreed equably, smiling gently at him. "Why don't you put Elvis down, let him sniff around, make himself at home peeing on your priceless antique furniture?"

"His leg hurts."

"Not as much as he's making out." Jack took a slightly resistant Daniel by the shoulders and looked him straight in his big beautiful baby blues. "You need to let him know who's boss, Daniel, or this little bugger will own your sorry behind," he promised solemnly, his eyes dancing.

"I know you're not talking about the dog," Daniel sniffed, well aware of his alleged - by an extremely bitter, mouthy colonel - impact on the chain of command. Also, apparently, on the sanity of the extremely bitter, mouthy colonel. And his hair colour, too. "I have no sympathy, Jack," he countered. "You had your shot at me doing the yes-colonel, no-colonel, how-high-colonel thing and you blew it."

"*Doing* the yes-colonel thing?" Jack hooted incredulously.

"Trying," Daniel amended fair-mindedly. "Not that it matters much, not when I follow your orders anyway. Even the really stupid ones," he reminded Jack.

"Stupid?" Jack's volume rose impressively.

His hackles rising with Jack's voice, Elvis barked at him.

"Good boy!" a delighted Daniel praised him proudly.

"Oh, God!" Jack groaned, not about to get into a pissing contest with a pocket-sized protector, especially one he would lose. As hard as he was fighting it, he could *see* the cuteness. He cursed himself for his susceptibility to man and beast.

"See how Elvis listens to me?" Daniel said happily, wanting to share the thrill. "How good he is? He's a smart boy."

Try petting me like that, you want to see just how good a boy *I* can be, Jack thought, barely restraining himself from voicing it.

"He whines less than you do, too," Daniel observed impishly.

"Elvis needs to learn this is his space too," Jack announced firmly, ignoring this childish provocation. "Put him down and let him rip."

Somewhat reluctantly accepting Jack's expertise as a long-time pet owner and more importantly, a proven dog-loving sap, Daniel carefully put Elvis down. Elvis looked up at him pathetically, then sat on his foot.

Jack sighed. He was fighting a terrible urge to hug them both, especially as Daniel was melting visibly in response to the dog's dependency. Jack had a feeling Elvis wasn't going to know what hit him in the TLC stakes.

"He's scared," Daniel made excuse as he instantly bent down and picked Elvis up again, cuddling him in to his chest. He sat at the table, petting Elvis comfortingly as Jack unpacked everything he'd bought in his lightning raid on the pet store in the Pilgrim Street mall on the way home from the vets.

"Dog food, the ridiculously expensive gourmet kind, several varieties as instructed," Jack checked off.

"I don't know what his tastes are yet," Daniel explained. "Although," he added hopefully, "he did eat a Big Mac so he can't be all that hard to please."

"Cereals to mix with the dog food, or more likely, the filet mignon you'll be sneaking the mutt the minute my back is turned. A dog food bowl." Jack held this up for inspection, then rapidly unpacked the rest. "A water bowl. A collar and lead. Stuff for bathing him. Dog litter box. A dog basket with a comfy blankie." He tilted the basket so Elvis could sniff it.

"The tartan will give him nightmares," Daniel criticised, frowning.

"And your whatchamacallit death masks won't?" Jack asked sarcastically. "Plus we have dog treats and an annoyingly noisy ball." He shook this, tiny bells tinkling. Elvis growled at the ball, or possibly at Jack, which Daniel clearly thought was too cute for words. "Last but not least we have a chew toy from some sap who should know better." He sourly squeaked the little bone in evidence.

"That was sweet of you, Jack, thank you!" Daniel gushed gleefully, beaming. Elvis perked up and took an interest, sniffing the toy thoroughly when Daniel held it to him. He licked the bone, then he licked Daniel.

"Sweet?" Jack spat, giving his 'outrage' all he'd got, wanting to keep the beguiling spark of fun in Daniel's eyes a while longer.

"Saccharine," Daniel agreed demurely.

"Do you want to bath this flea-ridden cur by yourself?" Jack demanded, pointedly threatening, although he ruined the effect of this severity by scratching Elvis under the chin. "You should say his name as often as possible, get him used to it," he instructed as Daniel obediently followed him into the kitchen.

Feeling that they were going to have take the How To Look After Your Dog thing as it came, Jack pulled out the rubber mat he'd bought and placed it in the kitchen sink. It was a start. "It'll help him feel secure," he told Daniel, who was watching his every move with alert interest.

It was hard for Jack to take, that this was all new to Daniel. He tried not to think about what Daniel's childhood was like, not when every subtle reminder made him sorry for all the small things Daniel had never learned to take for granted. Daniel never acknowledged his time in foster care, never spoke of being a child or of the loss of his parents. It was one wall of his Jack had never breached. He was still not ready to accept he probably never would get past this one barrier.

The openings Daniel gave him, Jack took. And then he took some more.

"I know it seems obvious, Daniel," he went on as he worked the cups of the rubber shower spray attachment over the faucets. "But wet his coat first with warm water, then rub in the shampoo, keeping the suds away from his eyes. Rinse him with more warm water, but be careful to keep it out of his ears. Towel him dry while he's still in the sink."

"How often do I bath him?" Daniel asked as he and Elvis dubiously eyed the sink.

"Only when he stinks," Jack grinned. "Like now." He looked appreciatively over at Daniel's slim form, clad in what Jack thought of as geek chic, smart grey chinos, a fine-knit sweater and a long wine-coloured shirt he was busy shrugging out of in preparation for Operation Elvis. The chinos were filthy from kneeling in the dirt, the sweater decidedly on the doggie side. "You're going to get soaked," Jack observed pleasurably, very much looking forward to seeing Daniel in damp and clinging everything. "Cashmere?" he enquired pleasantly.

"It doesn't matter," Daniel impatiently dismissed this irrelevant objection as he pushed up his sleeves and tested the spray for adequate water force. Next up was temperature control as Daniel dipped his hand beneath the spray. Then he looked appealingly to Jack for confirmation.

Settling back against a kitchen unit, Jack watched them both, enjoying himself hugely. The dog was a sweet-natured little thing, very quiet, very gentle, clearly unable to believe its luck, ludicrously protective. Much like his new owner. Elvis watched with melting eyes as Daniel talked him through what was about to happen to him, nuzzling into every touch of Daniel's beautiful, eloquent hands.

"He trusts you," Jack observed mildly.

"So soon?" Daniel asked doubtfully as he warily put a less than enthusiastic Elvis in the sink. While he had every hope of seeing his dog regain his confidence in time, of winning his trust, he wasn't expecting it to happen any time soon. His immediate reaction to Jack's gratifying pronouncement was that Elvis had been through a terrible ordeal, he was

frightened, so of course he was going to identify closely with his rescuer. It wasn't a response to Daniel so much as to the circumstances.

Daniel didn't know dogs the way Jack did, though.

He lifted Elvis's chin and stroked a finger over his head. "Good boy, Elvis," he praised him. Elvis tugged his head away to nibble at Daniel's fingers. It was slightly embarrassing, how pleased he was by this first hint of playfulness. He glanced hopefully at Jack.

"He's yours, Daniel," Jack promised him, his face kind.

Daniel's face lit with shy pleasure, his rare, sweet smile punching Jack's heart out. It always did. Jack wouldn't - or maybe couldn't - look away, even though Daniel rocked back a step, staring at him, a shock of recognition in his widening eyes.

"The way you look at me?" Daniel murmured uncertainly, as if he didn't realise he was speaking aloud.

"Say it," Jack boldly invited.

Daniel was distracted by an indignant Elvis making a determined, yelping escape bid as his skinny little butt got soaked. Daniel had to hold onto him with both hands while Jack expertly sprayed him, keeping a beat ahead of the eel-like squirming and the growling, vengeful bites at the shower attachment. As soon as Jack had him at the drowned rat stage, Daniel pounced with the flea shampoo and his magic fingers, rapidly reducing Elvis to foamy, orgasmic adoration. Taking advantage of man and dog being fully occupied with their mutual adoration society, Jack slipped his hand around to rub the small of Daniel's back.

"Jack," Daniel whispered, shifting uncomfortably under the warm, invading hand. He was so not ready to face this. His own tangled feelings were difficult enough, without having to deal with Jack's too.

"Say it," Jack said again, his eyes insistent.

"You're - attracted to me," Daniel admitted slowly, his tongue stiff and stumbling. He wished he could back down. Hide. That one of them could.

"Say it like you believe it, Daniel."

"I'm - I'm not sure I do."

"Try me."

Daniel was shaken by what Jack was saying to him, by what he was seeing, by the feelings shivering through him. What Jack was doing to him with the ache in his dark eyes. He

didn't mean to, but he found himself leaning into the heat of Jack's body, his fingers stalling on Elvis as a capable hand slid in front of him, long fingers curving around his waist. He was shocked to feel Jack trembling against him. Jack was afraid? Of him?

"I'm scared shitless," Jack snapped, his voice rough and edgy. "Daniel, please. *Please.*"

Hesitantly, Daniel turned. He wanted to say it was too soon, it was too much, but he wasn't good at lying, least of all to himself. Fear and uncertain arousal sparked and shivered through him as he reached up to kiss Jack softly with a shaking mouth. The barest touch, then Jack was kissing him, his firm lips inexpressibly tender as they moved over Daniel's.

Elvis squirming out from under made them break off abruptly after a few brief moments. They filled the next desperately awkward minutes with wet, protesting dog, rinsed thoroughly and towelled dry by Daniel while Jack put some rabbit-flavoured dog food and crushed worming pills into the bowl, their swift, surreptitious glances skirting.

Battling an odd, muted panic, Daniel knelt down while Elvis investigated the contents of the bowl, his tail beginning to wag as he sniffed. He looked up, nosing gently at Daniel's fingers before he began to eat, once again gulping down the food. Upset by Elvis's desperation, Daniel delicately drew a silky ear through his fingers, unable to imagine the kind of person who could leave a small, defenceless animal who had trusted and loved them, to starve to death. He'd rushed into this responsibility without any thought for anything except protecting the dog, but even with all the adjustments he was going to have to make in his life, he found he didn't mind. In a way, he was looking forward to having another presence in his home.

"Could I get a T-shirt? I'm soaked," Jack interrupted, his fingers trailing warmth over Daniel's nape, making him jump. "When we're done with the dog." Jack knelt beside Daniel to gently rub Elvis with a fresh towel, trying not to disturb him too much as he ate. He shot Daniel a quick, sidelong look. "You doing okay?"

"I don't know what in hell I'm doing. I may never figure out the how I'm doing part," Daniel admitted jerkily. Had he given Jack permission to be so intimate with him? Because of a kiss he hadn't been prepared for and didn't wholly understand, let alone trust?

"You think I do?" Jack retorted, sardonically amused. "I was so damned smug, so damned sure I wouldn't push you into bed with me."

"Bed?" Daniel echoed stupidly, trembling now, his body tight and hot, as if his skin were too small for him.

"I don't want to do this, I tried not to. I promised myself," Jack snapped in frustration. When he looked at Daniel, he was raw, grieved. "I need you," he said starkly. "Don't let me fuck this up. Don't let me push you away."

"I don't know what I want, Jack! How can I set limits for - for feeling *lost*?" Daniel retorted agitatedly.

Before Jack could answer him, Daniel dashed along to his bedroom, pulling off his sweater as he ran. He was angry and upset with Jack and with himself for the risk they'd just taken. If Jack wanted him, no, needed him, where did that leave him? He was so confused. Conflicted. Fucking was not an inevitability of friendship, and Daniel was so far from certain he wanted a sexual relationship despite the attraction he was feeling. The only thing he knew was he couldn't be without Jack, not now. Jack was - was *necessary* to him. He didn't know what to do. He couldn't think, his mind skittering agitatedly when he tried.

Daniel stripped rapidly, tossing on some jeans and an old blue shirt he wore loose. He snagged a black T-shirt out of his bureau and walked unwillingly back to the kitchen to face Jack, rolling up his sleeves to the elbow as he went. Elvis came scampering to greet him, off-balance because he couldn't put his weight on the infected leg. When he stood on the top step waiting for Daniel, his tail was wagging, but his front paw was poised awkwardly. Surprised by a rush of affection, Daniel sat down beside him and scooped Elvis up into an exuberant hug, a hot, rasping tongue swiping moistly at his throat.

"I gave him a drink," Jack informed him, handing him a brush in exchange for the T-shirt. "Brush his coat carefully," he ordered.

Elvis sat on Daniel's knee, his tail gently thumping as Daniel patiently brushed the tangles from his damp, matted fur with painstaking care. "Good boy, Elvis," he praised him warmly, hugging the frail chest, the rapid heartbeat fluttering against his cupping hand, which Elvis was trying to lick. "He's such a good dog," he said in bewilderment, as Jack sat down close beside him.

"I know. Don't eat your heart out over who did this to him and why," Jack advised mildly. "You'll never know."

Daniel started when Jack's arm went around him. "I don't want to fight." He shrugged his shoulders, Jack's arm simply skimming down to his waist. He couldn't make an issue of it, not with Elvis just beginning to yawn and settle, his consideration something he knew Jack was totally taking advantage of.

"I'm such a prick, Daniel," Jack acknowledged.

Accurately, in Daniel's opinion.

"God knows you can't lie to me on your best day. I know you're not ready."

"You know a lot," Daniel snapped, unsure how he was supposed to be 'ready' for his closest friend to want to get him into bed. He put down the brush and began to stroke his sleepy dog, curling now into a small, defensive ball in his lap. Jack reached past him to apply some of the ointment the vet had given them to treat the cut on Elvis's leg. Daniel

was grateful for Jack's gentleness with the dog. Elvis got a bit restless, but happily no more than that, settling again as soon as Jack let him rest. "He was lucky," he said softly.

"Very."

The warm indulgence in Jack's voice embarrassed Daniel.

"He's a one-man dog, you know," Jack said quietly, running the ridiculous tail through his fingers. "He'll tolerate other people, the people you have around, but no more than that. Be careful who you choose to look after him. He has to be at least comfortable with them. I'll put the word out on base for you."

"Thanks, Jack," Daniel said gratefully.

Without warning, Jack's arm around Daniel tightened, drawing him in to Jack's side. Jack kissed him swift and hard, leaving him flushed and breathless. Before he could speak, Jack kissed him again, a warm, affectionate gloat of a kiss. He only laughed when Daniel pushed him away.

"You have no idea how long I've wanted to do that," Jack gleefully celebrated, breaking out into a huge shit-eating grin.

"No," Daniel agreed darkly, scowling at Jack.

"Just like you've no idea how cute that is," Jack said solemnly, failing to resist a reprehensible urge to mess with Daniel's serious mind.

"I told you he had character." Daniel looked fondly down at Elvis, a finger sneaking out to caress the silky fur on his head. "Ugly!" he sniffed disparagingly.

Highly entertained by this innocent modesty, Jack decided to go for the jugular. "Cute dog," he conceded graciously. "Gorgeous owner," he added blandly, turning to face Daniel so he could put his other arm around him, hands lightly clasped around the slim waist. He watched the play of emotions on Daniel's handsome, vital face: realisation, outrage, alarm, confusion. "Can I kiss you?" he asked winsomely, snugging his chin into Daniel's shoulder and making with the pleading puppy eyes.

"Now you ask me?" Daniel bridled indignantly, ending in a tiny gasp as Jack kissed his throat.

"Put the dog down and kiss me," Jack coaxed with soft bites at sensitive skin, pleased to see Daniel's chin tilt to grant him better access.

"He needs me!" Daniel argued, a protective hand on Elvis's side.

"I need you!"

"Oh."

"You don't want to kiss?" Jack sighed plaintively.

"I - I didn't say that," Daniel answered haltingly, going red.

"We could go get comfortable," Jack suggested persuasively. "Talk this through."

"Go where?" Daniel asked blankly.

"Bed."

"No pushing, remember?"

"Did I say we would be naked?" Jack asked reasonably.

"You want to talk?" Daniel demanded, ignoring what he felt to be deliberate provocation.

"No," Jack admitted cheerfully. "But I do want to get you into bed. Even fully clothed and chaperoned." He flicked Elvis's curly tail.

"No."

"We're too big for the couch!" Jack argued briskly.

"Only if we're lying down."

"Exactly!" Jack beamed.

"I'm not getting horizontal with you anywhere."

"Ever?"

"Jack!"

"You don't trust me," Jack recognised sadly.

"I did until you started kissing me and saying - stuff - about me," Daniel snapped, unable to do his aggravation justice. "After years - five years! - of salty, bad tempered insults and gratuitous, infantile alleged humour, you can't just say I'm - I'm..." Daniel couldn't say what he was.

"Gorgeous?" Jack supplied, ever helpful in the face of the flustered.

"Will you stop saying that!"

"Ludicrously handsome?" Jack politely offered an alternative, very appreciative of the presence of the snoozing Elvis, who was severely hampering Daniel's ability to retaliate in any meaningfully homicidal way. "I'm willing to concede the point and refrain from telling you exactly how gorgeous you are in the interests of establishing harmonious relations, even though you are a total babe, everyone but you knows it and you should just get over it, already."

Daniel blinked hard at the rapid flow of information. Or was that condemnation?

"How about we start smaller?" Jack proposed cheerfully. "How would you react if I talked about, say, your eyes?" he suggested brightly.

"Badly."

"That hurts my feelings."

"If I wasn't trapped in the Twilight Zone I might care," Daniel declared.

"Do you want to know how long I've been looking at you and wanting you?" Jack said in quite another voice. "I think about you all the time, you know."

"I only know something has changed between us," Daniel confessed in a stifled voice. "There's an intensity there."

"Attraction," Jack nudged gently.

"I guess," Daniel agreed unhappily. He sighed heavily, letting himself lean at Jack's urging. "Yes," he whispered. "I'm attracted to you." He wrapped his fingers around Jack's arm, cradled heavy across his stomach. "It feels good to be held," he added, incurably honest. A quick, nervous smile had Jack frowning. "It's been too long, I think."

"Longer than I wanted to wait, not as long as I needed to wait," Jack said wryly.

Daniel didn't pretend to misunderstand him or the difficulties inherent in any kind of physical relationship between them. There was so much he wanted to ask, so much he didn't understand, he didn't know where to begin. "I thought I knew you," he uttered in bewilderment, searching Jack's face. "I thought I knew myself."

"Tell me about it." The hard edge of bitterness in Jack's voice was unmistakable. "Do you think I ever imagined myself falling for another man?" He'd enjoyed the physical but hadn't hesitated to bury it in the dim, distant past. Sex. It wasn't important enough to him to regret.

"Jack!" Daniel murmured distressfully.

"I didn't fall easily or well. I went down fighting and when it hit..." He looked up at Daniel, his face tight with feeling. "The first time I dreamed about being with you, it killed

me. I thought I could take anything, but I couldn't take that. Wanting you." Wanting a man he loved. "The dreams didn't stop, Daniel," Jack confessed roughly, his strain beginning to show. "I was so angry, with myself, with you, can you believe that?" he said angrily, his voice thick with condemnation.

"I knew," Daniel said diffidently. "I didn't know why, just that you couldn't stand..." He couldn't finish, Jack looked so hurt, so mortified. "I didn't know what I'd done," he said inadequately.

"I took your hand once, told you I was sorry," Jack tossed out, his eyes bleak. "I dream that again and again, holding your hands while I fuck you, licking the sweat from your shoulder blade. The way you *move*..." He caught himself up, smiling blindly. "It was more than a year before I could face it, what it meant." He laughed humourlessly. Sex. It wasn't supposed to mean anything. Not to him. It was buried, forgotten, meant to stay that way. "I had to make sense of it all," he said carefully, knowing in his gut he should never tell Daniel just how hard he'd fought his feelings. "None of this is easy for me to say, none of it. That makes me a smart-ass, sometimes."

"What do you want, Jack?" Daniel asked bravely.

"Everything. I want you, I want a relationship." As hard for Jack to admit as it had been for Daniel to admit there was an attraction between them.

"A sexual relationship," Daniel clarified, feeling stupid but unable to stop himself from saying it.

"You don't have to decide the rest of our lives right now, Daniel," Jack promised, his eyes softening to warmth. "I want to see you, be close to you. I want sex too, but I can wait. You know that, right?" he demanded.

Swallowing a sudden lump in his throat, Daniel nodded.

"When you're ready," Jack said gruffly.

Ready for Jack to fuck him? "I'm attracted, Jack, but I haven't decided – I don't know what I want. I have to think." Daniel couldn't be more definite than this. He really didn't have an answer for Jack, not yet.

"You think too much."

"I can't be anything other than straight with you. Do you really want me to lie to you?"

Jack's lips tightened but in the end he just shook his head quickly.

Daniel had a hard time picturing Jack getting in touch with his feminine side. All the sensitivity Daniel had seen had been reserved for the children Jack had needed to help. It was there for him too, at times of need, the patience and gentleness, the acceptance. Was

Daniel naïve to have believed that was because they were friends? Or had he somehow breached Jack's defences, touched his friend in a way he'd never intended? Whatever the cause, he was beginning to understand Jack had always treated him differently than Sam or even Teal'c. Perhaps differently than he'd treated any of his friends in the past, the guys he'd worked with, like Kawalsky.

"I was thinking this wasn't inevitable - us," he said in some confusion. "There's nothing written in stone stating men can only be so close without needing sex to be part of who they are together."

Jack smiled at Daniel. "I think I've loved you since I met you. The fact we were both guys got in the way for a long time."

Daniel was deeply moved by Jack's honesty. He needed to express what he was feeling, but words were failing him. Holding Elvis carefully balanced across his thighs, Daniel leaned in to slide an arm around Jack's shoulders and draw him into a kiss, their mouths meeting softly, but more surely this time. Jack nuzzled at his lips, tasting him, an eager tongue flickering over each curve and contour as strong fingers rubbed the nape of his neck.

It wasn't the steamy kiss of Jack's dreams, but Daniel was toe-curlingly sweet and giving, the tension gradually seeping from his body as they learned to kiss one another. Jack found he couldn't resist nibbling at the pout of Daniel's lower lip while Daniel was simply fascinated by the way Jack's mouth fit his. He seemed to like it when they rubbed against one another, unhurriedly tilting his face this way and that to deepen the pressure or change the sensations.

They were both easy with this, which was good in a way Jack hadn't been looking for. He was beginning to feel he didn't want to rush this. Daniel's eyes were slow to open when Jack sat back, his tongue darting out to taste Jack on him. "You're the first man I ever kissed," Jack revealed, for the first time wondering if that had hurt the guys he'd slept with.

"Me too."

"Not even in school." Not even then. It had always been just sex. Exercise.

Daniel's fingers slid down from his shoulder to hold his arm. "No one was ever that interested in me," he confided, looking embarrassed.

"I would've been all over you like fleas on Elvis."

"I doubt it," Daniel retorted.

"Is it any more unlikely than me being all over you now?" Jack challenged him.

"When you put it like that, I guess not." Daniel eyed him somewhat speculatively. "This raises questions about your past behaviour towards me, you know. This whole 'geek' thing, for example. I should have realised it was your own uniquely obnoxious, juvenile version of courting me." He perked up as Jack bristled. "In defence of my admittedly shameful ignorance, I'd like to point out that you're too old to be so hormonally charged and emotionally volatile."

"Emotionally volatile?" Jack queried.

"Pissy," Daniel amended, generously stretching a point.

"I have no problem with hormonally charged," Jack hinted broadly, giving Daniel a distinctly flirty look, which totally floored him. Jack was quite pleased by his undeniable effect on Daniel, what with being *old* and everything. "Guys can do a *lot* together. You'd hardly believe it." Jack felt his supportiveness needed some gas. He tried again. "We don't have to do anything freaky."

"That's reassuring," Daniel responded in a small, wooden voice, looking kind of wild about the eyes.

"It's mostly friction," Jack mumbled, desperately embarrassed. "A guy knows a guy's body. You know?" He wasn't sure at this point he wanted Daniel to know how much he happened to know.

"I - um - I know."

Daniel didn't sound too sure what he knew, but Jack thought that was probably a good thing.

"You think I'm good-looking?" Daniel asked uneasily of the unconscious Elvis. He had no idea why he couldn't let this go.

"Have I explained how easy this stuff is for me to talk about?" Jack snapped, pardonably exasperated. "You think for one second I'm going to be able to say something I *don't* mean?"

"We're sitting in a briefing, discussing a mission," Daniel hypothesised rapidly.

"Arguing," Jack corrected him crisply.

"You're looking at me," Daniel said invitingly. "You're thinking?"

"Nothing," Jack retorted. "I don't have a thought in my head except shutting you up the best way I know how."

"Which would be how? Exactly?" Daniel asked nervously.

"Sometimes it's a long, deep kiss. Sometimes, it isn't."

"You imagine me..." Daniel glanced down at Jack's crotch, blushed to the roots of his hair and stared desperately at his dog.

"Or me," Jack interrupted hastily. "I don't want you to get the wrong impression, here!" He grinned wolfishly. "Either way works just as well," he smirked. "I'm very well endowed." He waited a beat while Daniel sputtered. "In the illustrated how-to guide department."

"In briefings?" Daniel shook his head as if to clear it. "You're thinking about doing that to me in briefings?"

"Right there at the table," Jack confirmed with slightly insane cheeriness.

"How the - how the hell am I supposed to look you in the eye after *that*?" Daniel gulped.

Jack smacked him heartily on the back. "Welcome to *my* life!"

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With a beautiful, bewildered linguist and small, snoozing canine chaperone on his hands, Jack ordered pizza for dinner. All things considered, he figured he was ahead of the game. They were still on the stairs and not in the bed, Daniel had yet to kiss him like he wanted to be kissed, there was way too much talking, the only heavy petting thus far was of Elvis and the pizza boy was late and, according to the guy on the phone, both new and lost. On the upside, Daniel hadn't tossed him out on his ear, demanded his instant transfer off the team or objected strenuously to having the crap hugged out of him. In fact, Daniel was so pathetically confused about pretty much everything, he seemed to find being nestled to Jack's side comforting. Also, he didn't want to wake his dog.

A sharp knock at the door made Elvis twitch. A scorching glare from Daniel had Jack running to shut the pizza guy the hell up. He yanked the door open, forked over twenty bucks to a kid who clearly had more hormones than Jack, Daniel and Elvis put together, grabbed his now lukewarm pepperoni and meatball pizzas and icy Pepsis, calling to Daniel to come work the microwave. No two microwaves were alike. This was a matter of scientific fact in Jack's universe. The setting that equalled 'reheat' on Jack's would equal 'cremate' or 'combust' or possibly even 'explode' on Daniel's.

Daniel slid his hands under Elvis's tummy and lifted him. Elvis woke up, yawned and stretched, then he turned around to rest his paws on Daniel's chest, his tail beginning to wag. Daniel ran both hands down Elvis's back, smiling as he wriggled with pleasure, his tail wagging harder. "Elvis," he murmured with quiet satisfaction as he gave his dog the hands he was nosing for. The ecstatic licking flustered Daniel as much as Jack's kisses. He put Elvis carefully down, alert for any signs of distress. Elvis watched him as he stood up,

limping gamely along at his side as he walked into the kitchen. Elvis stopped in his tracks when he saw Jack cursing at the microwave, looked uncertainly up at Daniel, then sat on his foot.

Jack stopped cursing to bestow a doting look on them. "He smells you on me," Jack said indulgently, picking out a couple of stray meatballs. "Or me on the pizza." He knelt down. "Here, boy," he called softly, holding his hand out. "Elvis, come. Good boy, Elvis. Come." Elvis stood up and took a few steps towards him. Jack made no moves at all, letting the dog come to him in his own time. A few more steps and Elvis took fright, looking around for Daniel. His tail began to wag as Daniel walked him over to the big scary colonel and knelt beside him as he ate the treats out of Jack's cupped hand. Elvis suffered Jack to stroke him as Daniel put the pizzas into the oven to warm. He wriggled away and trotted limpingly after Daniel when he went over to the dining table to check through the things Jack had bought. Jack trotted after Elvis.

Daniel knelt again with Elvis's collar in his hands. "Elvis Jackson?" he asked Jack incredulously as he read the tag.

"Bite me," Jack retorted pleasantly. "I thought it was cute. And annoying." He grinned at Daniel. "Say his name when you give him a command," he instructed, casually parking his butt on a corner of the table. "You should talk to him as much as you can. He loves the sound of your voice, so use it. You've got a lot of fragile and irreplaceable stuff here, but to Elvis, the whole world is just one big chew toy. You have to teach him what he can and can't chew, starting with anything that's older than he is."

"He's two. Laurie said," Daniel muttered as he fastened the collar.

"I've got stuff in my fridge older than that."

"He has your bone and the ball."

"Try him with both," Jack suggested. "Some dogs don't like toys that make noise, some love them. Get him different toys, a sturdy twist of rope, anything you can fill with a treat he can eat after he's chewed the crap out of it.. A tennis ball for walks. When his leg heals, you'll need to walk him at least twice a day, more if you can manage it."

"I run."

"You do?"

"I'm required to meet the same fitness standards you are," Daniel reminded him mildly.

"If you ever feel like company," Jack prompted optimistically, strongly drawn to the idea of an athletic, sweating, skimpily attired Daniel. "Unless three is a crowd," he added stiffly.

"No," Daniel hastily uttered a reassurance. "I'd like that." As he stood, he looked resentfully at Jack. "I mean it," he said accusingly, his eyes brooding. "I really would like that!"

"Cool!" Jack gloated.

Daniel sniffed. So did Elvis, but he was sniffing Daniel. This required further investigation. Daniel looked enquiringly at Jack.

"I think you smell good too," Jack offered unhelpfully.

"Do you think he needs reassurance?" Daniel asked innocently, hoping so.

"I think he's going to lose the use of his legs if you keep carrying him around," Jack retorted laughingly. "The little bugger knows a sucker when he sees one."

"Where should I put his basket?" Daniel wondered. "Where he'll feel secure?" Trying to see his apartment from Elvis-eyes, he looked around unenthusiastically at his stone floors - cold on small paws - and the elegant lines of his antique furniture and artefacts - big and scary in the dark.

"Or where you'll feel secure?" Jack tossed over his shoulder as he went to check on the warming pizzas.

"He seems to like being near me," Daniel explained, picking up the basket and promptly sidling off towards his bedroom while Jack was otherwise engaged. "Elvis, come," he called, obedient to Jack's instructions, feeling silly when Elvis was right there attacking the laces on his shoes every other step. Daniel stopped when he got into the bedroom, which seemed to be Elvis's prompt to sit on his foot and give him the plaintive 'pet me' look. Elvis was less than impressed when Daniel hardened his heart, gently stirred a furry rump with his foot and put the basket down beside the couch. He figured this was the best spot in the room. Elvis could see him sleeping from here, but was far enough away not to have a disturbed night if Daniel did. Plus, Daniel would see the basket when he needed to get to his PC even if he was distracted and didn't remember it was there.

His dog climbed stiffly into the basket, had a little look around while Daniel hovered anxiously, then whined to be lifted out. Daniel thought he did well to put Elvis straight down, although this didn't seem to match Elvis's assessment of the situation. He was the picture of pathetic, huddling rejection, pawing appealingly at Daniel's shoe. Feeling like an absolute bastard, Daniel swallowed hard but stood his ground, telling Elvis he was a very good boy and - somewhat unconvincingly - it was good for him to be independent.

As Daniel was being ruthlessly strict with him, Elvis ambled off, still favouring his injured leg, to sniff pretty much everything he could reach until he got to the steps leading up to Daniel's bed. Another whine had Daniel scurrying to his assistance, although he regretted it when he heard a dark chuckle behind him and Elvis started tugging on the sleeve of his discarded sweater, dangling down from the bed in front of him.

"You're going to spoil that dog rotten," Jack accused him, sounding anything but disapproving. "The pizza's on the table." He walked over to the bed, taking a good look around tasteful Terra Incognita, then graciously assisted Elvis down the stairs with his hideously expensive prize. They watched in fascination as Elvis stiffly dragged the sweater across the room, his little head held high. He climbed tiredly into his basket and began to tug the sweater in behind him.

Daniel and Jack glanced at one another, then back at Elvis. Daniel decided it was less fraught smoothing his sweater than it was watching Jack interestedly smoothing the cover on his bed. "I told you he wouldn't like the tartan," he muttered, feeling the abject surrender of a two hundred dollar sweater required some sort of explanation for certain cynical colonels who were eying him with amusedly knowing pity. Elvis was delighted to assist him to tuck and fold and smooth the cashmere into a comfortable, cosy bed. He managed to lick Daniel's ear while he was distracted.

Jack went one better. He goosed him while he was bent over.

When Daniel stood up, scowling menacingly, he found Jack anything but penitent. In fact, Jack was alarmingly bright-eyed and seemed to want him to make an issue of it. He took hold of Daniel's waist, a broad smile breaking out as Daniel's fingers came up to rest on his shoulders. They found themselves without a word to say, staring, trying to make some sense of what they knew about one another now. They kissed lingeringly, Daniel's lips parting in shy invitation. He gasped as Jack slowly slid into his mouth, a hot, rasping tongue ardently rubbing over his.

Two years, he thought giddily. Two years since he was last kissed. Never like this. He wanted it though. He wanted Jack, his whole body throbbing and aching. His legs trembling, Daniel clung to Jack as cradling arms wrapped tight around him. He pulled Jack's head to him, gladly deepening the kiss, shaking with fear and excitement at the happiness flowing from his dear friend. It had been so long for both of them and he felt so good not to be alone, he let it take him, Jack soaking into his skin.

Jack was thrilled and terrified at once when Daniel melted bonelessly into him, his generous mouth grinding into Jack's as his body surrendered. Daniel shook him to his core, touched him bone deep. He always had. It hurt Jack to ride out this explosion of feeling, to let go of the old fears in the shock of it all. Daniel was open to him. It pounded through his head again and again. Daniel knew how he felt, but he was with him and Jack had a chance now. He gave himself over to the heady kiss, fierce joy welling as he revelled in Daniel's sweetness and the innocent honesty of his feelings.

Daniel was so gentle, and Jack was so in love with him, it was impossible for him to rush this. He savoured the taste and the feel of Daniel, his fine-boned, slim body so exotically attractive, his firmness and strength arousing Jack in ways he'd never quantified. It felt surprisingly natural to him to want Daniel, his desire without the frenetic, guilty edge of his dreams. Jack was starved for Daniel's touch, unable to hold him close enough even though their bodies were plastered together.

Ecstatically stroking over Daniel's receptive tongue, Jack ignored a peremptory bark and suppressed an instinctive twitch from Daniel by segueing smoothly from licking to sucking. Daniel moaned delightfully. Then he chuckled as a small, sinuous, furry body squirmed determinedly between their ankles. Jack gently but firmly pushed Elvis away. It took only moments for the dog to cock a retaliatory leg. Jack eased back to take swift, distracting nibbles at Daniel's inviting, swollen lips.

"You don't need to walk him," he murmured, smiling as Daniel kissed his jawline.

"Hmmm?"

"Elvis. You don't need to walk him now."

Daniel gave up his assault on the tender spot beneath Jack's ear. "I don't?"

"Nope. The cocky little bugger is peeing on me right now."

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"No!" Daniel refused sternly, finding it difficult to meet the big, imploring eyes fixed on his. "There is no way spicy pepperoni can be good for your digestion, especially not after those worming pills. You can have a dog chew." Elvis sighed heavily, abandoned his attempt at emotional blackmail, and went back to his spirited attempts to eviscerate his squeaky bone. Daniel reached down to pat him in commiseration, reflecting that after four hours of dog ownership, he was down three hundred and fifty bucks, one cashmere sweater, one pair of fine Italian shoes - he was wearing a bio-hazard suit next time he wormed Elvis - and some glow-in-the-dark hieroglyph socks that had come from a Secret Santa with a whacked sense of humour. In other words, Jack. His *bête-noir* and - um - boyfriend. Apparently.

"Elvis can't have anything," Jack argued, glancing down unenthusiastically at his borrowed sweats, which he'd come to realise rapidly had definitely been purchased with a more pert and youthful rear in mind, taking some of the fun out of how he'd acquired them. "He's been a very bad boy."

"You have no shame!" Daniel accused him. "When the worming meds hit and I scrambled for mop and newspapers, I heard you telling Elvis he was a *good* boy."

"Why would I do that?" Jack enquired, the picture of butter-wouldn't-melt deceptiveness.

"Well, it wasn't just because he held it to crap on my feet instead of yours," Daniel informed him tartly.

"I don't know what you mean," Jack denied, leisurely swiping the last wedge of pepperoni pizza.

"You're wearing DKNY underwear," Daniel reminded him coldly. "How do I know this?" he complained bitterly.

Jack quirked a questioning eyebrow.

"Because you got out of your jeans faster than I got out of my shoes!"

"Talk about your captive audience," Jack observed complacently, a huge, fatuous smile spreading over his face.

"And the reason you didn't rush to look for something to change into was?" Daniel left it open, waving an airily inviting hand.

"Gallantly rescuing a stricken comrade who'd finally found something he would not touch," Jack answered sleekly. "I don't recall making you crane around to watch my ass as I walked out of the room."

"Strolled," Daniel blurted involuntarily, his face beginning to burn. "I was curious," he admitted gruffly, deciding this was a good time to move into the living room. He was fairly alarmed to see both Elvis and Jack chasing after him, Elvis carrying his squeaky bone, Jack two freshly poured glasses of wine. They were evenly matched, the care Jack had to take with the expensive Chardonnay cancelling out the handicap of Elvis's limp. They reached the couch at the same time, Jack sneering as Daniel cravenly scooped up Elvis and deposited him on the cushion next to him on the two-seater.

After disposing of the wine glasses, Jack picked up a surprised Elvis and popped him back down on the floor. After a reproachful look up at his embarrassed owner, Elvis made do with lying on Daniel's bare feet and attacked his bone again. Jack sat down next to Daniel and put an arm around him with the air of a man settling in for the night.

"This is one helluva a first date," Jack said light-heartedly, toying with the fabric of the blue shirt, which made Daniel's eyes look big enough to drown in. "I mean, life does not get any better than this. I got peed on, you got crapped on, Elvis has had two baths, you've had one shower, I got to mop up ballistic poop and collect stool samples."

"It wasn't all biological warfare," Daniel retorted, beginning to relax, even though it looked like Jack wasn't going to be letting go of him any time soon. "I kissed you."

"You looked at my ass, too."

"I - " Was there any point in denying it? Daniel uneasily considered the possibility Jack might just have seen him nearly fall over, he was leaning so far back to watch him swagger out into the living room in nearly all his glory. "I did."

"How was it?"

"Odd."

"Thanks," Jack said ungratefully.

"Your ass wasn't odd. Wanting to look at your ass was odd."

"Okay. Thanks," Jack muttered. "I think."

"We're not in any kind of rush to leap into bed or anything," Daniel hinted with suggestive negativity. "Are we?"

"Honestly?"

"Oh."

"I can wait," Jack offered dubiously. "I mean, I'll have to wait. No," he corrected himself hurriedly. "I don't mean I *have* to." He looked nervously at Daniel, clearing his throat. "I don't know what I mean."

"Neither do I."

They sat in silence for a while, listening to Elvis happily squeaking his bone and to the muted sounds of the city outside. The balcony windows were wide open in the aftermath of Operation Poop Scoop, as Jack called it. Then Jack kissed Daniel, another of those warm, nuzzling kisses they both liked very much. When they finally parted, Daniel found their intimacy much less forced, sitting a little closer than before, his hand resting over Jack's, clasped around his waist.

"What's on your mind, Daniel?" Jack asked, his voice very kind.

Daniel allowed his head to rest against Jack's, a contented sigh escaping him. He felt almost comfortable. "I don't know," he mused quietly. "It's as if the whole world shuddered and changed around me. Everything has changed; us, our friendship, our feelings. My sexuality," he added deprecatingly. "Yours."

"Too far, too fast?"

"No," Daniel disagreed, surprised to find he meant this. "I'm - I'm glad you made me face up to the attraction between us, if it means we can be like this." He took Jack's hand in both of his. "If you can."

"I feel good." Jack rubbed his face into Daniel's silky hair. "What I said before...about waiting?"

Daniel looked at him encouragingly.

"I meant I'm in for the duration."

"Okay."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"I understand."

Jack coughed.

Recognising a blatant cue, Daniel uttered a hasty reassurance. "Um - me too!" He kissed Jack's jaw, fascinated by the chafe of faint stubble against his lips. "Can we see each other for a while?" he suggested.

"You mean, do stuff together? Go out? Hang out? Neck?"

"What kind of stuff?" Daniel asked inquisitively, honestly finding it difficult to envision dating Jack.

"Strip gin."

"I'm not very good at gin."

"Which is why it's the fastest way I know to get you in your underwear, unless I can train Elvis to crap on command," Jack snorted.

"Neck?" Daniel blurted out what was, for him, the salient part.

"The activity we engage in after I've got you in your underwear and before you toss me out on my ass."

"Demonstrate," Daniel ordered boldly.

"Our size relative to the couch severely hampers my ability to fully demonstrate my necking capabilities," Jack drawled, a roughness in his voice that made Daniel shiver.

"The other couch is bigger."

"Wasn't this the exact point I was making earlier?" Jack countered. "Which brings us right back to the bed."

"I don't want to start something I'm don't feel ready to finish," Daniel told him seriously. "Plus," he added haltingly, desperately embarrassed, looking anywhere but at Jack. "It's been a while." It felt like forever.

Jack found the notion of making Daniel come in his jeans just from a little rolling around breathtakingly hot but decided it was hardly tactful to say so. He settled for tweaking off Daniel's glasses to take his first openly wanting look at Daniel's face.

"Jack," Daniel protested breathlessly, his face flushing as Jack stared wordlessly, drinking him in. "Honestly, I think the more upright we stay, the less trouble we'll get into!"

"That assumption is wrong on soooo many levels," Jack chided Daniel, shaking his head sadly. Conscious of the presence of a decidedly drowsy little furry foot-warmer, he once more failed to resist taking advantage. Daniel emitted a cute squawk when Jack pushed him back against the arm of the couch, glaring up at him with outraged eyes because he didn't dare push back. "Love your dog!" Jack gloated, pulling up Daniel's shirt to bare... "Skin!" he breathed reverently.

All the air seemed to whoosh out of Daniel's lungs as Jack licked his belly, then he grabbed onto Jack's head. Walking on air, Jack traced the contours of a respectable six-pack with a worshipping tongue and grazing kisses, blown away by the way he was making Daniel quiver and moan beneath him. Daniel, always a fast learner, yanked Jack up to kiss him hard, clamping long, strong, agile fingers to his ass, grinding his hips into Jack's as he plunged an aggressive, limber tongue deep into his mouth.

Daniel's comfort zone was definitely expanding and this goddamned couch was definitely too small.

I am so easy, Daniel thought, abashed by his - well, unfortunately, desperation was not too strong a word for it. Jack was all over him and someone appeared to be both egging Jack on and dragging him back for more every time he tried to surface long enough to snatch a wheezing breath. The man looked like all his Christmases had come! Or he was having an exertion-induced coronary. Or Daniel was. He was jumping out of his skin, his heart was pounding so fast he kept having to swallow it and that was before Jack's hand slid down to rub his thigh. The first squeeze of those strong fingers made Daniel's whole body jerk, dislodging Elvis.

A startled whine made Daniel take his tongue from Jack's mouth. "Sorry, boy," he apologised, dangling his fingers over the side of the couch to stroke an apology. A cool nose snuffed air into his palm, then Elvis's tongue began to lap at his fingers. Feeling he was neglecting Jack, Daniel hooked his leg over Jack's and rubbed his calf. "Good boy, Elvis," he called distractedly. "Good..." Jack pushed his shirt up towards his shoulders. "Good..." A hot tongue lapped at his nipple. "God!" Daniel yelped, bucking beneath Jack as his insides liquefied. "Oh, Jack," he gasped breathlessly. "Jaaaack!"

Realising they were headed into freefall, Jack peeled himself away from Daniel and collapsed back into his seat, hot, aching and decidedly shaky. He picked up Elvis and handed him to Daniel, who took him blindly. Elvis planted his front paws on Daniel's chest, his tail wagging furiously as Daniel ran each hand in turn down his sides, over and over, making him wriggle ecstatically.

Jack knew how he felt. "I am crazy in love with you, Daniel Jackson," he swore solemnly. "God help us both."

"I think - the sex..." Daniel took a deep breath. "We'll be fine!" he blurted. He was going to explode if he didn't jerk off, but other than that - fine. Holding on to Elvis, he reached around and planted a swift, strong kiss on Jack's mouth, feeling more alive than he had in years. Then he put his hand on Jack's. "Me too," he murmured bashfully, hesitantly returning Jack's huge, disbelieving smile.

"Come over to my place tomorrow," Jack urged him eagerly. "Spend the day. Elvis can play in the yard. I'll get everyone over for a barbecue in the afternoon, we can eat some steaks, have some fun, show Elvis off to the susceptible and start grilling those pet owners about carers."

"Sounds good," Daniel admitted shyly.

"Then how about we run off some of those calories and take a little play-time for ourselves?" Jack invited him softly, his eyes melting.

Much like Daniel's spine. He nodded speechlessly.

"Come by for breakfast. Say, around nine."

"Mm-hm." Daniel stroked Elvis rhythmically, Jack's long, muscular legs very much on his mind.

"Bring a deck of cards."

"Sure," Daniel acquiesced vaguely.

"And clean underwear."

"What?"

Jack gave him a lingering, predatory once-over.

"No," Daniel refused with flat finality. "No strip gin."

"Strip poker?" Jack suggested, generously willing to stretch a point.

"No strip gin, no strip poker, no strip Scrabble, Clue or chess."

"Twister?"

"Good night, Jack."

"The dog craps on your feet and you throw me out?"

"Elvis was very sorry. You, on the other hand, are a stranger to shame."

"Daniel," Jack said softly, taking Daniel's hand in a sustaining clasp. "You've been buttoned up and multiple-layered in BDUs two sizes too big for you for years. Years. We share a locker room. Hell, we even share showers. Can you explain to me why, in all that time we've been up close and supposedly personal, I still don't know the answer to one simple question?"

"It would help to know the question," Daniel said, almost certain this was in fact the wrong thing to say.

"Boxers? Or briefs?"

"Neither. I think they call them something else."

"What?"

"I don't remember."

Jack seemed to feel this required some kind of elaboration.

"They're black," Daniel offered, feeling control of this surreal conversation was slipping from him with every syllable.

Jack was reflecting on this latest revelation.

"I can guarantee that at no point tomorrow will you see me in my underwear," Daniel insisted firmly, taking advantage - he hoped - of Jack's abstraction.

"Want to bet?"

"Is this what it's going to be like for us now? Obsessing about underwear?" Daniel wondered.

"I've been obsessing about more than underwear for a while," Jack said heartily. "You get used to it."

"You do?"

"Get some sleep, Daniel," Jack advised him. "There'll be plenty of time for me to figure out how to get you to strip off tomorrow."

"You're relentless," Daniel complained.

"What part of obsessing don't you get?" Jack had the effrontery to wink at him. "Do I get a kiss goodnight?"

"I'd love to say no, but that means I won't get one either," Daniel sighed, sadly recognising sex was his least likely line of defence against marauding obsessive-hormonal colonels.

Cradling Elvis in the crook of his arm, he got up to walk Jack out, really grateful to him for knowing just when to let him be. He felt incredibly tired, more confused, if anything, than he had been. He wasn't just trying to make sense of feelings for Jack he'd had walled up in safety for so long, but facing his desire for him. The sullen ache low in his belly was proof of that. "Jack," he called impulsively as Jack was shrugging into his jacket. "Thank you."

"For?"

"Understanding." Daniel reached up and kissed Jack tenderly.

"Aah, I've got plenty of time to mess with your mind," Jack smirked. "And your underwear."

He rested his hand at Daniel's waist and walked with him over to the door, grinning as Daniel put Elvis down and gave him a little pat on his rump to get him to scoot to safety. His gut clenching reflexively, Jack put his arms around Daniel, slowly lowering his head to kiss him. Daniel moved easily into him, kissing him more confidently than before, increasing the pressure until Jack opened to him. Daniel thrust deeply, passionately rubbing tongues with breathtaking tenderness. This was better than the way Daniel kissed him in his dreams. Reality had all the sweetness and gentleness, but also a straightforward masculinity that seriously turned Jack on.

He was so going to have his hands full with Daniel: off-world, at home, in bed.

He could not wait.

"Wear something hot tomorrow," he whispered into Daniel's ear as he stepped back, grinning as the dazed pleasure on Daniel's face gave way to suspicion and mild horror. "Love you," Jack promised, reluctantly opening the door.

"Hot?" Daniel's voice rose.

Jack exited rapidly, closing the door smartly behind him.

"Define hot!" Daniel complained to Elvis, who came prancing as fast as his injured leg would let him when Daniel stooped down to scoop him up. Daniel locked his door, then turned out the light. Elvis was yawning, snuggling contentedly into his chest. Daniel kissed Elvis's head. "I can't believe I'm saying this, let alone planning on doing it, Elvis. Want to help me pick out something hot to wear for Jack? In case I don't come to my senses in the morning."

Daniel carried Elvis into the kitchen to have a drink while he applied some more of the ointment to the cut. "I'm glad I found you, you know," he promised his sleepy dog as he

closed the balcony doors, then took him into the bedroom. "I was living inside my head too much. Not that I stopped caring, I just felt so distant. I didn't know if it was him, or if it was me." He put Elvis into his basket, sitting on the floor beside him for a minute or two as he turned around and around, curling himself into a ball. Daniel stroked him for a while longer, hoping Elvis understood he was safe now.

Jack had said to use his voice.

"We seemed to be fighting all the time, Jack and I. I didn't push him away. At least, I don't think I did. I didn't know he was falling in love with me. Why didn't I see his feelings for me were changing? I know Jack. Sometimes, I know him better than he knows himself. All I saw was his anger. It hurt," Daniel whispered. "I've never had so many friends I can afford to lose one but even so...When I thought I'd lost Jack, it hurt me more than it was supposed to."

Daniel got up then and after checking Elvis was staying put, loped up to the closet in front of his bed. He undressed rapidly, a sudden impulse planting him in front of the mirror on the closet door. He looked warily at his reflection, frankly wondering what it was about him that got Jack so excited. He was pale and lanky. He didn't think too much about what he wore or why, his favourite activity was reading and he selected his underwear for comfort. There just was nothing he could see to explain the attraction. Shrugging, Daniel stripped, tossed his laundry into the canvas basket, then pulled on a favourite T-shirt from his days at the Oriental Institute and a pair of thin navy pyjama bottoms.

He climbed into bed, craning up to check one more time on Elvis, then hit the lights, wondering if he was being a tad judgemental about Jack's libido. He wasn't able to quantify what it was about Jack's body that attracted him, but he couldn't deny Jack cleaned his clock, hormonally speaking.

The patter of hesitant paws over the carpet made him lean across and put on the bedside lamp. Daniel scooted over the bed to find one miserable little dog slinking towards him, head down, his tail clipped abjectly between his legs. "Elvis, what is it, boy?" Daniel pulled a face. As if Elvis could answer. He jumped out of bed and sat on the steps, patting the floor. "Elvis, come. Come on." Daniel reached down and lifted Elvis up to the top step, wrenched with pity when the shivering dog cuddled against his leg, the way he had when Daniel had rescued him on the mountain.

"Hey," he said gently. "Don't be scared, Elvis. I'm not leaving you, I'm right here. I promise." Trust was built, though, and the last human Elvis trusted had left him up there in the woods to die a slow death. His dog was scared. Daniel only had three days downtime and then he had to go back to work. He was going to have to get Elvis used to him being gone and trusting him to come back. That was going to be hard enough on his dog without keeping him at unnecessary distance while he was home with him too. Elvis wasn't an inconvenience to him: he was an unexpected gift.

Thinking guiltily about the unread pamphlet from the vet, Daniel picked him up and climbed back into bed. He turned off the lamp, then rolled onto his side facing Elvis, petting him to soothe away the shivers.

"Do you want to hear more about me and Jack? I feel ridiculous talking to you, but Jack said you needed to hear the sound of my voice so...Um, where was I? Oh. Yes. Which is worse, Elvis? Lashing out at the man you're falling in love with, or hiding even from yourself? I don't have anything to feel superior about, do I? Jack was just as scared as I was, but he faced his feelings, made a kind of peace with them. With himself. I shut myself away. What was I so scared of? To fall in love again? To fall for a man?"

The small body was stilling beneath his hand, a rough tongue rasping hotly over his fingers, spread out on the pillow.

"I'm not that small, Elvis. I know myself well enough for that. I think I was afraid because it was Jack, because I've always felt too much for Jack. Can you love two people at once?"

Flipping his pillow to find a cool spot, Daniel stretched out comfortably. Elvis was quiet now, nestled in a fold of the comforter. His eyes adjusting to the dark, Daniel watched him fondly, listening to him breathe.

His feelings for Jack hadn't changed when Sha'uri died. Maybe that was what he found so difficult to accept. Jack couldn't have meant more to him than he did, not when his instinct took him to his friend time and again. Daniel hadn't wanted to face his growing attraction to Jack or admit that it had always been there between them.

Jack's rigidity was at least partly the fault of his career. He was used to sublimating his feelings for the good of his team. In a way, Daniel was the one who had pried Jack open to new possibilities, made him think and feel as much as he judged and acted.

Daniel had Sha'uri. He'd truly loved her, he always would. He'd reached out past her though, hadn't he? Reached for Jack. Their connection was different than anything Daniel had ever felt. Loving Jack didn't cost him any part of Sha'uri, did it? He loved both of them and he'd been moving towards Jack for so long he hadn't been able to see it.

Clarity didn't mean Daniel was at peace with his feelings, but he felt more able to be honest with Jack and with himself. He rolled over carefully to avoid waking the sleeping Elvis and dialled Jack's cell phone. "Jack?" he said the instant Jack picked up.

"Hey. What's up, Daniel? You freaking out on me? I just got home, but if you need me?"

Warmth and affectionate concern washed over Daniel. He relaxed, lying back down with the handset of the phone. "I'm okay," he promised. "Doing better, I think."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I wanted to say thanks, Jack."

"Didn't we already do this?" Laughter mellowed Jack's voice.

"I'm glad you didn't let sleeping dogs lie."

"You are?"

"I - I will be. I'm sure of it. And, Jack?"

"Still here," Jack promised.

"I love you."

**FINIS**