

Title: Sleeping Dogs Part Two

Author: Biblio

Rating: PG-13

Pairing: Jack and Daniel

Category: First Time. Friendship. Romance.

Series: Sleeping Dogs

Season/Spoilers: Season 5.

Synopsis: It's the morning after the night before and reaction is setting in.

Warnings: None.



Sleeping Dogs Part Two

A slash story by Biblio

Daniel had a certain guilty suspicion he was already firmly wrapped around one small, appealing paw, because allowing your dog to sleep cosily curled up on your tummy had to be right at the top of the How *not* to care for your dog list.

A quick, nervous glance at the clock told him it was seven-thirty already so he should be up and picking out something sexy, an exercise in futility he expected was going to take some time. Elvis looked so sweet, though, Daniel didn't want to disturb him.

Um, comfortable. He meant comfortable.

"You're a bad influence, Elvis," he complained gently, drawing the curly tail through his fingers. "Smart too, using me as a cushion so I can't get away from you." Daniel allowed himself to be quietly pleased by this small sign Elvis had some faith in him. While he certainly wasn't about to apologise for his protectiveness, the pleasure he was taking in getting to know Elvis was surprising him.

On principle, he was reluctant to admit Jack was right, but in this instance it was undeniable. Fish were not the same.

"I'm so happy I found you," he murmured, thinking how quickly this had become true for him. He was determined to make his dog secure and happy because Elvis's gentle, loving nature deserved nurturing, and because he loved him already. He was so enjoying discovering each - to him - charming new facet of Elvis's irresistible personality, grateful

for and quite humbled by the affection Elvis wasn't shy of showing him. It was a new experience, one he was willing to take the time to explore.

"I always wondered what cute was," he mused idly, his fingertips dwelling in silky fur, careful of the dog's emaciated state. "I've been described by women of demonstrably little discernment and limited vocabulary as cute. The dictionary definition is daintily or quaintly pleasing, you know. Somehow, I doubt that's what women mean by it. There are some gender specific semantics going on with that. Aesthetic judgements," he suggested, dark with disapproval. Daniel rested his hands on the dog's side, feeling his gaunt ribs move as he breathed. "You're cute, though, in all senses of the word," he said softly, smiling.

Elvis slowly opened sleepy eyes, yawned cavernously, planted his three good paws solidly and stretched himself, wobbly but perfectly at home on his Daniel. His smile broadening, Daniel fielded his excited dog, scrambling gamely up his chest to bestow a good morning lick, scolding Elvis with no conviction whatsoever for overreacting.

"Cute," Daniel sighed, melting embarrassingly as Elvis's tail wagged so furiously his whole butt moved. "You're not going to pee on me, are you?" he asked sternly, failing to avoid a rasping tongue on his chin. He petted Elvis good morning, carefully smoothing out the ruffled fur with his fingers. Elvis appeared to thoroughly approve of this grooming technique, squirming and arching to keep Daniel's hands on him. Daniel rather enjoyed it too. He didn't think he'd ever seen anyone - or anything - so pleased to see him before. Not even Jack. He decided he and Elvis were both suckers for one another, which made it perfectly okay of course.

He soon realised there was an undercurrent of desperation to Elvis's ecstasies, a palpable, almost hysterical relief Daniel was still here, that he was still safe. It was clear the dog didn't really trust what was happening to him. As raw over what had been done to Elvis this morning as he had been last night, Daniel cradled the dog to him and simply held him while he quieted down. He was mortified by his own emotion when Elvis settled into a slow, repeated pattern of gentle licking, as if he were grooming Daniel, seeking and giving reassurance, contact, constancy.

Seeing the impact he had on Elvis, Daniel began dimly to understand the extent of the responsibility he'd accepted for this animal. Dependency wasn't a trait he was comfortable with, but then, neither was love if he were being honest.

"We've got some work to do," he informed Elvis, who jumped at the sound of his voice. The curly tail wagged uncertainly, the dog unsure of what he could do to please Daniel. He was so starved, so pathetic, Daniel was wrenched with pity for him.

"I want to do the right thing for you," he promised determinedly, kissing the eager head. This meant research, and questions for Jack, who knew dogs but more importantly, loved them.

"Hungry?" he asked, both of them startled, shying when the phone rang shrilly. Elvis went slithering into the comforter when Daniel strained awkwardly across the bed to answer. "Hello?"

"Hi."

There was a long pause then as Jack apparently ran out of steam, filled by a scared, indignant Elvis limping up the bed to assume his rightful position snuggled into Daniel's arms.

"Er - hi."

"You sound awkward, Jack," Daniel snorted, amused. "Embarrassed, even." There was another pause. Daniel had plenty he wanted to say about Jack being rendered apparently mute, a kind of quid pro quo for all Jack had had to say about certain allegedly loquacious linguists, but some very specific memories inconveniently surfaced before he got started. "Um. I. Er," Daniel mumbled, very glad Jack couldn't see his face slowly flame. It was very definitely the morning after the night before. "I - er - you..."

Strange. He appeared to have something in his throat.

Possibly his heart.

"I know, I know. It's the whole crazy in love with you thing," Jack reminded him sweetly, annoyingly making a recovery just as Daniel was losing it.

Daniel felt his decidedly nervous bleat was not an adequately enthusiastic response to this. He was also pretty sure he'd just abjectly surrendered whatever small conversational advantage he'd had. Crucified by embarrassment, he cringed as Jack, ever considerate to friends in need, chuckled malevolently.

Elvis was sitting up and taking a bright-eyed interest in the phone, curiously tugging and chewing on the cord. Daniel put his hand invitingly in front of Elvis's face. He snorted as his wrist was pinned beneath a wily paw, Elvis dropping his head to lap wetly at Daniel's fingers.

"How's the mutt?"

"He's good." The mutt didn't like Daniel being distracted. He wanted to assist with the phone call.

"How'd he like his basket?"

Daniel decided to perjure himself on the grounds of having a spine like a damp noodle. "Fine," he said firmly.

"He slept with you, didn't he?"

Daniel didn't care for Jack's tone of voice. "He did not!"

"That skinny flea-ridden ass is parked in my spot!" Jack indignantly accused him.

"You don't have a spot," Daniel responded coldly, not prepared to go there this early in the morning. He wasn't ready to face Jack asserting access rights to his blankets. "Even if you did, Elvis isn't in it." Uneasily, Daniel assured himself pedantry was not synonymous with dishonesty.

"So that's you licking the phone, is it?"

Scowling, Daniel craned up to lift the handset out of Elvis's orally fixated reach. Elvis liked this new game, tugging energetically on the phone cord, bouncing up on his rear paws as Daniel tugged back. "Did you just call to say you love me or is there a point to this?" Daniel asked loudly, suspecting all the playful growling was a bit of a giveaway.

"There's a point as well," Jack responded with freezing dignity. "Want to meet me at Garden of the Gods? Take the flea bag for his first walk? Have breakfast with me?"

"I - I'd like that," Daniel accepted breathlessly.

"Our first date!" Jack proclaimed, gloating dotingly. "I'll meet you at the first parking lot at nine. Remember! Wear something hot." Jack hung up on him before he could respond to that.

Daniel returned the handset to its cradle, then rolled onto his back. Elvis clambered up on to his chest, inviting further petting if Daniel were so inclined. They enjoyed themselves very much with their mutual tactile learning curve, while Daniel eyed his closet doors broodingly, wondering aloud if he could get away with interpreting 'hot' to mean something like a really thick sweater or thermal underwear.

"Breakfast first," he decided, scooping Elvis up as he rolled neatly out of bed. When he got down the steps, Daniel conscientiously put him on the floor and looked at him encouragingly. Elvis sniffed his ankle, then gleefully attacked his bare toes. Telling himself he was too pushed for time to let Elvis play, Daniel happily cuddled him up again and trotted out. Elvis didn't mind. He didn't seem to mind anything except being put down. Even then, he was flexible if this involved petting.

In the kitchen, Daniel deposited Elvis suggestively by the litter box. Elvis sniffed at it dubiously then began to back away until he was huddled by Daniel's feet. It occurred to Daniel he had no idea how to make a dog pee. It had never come up, not even in conversations he'd had with dogs.

He hunkered down. Elvis looked up brightly, anxious to please.

"Go, um, pee," Daniel suggested hopefully.

Responding to his voice, Elvis licked him but that was all.

Remembering Jack's advice to assert himself, Daniel ordered Elvis to pee. Looking flattened, Elvis whimpered and started to pee on the floor. Daniel instantly scooped him up and deposited him into the litter box, where nature continued on her majestic course. Confused and crying, Elvis took a lot of soothing and praising before he calmed down enough to take the only treat Daniel had within reach. Fortunately, they both liked Cheerios for breakfast.

While Elvis sniffed around in the box, clearly happier now he could smell his own scent in there, Daniel cleaned up the floor, did what he could for himself, then darted over to the table to choose some food for Elvis. Mindful of Jack's orders, he took out the bag of dry food as well as a can of chicken flavoured dog food. Idling his way through a gentle lecture on scent marking, he took his time mixing the food in the bowl as appetisingly as possible, hopefully disguising the taste of the crushed pill he was supposed to give Elvis. The pills were twice a day. The ointment was four times, which meant it was coming with them.

"Does it make me a loser if I'm looking forward to taking you out?" Daniel asked as he freshened his dog's drinking water.

Elvis was sitting smugly by the damp spot on the litter tray, clearly awaiting his due praise and petting, even though he was airborne when most of it hit. Deciding he could grade Elvis - generously - on a curve, Daniel happily obliged, then settled him down to eat. It upset him to see Elvis gobbling down each meal as if it was his last, fuelling his determination to have him plump and contented as soon as humanly possible.

He had to wonder if he was going to annoy Elvis with his healthy-eating nagging as much as Sam and Janet annoyed him.

As Elvis rapidly vacuumed up his chicken meal, Daniel made a mental note to ask Jack about appropriate feeding for small dogs, because Elvis seemed to him to be desperately hungry all the time.

He wasn't going near that pamphlet Laurie the vet had given him. It was bound to be rigid and preachy about things like not allowing your dog to sleep on you and making him walk on his sore leg whenever possible. What he needed was a trip to the canine care section in the Chinook, his favourite bookstore.

Leaving the little dog to finish his heaped gourmet breakfast and enjoy a nice cool drink, Daniel headed off to snatch a quick shower. Even when it was drying on you, dog pee was pervasive. He honestly wasn't sure what to do for the best when Elvis immediately followed him out of the kitchen, his tail again wagging uncertainly.

Daniel almost went back to reassure him, but felt it would do more harm than good. Surely, Elvis had to get used to him not being there before he could learn to accept Daniel would come back?

After some diffident mutual hovering, Daniel compromised, keeping the door to the bathroom open while he showered and Elvis ate. He sang too, optimistically thinking the sound of his voice would soothe Elvis's nerves, whatever it did to Mrs. Lewicki's next door.

Unfortunately, this led him to wonder what Mrs. Lewicki's cat would make of Elvis. Smudge had never struck Daniel as a canine-lover. In fact, he'd never struck Daniel as a lover of anything, including Mrs. Lewicki. If Smudge had a credit card and a can-opener, he'd blow off his adoring, elderly owner in a heart-beat.

Daniel's own relationship - and he used the word in its loosest possible sense - with the cat was difficult to say the least. Smudge appeared to be magnetically attracted to him, almost besotted in a crazed-stalkery restraining order kind of way. Daniel was going to have to keep the two pets apart and if he couldn't, if Smudge gave Elvis problems, well, he had a creative, resourceful Special Ops trained cat-hating colonel very much at his disposal.

Jack was a great comfort to Daniel, for all kinds of reasons.

When he emerged from the shower, Daniel was disconcerted to discover he wasn't any more comfortable being naked in front of his dog than he expected to be in front of his - his - God. He had difficulty even thinking it. Boyfriend. Significant Something Or Other. Whatever it was Jack was to him now.

He also discovered Elvis liked rolling around in huge fluffy towels, but not nearly as much as he liked Daniel's toes.

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Jack's butt was numb but he looked really cool in his leather jacket and shades, sitting perfectly poised on the hood of his truck, so he stayed put, thoroughly enjoying the show as Daniel and Elvis made their way towards him through the packed car park. Garden of the Gods, with its vast red rocks, heaved with joggers, climbers, families on outings, dog walkers, picnickers, tourists, coffee-swilling lollygaggers and arty types dawn 'til dusk, day in, day out. Jack had long suspected its appeal to Daniel lay not in the stunning scenic beauty but the drive-thru Starbucks just down the road.

Man and dog were on either end of a light leash, but it was anyone's guess who was doing the driving. To Jack's amusement, Elvis appeared to have way more experience of being owned than Daniel did of owning. His sweet baby towered over the little dog clinging so closely to his side, Elvis bouncing along slightly awkwardly as he favoured his sore leg,

looking up adoringly at his proud owner with every other step, his tail wagging the whole time.

The flea bag looked as gung-ho as Jack felt.

Jack was delighted - and amazed - to see Daniel had taken him at his word, dressing hotter than hell in jailbait-tight dark indigo denim and a slinky soft sullen blue sweater which clung faithfully to every curve, the sleeves falling down over his graceful, speaking hands. Daniel's attitude was eloquent of straight-forward masculine challenge perfectly blended with wishing-the-ground-would-open-and-swallow-him-whole mortified modesty. The former was clearly aimed right between Jack's shamelessly ogling eyes.

Everything, in fact, was perfect. At least until Daniel walked into a gaggle of power-walking grannies emerging from a people-carrier. The gaggle took one look at the emaciated Elvis and freaking ensued.

Jack's instinct was to rush to the rescue but, one, little old ladies scared him, two, Daniel could scare him, three, Elvis was practically hysterical in defence of his idol and four, Daniel had a way with him. The raucous, ugly calls for cops and ASPCA faltered in the face of - well, Daniel's face. He was much too pretty for everyone's good. It worked against him as much as it worked for him, but this time, those big, beguiling baby blues worked like the proverbial charm.

While Daniel made soothing noises and fussed over the cute little doggie, the old battleaxes gradually stopped with the yelling and started with the listening. Then the outrage on the little doggie's behalf as Daniel revealed himself to be rescuer, not abuser. Finally, the sage nods, sound advice and petting. More of Daniel than of the dog, Jack was sad to see. Fortunately, Elvis was about as keen on sharing as Jack was and satisfyingly open about showing it.

The grannies departed amicably, but not without a cheeky wolf-whistle or two when they got a load of Daniel's equally impressive rear-view.

"Don't these people have anything better to do?" Daniel bridled indignantly as the old gals went off giggling.

"Not when what they want to do is you," Jack observed judiciously, sliding lithely down to ground level. "Nice job, by the way." He activated the alarm on his truck and waited expectantly for further communication.

"Oh." Daniel stood in front of Jack, looking at him. He nodded vacantly, a possible thanks for the compliment. Elvis sat on his foot. "Um." He looked some more. "Hi." He was still looking.

In the absence of petting, and apparently remembering Jack as a source of treats, Elvis stirred himself to amble over to sniff him, leading Daniel along resistless at the end of his leash.

"If this were a better world, I'd kiss you," Jack informed Daniel as he hunkered down to say hello properly to Elvis, gratified he'd reduced the boy to monosyllabic incoherence and his dog to squirming acquiescence.

"That would be fine," Daniel agreed in a small, distracted voice, still staring.

"Let's walk." Jack took the leash from Daniel. Elvis planted his skinny behind on the pavement and barked. This was clearly going too far even if Jack had been granted petting privileges. Meekly, Jack gave Daniel back the leash. Elvis wanted to walk between them. "He thinks he can take me," Jack snorted.

"He's protective," Daniel admitted affectionately. "I know it's absolutely ridiculous. I mean, look at the size of him!"

"He's going to embarrass you all over Colorado Springs," Jack observed cheerfully, looking forward to being there, preferably with a camera. Elvis was enjoying himself, dividing his time between sniffing Daniel's leg and the ground in front of him with ferocious lightning assaults on Jack's bootlaces.

"He has a toe fetish," Daniel muttered darkly.

"Really?" Jack politely invited clarification.

"Yes!" Daniel nodded vigorously. "It's inconvenient to say the least. I love working - um - relaxing," he amended instantly, looking shifty. "I mean relaxing."

"Of course you did," Jack agreed in his most blandly soothing tones.

Daniel avoided his eyes. "Barefoot."

"You 'relax' barefoot? Really?" Jack perked up, abandoning an argument about Daniel's recreational habits in favour of intriguing fetish-related intelligence. He and Elvis were as one on the subject of toes. He could also harangue Daniel in private for having no social life any time he felt like taking him out on the town and showing him off to the bitterly envious someplace expensive.

"This is going to cause problems. Distractions. Rolling around playing." Daniel sounded as if he was quite looking forward to this.

"It certainly is!" Jack agreed heartily, wondering if Elvis was up for a threesome in the rolling around department. If not, the mutt could make his own amusement. "Speaking of distractions?" he segued smoothly into something he did want to investigate further at this time. "Want to tell me what was going through your mind back there?" he asked invitingly, jerking his thumb towards the truck.

"No."

"All that staring?" Jack coaxed.

"No."

"You love me," Jack observed complacently.

Daniel went very red.

"It just got real for you, huh?" Jack suggested sympathetically. "I think I slept ten whole minutes last night," he admitted ruefully. He was fine until he got into bed, then he stupidly pictured Daniel *in* bed and promptly freaked about him coming to his senses. It was to Jack entirely possible for them to be in love and for him to still not get any. It was just his luck. Worse, it was Daniel's.

He'd waited three hours next to his phone lying to himself he was reading about the very deep deeps of the deepest lake in the world in his National Geographic before he let himself make the call to Daniel this morning. Even if he was possibly maybe slightly too worried about getting laid before Daniel dumped him, Jack liked to think he had *some* dignity.

"We're in a relationship, Jack!" Daniel babbled, clearly into some freaking time of his own.

"Do you want that?"

"I want you."

"Then everything else will come," Jack promised reassuringly. "Including me, I hope," he muttered.

"Good to know you have your priorities straight," Daniel snapped, pissed and showing it.

"Absolutely. I planned to soften you up with coffee and pastries before the morning study group commences."

"Study group? I'm afraid to ask," Daniel hinted inquisitively, brightening up.

Sucker, Jack thought fondly. "Sex Ed. I figured we'd hit the books hard and, you know?"

"Try a little hands on?" Daniel guessed, his perfectly arched, ridiculously mobile eyebrows soaring as he sneered.

"That's a good suggestion," Jack commented, much struck by this evidence of Daniel's foresight and sexual open-mindedness. He was confident Daniel - and Elvis - would want to look at the books. There would be questions. Possibly notes. Cross-references and use of the laptop. Licking. "Life is good," he decided, smiling expansively. Daniel seemed to

agree with this pronouncement, a smile lighting his face. "I'm touched you actually looked at me before you looked at the flea-bag," Jack thanked him graciously.

"You're taller," Daniel explained.

"There speaks a man who's just asking to drive all the way downtown to Panera Bread to buy his own cinnamon crunch bagels," Jack retorted, hefting a large decorative bag of fresh-baked, still-warm goodies.

"Cinnamon?" Daniel echoed greedily. "Can Elvis eat bagels?" he asked after a swift glance down.

"No."

"I think he wants to."

"I don't care how much he wants to. Dogs always want to. Dogs will eat until they explode if you let them. That doesn't change the fact cinnamon bagels are bad for him."

"Don't tell me that, tell him."

"He can't explode before the barbecue. I told everyone they were meeting Elvis."

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Daniel found he was enjoying their stroll through the park, surrounded by the magical towering red-gold, sun-drenched rock. Elvis was being very good. So good, in fact, Daniel suspected he was going easy on his stupid human. Jack was going easy on him too, patiently assured, cheerful and teasing by turns, especially when they passed the Kissing Camels rock. There was a lingering warmth in his eyes though, a hint of predatory possessiveness in the fleeting, fugitive touches to Daniel's back or waist which told him everything had changed between them.

Although what they were talking about was evidence enough.

"Instructional videos?" Daniel asked for about the third time.

"I swear to God!" Jack held up a solemn hand as he gracefully insinuated his long legs into the small gap between bench and table in the fortunately quiet picnic area.

Daniel put the creamy cappuccinos onto the table and sat Elvis on the bench next to him. Elvis promptly propped his chin on the table and tried to psyche out Jack with kilowatt pleading puppyish eyes, smartly targeting him as the source of those delicious warm cinnamon scents.

"They do that?" Daniel hinted delicately, having difficulty following the conversation even without Elvis being cute as a button at him.

"I hear that men think about sex all the time," Jack responded solemnly, a grin tugging at his lips. "Even with each other."

"Videos."

"Cued up in the VCR and ready to roll," Jack said cheerfully, attacking his first bagel with audible and visible relish.

"You've watched them?"

"They're instructional, Daniel," Jack explained in a slightly superior, pitying tone. "Not porn."

"Are they?" Daniel pulled a face at Jack, unsure himself what he was asking. His brain seemed to have seized.

"I'm fully briefed and good to go," Jack declared confidently.

"I know I said I believed we'd be okay with the sex, Jack," Daniel began a difficult explanation - he refused to think of it as wussing out - of his tangled feelings. "I didn't expect to have to be okay with it today!"

Frowning at Jack, he helped himself to a bagel, a pair of bright, gimlet eyes tracking his hands all the way. Elvis instantly abandoned Jack for easier meat. Daniel distractedly stroked the pathetic, neglected head resting persuasively on his thigh. "I know you want to go to bed with me," he acknowledged doubtfully. Jack had made this crystal clear. "I also thought we were going to be getting to know one another better, not focusing on a sexual relationship. Not right away," he added hesitantly, sure he wasn't explaining himself well.

"Would you prefer not to know that I want you?" Jack retorted. "That I'm thinking all the time about how we'll be together? Neither of us are kids, Daniel, and I prefer to be honest. We don't have time to screw each other around, we have too much going on in our lives for that. I figure we both need to know where we stand and it's not just about what we feel. That part is great, it's good, I want it too," he promised with unwonted earnestness. "I want everything. I wish I could offer it all up to you in a neat, logical a to b, b to c, c to d package, but I can't. Sex and love, it's all part of what I want, what I feel." Jack took a long drink of his coffee, cradling the container between his palms. "I need to be honest," he said again.

"You had time to adjust to your feelings, Jack, a time when I didn't know you were in love with me. It took as long to come to terms with wanting me sexually as it did to admit you love me," Daniel reminded Jack gently. "I have to try to deal with all of this too, but the difference is you know. You're right here, watching every move I make, waiting for,"

Daniel trailed off, well aware of the depth of Jack's frustration. "I don't expect anything but the truth from you, Jack. It's all I've ever asked for. Except now, when I - I need some patience." He looked unhappily at Jack. "You told me I didn't have to decide the rest of our lives right away."

Jack relaxed, his eyes twinkling rueful acknowledgement. "I meant it too," he admitted reluctantly, a real grin breaking out. "God knows I've never managed to railroad you into anything you didn't choose to do," he complained, flourishing a bagel for emphasis. "You have a damned inconvenient memory for the stupid things I say to you."

"I know." Daniel risked a smile and was magnanimously rewarded with a bagel for his pains.

"This was stupider than most," Jack grumbled. "That video is wide screen, you know."

"Jack!"

"I'm not pushing my luck," Jack informed Daniel reproachfully. "I'm explaining. Elaborating. Reiterating."

"Aggravating."

"You love it," Jack said complacently.

As he was likely to lose this one, Daniel prudently decided to change the subject. "I need a licence for Elvis." He was sure of this. Jack would be sure of everything else.

"He has a certificate for his rabies shots so we can swing by the Humane Society," Jack shrugged easily. "If you think the flea-bag is worth eight bucks."

Daniel didn't dignify this with a response. He took another bagel and stroked his dog.

"Or maybe twenty. Elvis still has quite a spring in his step even with the limp." Jack straightened up to peer inquisitively over the table. "Is he fixed?"

"Fixed?" Daniel looked down. Elvis looked up. "How can you tell?" he asked at last, genuinely perplexed.

Jack rolled his eyes. "Take a look," he advised Daniel with slow, crisply enunciated clarity, as if he was talking to a fractious, none too bright pre-schooler.

"Oh, like you're an expert in canine castration!" Daniel snapped, feeling goaded. He refused to be made to feel inadequate because he lacked the broad experience of multiple-species male genitalia which appeared to be a key component of Special Ops training, if the pitying look on the colonel's patronising face was anything to go by. "I'm not taking a look," he refused sullenly.

"Daniel."

"I'm aware I'm anthropomorphising Elvis," Daniel interrupted, heading off at the pass Jack's all-too-imminent lecture. "I'm also aware of the issues and of my responsibilities as a responsible dog owner. I'm just not going to look for his testicles here. Not in front of everyone. He has his dignity, you know?"

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When Daniel put him down, Elvis wanted to be picked straight back up. Jack's place was, apparently, big and scary. Daniel, who'd never had to deal with Jack undressing him with his eyes, was inclined to agree. "Coffee?" he hinted, desperately casual.

"Sure." Jack smiled to himself and signed to Daniel to lead the way. He wolf-whistled before he even got the door closed behind them.

Elvis, meanwhile, was sniffing distractedly at the air. Hunger winning out over nerves, he limped straight for Jack's kitchen, following his nose.

"How often am I allowed to feed him?" Daniel fretted.

"Twice a day."

"He's very thin," Daniel hinted hopefully.

"He's an expert guilt-tripper."

"Possibly, but he still needs feeding up," Daniel insisted stubbornly. A peremptory bark had him lifting his head to sniff the air over the steamy stove. "But not on - what *is* that?" he demanded, his nose wrinkling disgustedly.

"Chilli," Jack informed him coldly. He'd spent a great deal of time and extremely precise experimentation perfecting his recipe, blending herbs and spices with juicy fresh tomatoes and chillies, the best beef money could buy, ground right here in his kitchen to the exact texture for optimum sauce absorption. In Jack's opinion, good chilli was both art and science.

"Chilli? Elvis!" With a bleat of panic, Daniel dashed into the kitchen.

Jack was clearly in love with a thankless culinary philistine who would be apologising and making it up to him suitably and at length, preferably this evening after all the extraneous guests had gone home. The late September sky was wine-crisp, with just enough bite after dark to beg a fire. In the meantime, he was planning to idle away a sunny morning in his garden communing with Daniel while Elvis - for preference - built up his strength in a long, refreshing sleep.

Thanking his realtor for a garden masked by mature trees and high fences, Jack picked up his favourite woollen blanket and the pile of how-to guides which were so focusing Daniel's mind, strolling out onto the deck, then down into the garden. He'd missed a couple of weeks of mowing and the grass was long and tender, perfect for a small, still-frail dog to play in confidently.

"Elvis likes your chilli," Daniel said from behind him. "He likes it more than he apparently likes me right now."

"He's fine," Jack said reassuringly. "He can't do any damage and he'll come out to you when he's ready."

Daniel looked longingly into the house.

"You're breaking every rule in Laurie's book," Jack teased. "I know you are."

His only response to Jack's accusation a stubborn sniff, Daniel took the blanket, shook it out and spread it, then tumbled down to sprawl over most of it.

Jack dropped his assortment of well-thumbed and in some cases annotated sex books onto the grass in front of them, then joined Daniel on the blanket, which took quite a bit of nudging before the love of his life sullenly shifted over an inch or two and made room. Jack gave him a good, hard shove, then stretched out next to him, propping his chin comfortably on his hands.

They both watched the pile of books in silence for a while, trying, not very successfully, to act unconcerned.

The skitter of paws on the deck had Daniel looking around. Elvis whined but he wanted to be down the steps more than he wanted to wait for Daniel to pick him up, so he gave it a shot. It was slow progress and when he reached the grass, the dog's limp was more pronounced, but his tail was wagging. He came over to Daniel, nosing at him to be petted. Daniel stroked him and kissed him on the head, praised him lavishly for his intrepid bravery, and then Elvis went over to say hello to Jack, who melted like butter in front of a blow torch. They both thoroughly enjoyed the fuss. Elvis started sniffing the grass as soon as Jack put him down, rambling off to investigate.

"I love him," Daniel confessed in a rush to Jack, embarrassing himself. "Already. He's filling up an emptiness I wasn't aware I had."

"Unconditional love," Jack said softly, his eyes far away. "He's always going to be a responsibility, he's always going to need your care. Give him your affection and what you get in return?" He shrugged uncomfortably, as embarrassed as Daniel was at his sudden sentimentality. "You have no idea how he's going to change you."

"He's a good dog." Daniel smiled as a small head popped out from behind a tree, checked on him, then vanished again. "I hate what happened to him and the way he was treated. I hate that he loved someone unconditionally and trusted them and they did this to him. I don't care what was wrong with them or their lives or what they lacked in their souls. They tossed him like trash and left him to die. I hate what they did." He picked at a fold in the blanket. "It's not a huge leap to hating them."

"Try not to think about it," Jack advised, knowing it wasn't possible.

"No," Daniel said definitely. "Elvis needs me too much. It's more than just his injury. He was frightened last night, in the dark."

"There are a lot of predators out in those woods."

Daniel's face hardened. "It's going to be hard to leave him," he said slowly, watching a rustling bush. Elvis peeped out, looked at Daniel, his tail wagging as he limped through the soft grass. "It's too soon. I won't traumatise him with what would have to feel like another abandonment. I have a ton of translation work to catch up on and I can do it from home."

"I think your colonel might have something to say about that," Jack suggested meekly.

"Sam has a back-log which might actually be bigger than mine and the only reason either of us needs forty-eight hours in the day is your expressed loathing of paperwork."

"You can go off people, you know."

"Yes," Daniel agreed crisply, "You can." Elvis came up to him and snuggled into his shoulder, his fur warm against Daniel's throat. "You're such a good boy," he crooned, stroking him.

Jack's legendary will of iron crumbled for a wagging tail and a soft, hesitant lick of his outstretched hand. "Base time sounds good," he lied through gritted teeth. George would be thrilled. At some point he'd decided it was time to groom Jack for command and he seemed to prefer it when Jack showed some hackle so he could rub him up the wrong way some more. It was possibly character building. George certainly intended it to be, but Jack wasn't playing along. He was happy to keep a cool head in a crisis but he reserved the right to lose it when the small stuff screwed him over.

Elvis lay down on a corner of the blanket, drowsing under Daniel's hand.

"Book?" Jack asked pleasantly, sliding one of his 'how to?' manuals across.

Native caution where Jack was concerned warred with Daniel's proper scholarly curiosity. He guessed they both knew which would win out. He took the book, opened it and checked out the contents page, disconcerted by the serendipitous go read wherever the mood takes you approach. A logical progression would have been slightly more

reassuring to the absolute beginner, he felt. He read on, checking out the foreword, then on into the introductory chapters, finding the emphasis on the sharing of pleasures, on comfort and mutual consent encouraging.

"This is probably the most surreal experience I've ever had with you," Daniel informed Jack after a while, leafing back a couple of pages in the book to check out the photographs again. It was ridiculous, but he was very glad Elvis was sound asleep, curled into a ball in the corner of the blanket by his head. This was bizarre enough without having Elvis listening in. "I didn't even know they published books like this. The only ones I've ever seen..."

Jack raised an enquiring brow.

"When I was researching the Spartans," Daniel informed him dampeningly. "Those books had line drawings."

"Just wait until we're trying it in bed," Jack said smugly.

Daniel stared at the uppermost photo of the two naked men, one with his legs hooked over the other man's shoulders. "It doesn't look comfortable for either partner," he commented doubtfully. "Or dignified."

Jack reached across him and flipped over the page, pointing to figure seventeen.

Carefully noting the ecstatic expressions on two effortful faces, Daniel cleared his throat nervously. "Possibly worth the indignity," he admitted.

"When was the last time your right hand made you look like that?" Jack asked dryly.

Daniel glanced skittishly at figure seventeen again. That would be approximately never.

"Me either," Jack admitted woodenly, apparently reading Daniel like the book.

"This reminds me of learning to drive," Daniel muttered, wondering if he dared to check out the chapter on - what was it called? Rimming? "Ferocious concentration and not enough arms and legs for all the manoeuvres." He waved a vague, explanatory hand over the double page spread of full-colour figures fourteen through seventeen. Rimming worried him. He'd never heard the term before and given this was in the context of 'Sharing oral pleasure with your partner' he wasn't sure of much except it sounded highly unlikely to him.

Daniel turned onto his side, facing Jack, a cheek propped up on his hand. "You watched a video?" he asked, in awe of this accomplishment.

Jack nodded, his expression mild.

"How was it?" Daniel was fascinated and appalled at once. "As bad as it sounds?"

"Bad maybe isn't the term I'd use, but bad enough it made me realise there's something fundamentally screwed about sex education," Jack grumbled. "All this fulfilling your partner shtick is really about fulfilling the woman. With the guy, it's assumed orgasm is inevitable."

"Like death and taxes."

"If the woman isn't fulfilled, it's the guy's fault. If the guy isn't fulfilled," Jack complained, "It's also the guy's fault. We're talking medical practitioners. The assumption is there has to be something physically wrong with the guy because god forbid we get all judgemental about the woman being lousy at sex."

Daniel made 'what he said' noises.

"Your average hetero how-to guide is long on the woman's g-spot but comes up short on why straight sex for a guy is, physiologically speaking, always a few fries short of a Happy Meal."

"Good, but," Daniel trailed off, his eyes once again drawn to figure seventeen. "Er..."

"Could be better." Jack's eyes were dwelling too. "Way better." He was being extremely careful not to let on to Daniel just how much sexual experience he'd had with men. He couldn't think of anything he hadn't tried and enjoyed at least once. He consoled himself that he wasn't exactly lying, just being economical with the truth. Daniel was feeling hopelessly inadequate and overwhelmed as it was. Jack couldn't see it helping him in any way to have performance anxiety on top of everything else. There was to be no question in Daniel's mind of disappointing or of being compared to other guys Jack had been with.

"I don't know if reading all of this makes me less or more unnerved than I already was," Daniel confessed, reaching over to rest his hand at Jack's waist.

"I recommend de-sensitising," Jack responded instantly. "Repeated exposure eventually dulls the knee-jerk reaction that makes you want to gibber under the bed with 'Miss July' to prop up your psyche."

"I'm very proud of you," Daniel decided. "Even if you are scaring the crap out of me."

Jack rolled smoothly on top of Daniel, pinning him neatly with the weight of his body. While Daniel tried to figure out how he felt about this, Jack removed his glasses and set them safely down on top of the pile of reference books.

When he turned back, Daniel reached up to stroke trembling fingers down from Jack's temple to his jaw, his blue eyes wide and wondering. The intensity of Daniel's gaze was as much for Jack as a physical touch.

"I never really noticed how good-looking you are," Daniel remarked absently. "Although that's not specific to you. I always seem to be searching for more than there is on anyone's surface. I get so caught up in that, in knowing a person, maybe I don't really see them." He smiled shyly at Jack. "Seeing you now, though," he confided, lifting his face to kiss him.

They lay tangled up together, moving their mouths restlessly, curiously, together. Daniel closed his eyes but Jack watched, assessing the unsubtle incredulity and awkwardness in Daniel's face and body. Even his lips were stiff and careful. Jack couldn't even remember the first time he got laid with a guy but guessed it must have played out something like this.

"I never kissed a man before you," he promised quietly, reaching across to rub Daniel's stomach. He found he was aroused by the sensation of firm muscles sliding beneath the soft wool as he rubbed in slow circles, by the difference between a man and the boys he remembered being with. Jack slid his hand lower, slipping it beneath the sweater. Daniel gasped, shifting jerkily as Jack's fingers stroked over his skin.

Not really thinking, Jack went with it, curiosity at Daniel's reactions, at his own, leading him to skim over the sharp jut of a slim hip, across a muscular, denim-clad thigh. He didn't mean to push, but suddenly his hand was there, between Daniel's legs. Daniel shuddered convulsively, shook and shook as Jack's palm massaged his slow-swelling crotch, his mouth working soundlessly, in pleasure or protest Jack couldn't tell, until it was too much for him and he cracked, pushing Jack away.

Daniel apologised immediately, disjointedly, neither of them sure what for, exactly, promising it was okay, he was okay, he just wasn't used to - to this. Sorry himself, Jack slid his arms around Daniel, hugging him close, in comfort, Daniel's head moving diffidently onto his shoulder, a strong hand coming to rest over Jack's.

It struck Jack then that Daniel was as wary and uncertain of him as the dog was of Daniel. They were both mistrustful. The dog had learned this response from experience, but he wondered now what had happened to make Daniel this way. Was it experience or was it truly his nature? The answer could be important if he was going to make things right between them. If he was going to make Daniel happy.

"What was it like for you with Sha'uri?" he asked impulsively.

"You want to know about my sex life?" Daniel was astounded. "My sex life with my wife?"

"I'm not trying to pry," Jack explained in his most reasonable tone.

"That's exactly what you're doing!" Daniel countered hotly, shoving at Jack until he reluctantly shifted, barely enough to allow Daniel room to wriggle out of his embrace. "It's none of your business!"

"When you go to bed with me, your past experiences are kind of my business, Daniel. Our business," he corrected himself with conscious emphasis.

"Does that mean you're going to fill me on your sex life with your wife?" Daniel demanded, struggling to control his temper.

"That's different. I know how bad that sounds, Daniel, but it's not an excuse. It's a fact. We were married a lot longer and we were married here." Where things at least could pass for normal. "You, though," Jack paused, knowing he wasn't necessarily doing the right thing but at least was trying to say it right. "All the time I've known you, you've never dated. The only woman you ever went for was just as alien as Sha'uri was. I don't get it. I don't get that part of you."

"I've never known you to date either," Daniel argued, stiff with resentment.

"I was in love with you," Jack reminded him calmly. "I only lost sight of that once, when I thought I had no choice, when I believed I was never going to see you again. I was..." he hesitated, then decided to let Daniel hear it. "Lost."

"Edora," Daniel replied instantly, softening as he caught the deeper meaning of what Jack was telling him. Despite himself, he reached out tentatively to rub Jack's arm in quiet empathy and understanding.

There had been nothing easy about Jack's relationship with the Edoran woman Laira. It took her almost the whole time he was trapped there with her to corner him. It was only with hindsight that Jack could see how manipulative she had been.

They sat for a while in silence, Jack looking, waiting, smiling to himself as Daniel thought all of this through, forgave him for being a tactless asshole and thawed just enough he found his voice again.

"Difficult," Daniel said at last, sounding very gruff. "It was difficult."

"You told me she laughed," Jack recalled. The first night Daniel was back on Earth with him. "Everyone else worshipped the ground you walked on and she...laughed."

"Kept me grounded," Daniel corrected him with gentle dignity.

Jack freed his arm and slid it around Daniel, who put up a token resistance, then slumped gratefully and, daringly, started up with the rubbing thing again, only this time on Jack's thigh.

"Have you had a - a lot of partners?" Daniel asked with extreme caution, bracing himself for a rebuff.

"Some," Jack shrugged carelessly, not about to open up the thorny issue of gender. "You?"

His hand stilling, then slipping from Jack's thigh to wipe nervously over his own, Daniel looked down, pale and mortified. "My wife," he admitted in a stifled voice.

Somehow, on some level, Jack had always known this, but it was still a shock to have it confirmed. He had the sense not to let it show, not to say anything, and to wait Daniel out again, with more patience than he'd imagined he possessed. It was becoming terribly important to him Daniel be more than happy. He wanted him comfortable. He wanted him to have expectations, to be certain of him, to feel free to push him. He wanted Daniel to trust him, to give more of himself to Jack than he had ever given anyone before. To let Jack in.

He was asking the world and intended to have it. Daniel meant this much.

It was about limits for him, for both of them, he guessed. He thought he'd opened up them both, expanded what they knew and what they wanted from one another but in reality, all he'd really done at this point was make Daniel painfully aware of all his old limitations and a whole bunch of new ones. And left himself trying to deal with it all. He didn't have his usual option or excuse of emotional constipation, not when he was the one with the experience. There were plenty of times he'd depended on Daniel he shouldn't grudge the tables being turned.

"I loved her very much." Daniel sounded sure. "There's nothing I haven't thought about, replayed over and over in my mind, so much I would've changed if I could." He smiled, strained and difficult. "So much I did change. I made her fit to me. All of them."

Jack could imagine some of it. The cartouche room had always nagged at him. It had looked to him like the set of one of those wildly lavish Cecil B. DeMille epics with an improbable cast of thousands and had probably taken that many to dig it out. Not to mention the time spent by Daniel exploring and finding where 'X' marked the spot before the excavations ever started. Throw in teaching the people English and the rudiments of archaeology, training them in digging and soldiering, or at least mounting disciplined guard on valuable artefacts. Uncovering the Stargate, experimenting with it. So much Daniel had accomplished, in so little time.

No wonder Daniel was stricken. As driven as he was during that year away from Jack, he must never have believed Abydos could last for him, that it could ever be more than a dream. He had never trusted it, never given himself wholly to that life or to Sha'uri.

"She didn't like me," Jack noted, wondering if Daniel had ever picked up on this. He remembered Sha'uri's reluctance when he took his team back through to Abydos, the way she had clung to Daniel's side and shook Jack's hand as if it had shit on it. He remembered the challenging, territorial kiss and Daniel's stupefaction as she staked her claim on him, the lusty approval and encouragements of the crowd, Skaara and the kids.

Kids?

No birth control.

No babies.

He understood then how it was for them, he guessed he knew it all. Daniel anxious for Sha'uri, taking no risks. Not with her life, not with a child's. Pouring all of his energy, all of his life into - what had Carter called it? The archaeological find of the century. No surprise Sha'uri had hated Jack and feared him. She was barely holding on to her precious Danyel before Jack ever came back through the Stargate. She had never needed to be told Jack had come to take Daniel from her. How long had she waited for exactly that?

"Talk about me a lot, did you?" he asked Daniel, carefully neutral.

"Sha'uri didn't," Daniel tried to argue, bewildered, defensive and meaning his stuttered objection honestly. "She didn't dislike you."

"We both wanted the same thing, Daniel," Jack interrupted, reaching up to stroke Daniel's face. "We both wanted you and I guess on some level we both recognised it in each other."

"Ke'ra," Daniel said slowly, frowning through another realisation. "You loathed her from the start, Jack. Learning her real identity only justified the feelings you were already expressing towards her, didn't it? The way you overreacted to our friendship never made sense to me. It never occurred to me you could be jealous."

Jack stifled a sigh. He could almost see the question coming at him.

"Were you jealous of Sha'uri too?"

"Maybe as much as she was of me," Jack replied steadily enough. "Maybe more."

"All this time," Daniel muttered fretfully, distressed as much for Jack as for his surfacing memories and his blindness. "I've spent half my life studying...No," he caught himself up hastily. "More than that, Jack. Much more. Spent it captivated by the written word, and I married a woman who couldn't read or write or speak my language. Do you know what that means?" he asked painfully. "It wasn't the words. Those I could teach. It was the *meaning*. A pen was a wonder to Sha'uri. A pen." He pushed away from Jack and got up, pacing off his agitation. He didn't slow when Jack followed to stand a small distance from the path he was wearing through the grass, back and forth, back and forth.

"I did love her," Daniel protested, needing to say this even though Jack wasn't arguing with him.

"I know, but it wasn't a marriage of equals," Jack said quietly, knowing it was exactly this equality and balance between them which had most attracted him to Daniel.

"She was strong," Daniel argued fiercely. "Strong and smart and capable. The things she could do, Jack, the skills she had."

All about survival, Jack knew. Sha'uri was simple because her life was simple. It was easier for her people to die than it was for them to live. Without reading and writing, without recording the history and accomplishments of the people who lived before them, the Abydonians had stagnated. Sha'uri had known no more and could do no more than the women Ra had brought with him from Egypt. Daniel could love her, and teach her, but they could never be equals. She could never challenge him intellectually or even emotionally. Her laughter was like her obedience, a control, a way to push Daniel into the role of husband and provider that she understood. She had wanted Daniel to conform, not question, for him to be the one who was changed, not her people.

Jack had no doubt she had loved Daniel as much as he had loved her but whether they were happy, whether they would have lasted, he didn't know. He felt not.

"I never did put her first," Daniel admitted, his voice breaking. "Jack..."

"I'm here," Jack said simply, standing his ground. Not pushing, not this time. He felt a rush of relief and aching gratitude when Daniel came to him.

Daniel's eyes were huge, shadowed in a grey face. He was burning inside, hurting and scared to lean on Jack. He was also strong and excruciatingly honest, even with himself. "I never was who she needed me to be."

Knowing it was easier for Daniel to remember Sha'uri as perfect rather than human, to hold on to his remembrances rather than reality, Jack kissed him warmly, softly, then folded him in close and held on to him, hoping and waiting for him to want to give in, to meet him halfway and reach out for him too.

They needed to talk, to help each other reach an understanding about this shared past of theirs, interlocking painfully on so many levels, but Daniel didn't try to comprehend or explain what he'd just learned about Jack and maybe could begin to face about himself.

A soft nudge at his foot made Jack glance down to find Elvis anxiously staring up at Daniel. Sensitive to their mood, he was silent, cuddling shyly into their legs.

Daniel didn't try to talk. He only kissed Jack's neck and hugged him hard.

He held on.

For Jack, this was better. This was worth it all. For the here and now, this was pretty near everything he wanted.

**FINIS**