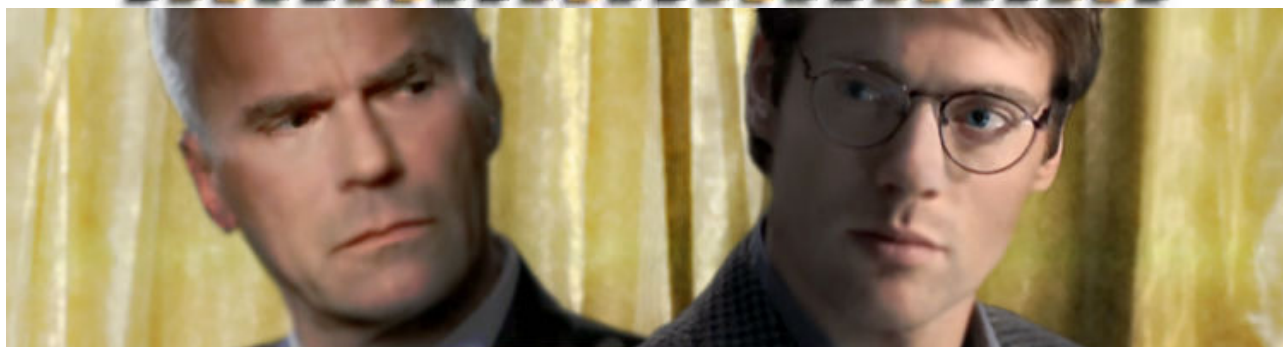


Title: Stealing Minnesota
Author: Biblio
Rating: NC-17
Pairing: Jack and Daniel
Category: Angst. Drama. Romance. First Time.
Season/Spoilers: Season 5.
Synopsis: One little white lie...and some home truths.
Warnings: None



Stealing Minnesota

A slash novella by Biblio

Daniel was seriously starting to wonder if he was sending out some kind of 'fuckable!' vibe.

He tended not to go out because it always stressed him out waiting for the inevitable someone, somewhere to call him a geek and get a loaded Sam in the face. Or Jack. Or, on one never to be sufficiently regretted team outing, Cass.

When Daniel went out on his own, people...well, they looked at him in a manner he could only describe as rude.

Consequently his favourite social haunt was the university archaeological society's Yahooogroup, where he was a known and feared flamer of lazy sophomore Budge advocates. His credibility was slightly suspect given that when he'd briefed Sam to come up with a suitably anonymous Yahoo identity for him so he could mess with the minds of the upperclassmen, his so-called surrogate sister had saddled him with the astonishing nom-de-plume 'chocolate_covered_archaeologist' and a sig that said 'Bite me' every time he posted.

Having five people in one night try to pick him up was outside of his experience to say the least, even if he was wearing his good jacket. If he was being hit on in some downtown bar, Daniel could have - um, would have - walked away. Or run. Unfortunately, he was in a formal reception being held in the Orangery of the Devidae Palace on a world known to Sam as P7X-985 and to everyone else as Shreve.

Being hit on in a downtown bar by three women in a row and then two together would have been embarrassing enough, but being hit on in the Devidae Palace was a fathomless humiliation. Daniel was going to have to leave immediately, and he couldn't do that without giving Jack an explanation. He might be paid an astonishing amount of money to act as Earth's first line of communication, but he had to admit even he couldn't come up with a goddamn word to get him out of this one.

'SHIT!' was all that was currently coming to his resolutely blank mind.

The two who wanted to get together and make him scream were the Prefect of the Most Noble Devid's army and the Prime Minister of the Most Noble Devid's government.

Daniel could feel another treaty slithering from his grasp.

It went without saying that Jack would laugh his ass off.

He began to politely make his way through the throng of happily chattering guests to the exquisite ice sculpture Jack couldn't be dragged away from. Daniel sensed he should have known something was up from the subject matter, which Jack classified as tasteful erotica and he and Sam dubbed porn, but really, if anyone had to be fielding amorous advances from ardent - and in one case elderly - admirers, why couldn't it be Sam?

Trapped in her regulation heels for four hours, Sam was ripe for murder, treaty or no treaty. From the look she was shooting Jack, Daniel figured they were about to get a vacancy in the chain of command. If only he'd stop looking at the ice breasts and work the room a little, Daniel could...oh, shit!

SHIT! Crystal cup at twelve o'clock, closing fast. Between him and Jack.

Tragically, the Shrevans had flatly refused Teal'c entry to their world because he still bore a symbiote. Daniel would have hidden behind him until the latest in the ever-growing line of nobles to sidle up to him bearing one of those little crystal cups gave up and found someone else to feel up.

The fact that the general gave the mission a go despite Teal'c being barred from participating showed how much pressure he was under to deliver the goods this time. Hence Daniel's quandary. He couldn't afford to fuck this up. Hammond had always done his best for Daniel. Screwing up a valuable treaty because he didn't like the way the locals were eyeing him was no thanks for the general's kindness and generosity.

There was no help likely from his other teammates. Sam was trapped with the Most Noble Devid himself, grimly smiling while enduring a breast fixation as pervasive and blatant as Jack's. SG-1's glorious leader was currently broadening his repertoire with a thorough inspection of the recumbent female's icy ass.

After admiring the craftsmanship of the first crystal cup, Daniel had yielded to the pleading 'Yes?', taken one sip of the fruity concoction he'd accepted in the interests of diplomacy and the alcohol had fried his tonsils. He'd made a show of appreciatively sipping the rest and tipped it neatly into the nearest ornamental flower display during the Shrevans' First Quarter Obeisance to the east.

Daniel had disposed of one crystal cupful each to south, west and north. Unless he gained some ground on his wheezing but determined pursuer here, who he suspected was the Most Noble Devid's oldest daughter, he was going to be raising a toast to the east again.

After a brief moment to consider his tactical options, Daniel bolted into the garden. If nothing else, his unexpected absence would force either Jack or the Most Noble Devid to stop admiring breasts. He hoped the latter. He could tell Sam every Shrevan woman with a pulse was hitting on him and she would not, for example, call him a dog and make lewd tweed jokes.

Daniel made it safely onto the lovely mosaic terrace, using every scrap of cover from the palms, ferns and fragrant orchids, to rapidly traverse the velvety lawn towards the outer terrace that overlooked the sea, glittering eerily below in the moonlight. He leaned against the balustrade and caught his breath.

"Dok-tore Jack-sone!"

Daniel suppressed a groan and turned to smile at the beaming - Tulla, was it? - bearing down on him like a galleon in full sail. She had lovely eyes, Daniel remembered, and was rather...large. "Daniel, please," he offered politely as she took his proffered hand and kept it.

"Dann-yel," Tulla beamed at him. She hefted the crystal cup. "Yes?" she asked anxiously.

Dear God, no-oo. The stuff was VILE.

"My pleasure," Daniel accepted the cup graciously, toasting her with it. Her blinding smile - which was also lovely - broadened as she stepped closer, and then died as Jack shot out onto the terrace urgently calling Daniel's name. "Over here!" Daniel called back with heartfelt gratitude.

He was slightly taken aback to see Jack sprint across the grass.

"Daniel!" Jack snapped as he loomed up at Daniel's side. "Don't you think you've had enough?"

Was that a trick question?

Tulla stiffened alarmingly at Jack's tone. "Col-nell Jack?" she asked with marked coldness, tightening her grip on Daniel's hand enough to make him whimper.

"I'll just finish this one," he suggested placidly, trying to smooth Tulla's ruffled feathers enough to restore the circulation to his fingers.

"THIS one? How many have you had?" Jack demanded.

"Dann-yel?"

Ow! Could she talk WITHOUT squeezing? The tears in his eyes weren't joy, here.

Dann-yel had a pissy princess on his left and a contrary colonel on his right. He decided to split the difference and lie to Tulla now and tell Jack the truth later. Not that he had any right to get on Daniel's case for drinking on duty. Daniel hadn't, and anyway, Jack had been looking at hooters and asses all night. He wasn't exactly attacking from the moral high ground.

"This one makes five," Daniel said brightly.

"FIVE?"

Daniel jumped as Jack snatched the cup from him, tipped the contents on the ground and muscled his way between him and Tulla. Daniel didn't have a clue what he'd done to tick Jack off this time. Until his colonel let him in on it, he was just going to stand here trying to massage some feeling back in his hand and enjoy the view, distractingly clad in dress blues.

Not that his colonel was his colonel, unfortunately.

"Oops!" Jack snapped in a cutting tone Daniel had last heard him use to Ke'ra.

Although Jack acted like Daniel was his archaeologist the whole damn time.

"Pth'rok'sone!" Tulla snarled, turning on her heel to march back towards the Orangery and presumably Daddy.

"Pth-thingie?" Jack prompted.

Off the cuff translation? Fuck off and die, Tau'ri scum.

"Not good," Daniel said gently. He jumped back in surprise as Jack whirled and grabbed his shoulders urgently, hauling him right up close to - um - look at him.

Thank god he didn't have X-ray vision.

"We've got to get you back to the Infirmary. God knows what that alien goo-goo juice did to you," Jack said anxiously.

Daniel blinked at him hard, his glasses slipping down his nose. He blushed furiously as Jack automatically reached out and pushed them back up, not even noticing the intimacy, Daniel realised bitterly.

"Goo-goo juice?" he asked coolly, making ineffectual attempts to shake Jack's hands - broad, capable hands Daniel dreamed of touching his skin after he'd jerked himself off to sleep - from his shoulders.

"The local equivalent of Rohypnol-cum-Viagra from what Carter just heard, and you've been tossing that shit back all night."

"What?" Daniel asked incredulously. Those women were trying to drug him into having sex with them? "That's...that...I..." he sputtered helplessly. Suddenly his bizarre social climbing through the noble ranks of the Shrevans made sense. They thought he'd withstood four shots of this poison without it doing whatever it was supposed to be doing to him, which must make him pretty studly by anyone's reckoning.

"An aphrodisiac, Daniel," Jack explained in his 'patient' paternal voice, patting Daniel consolingly. "Carter figures the effects are being delayed or somehow negated by your antihistamine meds. Only you," he sighed.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Daniel demanded indignantly, his body treacherously yielding as Jack took advantage of his confusion and stood with his hands resting at Daniel's waist. Daniel's heart was in his throat, his brain was in his shorts and his tongue was hanging out his mouth. Instead of doing the decent thing - i.e., dropping to his knees and blowing Daniel's brain out his ears - Jack just stood there doing the goddamned good friend thing.

Just like always.

"Sweet and nice gets you stoned, Daniel," Jack said impatiently. "And then it gets you laid," he added unforgivably as he grabbed Daniel's hand and tried to pull him along.

He was in love with a first-class shit, Daniel thought wearily. He was in love with the kind of shit who could look at ice-sculpted hooters all night because it was irresistibly funny. Without ever meaning to, Jack could cut Daniel into little aching pieces with a look. A look that never really saw who Daniel was or what he wanted.

"I'd better get you back before you start humping the table legs," Jack muttered.

It hadn't even crossed Jack's mind his beloved best bud wanted to hump him through the wall every time he laid eyes on him, Viagraed up or not. Daniel was always up where Jack was concerned! He wondered whether Jack had ever figured out his dear old parents had to have done it at least once, if he couldn't even face the fact his archaeologist did it and in fact loved doing it. If Jack ever had to face the fact his archaeologist wanted to do

him, he'd probably drop on the spot. Which begged the question. What exactly was he to Jack? Eunuch Boy?

Right after that insulting realisation, it also occurred to him that Jack had just assumed he'd done this damned stupid thing despite his track record with mind-altering substances of every kind. Including Jack's tuna casserole.

Jack had leaped to the wrong conclusion and barrelled in as always to rescue Daniel, his closest friend and confidant. It hadn't even crossed his mind to check with Daniel if he needed rescuing. Zero to impossibly pissy and overprotective in sixty seconds. Or less. He had no objectivity at all where Daniel was concerned. He didn't even notice that he hadn't freed Daniel's hand, even though Daniel had emphatically not budged an inch.

He was not about to allow Jack to drag him by the hand back to the Stargate like a naughty child. Daniel had to tug his hand away.

This was why - exactly why Jack O'Neill was his dearest friend, and not his lover.

They were going to Minnesota in two days' time. Fishing. Though he'd die at the stake before admitting it, Daniel knew his friend well enough to know that Jack was happy and excited, looking forward to having Daniel's undivided attention in his most favourite place in the world. Daniel was dreading it. The last time they'd been up at the cabin, he'd tumbled into that big bed with Jack and not given it a moment's thought. Now he wanted to lick the sweat from Jack's shoulder as they made love.

It was maddening to have the man so close to him, closer to him than to anyone else in the history of ever, to have Jack loving him and needing him so much as a friend he would never, could never, fall in love with him and be his lover.

Daniel couldn't stand it. He loved Jack too, and he would never, could never hurt him.

He found it easy to hurt himself. Easier every day.

He really could not stand this.

For once, he...he wouldn't. Just once he wanted to have who and what he needed. He wouldn't get to keep Jack. He never did. The need would be worse, after, but he was used to that.

Daniel stretched up and kissed Jack full on the lips, the whole thing lasting about a nanosecond and embarrassingly short on porno content of any kind. To be fair, despite extensive reading and some terrifying online research, this was Daniel's first time kissing a man. He'd done okay. He'd managed to hit Jack's lips first time out. More or less.

It was nice, if...brief. Jack's mouth was firm, warm and mobile. Surprisingly strong and...and he wanted to kiss again, so badly. To have Jack kiss him back, more...

Jack's eyes narrowed with intense, wicked amusement, but that was about it. "You are SO going to hate yourself in the morning, Dannyboy," he enunciated each word crisply. He shook his head in fond exasperation and took Daniel's shoulders firmly.

Daniel clasped his arms around Jack's neck and stretched up to kiss him again, flickering his tongue over Jack's lips, cataloguing the taste and texture of a pleasure he would never have again. Jack's mouth opened to him - surprise, probably - and Daniel fell into him, drowning in the silky rasp of tongue on tongue. Jack's fingers clenched bruisingly on his shoulders but his mouth was gentle and he didn't push Daniel away.

Jack's whole body was tense and oddly still while Daniel burrowed closer, the reality of being this close overwhelming him. Jack was like a slab of granite, every inch of him long, lean and impossibly hard. Daniel was aroused by the explosive strength of the man, contained by the familiar, subtle rhythms of friendship and protectiveness.

He was truly lost as Jack's lips moved over his, hands sliding down to lock in the small of his back, the balustrade digging painfully into his ribs as Jack exerted his strength, his weight pinning Daniel.

It wasn't until Jack's tongue pushed aggressively into Daniel's mouth that he realised he was no longer alone in his single-minded passion. Jack was angling his lips to deepen the kiss, the gentle, accepting stroking of a few moments before now a profoundly sensuous pulsing of tongues, straining lips and clashing teeth.

Daniel completely embarrassed himself by moaning, mostly incredulous disbelief rather than passion, and found himself trying to...well, climb inside Jack. He was plastered to the man so close and so hard he rocked him back on his feet. He moaned again and hooked his leg around Jack, who went still again as Daniel's erection rubbed against his groin. He moaned too when Daniel suckled on his tongue.

Jack seemed very distracted by Daniel's mouth and Daniel was always completely distracted by Jack's ass and fair was fair, so he slid his shaking hands over it, stroking reverently, ecstatically. Jack seemed to think fair was a damned fine plan too, because a moment later his hands were clamped to Daniel's ass and the rubbing was mutual.

Daniel was straining up into the kiss as Jack thrust powerfully into his mouth; it was wild, out of control, they were eating one another alive, lips grinding...

Jack was...Jack was with him...

"Sir!" Sam's shocked gasp had Jack shoving Daniel away, hard.

He stumbled, didn't have time to be hurt. Jack's face wrenched and his hand cupped roughly around Daniel's nape, hauled him in close again to press his white face against

Jack's shoulder, Jack's arm tight around him. "Shh," Jack whispered. "I'll take care of it, don't worry yourself. I've got you."

"Wh-whaa..." Daniel stammered, shaken and stirred.

"They got Daniel good with that shit, Carter," Jack announced calmly.

"Daniel? Are you okay? Maybe I should..." Sam began anxiously.

"I should," Jack corrected her flatly. "The Devid likes you and we NEED this treaty. Get back in there and get him to sign on the dotted line. I'll take Daniel back to the Infirmary, get him checked out."

A good friend. The best.

"Please, Carter. Let's not make this any worse for Daniel than it already is," Jack asked with unwonted gentleness, his hand, unseen by Sam, petting constant reassurance against Daniel's nape and hair.

"Of course, Sir," Sam agreed at once, sounding a little deflated.

"S-Sam," Daniel stammered.

"I'm here, Daniel, just trust me okay?" Sam said gently. "No one has to - it was the drug," her soft voice tightened to anger. "There may be side-effects," she told Jack worriedly. "His meds."

"I'll take him now."

And that was that. Jack had kissed him like he'd never been kissed before, food for dreams and nightmares, and now his dearly loved friends were with him and he was their Daniel again, weighed down by the burden of their needs and expectations.

"Thanks, Sam," Daniel muttered hopelessly into the broad, comforting expanse of Jack's supporting shoulder.

Daniel needed more than friendship, comfort and unswerving, unquestioning loyalty and support.

He needed love and passion, a presence in his life and in his bed.

He needed Jack.

He needed himself.

He wasn't denying the battle. He was losing.

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The rest of the night passed in a blur of anxious friends, kindness and discretion.

Jack could not have been more supportive, sitting close at Daniel's side as Janet examined him, dismissing the searing passion they'd shared with a joke about Daniel needing to get out more if Jack was starting to look good. He got a lecture on sensitivity from Janet, as he'd no doubt expected, and his own actions weren't questioned.

Everyone - Teal'c, Janet and the general, all hovering - thought Jack had handled the situation well.

There was anger against the Shrevans and wry acceptance that getting an archaeologist stoned enough to plant one on his C.O. wasn't enough of a moral question for the Pentagon to be warier of the people they were getting into bed with. Hammond's comment provoked another joke from Jack and tension relieving laughter.

Everyone was glad Daniel was okay.

Daniel wasn't okay. He hadn't been for a long time, though he refused to let himself dwell on that. It seemed he'd made his choice, unknowing, on his balcony. He wasn't strong enough to walk away, it wasn't in him to take the easy way out, to fall away from his problems, and when he'd come to the edge, he'd chosen Jack.

He would always choose Jack.

He was in love.

With a man.

His commanding officer.

His friend.

Jack loved him, but he would always choose the Air Force.

It was getting harder for Daniel to feel like more than the sum of his friends' expectations.

Sam returned from Shreve triumphant and uncaring, rushing straight to Daniel's side. She dislodged Jack and took his place, held Daniel's hand in hers, her arm hugging around him, loving and gentle, assuring him without words that she understood, she was there for him.

Daniel rested his cheek against hers and Sam kissed him, clinging closer.

It was forgotten. Over. Not to be held against him and Sam's fierce look to Jack suggested he better not try any of his so-called jokes over this. Daniel was drugged. Not responsible for his actions. End of story.

He didn't disagree. He was given so much by these few people, now his family. It wasn't their fault any more than it was his that it wasn't enough for him.

He did wonder at times how much longer he could go on. Jack had never been happier with his performance in the field; they'd never been closer professionally or personally. Daniel had never lived less. Every day he died a little inside, from wanting, needing, burning, and never, ever having.

It was just his luck.

Janet decided arbitrarily that Daniel was exhausted and needed rest. Daniel was sick enough at heart for his anxious friends to need no convincing. Jack, of course, refused to budge, and Janet, of course, let him stay.

Daniel drowsed, comforted by Jack's closeness, at the cusp of sleep a gentle hand smoothing over his brow and the sound of his name, soft-spoken and infinitely regretful.

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It wasn't until the third time the flustered nurses told him he'd have to wait for Dr. Fraiser that Daniel realised he was in isolation here. He had been so tied in knots over the kiss he could barely remember Janet taking a blood sample. It occurred to him that she would have found trace elements of whatever the drug was, because he had drunk a little. Sam's theory about his antihistamines ameliorating the effect would likely be accepted without question. This morning's bloods would come back clear and Janet would release him, and they would all chalk Shreve up to experience and move on.

Daniel wanted to bury it. He should never have kissed Jack. Never. Tasting what they could have if Jack would just let himself...if he could look at Daniel and SEE...

It wasn't fair on either of them. Daniel had to let Jack off the hook. He decided he would tell them he didn't remember anything and that would be that. As buried as it could be.

A tap on the door made him look up. He smiled involuntarily as Jack sauntered in, brightening a little.

"How are you feeling, Daniel?"

"Confused," Daniel admitted honestly.

"Yeah, about that, Danny..." Jack said awkwardly.

Danny? Crap. Daniel straightened up anxiously. It was always an indicator of Jack's state of mind when 'Danny' slipped out.

"I'll understand if you don't want to go fishing after - you know." Jack slouched over to slump against the wall, his hands shoved deep in his pockets.

Say WHAT?

"No." Annoyance that he'd brought this on himself made Daniel's tone sharper than it should have been. "I don't know."

"I'm just saying, I understand if you're - er - embarrassed," Jack gruffly suggested to the outstretched toe of one of his boots.

Jack was embarrassed, certainly.

Daniel had been drugged. Allegedly. What, exactly, was Jack's excuse for that kiss? He needed to get out more?

"It's not your fault there aren't any fish in the lake. I'll just pack a few more books than last time," Daniel said lightly. "You know. Make my own entertainment."

Jack scowled - he was sensitive about the whole 'Pond With No Fish' thing - and then looked slightly alarmed.

A new and unfamiliar feeling stole over Daniel, and his reaction was not what a sensitive, caring friend's should be. The moment he realised Jack was a little afraid of him, he was lost to a tide of sheer mischief.

"Quality time," Daniel suggested blandly. "Working on the whole - friendship - thing," he murmured dulcetly, eyes wide and innocent as he put edgy emphasis on 'friendship'.

"Dr. Fraiser may not clear you," Jack backtracked spinelessly.

Daniel straightened up. "Don't you want me at the cabin, Jack?" he asked stiffly. "You just have to say. In fact, if you didn't want me there, you didn't have to invite me. I could have found something to do in my downtime." He could write another paper that wouldn't get published or update his article index or take in a wild trip to the Meso-American exhibition at the U. Grout his kitchen. Something.

Jack winced. "It's not that. I just thought...after last night..."

Jack couldn't say it! A little distance from ecstatic mutual osculation and the supportive friend of last night was squirming. Daniel had slept badly and probably looked worse than he felt. It seemed as if Jack had put in a long night too and he really had found no excuse for kissing Daniel.

Except that he'd wanted to, and that was a place Col-nell Jack wasn't prepared to be.

Daniel was mad at Jack, and hurt, but he'd also brought this down on himself so he was sticking to his plan of letting Jack off the hook. When Janet appeared at his door, smiling, Daniel launched into his amnesia routine.

"Your bloods are clear," Janet told him lightly.

"Was I sick?" Daniel asked blankly. "I remember drinking something..." He let it trail off, biting his lip and looking anxious. "Did I pass out?"

"Yes!" Jack agreed before Janet could open her mouth. She shot him a long, hard look.

"You were given a drug, Daniel," Janet said soothingly. "Major Carter was informed that there was a risk to you and the colonel thought it best to bring you back to the Infirmary to be checked out."

"The treaty?" Daniel prompted.

"Fine. Carter sealed the deal," Jack said promptly. He glared meaningfully at Janet and she sighed.

"Colonel? A WORD."

Jack grimaced but followed her out. Daniel heard a brief snatch of self-serving puerile Springerism that annoyed the crap out of him. Jack didn't want him told for his sake, poor sensitive Daniel...been through enough...you know how...

'You know how he is!'

Sonovaspinelessbitch!

"Morning, Sir! Janet. How's Daniel?" Sam called brightly.

"Carter!"

There was more muttering, the three of them clearly forgetting the patient was neither deaf nor unconscious and was, in fact, getting more impatient by the second.

Sam came in with Jack and Janet. Daniel crossed his arms over his chest and scowled at them. "Am I free to go?" he asked stiffly.

"Of course," Janet assured him.

"The vacation?" Sam asked, smiling at Daniel.

"That too," Janet said sweetly. "It'll do you the world of good. And if you do start to remember anything...well, the colonel is the best one to help you with that by all accounts."

Sam snorted explosively and went very red.

Daniel glared at Jack. "Really? Maybe he can take me through it all again blow by blow while we're at the cabin."

Not surprisingly, Jack was left without a word to say.

Daniel walked out companionably with Sam.

She looked up at him as they strolled along to the elevator. "What's on your mind, Daniel?"

"Everything. Nothing."

"That narrows it down," Sam agreed solemnly as she punched her floor.

"I need a change," Daniel said slowly, realising it was true. He needed to change the way Jack saw him. Failing that, he needed to change himself. "Maybe...maybe I should get out more. Instead of..."

Sam smiled at him, her hand touching his for a moment.

"People take one look at me and think I'm a geek," Daniel confided in a rush.

"You like tweed, Daniel. And plaid," Sam chuckled. "That's all the ammunition they need right there."

"I was thinking..."

"I'll pick you up from your lab at six," Sam interrupted ruthlessly. "I know you. If you have time to think about it, you won't do it, and I think you should."

Do it?

He couldn't agree more. His left hand was starting to feel unloved and unwanted because it just couldn't give him the quality time he was spending with his right hand.

"House rules. You don't argue with what I pick and you buy me an expensive dinner," Sam ordered. "And you have to wear what I bully you into buying and not hide it in your closet."

"Deal!" Daniel called as she got off at her floor. "Except the expensive dinner part."

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"Wuss," Sam sneered, holding up the shirt against him. She tilted his chin this way and that.

Daniel could honestly say his skin tone was the last thing on his mind when he shopped for clothes. He liked grey. It laundered well and it didn't matter if he forgot and washed it with colours. It was grey to start with. "Purple?" he protested carefully.

"You're scared."

"Yes."

Sam grinned at him. "Which one do you like?" she offered generously.

"Consumer choice? That's a new shopping concept," Daniel marvelled.

Sam punched him, not gently.

"That one," Daniel pointed out the best of a bad lot.

Sam's face lit up. "Good choice," she praised extravagantly. "That teal colour - it's you. Brings out your eyes. We'll take the black one too. To go with the..."

"I'm not wearing them," Daniel said flatly.

"You agreed to the deal," Sam reminded him smugly.

"You never mentioned leather!"

"They bring out your ass," Sam said blithely. She chuckled richly as Daniel blushed. "I let you get that sweater. It's nice and long," she added innocently.

"It clings," Daniel corrected her.

"If you've got it, flaunt it," Sam said firmly. "I guarantee no one will call you a geek when you swagger past in these pants," Sam tugged the offending item in the pile of clothing draped over Daniel's arm. "And this." She held up the shirts for inspection. "Or these."

"Slut is the word that will jump to mind," Daniel bitched.

"I prefer 'available' and I believe I expressed a preference earlier for expensive food," Sam prodded him as she led him resistless to the clerk.

All the fight had gone out of Daniel by the time she'd inflicted the black leather pants on him. He already had skin tight black jeans, indigo jeans and cream chinos by that point. Now he had a slinky black sweater, and three embarrassingly skimpy shirts, including the pale blue one.

Sam stopped in her tracks. She had apparently seen the promised land.

Daniel started eyeing the exit. He took a fleeting glance at what had Sam mesmerised and froze. "No!"

"Yes," Sam breathed. "They're you."

"They're tighter than the ones I've got!" Daniel bleated.

Sam took this calmly, fishing the existing pants out of the pile and hanging them haphazardly in front of some rather nice checked shirts...two-tone grey...while the Major was away...

"Don't you DARE!" Sam snarled as she skimmed the rack rapidly and neatly extracted the pants in Daniel's size. She lifted them up and looked at them lingeringly, smiling sweetly. "Oh, yes!"

"Oh, no, Sam. No. No way."

Daniel was still arguing fruitlessly as the clerk totted up the staggering bill and packed Sam's spoils, which she made him carry. She also graciously accepted Daniel's complementary gift on his behalf after his emphatic refusal and he expected the worst when she slid her arm through his and praised his cooking.

"You are NOT putting that muck on my face!" he protested vigorously as Sam waved the complementary gift bag mockingly.

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"I can see right up your nose," Daniel said loudly.

"Quit your whining," Sam ordered, circling her fingertips firmly over Daniel's temples. "You would not believe the crap that is embedded in your epidermis," she muttered darkly. "When was the last time you exfoliated? And I don't mean picked leaves!"

"I'm a man." Daniel felt this was a valid defence and was sticking to it.

Sam treated him with the feminine contempt she clearly felt he deserved. "Don't use those granules," she ordered bossily. "This works much better, believe me. Rubbing in the lotion this way lifts the dirt and grease particles, helps to rehydrate the skin and relaxes you."

"It does?" Daniel asked with unkind incredulity. "And if you hit me again you're on the salad," he warned.

"What exactly is your regime?" Sam asked, curious.

"Regime?"

"Skin care."

"I wash," Daniel offered, knowing this would not be enough.

"And? What do you use?"

"Soap?" Daniel suggested uncertainly.

Sam was frowning. "Soap?" she asked somewhat coldly. Her fingers stroked over his cheek. "Soap," she echoed flatly, a definite scowl appearing. "I hate you."

Daniel grinned cheekily. "You're older than me," he said kindly.

Sam's glare was sabotaged by a fit of giggles.

Thinking the worst was over, Daniel made the mistake of trying to sit up. Sam shoved his head back down onto the cushion resting in her lap and leaned over him again, wiping industriously over his face with a cottonball. She solemnly held this up for inspection.

"Yuck."

"Exactly. Exfoliate," she ordered. "I bet you've never had a pimple in your life," she observed bitterly. "O-kaay. We've exfoliated, now we cleanse."

Which meant more muck. Then they toned, apparently, with some nice herb smelling liquid that made his face tingle pleasantly, then they moisturised, though the 'they' was pushing it a bit. Daniel's participation was limited to lying still and not whining too much. Eventually Sam had done all she could do to him short of applying full make-up, reluctantly let him up and made him 'model' so she could admire her handiwork.

"Perfect," she gushed. "You're glowing."

"Glowing?" Daniel snapped. Not that he was the macho type per se, but glowing was going too far.

"If the colonel says anything, just tell him you're knocked up," Sam advised him kindly, smirking broadly. "Now...food!"

"You're a very demanding guest," Daniel grumbled as Sam shoved him bodily into the kitchen.

"I'm a lousy cook. I am not a lousy eater though, which creates something of a skills gap." She hitched her butt up to rest easily against the worktop. "What are we having?" she asked eagerly.

"Rice and mushrooms," Daniel offered generously.

"Oh. I could cook that," Sam grumbled.

Daniel looked at her interestedly.

"I could!" Sam protested indignantly, chuckling.

He decided to put her out of her gastronomic misery. "With cream and white wine sauce flavoured with balsamic vinegar and garlic, plus onions, peppers, and fresh vegetables."

Sam jumped up and hugged him exuberantly. "I think I love you."

"Cupboard love," Daniel riposted lightly, kissing her cheek.

Sam wandered around to the refrigerator and helped herself to a cranberry juice. She'd been a guest here often enough to know Daniel wanted her to feel at home. She was relaxed tonight, wearing tight jeans and a sheer delicate blouse over a sleeveless skimpy top. Sam was attractive, intelligent, loyal...one of the closest and kindest friends Daniel ever had.

He had no idea why he had fallen in love with Jack, but it didn't change the facts.

She was this relaxed with him, chatting easily and inconsequentially, because she knew she was safe. She had the respect of an equal and Daniel knew how much she valued the fact he never made her conscious of her gender around him. It was comfortable and easy, their friendship deepening over time to the point they could be like this. Sam was a wicked tease, putting him through a myriad of chick rituals he didn't get, airily claiming as a de facto anthropologist he should be grateful she was letting him sidle under the glass ceiling.

They understood one another effortlessly.

There was just no heat, no need, as there was with Jack. Daniel never felt like he was jumping out of his skin when Sam stood too close to him.

"Do you really want to go fishing?" Sam asked with polite incredulity. She eyed the mushrooms waiting to be chopped, sniffed and pointedly muttered about already having sung for her supper.

"No," Daniel admitted. "But I do want to laze in the shade of a tree and read for a week." He needed the bittersweet sharpness of Jack's company, pushing him, challenging him. Making him work. Both of them worked at their friendship. There were times when they each seemed to need the other like a drug. He and Jack couldn't be without one another, but they would never be together, not in the way Daniel needed them to be.

"Teal'c said the colonel came close to death a number of times during his stay," Sam grinned. "My advice? Take a LOT of books. Good long books."

Good sex was what Daniel wanted. Sex and closeness. Letting Jack inside his walls, losing himself in heated skin and touch.

Sam's arms slipped around his waist suddenly, startling him. She leaned her face into his shoulder.

"Sam?" Daniel asked anxiously, trying to turn, to see her, but she tightened her grip.

"Just...ssh," Sam said shakily.

Daniel rested his hands over her clasped ones, let her hold him.

"I worry for you," a small voice confessed. "I'm glad you feel ready - that you're reaching out. You've been so far away."

"I could say the same," Daniel said tentatively.

"I know," Sam whispered. "But that's over now. I let myself...I shouldn't have, it was wrong for me, and I've moved on. I - I've always been your friend."

Nothing had ever been acknowledged. Only Daniel had been out in the cold. Not that he'd needed anyone to tell him Sam and Jack had crossed the line. He was happy for Sam, that she'd worked clear of her confusion and was getting on with her life. Recently, she'd been reaching out too.

He was happier still that he had never added to her confusion. One of Jack's team members in love with him was bad enough, but two? All of them friends, each of them loving the others, there for one another. It had felt so wrong to have that distance between them all, hurt him more than he'd been prepared for. They were all inside his walls, and he had no defence against being hurt by any of them.

An impossible situation.

Sam was doing better than he. Daniel had to move on too, because he couldn't go on like this, just functioning. If it was never going to happen with Jack, it was time...past time he allowed himself the potential to be with someone else. If he could get clear of this, if he

could know this was it for him, he and Jack would never have more than this...he would have a chance to find someone else and be with them honestly.

"You don't have to say it, Sam," Daniel said gently. "I know you're my friend."

"Just so long as you do!" Sam said strongly, poking him in the back. She stepped away at last. "Got anything to drink?" she asked, looking pointedly at the wine rack.

"You're driving," Daniel mentioned mildly.

"They have this great new invention. It's called a taxi."

"Knock yourself out," Daniel invited.

"What's the most expensive wine you have?" Sam asked as she poked around, checking out the labels.

"The Far Niente is nice," Daniel suggested as he roughly chopped his garlic. "It's a Napa Valley chardonnay."

"You're having some too," Sam ordered, "if the colonel is flying you out to Welling City in a Piper Cub."

"J-3," Daniel corrected absently as he sliced vegetables.

"Do you know the difference?" Sam asked, laughing.

"Nope," Daniel admitted cheerfully.

"There is no difference. The J-3 is a cub. A seaplane in this instance," Sam said lightly, shaking her head reprovingly over his shocking ignorance of all things aviation. "Don't forget to ask the colonel about the...er... provenance of the craft," Sam hinted darkly, with noticeable satisfaction.

"Provenance?" Daniel asked, slightly alarmed. Were planes old enough to have provenance? Surely not. They were all new and...um...flew.

"Teal'c hasn't a good word to say about Minnesota," Sam snorted, blithely ignoring his politely questioning look as she uncorked the wine, sniffed ecstatically and headed into the other room to fetch glasses. "'There is nothing of interest Welling City,'" she intoned solemnly. "'There are no fish in this pond O'Neill speaks of!'"

"I think Jack likes company at the cabin because it's one more warm body for the mosquitoes to suck dry."

"Apparently they didn't touch him at all with a big juicy Jaffa on the hoof," Sam sniggered.

"Well, he's out of luck this time," Daniel said crisply. "If I keep up with my totalitarian skincare regime the poor little suckers will slide right off."

Sam thumped him.

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"Ohmygod," Daniel whimpered, cringing back as Jack hooted a greeting. He tossed his bag into the back of the truck and crawled into the passenger seat. "Do you know what time it is?"

"06:00," Jack said cheerfully.

"I hate you."

"The plane leaves at 08:45, Daniel. We just have time to check in and grab some breakfast," Jack told him heartlessly.

Daniel shuddered, flipped Jack the bird when he ordered him to belt up, then slumped pathetically.

"Why are you wearing sunglasses?" Jack asked as he pulled away.

"Must you?" Daniel whined.

"What? Talk?"

"Breathe."

Jack plucked off Daniel's glasses, looked at him and laughed meanly. He tossed them back, laughing again as Daniel fumbled for them.

"How much did you have to drink last night?"

"I have no idea," Daniel admitted honestly.

It couldn't have been ALL the empty bottles. One at least had to have gone down the sink. At least. The last thing he remembered was Sam drinking two-thirds of the Far Niente, then announcing she didn't like it. From the heap of bottles piled accusingly in the sink, they seemed to have conducted an extensive tasting.

Things had happened.

Food had been cooked and apparently eaten. He'd got out of his bed, so presumably at some point he had climbed into it. His bag was packed, padlocked and neatly labelled.

Sam's voice was on his answering machine loudly singing 'It's raining men! Hallelujah!' so he had to accept she'd made it home okay. The second message on his machine was from Janet, warning him to drink at least two litres of water today and promising a stern lecture on the evils of alcohol, especially if it made Sam sing, so he amended his earlier assumption and accepted that Sam had made it to Janet's home okay.

The fact he remembered none of these events didn't trouble him at all. His head wasn't actually hurting, it just felt like someone very large was standing on it. As long as he didn't have to do anything stupid, like think, talk or move, he would be fine.

"I'm planning to sleep all the way to Minneapolis, then I'm taking my drugs before I get in the Piper-whatsit with you," he announced unequivocally.

"Dramamine?" Jack asked innocently.

"Valium."

Jack laughed. "Jeez, you find out I crashed ONCE!"

Daniel whimpered, clutching his head defensively. "Noise."

"IF YOU INSIST. I WAS TRYING TO BE SENSITIVE TO YOUR FRAGILE STATE BUT..."

Daniel snarled wordlessly.

It wasn't easy to tune Jack out but Daniel did his best, planting his feet on the dash and crossing his arms over his chest as he tried to convince his brain he really was the right way up. He did vaguely wonder why Jack was so chatty. In anyone else he would have put it down to nervousness, but when was Jack ever nervous? Especially around him.

The kiss was in the past. Over. Jack was off the hook, his confident heterosexuality about as far from being on the ropes as it could get, unlike Daniel's, which had thrown in the towel after three weeks of wet dreams about the small of Jack's back, glimpsed briefly in the showers and tragically never forgotten. Over and...um...out.

Jack had nothing to worry about. Daniel had plenty to worry about but didn't have the strength.

Maybe this inane chatter was some form of serial archaeologist-torture, for which Jack reserved exclusive rights. This was probably Jack-speak for 'how dare you get hammered and not invite me?!

As Peterson Field loomed up at them, Daniel turned once more to Jack. "I hate you." He felt better for clearing the air.

"I hate you more," Jack replied cheerfully.

Daniel followed where Jack led, lumbering along with his bag banging awkwardly against his leg, way heavier than he remembered, every nerve in his body jangling at the NOISE and his gaze fixated on Jack's tight denim-clad rear, swaying taunting and untouchable right in front of him.

Nothing new there. Clueless edible bastard.

They checked in and Daniel almost checked out when Jack steered him towards breakfast and the rich-roasted coffee scent hanging heavy in the air got him in touch with his dinner again. Jack had the sense not to follow him into the mensroom, where Daniel violently threw up and shivered abjectly on the floor beneath the hand dryer for five minutes after dipping his whole head into a basin full of cold water.

When he recovered the power of speech, he fished out his cell phone, called Janet's house and informed Sam via the answering machine he hated her too. Then he gave her, Janet and Cass his love, metaphorically signed up for the Colorado Springs Temperance League, and staggered out to face his colonel.

His colonel was shovelling down bacon and eggs, but was saved from summary execution on the grounds of being a complete shit only by the presence of two bottles of water, aspirin and antacids, and best of all, toothpaste and toothbrush on Daniel's side of the battered booth in the main concourse coffee shop. He addressed his most pressing need and headed right back the way he came with toothpaste, brush and water.

When he stumbled back to the coffee shop, feeling about 3.5% more human, there was a mug of coffee and a muffin waiting. Daniel sank into his seat, took his aspirin and antacids - not quite what he needed but he appreciated the gesture - took a sip of his coffee and felt a lot better. Maybe 5% human. "I don't completely hate you," he generously informed Jack.

Jack grunted acknowledgement round a vast mouthful of waffle.

Jack was a good friend. The best.

Daniel stuck to his plan like crazy glue, and apparently also to Jack. He slept like a baby for the full two hours to Minneapolis, surfacing as the pilot announced they were about to land to find his head on Jack's shoulder and Jack's hands in his lap. He completely embarrassed himself and prayed to any god who might be listening that Jack didn't notice how hard he got, how fast. He fumbled gracelessly to take the seatbelt from Jack and buckled up, his fingers trembling and clumsy.

"Did I mention you've been snoring in my ear for two hours?" Jack asked chattily.

"I'm not sorry."

"Still hate me?"

"You're okay," Daniel acknowledged grudgingly. He slowly rocked his head from side to side, hoping some of his vertebrae would get with the program and snap back to more or less where they were supposed to be. "Uncomfortable, but okay."

Goddamned typical of his luck. He had his face buried in Jack's throat for two hours and missed it all.

"Pipers have ejector seats, you know," Jack said gently. "Loath though I am to part with your sparkling repartee..."

"Pth-thingie," Daniel said crisply. He smirked maddeningly as Jack scowled at him suspiciously, apparently managing a reasonably accurate off-the-cuff translation of his own.

"Maybe I should have worked out an itinerary," Jack mused. "Monday; fly out. Tuesday; Daniel regains consciousness. Wednesday; tragically, Daniel regains the power of speech. Thursday; kill Daniel. Friday; fly home."

Daniel drank the rest of his water, then settled back to enjoy the sensation of his stomach climbing out his ears as the plane plunged down to the runway. Jack praised the smoothness of the descent, but Daniel's stomach wasn't fooled.

He was glad he'd bundled into his favourite cream sweater. He still felt shivery and aching inside. It wasn't every day he gave up on the love of his life. Was giving up on love full-stop. It was past time to face the fact it was never going to happen. He was just supposed to be alone, the perpetual outsider, fulfilling himself through his work. He'd been lucky in the past to be pulled out of that, first by Sarah, then by his Sha'uri.

Third time wasn't a charm.

Third time was charming, funny, pissy, strong, stubbornly determined to the point of insanity and any number of good things, except open to extreme possibility. Jack would never look at Daniel and get hard, never lose himself in the desire to touch and kiss and hold, to fuck or be fucked.

Daniel would have to get used to living his life under glass; seeing, knowing, wanting and unable to touch.

He followed Jack off the plane without any repartee at all. Checked out, grabbed luggage, trailed him through another featureless airport concourse. Stood staring at nothing, guarding the luggage, the bag of muffins they'd acquired who knew where or when, Jack's precious black pilot's bag and the aeronautical maps while Jack signed for his Piper-Whatsit. Daniel followed Jack some more, glad one of them knew where they were going

as they navigated the bowels of the airport, and eventually found himself by a small hangar facing a plane that made his Volvo look spacious.

After some consideration, Daniel decided interrogating Jack about the number of times he'd flown a plane with skis was only going to lead to him spending the entire flight worrying about Jack landing the plane with skis.

"You're dripping scepticism all over the runway," Jack commented sarcastically as Daniel dissed his baby without a word.

"One propeller?" Daniel asked thoughtfully after staring at the plane for some time.

Jack grinned wolfishly. "And no parachutes," he intoned in a voice of doom.

"Don't you have a sweatshirt that colour?" Daniel asked, eyeing the schoolbus-yellow plane dubiously. He was solidly planted on terra firma here and had no desire to trade up for either aerial or, god forbid, aquatic.

"Makes it easier to spot if we go down in the wilderness." Jack shot him another long suspicious scowl, stowed his bag, Daniel's bag and then Daniel quite firmly.

Daniel looked out the cockpit for some time. On the whole, he was glad his view for the entire flight would be the nape of Jack's neck. "What's the provenance of this craft?" he asked carefully, Sam's evil hints all too fresh in his mind.

Jack turned from where he was checking stuff on the plane to beam at him. "I'm glad you asked that," he said happily. "This is an antique seaplane, a true original, built in nineteen thirty-eight," he added proudly, giving it a fond little pat.

"Nineteen thirty-" Daniel bleated in distress.

"Eight! They have these in museums." Jack pointed at the headset, obviously intending to continue to inflict his informative lecture on his for once captive audience.

"I'd rather not," the audience declined politely for the sake of his sanity. "I'm going to sleep now." Daniel had to bite down a near irresistible urge to make lame jokes about sleeping with the fishes. It wouldn't be right. There weren't any fish in Minnesota.

"Shocker!" Jack glanced at him, then again. "Still feeling the after-effects of that crap on Shreve?"

Daniel bit his lip and nodded.

Jack patted his shoulder clumsily. "Just a few more hours and you can kick back, forget about it," he promised softly. "In the meantime, knock yourself out. Or allow me!" he offered generously.

"I'll muddle through without you beating the crap out of me, thank you."

Jack's face fell. "You're determined to suck all the fun right out of my vacation."

"I thought that was what the mosquitoes were for?" Daniel asked sweetly.

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Daniel looked at Welling City, 'Second City On The Mighty Mississippi!'. Welling Tourist Information proudly proclaimed this fascinating fact right there on the pontoon they were moored beside. "I think city is pushing it," he muttered. He felt like himself again.

"Smooth flight," he praised Jack, who beamed back over his shoulder as they strolled across from the pontoon to pick up the rental truck. "The baby's butt of landings," he added, grinning as Jack's shoulders straightened. This was true, in the sense the plane was still on the water, rather than in it. Daniel felt he owed Jack something for waking up after an hour, sweating and confused, demanding he pull in, then barfing in the muffin bag.

Speaking of which..."Food?"

"Peg's Country Kitchen coming right up," Jack promised.

"You're not going to make me eat grit again are you?" Daniel demanded.

"Grits, and no. They're not a Minnesota speciality. 'Peg' isn't from these parts. The hominy grits being a bit of a giveaway," Jack said sarcastically.

"Does Minnesota have a cuisine?" Daniel asked. "A nutritional equivalent to curling?"

"Are you going to be like this the whole damn time?" Jack scowled at him.

Daniel peered over the top of his glasses. "I've been hanging out with some prick called Jack O'Neill too long."

Jack grinned despite himself. "Yes, Daniel. Minnesota has food. You may have heard of some of our quaint regional dishes. Like...let me see...Chicken? Pork. Turkey. Potatoes. Sweetcorn. Green peas. Wild rice. If you're good, I may even treat you to Lutefisk."

"Lutefisk?"

"Norwegian/Minnesotan," Jack said cheerfully. "It's a...fragrant...dish."

Daniel perked right up. He liked ethnic cuisine. "Is Peg's the place we went last time? Where we had that pie? What was it called?"

"Caramel apple granny." Jack licked his lips. "Oh, yeah!"

"Are we there yet?"

"Don't make me turn this vacation around," Jack teased, stopping by the truck he'd apparently rented.

Daniel looked at the truck for some time. "Hertz?" he asked dubiously. The truck was a little on the - um - seasoned side. In fact, it was depreciating before his very eyes.

"Don't diss the truck, Daniel, just get your ass in it. It's four-wheel drive," Jack said defensively as he tossed his bag.

"It has four wheels, certainly. I'm suspending judgement on the drive part until I see it move," Daniel announced briskly as he slid his bag into the back too. He couldn't for the life of him work out why it was so heavy. He didn't pack that much.

Welling was a little bigger than a one horse town in the sense you'd still see the town even if a few horses stood in front of it, but Peg's Country Kitchen was the local supermarket, liquor store, diner, bar 'n' grill and throbbing heart of downtown entertainment.

The 'Peg' in question was from down south, in the sense Florida was definitely south of Minnesota, but he didn't answer to anything but Vinny. His recipe book was inherited from his grandmother though, and if Daniel recalled correctly, she was called Peg. Daniel had a sneaking suspicion Vinny was either in the witness protection programme or tragically still campaigning to get 'Miami Vice' back on the air.

"Hey!" Vinny called sociably when they wandered into the diner part of the establishment. "Jack and Balsamic Boy."

Jack laughed.

Daniel trod on Jack's foot, trying not to sniff Jack too blatantly while he was all up close and personal. Jack smelled good.

Tasted better.

He was certain grits would taste better too with a dash of balsamic, most things did, and grits could hardly taste worse.

"Two blue plate specials," Jack ordered confidently.

"Light on the grits?" Vinny asked dryly.

"And the cholesterol," Daniel muttered. A vitamin would die a lonely death on any plate Vinny served up.

"Caramel apple?" Jack asked anxiously, eyeing the menu board.

"Fresh today," Vinny assured him. He hollered their order in the general direction of the kitchen.

A harried waitress bustled straight out bearing two heaped blue plates. The men watched as she selected a table at random from the array of empty tables...

"Lunchtime rush over?" Daniel asked brightly.

...tossed the plates down, then dashed away.

"I think that's us," Jack suggested innocently, his lips quirking.

"You spend a lot of time with Balsamic Boy, huh?" Vinny asked Jack.

"What can I say?" Jack said expansively. "I rub off on people."

"Like warts," Daniel suggested sweetly. He sauntered over to the pine table - Peg's was long on pine and short on ye olde pioneer atmosphere - feeling slightly apologetic for his pissiness. The intense sexual frustration of four years of celibacy could do that to a man. Especially a man who would be crawling into a big, romantic Victorian bed with the completely sexy and infuriating man he was in love with and was extremely attracted to.

Extremely.

It was Jack's fault that if Daniel didn't have sex soon he would die. It also wasn't Jack's fault, in a way; he didn't know he was killing Daniel or anything, but Daniel was in no mood to be fair.

He was in the mood to sweat.

He had been for quite some time.

He wanted Jack to pin him flat and fuck him senseless.

He settled for sitting quietly opposite him and eating his lunch. Or was it dinner and supper in Minnesota? The food was actually nice. Pissiness apart, the steaks were perfectly cooked, the gravy rich, the mashed potatoes buttery, and Minnesotan green peas were plump and sweet.

Jack was sweet too, relaxing before Daniel's covetous eyes, his mood softening by the minute. He seemed determined to coax a smile out of Daniel. Not that Jack minded the pissiness, he thought it was cute, and funny.

Daniel loved him and so he smiled. He never relaxed around Jack these days, but he could put on a show good enough to fool even his sternest critic; i.e., Jack. They ate slowly, savouring the food, the companionable silence and each other. They had always worked at their relationship, but as distant and hurt as Daniel was some days, their friendship had never been easier or calmer.

When they were finished, Daniel paid for lunch and asked for a whole caramel apple pie to take with them. Naturally Jack had to holler 'hold the granny!' as he headed out of the diner and round to the grocery store part. Daniel followed him in to discover his role was gopher. Jack liked to push the cart - with a panache that reminded Daniel irresistibly of 'Wacky Races' - so he got to fetch and carry. Jack rather enjoyed running him around the store, issuing orders in a resistibly lordly manner.

The cabin had a generator, which meant they got refrigeration, but Jack liked to use kerosene lamps and light the fire at night. He was incredibly sensitive to atmosphere, a strange by-product of his Special Ops training. Daniel was also incredibly sensitive to atmosphere and wasn't looking forward to long romantic evenings curled up with Jack. Curling up with Jack tended to raise his blood pressure - or lower it emphatically - and Daniel's appreciation of the ambience was likely to be severely hampered by legitimate concerns about, random example here, hurling himself at Jack and biting him.

It wasn't a long drive into town, but they didn't want to have to do it. Vacations weren't supposed to be about having to do anything so they stocked up on fruit, vegetables, bread, pasta, rice, steaks, chicken and fish - over Jack's vociferous protests at the implied insult - and snacks, including popcorn and local dairy-made ice cream, taking a carton each of vanilla, maple pecan and something intriguingly proclaiming itself 'Lemon Soul'. Beer followed the food, then milk, cheese, eggs and OJ, and finally a cooler. Daniel had his own coffee packed.

The grocery bill was staggering. Both of them blinked.

"Maybe we shouldn't have picked out the gold plated beer," Jack grumbled.

The clerk smiled placidly while tapping the large 'no personal cheques' sign parked next to the cash register.

Daniel leaned in to check out the small print on the sign as Jack handed over his MasterCard. It said '*CASH* register. Nothing subliminal about it'.

"Eat slow!" Jack ordered Daniel.

"I guess you're too smart to smart to say eat lots of fish," Daniel observed primly. Mostly because god would have smote Jack mightily on the spot for a whopper like that. "Have you ever caught a fish?" he asked politely.

"I'm not answering that," Jack responded with cold dignity.

"So the rumours are true, then," Daniel smirked.

"Rumours?" Jack stiffened.

It was popularly believed at the SGC - and probably all over Becker County, Minnesota - that Jack had not in fact caught a fish, ever, and the whole pond thing was just a cover because he was too embarrassed to admit he loved the place and liked to hang out here soaking up the pine scented atmosphere.

There were only so many sap jokes a man could take, even a man like Jack, who told them.

"That Minnesota is the land of ten thousand lakes and two fish, neither of which live in your pond," Daniel said cheerfully.

"None of them lived in your tank!" Jack unkindly reminded him.

Daniel deflated. He'd tried, god knows he'd tried, but sometimes his schedule was...murderous. Literally. He sighed, biting his lip.

Jack was staring at him, an odd look in his eyes. "Sorry," he muttered. "That was low. True," he emphasised, "but low."

"You told Teal'c that fishing isn't about the fish per se," Daniel observed placidly.

Jack's face darkened at this tactless reminder.

The fishing was something Daniel could easily tolerate because he would get to watch Jack's body working and flowing without bothering Jack in any way.

It wasn't a case of suddenly gay for him. He didn't think it was a case of gay at all. He didn't care for labels. Maybe it was arrogant of him, but Daniel liked to think his experiences had helped him to make that leap of faith, to see beyond labels and what were supposed to be his limitations.

"Did you even bring your rod?" Jack snapped.

Daniel blinked at the double-entendre. "Yes, I have my...um..." He waved a finger. It went everywhere he went, and had a tendency to rise to the occasion every time he got within touching distance of Jack. He'd been looking at Jack and admiring for a long time. The change to looking and wanting had been gradual. His attraction was to all the complex strengths, flaws and quirks that made up the man, and that need was beyond his volition. He couldn't be without Jack.

Over time the pull had become specifically physical. Wanting had become needing, and not having hurt him. Daniel wasn't the type for casual sex and not purely because of his

inhibitions. His own defences were such that he needed to know the other person before he could make himself so vulnerable to them. Desire was to him the need to have all of the other; impossible for him to separate the physical from the emotional.

"No you don't. You brought a bag full of books and you're going to sit on your ass reading while I work mine off!" Jack vigorously refuted.

Daniel hoped this was true. He wanted a ring-side seat for any ass-action. He could see the beauty in masculinity, a different need than he'd felt before, hard edged and maybe selfish in how he imagined expressing it, but still touched with the familiar. As well as he knew Jack, he knew himself. Daniel imagined all the possibilities of being with Jack and what drew him time and again was the equality of their physicality. With Jack, he wouldn't fear his own aggression or be consumed with giving; there could be taking of pleasure without the possibility of miscommunication.

"I'm on vacation," Daniel said placidly.

"Working your way through a week's supply of textbooks is not a vacation. Fish!"

"I can't stand the excitement. Janet said I had to rest."

They understood one another, as men, as individuals, as friends. That HAD to be there in the physical. If Jack could only open himself to the possibility, with all that he felt for Daniel, it had to be the same for him. It was in him to make that leap of faith. Daniel was more certain of Jack than of himself.

That was why Daniel felt this was it, that Jack was it for him. Everything he had ever wanted, ever dreamed of having, was there for him in one man.

"Well wear your damn boonie, for god's sake. I don't want you getting sunstroke." Jack paused at the door. "You do have your Sunblock? Right?"

Daniel ground his teeth. If only he could get the man to SEE him.

They carried the groceries out to the truck, stowed everything and made the short drive out to Jack's cabin. It was warm for June, the skies clear and the air sweet and drowsy with early summer heat. Daniel divided his time between the scenery rolling past them and Jack's hands on the steering wheel. Despite himself, his gaze focused on the clean, strong lines of Jack's face and throat.

"Beautiful," he sighed.

Jack smiled at him, pleased. "Nowhere like Minnesota," he said softly.

"Is it still home?" Daniel asked.

"Oh, yeah," Jack murmured. "I plan to retire here. Buy a dog. Fish," he added defiantly.

"Probably the only way you'll catch any," he riposted, grinning as Jack glared at him, visibly ran the ensuing exchange through in his mind and settled for offended silence.

Daniel figured he could stick a satellite dish out back of the cabin and work from a laptop...He caught himself up on the stupid thought, flushing. He flushed even more when he couldn't stop the jumble of images...making love in that big bed with the world silenced and glittering with snow...

They were pulling in behind the cabin before Daniel had to explain why he was blushing. "I'll take the groceries if you want to start the generator and chop wood," he offered hastily, jumping out.

"Sure," Jack said easily.

Daniel went straight in with the first box of groceries and set it down on the table, returned to the truck for the second, then oriented himself. The kitchen end of the cabin was directly in front of him, the cleaning stuff in the cupboard beneath the ceramic sink if he remembered right. The refrigerator was behind the cabin door, the stove on the wall opposite. The first thing he had to do was clean the refrigerator with a weak solution of bicarbonate of soda to sterilise it. Then he loaded the groceries and switched on. The stove would have to wait until Jack brought the first load of wood in.

When he went out to the truck for their luggage, the rhythmic crack of wood was sounding in the clearing behind the cabin. Daniel grabbed both bags and hauled them in. Teal'c had performed his Kel'No'Reem ritual in front of the fire, and if Sam ever came up here, Jack would give up the bed and take the couch, but Daniel, the horny, desperate one, was expected to share the bed.

C'est la vie.

The kitchen table was placed between the old navy-blue couch and the kitchen proper. Together they were all the furniture in the room except for the low bookcases set beneath the windows. There were plenty of windows and plenty of light, the heat from the fire warming the rooms even in winter. Two doors led off from the far end of the room, one to the tiny bathroom, the other to the bedroom.

Daniel pushed open the bedroom door, his eyes going at once to the huge iron bedstead. He had to retrieve the bedding from the chest at the foot of the bed. The patchwork comforter picked up the colours in the other room, navy, wine and cream. There was a large oak wardrobe behind the bed, and a dresser under the window. He had to head into the kitchen to grab polish and a duster. His sinuses couldn't take this kind of dust. When the room was clean, and Daniel had done all the work he intended to for the duration of his stay, he lifted his bag onto the bed and unlocked it.

He stood staring at the contents for quite some time. He distinctly remembered packing. He always planned for trips in advance because he never knew if missions would keep them off-world longer than expected. His bag had been ready. He had no memory of unpacking last night, but he must have, because instead of comfortable jeans and loose shirts, he had a bag full of skin-tight, slinky and skimpy.

What the hell had he and Sam been talking about last night, anyway? There was a note on the top that said 'BRIGHT LIGHTS, SMALL CITY. GO FOR IT!!!! LOVE SAM XXX'. He also had all the necessary components for the oppressive skincare regime and seven books, one of which was the Colorado Springs phone directory. It was bristling with post-it notes. Daniel was afraid to look. He was on vacation with Jack. Two days ago he had been caught in flagrante-ish with Jack. He had mentioned needing to get laid. Or words to that effect. That was a very simple equation for a blitzed astrophysicist with an 'As if!' sense of humour.

As if. Words to live by.

Daniel kept dragging things out of the bag, relieved to find that at least he'd kept his essentials, including the flannel pyjama bottoms and navy tee he needed as hard-on camouflage.

His hiking boots and shaving kit were right in the bottom and that was all she wrote. Literally.

Who exactly did Sam think he could pick up in the wilds of Minnesota? It COULDN'T be Jack. Maybe she'd been misled by the 'city' part too. If there was a thriving metropolis wall to wall with desperate singles it wasn't anywhere near here.

Daniel was trapped in the little cabin in the big woods with a sprawling, affectionate colonel and a wayward penis.

He was doomed.

Jack's warm breath against the nape of his neck made him jump out of his skin, and when he landed, it was in Jack's arms, hooking comfortably around his waist. Jack rested his chin on Daniel's shoulder and surveyed the evidence spread out over the bed.

Daniel stood speechless, his heart racing.

"What the hell is that?" Jack asked eventually.

What the hell is THIS? Why - why wasn't Jack letting go, backing off? Didn't he realise he wasn't supposed to touch Daniel? He - he couldn't. Daniel was hard, already. He shook his head mutely, unable to think of a word to say.

"I use Clinique myself," Jack sniffed disparagingly.

It broke whatever it was that had held Jack in place and he stepped back, freeing Daniel to stroll around to pick up his bag and attend to his own unpacking. They engaged in some kind of bizarre dance, Jack quite without his usual grace or anything approaching his acute awareness of his own space. Every time Daniel turned round, Jack was there, hips or ass or hands hard against him, skimming past him, all over him, around him.

Jack was driving him crazy. His body was thrumming with need, hypersensitive to every move Jack made, which made him tense and edgy. It got worse when Jack decided to change. He simply peeled off his sweatshirt and took his time choosing a T-shirt to exchange it for.

Daniel stood silent, his eye drawn down the length of Jack's spine, exulting over the sleek muscles moving beneath the smooth, golden skin. There wasn't an ounce of spare fat on Jack, from the still trim waist to the broad shoulders. When Jack turned casually to pull on his tee, Daniel could see the fine hairs furring his chest, the dusky nipples...the flat, still-taut abdomen...he swallowed convulsively, nothing but glad when Jack sauntered out carrying the phone directory for fire lighting duty.

Despite the incriminating contents of his wardrobe, Daniel had no choice but to get out of his clothes. They were clinging to him, unpleasantly clammy and stale. Sighing, he changed into the black jeans and shirt, the least offensive of his choices, and like Jack, left his shoes in the bedroom.

Jack raised his eyebrow when Daniel wandered out but after his swift once-over, made no comment. Daniel accepted a bowl of ice cream and took it outside to sit with Jack on the dock, his feet dangling just above the cool water. Jack's thigh was hot against his; he was sitting close, but staring intently into the middle distance.

Daniel gradually relaxed, the mellow heat and peace sinking into his bones. He slumped towards Jack and caught himself up, and then Jack's hand curved over his shoulder and he allowed himself to lean, a little.

They were lulled by the sunlight dancing on the gentle ripples of water and the warm wind sighing through the leaves. Daniel didn't really notice when Jack's arm slid around his waist, he simply lost himself in the closeness, the quiet, unspoken affection.

"Colorado is beautiful, but I feel lost, sometimes, in the mountains," he murmured dreamily.

"You love the desert," Jack said quietly.

"No," Daniel frowned. "It's too harsh, requires too much focus. I admire the beauty, I even admire that harshness, the way the people who live in that environment don't just survive, but measure themselves against it. I don't miss it. I don't miss Abydos. I miss the people."

Jack turned towards him a little but didn't free him.

Heat surged through Daniel, but his voice was steady as he went on. "I'm drawn to the ocean. I've rarely lived near it, except for my time in LA, but it's the ocean I miss. I wasn't prepared for the power of it, like a physical pull of attraction. Sunday mornings were my downtime. I used to bike out to where it was quiet, where I could sit and watch the ocean. I would lose myself. Sunset too - watching the light change, the water blazing, and the sound of the waves in the dark. I miss it."

"You couldn't live in a place like this?"

"I can live anywhere," Daniel corrected him softly. "But a place I can sit and watch the water..."

Jack rose gracefully to his feet, stooping to take Daniel's hand and pull him up.

Daniel was confused. He was used to Jack touching him, casual affectionate gestures Jack couldn't help, even intimacies like ruffling his hair. It wasn't even the first time Jack had taken his hand. They were just walking towards the cabin, though, not through a cell heated by hellfire on Netu. Still, Jack didn't let go. He didn't seem to notice he was holding Daniel's hand, so it seemed pointless to make a fuss.

Daniel stayed confused. Jack vetoed chess in favour of popcorn and seemed to be in Daniel's space the whole time as they made it. Every time he turned around, Jack was in his way, his body against Daniel's. Daniel would glance up and find Jack watching him, and Jack would turn it with an easy comment.

As Daniel curled up on the couch, the bowl at his side, Jack lit the fire then put a CD on. He took his mini stereo everywhere. He turned the music down low, the soft, rich tones of kd lang echoing as the dusk closed in.

Jack moved the bowl and sat next to Daniel. "I don't trust you. You're a bottomless pit when it comes to popcorn," he teased lightly.

They wound up with the bowl balanced on their knees and a constant tangle of reaching fingers.

Jack seemed to need the nearness of a lover, draping his arm around Daniel's shoulders. It was almost as if - as if Jack was trying to seduce him.

"Tell me about Minnesota," Daniel asked, desperate for something to take his mind off Jack's nearness, the heat of his thigh hard against Jack's, the way Jack was holding him.

"Home."

"You were raised in Chicago."

"It's still home. This was my grandpa's cabin." Jack ate a huge handful of popcorn, chewing beatifically. "He used to come up here from Bemidji to fish."

"Did your Grandmother come with him?" Daniel asked, hungry for details of Jack's past.

Jack snorted. "He came up here to be alone. Not me, though. I like company. I like to talk."

"I noticed," Daniel said dryly. He jumped when Jack squeezed his nape, going very still when Jack didn't remove his hand. Daniel looked desperately into the fire, his face heating from the warmth of Jack's fingers cupped around the nape of his neck.

"I never planned to retire here alone," Jack confided. "It wouldn't be right."

"No?" Daniel was astonished his voice was so steady. Jack's fingers were slipping idly into his hair and he was about one wheeze away from needing to gasp into a paper-bag. "I always thought..."

"Minnesota...I guess it means family to me," Jack said quietly. "Everyone together, talking, just hanging out, being close, having fun. Having time for one another no matter how many people were around. And the place..."

"It's beautiful."

Jack looked directly at him. "Yes," he agreed, his voice soft with meaning. "Very. No matter how hard I try to get away, to not want, I keep coming back." His fingers were stroking through Daniel's hair.

Daniel swallowed painfully.

Jack reached up to brush his thumb over Daniel's lip. "Coming back to you, Daniel."

"Can't you just say what you mean, Jack?" he asked tightly, wishing Jack would stop touching him, give him some room. Let him read these signals, think a little.

"I can do that." Jack's hand cupped his head and pulled him forward to meet Jack as he leaned in.

Daniel flinched, trying to pull away, but he didn't make it. Jack's mouth closed over his in a lingering kiss. He sat mute, too stunned to respond.

"Clear enough for you?" Jack murmured against Daniel's mouth.

"No." Daniel took a deep, shaken breath. "It's not clear at all, Jack. Why? Why would you kiss me?" he asked, quietly determined despite the way his pulse was hammering.

"Well, I didn't buy that amnesia act for a second, so maybe I should be asking why you lied about kissing me?" Jack riposted, leaning in again.

Daniel planted his hand on Jack's shoulder and held him off. "You went along with me because it was easier on you."

"Daniel, trust me, there's nothing easy about this," Jack snapped.

"You're right. You are." Which was exactly why Daniel wasn't falling into Jack's arms like some moonstruck kid. He was far too aware of the potential consequences if he failed to understand what had compelled Jack to kiss him. Losing Jack's friendship, for one. Or his place on SG-1.

"So?" Jack asked, confidently close.

"So I need time to think." Daniel pulled away from Jack and got up. "About why we both lied."

"You think too much, Daniel. Sometimes, you just need to go with it."

Daniel hesitated, hand on the door. Go with what? Jack had never gone with it before. He'd never even looked before. Daniel watched and thought about Jack all the time, he loved him, and he didn't have a fucking clue why Jack had kissed him back on Shreve, or why Jack would kiss him now. There was too much at stake for him to fuck this up. As much as he wanted Jack, he had to be sure, and he didn't have it in him now to be sure of anything. He was bewildered and tired. So very tired.

"Daniel?"

"Later, Jack, please," Daniel said wearily.

"Fuck!" Jack snapped in exasperation as Daniel quietly closed the bedroom door on him.

Daniel stumbled through undressing, threw on his pyjamas and tumbled into bed. He lay drowsing, too exhausted and anxious to think about anything, his mind racing, aware of the quiet music and Jack's movements around the cabin. He rolled onto his side, his back to where Jack would be sleeping, when he heard Jack in the bathroom. Daniel kept his eyes closed as the door opened and Jack moved noiselessly over to the wardrobe. The soft rustles ceased after a few minutes and Jack slid into the bed.

Daniel lay still and prayed for Jack to go out like a light. He jumped when Jack spooned up behind him and threw an arm across his waist. He heard his own quick, shallow breaths, thunderously loud to him in the still evening air.

Jack sighed heavily behind him, and then his arm tightened, pulling Daniel around and into his arms.

"Jack," Daniel protested, trying to edge away.

"Daniel," Jack responded, holding on.

They were touching the full length of their bodies, Daniel's face burning as he realised Jack could feel his swelling erection.

"I can't," Jack said bleakly.

Daniel's heart skipped a beat. He nodded jerkily. He guessed he had his answer. Maybe Jack was attracted to him, but not enough. A few minutes alone to think, and whatever momentary impulse that had compelled Jack to kiss him, he was past. Reality had asserted itself. There was no comfort whatsoever in knowing his instincts had been right to walk away. It took everything he had to reach out to his friend through the suffocating weight of all those unspoken hopes never to be realised. "I - I underst..."

"Don't THINK, Daniel, for Chrissake!" Jack snarled. "Just DO." And then Jack kissed him passionately, his mouth hard, almost harsh against Daniel's, insistent pressure forcing his lips to part and Jack plunged into him, driving deep, demanding, aggressive, his tongue stabbing over Daniel's.

Daniel took it, took everything Jack had to give him, pulling his head down urgently. He went eagerly when Jack shoved at him, was braced and waiting when Jack rolled on top of him, parting his legs willingly as Jack pushed roughly at him.

Jack's weight on him was what he burned for, the rough fingers gentle on his face, the wildness of the kiss, the bruising need he'd never expected to arouse in Jack - he exulted in it all.

Beautiful, beautiful man.

They snatched quick, heaving breaths and plunged into one another again, Jack biting at his lips, pushing him until he sucked on Jack's tongue, chewed on it gently. Gentling Jack, a little. Daniel was insistently straining up into Jack's body, hooking his legs around Jack's, desperate for more.

"How do you want this?" Jack hissed against his mouth. "Tell me. Tell me how you want me to fuck you."

"L-like this," Daniel gasped as Jack rained kisses over his throat.

Jack reared back to yank his T-shirt up over his head, then reached for Daniel's. Daniel sat up to help him, and then Jack's hands were tugging feverishly at his pyjamas. There was a brief confusion of shifting bodies and curses, then Jack's skin was sliding over his, settling on him. Daniel moaned as Jack's steely erection stroked over his, opening his eyes to see Jack clumsily opening a tube of something or other, squirting the lotion onto his fingers, then he scooted down Daniel's body. He kissed Daniel's belly, nosing into him, inhaling ecstatically. Daniel writhed when Jack tongued his navel then froze as he felt a slick, cool pressure at his anus. He arched soundlessly as Jack's finger steadily pushed into him.

"So tight, Danny, Jesus," Jack gloated.

Daniel yelled as Jack's hand closed over his penis, his thumb brushing over and over the sensitive head. He shivered helplessly, yelling out again as Jack began to pump him greedily, his whole body tensing with dizzying waves of pleasure, some of it from that stunning alien pressure inside him, rocking easily, stroking sure and deep.

He realised dimly that Jack really did mean to just fuck him, that Jack's confidence meant he at least had done this before, he'd fucked another man...

Jack - Jack thought he had too.

"I'm a virgin," Daniel blurted, anxious to have only the truth between them.

A shudder ran right through Jack, then he was withdrawing, slipping his finger free of Daniel, rolling away to throw his arm over his eyes.

Daniel lay still as Jack fought for control, his sweat-soaked chest heaving. He had a fatalistic feeling that whatever Jack said now, it would be the wrong thing, the one thing he didn't want to hear.

"You shouldn't have kissed me."

Daniel reached out tentatively, resting his hand on Jack's belly. Jack took his hand.

"I know," Daniel agreed quietly.

"You've never been with a man?"

"No. I want to be with you, though." Daniel was scared by the quiet, deliberate interrogation. Scared because he couldn't read Jack and that was something he counted on. Jack was so much a part of him.

"I would have fucked you clean into next Tuesday."

"I wanted you to. I still want..."

"So do I, and I can't," Jack interrupted tightly. "And I can't not."

"Jack, I..."

"I'm not supposed to touch you and I can't keep my hands off you. I never could," Jack laughed, a sound without humour. "Big joke here. Cosmic fucking sarcasm. I've never been with a man either. I was married. I'd still BE married if..." Jack bit the words off. "I'm straighter than straight, career goddamn military here. I'm your C.O. for Chrissake. How do I reconcile that against the fact I want to have sex with you? When we both know now exactly how much I want you." He rolled onto his side, facing Daniel, reaching out tentatively to cup his face. "What do we do, Daniel? What the hell do we do now?"

Take a chance? Were they - was he not worth a chance?

"I was lying to myself, telling myself it was okay to fuck over everything I believe in, that I could do it, have it all, the job and you. I can't. I can't take the risk," Jack said flatly.

"You were all over me a few minutes ago, risk or not!" Daniel flared, his sudden anger fear-sharpened. "What changed?"

"You."

"What?" Daniel gasped.

"I thought - the way you were looking at me...if one of us had done this before, knew what we were getting ourselves into..."

"If I was a practising homosexual, Jack, trust me, you'd have known it. I would have been fucking you by now," Daniel snapped. He didn't miss the brief flash of distaste on Jack's face and all his stupid, private hopes were, in that moment, misconceptions. "You sonovabitch," Daniel whispered, totally done in by what he'd just seen. He pulled away from Jack, rolled out of bed, yanked on his pyjama bottoms with shaking hands and walked away.

He was too numb to grieve his abrupt loss of certainty, of self, so bound up was he in Jack.

Jack caught Daniel as he stepped in front of the banked fire, shivering with reaction and blindly seeking warmth. Jack grabbed his shoulders, angry and - and frightened, Daniel realised. It didn't soften him. He pulled at Jack's hands, wanting him away, but Jack's fingers clenched. "Don't touch me!" he flashed.

"I CAN'T STOP!" Jack yelled, his face contorted.

"YOU HAVE TO!"

Daniel was struggling in earnest and Jack tripped him, slamming him down onto the couch, grabbing his wrists as he surged up to force him flat. Jack rolled on top of him, holding him down. "Jack, no," Daniel protested wearily, looking away from Jack's tight, hungry face. "No. You don't get to HAVE me. If you w-wanted..." His voice shook. "It's not about the sex."

It was supposed to be about equality and honesty, about Daniel trusting, letting go; giving Jack everything. Giving himself. About Jack giving his trust too.

"I know! I LOVE YOU," Jack roared. "I want - I NEED to be with you! Don't you get that? What the hell else do I have to do to convince you?"

"Convince me that we're equals, that making love doesn't mean you inside me, Jack," Daniel said simply.

"I've never done this before," Jack muttered uneasily.

"Neither have I. I'm a man, and I still want you inside me. You don't want me that way. You've made that clear. Whatever this is, it's about you and your needs, Jack. Not mine. You. Not us," Daniel told him with quiet dignity. "A relationship with such a fundamental inequality would never work, no matter what our circumstances. I can't let you fuck me if I'm surrendering my right to your respect and that's what I saw on your face, Jack."

Exactly that. Jack wanted him, true enough, but Jack assumed. He didn't accept. If he could fuck Daniel and that was the only way it could be for them, then Daniel was nothing but a cipher. Jack loved him, but still didn't see him. Jack saw gender and labels, and the limitations Daniel hadn't seen in him would keep them apart.

Jack wanted him despite the fact he was a man.

It hurt, because somewhere at the heart of Jack was an unacknowledged need to be dominant, and there could be no sharing.

As little as Daniel cared for labels, there was one that would fit if he went along with this. The bottom. Maybe it was what he too would want and need, but it didn't matter because he didn't have the choice and he wouldn't let Jack take it from him.

"You have a deeper need than I ever knew to be the guy in charge, to be in control. I won't take anything less than equality because I believe love is about trust and sharing, not need and control. So let me up," he demanded.

"You're leaving me," Jack recognised, instinctively trying to hold Daniel, to keep him.

"In the morning. There's n-no point s-staying." Daniel fought to swallow the quiver in his voice. "I've got to get past this because if I can't, then I can't be your friend." Shit. Oh,

yeah. Well done! Way to keep it together, Jackson. Although, on the up-side, at least you're not blubbing, he thought bitterly. "Get off me!" he snarled, heaving up, Jack riding it out to pin him flat again.

"Jack. Get. Off. Me."

"Daniel. You. Are. NOT. Leaving. Me."

Daniel looked at him then. Really looked. "I can't, can I?" he whispered. "We can't."

"I fucked up here," Jack said tiredly. "I don't need you to tell me that."

Daniel flexed his wrists. "This is not helping."

Jack freed him and sat up, planted dead centre on the couch so Daniel had to scramble round him, off-balance, literally as well as...

"Bastard."

Jack flinched, looking away. "I've never THOUGHT about being with a man," he said, his voice edged with anger now. "I made an assumption, based on what I KNOW, Daniel, which is women. I didn't mean - Jesus." He turned abruptly to glare at Daniel. "It isn't YOU. I don't want you to fuck me. Is that what you want me to say? I don't. That doesn't mean I WON'T. How do I know? I've never thought about it. I haven't had time."

"That's fair," Daniel agreed, surprising Jack. "It is a fair point, Jack." He wasn't sure of anything at this point, least of all his motivations. Whatever Daniel wanted, whatever Jack said, and thought he meant, when it came down to it, Jack couldn't let him go, and Daniel - he couldn't leave. He didn't know what they were supposed to do now, because he was right about one thing. Jack was right too. They couldn't be apart. Neither was whole without the other. And if they couldn't be together, where did that leave them?

"You were right," Daniel sighed. "We can't and we can't not." He realised Jack was imperceptibly closer than he'd been and he instinctively moved away.

"Come to bed," Jack coaxed, setting his hand on Daniel's knee.

Daniel swallowed. "Here. I-I'm sleeping here."

Jack's shoulders slumped. He got up and moved away, turning to stare at Daniel.

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"Are you going to give me the silent treatment until we fly out?" Jack snapped.

Daniel quietly turned the page of his book. He was nursing his cooling mug of coffee between his cold hands.

Probably shock.

"You kissed me back!" Jack accused.

"I apologise for that."

His hands were kind of shaky too.

Why the HELL had he kissed Jack - after everything he'd said last night! Everything he believed. Jack had hurt him enough without him doing this to himself too.

"I don't. No way in hell. It's what we both want," Jack announced defiantly as he slammed his plate into the sink, a tidal wave of water slopping over the edge, soaking him. He jumped back cursing.

Daniel supposed this was his fault too.

"I don't understand why you want me to fuck you and you won't let me," Jack insisted as he angrily turned his chair and sat with his arms leaning across the back of it. His fingers tied themselves in restless knots, the only outward sign of his agitation.

It had been a long night for both of them.

"Perhaps it has something to do with the fact you assumed I was gay because I wanted you," Daniel said dryly, finally making eye contact. Jack was seething, his eyes wintry.

"Not an unreasonable assumption. Straight men don't normally want other men to fuck them," Jack riposted.

"Apparently gay men only want to be fucked, which means there must be a whole lot of gay guys out there not getting any," Daniel suggested smoothly, hiding his bitter disillusionment. His anger. "Either that or they're all really lucky and landed themselves some hot hetero willing to park his principles and fuck them six ways from Sunday. Sweet deal, you know," he confided. "As long as they don't give it up in return, they can go right on fooling themselves they're straight, because everyone knows the guy on the bottom is the gay one."

"That's what you think of me?" Jack asked stonily, a wave of dull red tiding his cheeks.

"That's what you told me," Daniel whispered. He smiled. "Ironically, I thought..." He choked on the thought as well as the words, dropping his head.

"What!" Jack fired the word at him.

"I thought so much of you it never crossed my mind you couldn't make the leap of faith," Daniel admitted in a wooden little voice even he didn't recognise. "The same one I made for you."

Jack flinched back like he'd been slapped.

"I was prepared for no," Daniel said drearily. "But not this."

"Do you want to fuck me? Is that what this is about?"

Daniel shook his head. "It's about choice. I've had it taken away from me too many times to just...let it happen now. We don't - didn't have to rush. All I wanted..." he faltered unhappily. "I expected that if you wanted me, you'd be open," he said more strongly.

"I am."

The flush on Jack's face darkened at Daniel's look of blank incredulity.

"And you want me." Jack was immovable.

Daniel jumped up and walked away without another word, angry all over again. Jack was assuming a hell of a lot. Both of them wanting sex didn't make it right.

"Don't walk away from me!" Jack yelled after him. "We're not finished."

We're never finished, Daniel thought bleakly.

"Daniel. Oh, for God's sake," Jack snarled. "Daniel!"

When he got into the bedroom, Daniel turned and closed the door with quiet finality. He stripped mechanically before snatching up his towel, wrapping it impatiently around his waist. Maybe a shower would wake him from this dulling lethargy. Help him think straight. Give Jack a hint. Daniel at least had said all he intended to say.

Daniel imagined he felt the heat of Jack's gaze on him as he walked out of the bedroom, his shaving kit in one hand, the towel safely grasped in the other. He went into the bathroom and kicked the door closed behind him.

He set the shower away, sitting patiently on the side of the bath as the water heated, then climbed under the pounding, steaming spray. He washed quickly, his mind a careful blank, then leaned his forearm against the tile to rest his head and drift...

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Daniel read steadily, the words veering wildly between frozen on the page and running into one another, none of them engaging his mind, let alone lifting him out of himself. For a man who flew with the power of the words he lost himself in, it was peculiarly painful to fight serried rows of neat black text for sense and meaning. And fail. He didn't - he shouldn't even see the book.

He wasn't thinking straight. Anything but, focused as he was on Jack's rigid, brooding presence on the dock. He was worn out from being watched, weighed and in every way found wanting.

Jack just didn't get it. Didn't get him. Daniel thought about all the ways he'd screwed this up and got mad all over again.

Jack had got him into bed. Jack achieved this by the simple expedient of planting himself in front of the fire with his arms crossed over his chest, staring at Daniel. He had stared at Daniel, stared and stared until Daniel was demented, then smugly trotted after him when he stormed into the bedroom.

Daniel was angry with Jack, but he was furious with himself. He'd fallen into an uneasy, exhausted sleep with his back pointedly turned and woke up deep in Jack's arms, raging. Jack was as hard as he and they tore into one another, greedy and needing, Daniel letting Jack tumble him onto his back, wiping the smirk from Jack's face as he'd shoved hard at Jack's sweats and owned his ass.

He was right. Jack was uncomfortable with him as a sexual being. There was none of that distaste Daniel was looking for, but there was shock. Quickly concealed, but there. Jack thought it was what killed the mood.

Daniel knew it was his wariness. He was looking for rejection, waiting for it.

It was impossible. All of it. Jack most of all. They loved one another. They needed...they...

They couldn't keep their goddamn hands off one another.

He was as disappointed in himself as in Jack. More. Daniel could not in fact blame Jack for not knowing which signal he was supposed to respond to. The joke was, they were both out of their depth here. For all Daniel's fine ideals, he had no more practical experience of this kind of relationship than Jack, and his naïveté wasn't helping him or Jack to get through this.

Daniel was scared that they wouldn't be able to put this behind them and go on being friends. He was just as scared that he wouldn't be able to withstand Jack. He lost someone he loved either way.

He couldn't lose himself.

Being friends, knowing one another so damned well was confusing the hell out of them both. They read each other too easily to lie with any success and keeping this defensive distance was wearing on them both.

Jack's pointedly turned back and stonily resistant silence suggested to Daniel they were past the point of compromise. Battle lines had been drawn here. If they weren't so stubborn...

Hurting.

"Jack?" he called tentatively.

Jack leaned down to pull another beer out of his cooler.

Daniel got up and walked away. He wasn't childish enough to slam the cabin door, and even if he was, he wasn't about to give Jack the satisfaction. He was childish enough to fling himself on the bed and pull the pillow over his head, like he used to when he was a boy and the world was too much for him.

He was exhausted. He wanted to empty his mind of his misery and rest. Not be hammered by a vivid memory of sweaty, urgent entanglement. Daniel groaned as his wayward penis filled, shifting his hips restlessly against the bed.

God, he ached.

It was so long since he'd been with a lover. He was afraid he was forgetting how to love, how to give. There was no one for him but Jack and they were as far from one another as they'd ever been.

The sun was beating through the window, playing over his slowly heating skin like a live thing. Daniel shifted impatiently, rolling over to unbutton his shirt, having to make do with giving himself what he needed, as he had so often. He was never more alone than when he cried out as he came into his hand.

He gritted his teeth and snapped his button open, yanking down the zipper to wriggle free of the too-tight, too-sexy jeans. The heat of the sun pooled on his belly, warming him a little. Daniel gave himself up to it, his jeans around his hips, comfortably sprawled, hand moving lazily in the only rhythm his body had known for too long.

He refused to rush, planting one foot against the mattress to rock up into his leisurely pumping, fingers tranquilly gripping and gliding, slowly pulling easy, empty pleasure from him.

The dreary comfort of familiarity drew him on, drew his climax out of him in long, lingering pulses.

For the first time in what felt like forever, he didn't think of Jack when he came.

Daniel mechanically made himself comfortable, mind determinedly focused on nothing, the heat soaking into his still aching body, soothing his shivers.

After a while, he slept.

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Daniel woke slowly, surfacing to warmth of a very different kind, the warmth and weight of skin curved possessively over him. He lay still, blinking slowly, confused and conflicted enough to make him very, very careful.

Archaeologists tried not to rush in where colonels feared to tread.

Jack's arm was heavy over his chest, his own hands curled around Jack's bicep. Jack's chin rested on his shoulder, his face nuzzled close to Daniel's. Soft breaths gusted over his cheek. Jack's long, denim-clad leg lay between his parted ones, his foot resting against Daniel's.

The message Jack was sending was just this side of unequivocal, never mind subliminal.

'Mine'.

"Hi," Daniel said evenly.

"Hey."

Jack kissed his shoulder lingeringly, licking at him with a wordless hum of appreciation, his toes stroking over Daniel's.

"You bewildered me," Jack told him quietly. "Still do," he added wryly.

"Why?"

"I don't know why." Jack sat up a little and scowled at him. "What a stupid thing to say," he complained, settling back down to take a vengeful little bite at Daniel's shoulder.

There was something of an instantaneous physiological response from Daniel.

Wayward.

Hadn't he said that?

Maybe it was time to have a man-to-penis talk. Tell the greedy little sucker straight; two minutes of the colonel's hands was IT because unfortunately they came with the rest of the colonel and he was a bastard.

A hot bastard, okay, and this man's best friend and all that, but still...a bastard.

"Bewildered means I don't know! Although I do know. It was your face," Jack propped himself up on his elbow to stare intently at the face in question.

"Are you going to start on my eyebrows again?" Daniel asked suspiciously, vigorously suppressing the usual urge to be pedantic when Jack messed with his mind. Dictionary definitions were too much of a stretch for a man whose body was thrumming. "I can't help having expressive..."

"Perfectly arched," Jack said matter-of-factly, a mere point of information.

Daniel's brows raised. He blushed and wound up squinting down his own nose as he tried to get them back to more or less where they should be instead of in his hairline. He was not assisted in any way by Jack smoothing one gentle fingertip the length of one of the alleged perfect arches.

"Beautiful," Jack breathed, a light in his eyes Daniel had never seen before.

Daniel felt oddly breathless; bitter, aching regret crowding his chest.

So close...

Too close.

"Too beautiful. Men aren't supposed to be," Jack informed him, his tone flat. Definitive.

"It's not my adjective of choice for the masculine form, no," Daniel agreed inconsequentially, too damn tired to engage.

"Men aren't supposed to be beautiful to ME," Jack qualified sharply.

"I'm sorry," Daniel apologised profusely, glaring at Jack.

"Me too."

Daniel tried to sit at that point, but Jack grimaced and shoved him flat.

"Suddenly you don't value honesty, Daniel?" Jack sneered. "Right."

It seemed the most natural thing in the world to reassure Jack, who only lashed out when he was hurting. They were both hurting here, and the irony of it was they were each

hurting themselves more than the other. Daniel rested his palm over Jack's wrist. The bruising grip at his shoulder eased in turn. "So talk," he invited softly. He needed to understand Jack here. He couldn't afford to fuck up. Too much - everything depended on him getting this right.

If Daniel couldn't work through this, it might cost him his friend and that could not happen. He wouldn't lose Jack by default.

Jack's hand skimmed down Daniel's body to spread wide over his abdomen, heaving now as his breath quickened despite himself. Daniel looked desperately at the ceiling as Jack's fingers slid under the waistband of his still open jeans. With slow deliberation, Jack nudged the jeans further open and rubbed gently at the bared skin, his fingertips following the narrow line of hair dusting Daniel's groin.

Daniel clamped his hand over Jack's as he got hard. "You can't," he reminded Jack.

Jack twisted his wrist, broke free, snatched Daniel's hand in turn and yanked it down to his crotch. They both gasped as Daniel's fingers curved over Jack's straining erection.

"I beat off," Daniel blurted, blushing almost instantaneously.

"So did I," Jack said grimly.

"What?" Daniel demanded, dismayed he'd missed it.

So? Maybe he was a bastard too.

He was a guy.

Practically part of the job description.

"Don't worry," Jack snorted, a little amusement warming him. "I took pictures."

Daniel wasn't going to ask. Among Peg's many civic services was one-hour photo development. "The clerk would never overcharge us again," he said mischievously.

Jack winked at him, his hand settling strongly on Daniel's abdomen. He sobered abruptly, staring once again at Daniel's face. "THIS is where that bewildering face of yours takes me. Straight to your dick. I want you. I'm sorry I'm not real happy about that. But I want you to be clear on this. I mean I'm not real happy NOW. This will change."

"Will it?" Daniel asked sceptically. He had fallen for Jack by degrees, his feelings so encompassing he'd wasted no energy trying to deny himself.

Jack grabbed his crotch and looked sardonically at Daniel. "Trust me on that. I'm not real big on self-hate and therapy. When it comes to adjusting, I'm a natural."

"Adjusting," Daniel echoed dispassionately.

"Damn straight!" Jack yelled. "I want to FUCK my closest friend. I had a hard enough time adjusting to the fact I LOVED you. Ask Hammond! His car got in my way."

"I'm sorry?" Daniel asked blankly.

Jack pulled a face. "You were dead at the time," he dismissed the irrelevant interruption impatiently. Then he rolled his eyes as Daniel's polite silence persisted. "Being dead should never get old, Daniel. Nem?" he prompted.

"Oh. Oannes. I remember. What did you do to the general's car?"

"Don't change the subject!"

Daniel counted to ten.

Slowly.

Oddly enough, he wanted to hit Jack more.

"Let's summarise, shall we?" Daniel snapped. "You want to fuck me. You really, really want to fuck me. You're sorry you do but you can't stop. You find the idea of anal penetration distasteful and yet - you still want to fuck me. You want me and you don't want to want me. You think this will all change if I go with the flow and presumably allow you to bang my brains out while you work out which way is 'bottom'," he accused Jack with cool, clipped precision. "Be still my beating heart," he added sarcastically.

"What?" Jack bridled.

"Whoop de doo?" Daniel drawled offensively.

"I'm baring my soul, here."

"Well, then, I'm here for you," Daniel admitted honestly. "As your friend you know I'd do anything I could for you. I'm not baring my ass for you, though," he said crisply. "Equals, Jack, or nothing. If you can't handle that, I suggest you handle this." He reached across quickly and squeezed Jack's crotch hard.

Jack went completely still and literally quivered from head to foot.

Daniel's hand flooded with moist heat.

Jack went very pale then flushed vividly.

Daniel thought he was doing better until he realised he was agitatedly patting Jack's damp crotch. He blushed too and snatched his hand away.

Jack flopped onto his back, pillowed his hands behind his head and glared sullenly at Daniel.

"Um..." Daniel took a deep breath, feeling a little quivery himself. "I'll accept that you're...um, motivated," he said carefully.

Jack glared at him. "Ya THINK?" he spat.

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"Dinner's ready!" Daniel yelled down the dock. "Supper?" Jack hunched an irritable shoulder. Daniel sighed. Jack had been like this all afternoon. He wasn't going to wait around to coax Jack in. What with spontaneous orgasms and home truths they'd both missed lunch and Daniel at least was starving.

He was also very tired. It had been a long afternoon of covert surveillance and cutting silence.

Shrugging philosophically, Daniel turned back into the cabin and left Jack to disprove the old adage that misery loved company. Misery seemed perfectly content to stew from a conspicuous distance in this case.

Daniel admitted what had happened was embarrassing for Jack. It was embarrassing for Daniel too, and it would have been even more embarrassing if it had been him. It HAD been him. He'd had three weeks of it obsessing over the small of Jack's back which even he knew was sad.

Daniel was not without sympathy here. He just wasn't sympathetic enough to drift into bed and a relationship that would make him, and probably Jack, miserable.

He set Jack's plate back on the stove and took his own meal to the table. He hesitated over Jack's sweating glass of beer and decided guys with the emotional maturity of the average sixteen year old, and hormones where his morals were supposed to be, deserved warm beer.

Daniel sat and took a careful bite of his pan-fried pork loin steak. It was succulently tender and cooked to his version of perfection. He relaxed and set some butter to melt over his corn and steamed vegetables. It was indulgent when he'd made rich gravy too, but he was on vacation and Janet's healthy eating lectures were a dim, distant annoyance. He happily piled the delicious herby stuffing and applesauce onto his plate, settling in to pig out.

Pun most definitely not intended. Daniel did not think puns were humorous plays on words. He didn't think they were humorous anything.

The door slammed open and Jack barged past him with an ill-tempered grunt. "You're right," he tossed out.

Daniel inhaled his herby stuffing ball.

"Wh-wh-whaa?" he choked.

Jack vented some of his spleen by wheeling around, marching back and smacking Daniel on the back. Hard.

"You're right," Jack said again, even more curtly than before.

"Jack?" Daniel called anxiously after him.

The bathroom door slammed metaphorically, if not literally, in Daniel's face.

Daniel sat looking stupidly at the door for some time, then pulled himself together. He guessed he'd have to wait for the next stunning revelation dredged from the depths of Jack's psyche.

Wait and...um...eat.

Jack emerged from the bathroom damp around the edges and scowling. Everything in the room seemed to be in his way. "Don't mind me," he tossed out sarcastically as he stalked past the table, watching Daniel savour his pork ecstatically.

"Applesauce," Daniel muttered thickly. "S'good."

He let Jack slide his plate haphazardly on the table without a word, merely raising his brows as Jack headed purposefully over to the refrigerator to grab a second beer. Daniel watched with mild, unspoken disapproval as Jack dropped gracelessly into his seat, all elbows and angles, hand darting to scoop up the beer. He drank it steadily down. Daniel was worried. Jack rarely had more than a couple of beers. He didn't drink to forget; he remembered.

"Right about what?" Daniel asked pacifically.

"I just mentally rewound our conversation and 'heard' what you said to me in your handy one condemnation-fits-all bullet point summary," Jack fired out the accusation.

Daniel straightened up and matched him look for scorching look.

"I 'heard' what I said to you," Jack admitted grudgingly. "I wouldn't take me on either," he muttered bitterly, shoving his plate away impatiently to reach for the other beer. He nursed the can, rolling it slowly from hand to hand, one finger catching the beads of moisture dripping down. "Left no insult unturned there, huh?"

"Is that a rhetorical question?" Daniel asked warily.

Jack's head snapped up. He shot a killing look at Daniel.

"No, seriously," Daniel replied firmly. "Do you want me to answer that?"

"Whatever," Jack angrily shrugged.

"You say you don't want me to fuck you? Fair enough," Daniel said simply. Jack lifted his head to watch him intently. "That's not the point though. Something I consider an act of love and intimacy and was willing to share, you find distasteful, an act your apparently rigid and narrow definition of masculinity can't respect enough to return," he told Jack with that same cool precision he'd managed earlier, his slow deliberation still barely enough to hide the shake in his voice. "What does that say about me to you, Jack?" He waited but Jack said nothing. "If I let you fuck me, do I lose your respect by default?"

"No!" Jack denied this furiously.

"What else am I supposed to think?" Daniel asked tightly. "You hurt me." Daniel wasn't proud to see Jack flinch and drop his head.

"I know," Jack admitted much more quietly. "Me too."

"It's not all you," Daniel said softly. "I'm - I'm looking for it," he admitted nervously. "For that look in your eyes. I don't mean to, but...Jack?" he asked, surprised as Jack jumped up and stormed around the table. "Jack?" He was yanked up, the chair crashing to the floor behind him as he was crushed to Jack's chest and that beautiful mouth, thinned now in rage, was grinding over his.

Daniel flung up his arms for balance as he reared back, trying to get some space. His lips parted beneath the onslaught and Jack slid into him like silk, all the sound and fury melting from him. Daniel's desperate bid for balance of any kind was stifled in sweetness, Jack's mouth as soft and pleasing now as it had been harsh moments before.

Jack - engulfed him, the kiss gentler and more generous than Jack's passion had led Daniel to expect, deepening with every breath as they stroked sensuously against and over one another, breathing easily now, leaning into it. Clinging.

They were each watching the other, devouring the other, gazes clashing and unforgiving.

The wrongness of being apart struck at Daniel. They couldn't be without one another, couldn't function if they weren't together. His body knew the rightness of this, hips rhythmically pushing hardness into Jack, hands tightening urgently, drawing Jack deeper into him.

There was a too-long impasse, neither willing to surrender, then they both gave into it, eyes closing as they staggered drunkenly in search of something to hold them up. Daniel's butt smacked against the cabin door and that was it. His hands clamped vice-like to Jack's ass as they blindly strained into one another, Jack's clenched fingers dropping to clasp in the small of Daniel's back.

He pushed now, Jack yielding, allowing him to plunge into wet heat and demanding, dizzying suction. Daniel thrust hard and deep, revelling as Jack opened to him, taking everything he had to give and firing it straight back, harder, faster, deeper, stronger, more, again, more.

Mine.

Fair was fair. He was Jack's too.

They broke apart at last, drunk on one another, feverish in arousal and confusion.

"You hurt me," Daniel gasped.

Jack nodded jerkily, his trembling hand too heavy as he cupped Daniel's nape.

"Don't do it again."

There was enough bleak warning in his tone to arrest Jack's attention, the watchful, assessing stillness in the man very familiar.

Threat-assessing.

"I won't."

It was a promise.

Daniel accepted because he had looked and he hadn't seen - Jack had in fact opened to him. Though they had each pushed it as far as they could, tried to own the other's ass, after his first shock there had never been a moment when he felt they hadn't been together.

"I'm not having sex with you," Daniel said slowly, knowing as he did so it was the right thing to do. There was too much at stake for them to fuck this up and too many issues lay unacknowledged between them. "Not until I'm sure." He was equally certain it was wrong for Jack to rush into this, conflicted as he was. He wanted Daniel badly, but only

time would tell if he truly wanted to be with Daniel. This wasn't a comfortable once-a-week fuck. This was their lives.

Jack shifted awkwardly against him, his face stiff and resistant. He didn't say a word.

He wouldn't, Daniel thought wryly.

Jack didn't agree, but wouldn't take the risk of losing what he'd just gained.

A chance.

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"Are you going to talk to me?" Daniel asked again.

"Busy now," Jack mumbled thickly against the sensitive skin of Daniel's throat.

"Kissing..."

Oh, yeah. That. Sighing, arousal warming him through, Daniel arched his neck as Jack urgently licked from the hollow of his throat to his chin. "You're not seducing me," he reminded Jack gently, moaning as he bit at his jaw, just - just there, just right, that sweet spot below his ear.

"I am," Jack contradicted, lifting his head to leer at Daniel.

He pulled Jack's head back down to him. "Just kissing," he insisted.

"Let's go to bed," Jack suggested, already moving.

Daniel shot him a long steady look, but took the imperiously outstretched hand and let Jack pull him up. He wasn't so comfortable crowded against the arm of the couch he would pass up on bed.

As soon as the bedroom door was slammed behind them, Jack made his intentions plain, shucking his clothes with ruthless rapidity. He peeled off his boxers and stood proudly naked and erect before Daniel, daring him to comment.

Daniel said nothing. He unbuttoned his ridiculous shirt and looked his fill, gaze lingering on the hard plane of Jack's belly, the sharply defined narrow hips, the gentle swell of belly below the navel. The unruly thatch of pubic hair, the heavy balls and the aggressive jut of his penis. Daniel quirked an eyebrow, undressing slowly as Jack looked his fill in turn, his penis twitching avidly as Daniel stepped out of his underwear, not exactly a shrinking violet himself, turning casually to stroll over to the dresser in search of his pyjama bottoms. He heard Jack's frustrated hiss behind him, but didn't react. As Daniel carefully smoothed the flannel over his hips, he heard the soft rustle of bedding and the creak as Jack's weight settled - defiantly naked - in the bed.

He turned off the light and made his way round to the left side of the bed, glad this at least they weren't fighting over. He couldn't sleep on the right side. Jack lay on his back, staring up at the ceiling as Daniel slipped in beside him, turning onto his side to look down at Jack.

"You mean it. This far and no further. Kissing," Jack said flatly, anything but happy.

"I gave you my trust," Daniel said quietly, stroking Jack's arm.

"And now I have to earn it, right? Rhetorical question," Jack added snidely, turning to face Daniel, hand reaching confidently to pull him into another ravaging, passionate kiss that left Daniel's body pounding.

They melted into an embrace, plastered to one another as they kissed and kissed. Slow and deep, tongues softly stroking. Quick, hard and dirty, sharp possessive stabs and thrusts. Suckling, biting, chewing...

Daniel wrenched away to flop onto his back, panting for breath.

It was good. Too good. He was falling deeper into Jack with every moment, wanting to give what Jack needed so badly. What he needed. Needing it didn't make it right for them, any more than being in love was any guarantee of being happy. Quite the opposite in his admittedly limited experience.

"What's your problem?" he asked Jack seriously as he was hauled in close again, Jack's hips pushing restlessly at him, penis rubbing luxuriously over the soft, clinging flannel until Daniel hitched back. "What is it you can't let go?" he pushed, ignoring Jack's frustration, though the hot, sweaty skin pressed to his was impossible... "Air Force policy?" 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' was anathema to Daniel, who thought all sexual misconduct should be treated equally, no one practice singled out for investigative efforts or harsher penalties.

Jack impatiently shrugged that off. "Hammond adores you, he needs us both and he's pragmatic enough to turn a blind eye. You couldn't be touched anyway. As a civilian your rights are protected. If the Air Force messes with you, you could sue," he explained rapidly.

"It's your own morality, then?" Daniel asked hesitantly, hoping like hell not.

"I do have a problem with fucking a subordinate, yes," Jack said coldly. "I could rely on Hammond turning a blind eye if you worked at the U, but I can't bang anyone who isn't my equal in the service. We're not talking a polite discharge, Daniel. Being a practising homosexual is just a small part of it. We're talking court martial if I fuck anyone within the chain of command."

"I'm not in the service. I'm a civilian consultant and I am your equal," Daniel riposted.

"That's a rationalisation." Jack's amusement was bleak. "I'm still your team leader. Effectively you are below me in the chain of command."

"Pity you didn't think of that sooner," Daniel snapped.

"Excuse me?" Jack leaned back to glare at him, the hand stroking hypnotically over his side stilling.

"Way back when, Sam told me to call you 'colonel' in the field. She tied it up in a pretty pink protocol bow, but she wasn't happy about me flouting your authority," Daniel explained. "I tried calling you colonel a few times. You slapped me down. You can't have it, Jack," he said uncompromisingly. "You can't make it personal and bail when it gets too personal. How is sleeping with me any different than loving me? You listen to me. You do what I say when I need you to. You've never been my commanding anything. Hell, when we first started out, you used to tell me something was an order so I knew it was something you needed me to do. How could you show me more favouritism than you do now?"

Jack shifted uncomfortably, a wry grimace acknowledging the truth of this. "Having sex crosses the line." He paused, thinking, his hand stroking again over Daniel's skin. "Thinking about having sex crosses the line," he admitted, lips twitching.

"Being friends doesn't?" Daniel challenged.

"Of course it does," Jack said impatiently. "I crossed that line with Teal'c and Carter too. Two wrongs never make a right and I don't want to do this with either of them." He leaned in and kissed Daniel's shoulder. "I do want to do it with you. I want it more and more. The idea of having sex - of wanting you seems less strange."

"More...natural?" Daniel asked haltingly as Jack's lips trailed fire over his throat.

"More real," Jack corrected him. "The problem is I know you too well. I didn't admit I was wrong 'til I tried to see myself saying what I said to you to Sara, and of course I frigging couldn't. I would never have treated her like that. I was so busy seeing the man, I forgot about you. I am sorry about that," he apologised sincerely.

Daniel nodded, swallowing hard against the sudden lump in his throat.

They kissed gently, acknowledging. Accepting...

"While we're on the truth kick, I don't want to wait to have sex with you," Jack said grimly. "I know we haven't resolved any of this, but where in life are there guarantees of anything, Daniel?"

Heart pounding, Daniel pushed his pyjama bottoms down, kicking them free of the bed.

"Daniel?"

Daniel lay facing Jack. He felt both stupid and excited at once as he took his penis into his waiting, knowing hand.

"You've got to be kidding!" Jack blurted incredulously.

He leaned in and kissed Jack hard, stroking himself luxuriously in perfect time to the slow, lazy thrusts of his tongue against Jack's. He slid his free hand beneath Jack to curve around his back and covetously stroke sleek skin. The nearness, being watched, the sharp musk of shared arousal...Daniel lost himself in it, throwing a leg over Jack's as he rocked into slow burning pleasure, eyes wide open, coolly meeting Jack look for look.

Daring him.

Jack caved, his hand plunging between them to grasp his own erection, roughly fucking his own hand as he watched Daniel. He pushed at the comforter, baring their bodies, warmth pooling across their thighs as they masturbated, each transfixed by the other. Jack leaned in to kiss Daniel, another slow, deep kiss at odds with their powerful, frenetic pumping.

Pleasure pricked Daniel's sweat-soaked skin as the night air played over his straining body. He was panting harshly, driving into Jack's mouth as he drove his hips into his grasping hand, Jack's hand hard against his ass, urging him on. His erection was slick now, his hand slipping and sliding easily just where he needed rough, demanding friction.

He needed Jack.

He had to settle for watching as Jack took his own pleasure, both of them entirely selfish, satisfying their own needs, but still...together.

Jack's face was flushed and slack, his mouth a tight grimace when he pulled away from the kiss to snatch deep breaths. Sweat dripped off his chin, rolling down from his temple.

Daniel leaned in and lapped at the salt-tang of Jack's cheek, gloating over the heat and reality of it.

The hand groping his ass abruptly cupped his face as Jack's body stilled and he slammed forward. The splash of heat over his groin had Daniel shuddering uncontrollably as his aching body tensed and he convulsed, coming slowly, in silence, to the sound of Jack calling his name over and over.

They lay close, soothing away tremors, closer still as they unclenched muscle by muscle. They couldn't rest until they were deep in each other's arms, legs entwined, stuttering heartbeats steadying. Too close for comfort. Uncaring of that, they slept.

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Daniel walked out of the bathroom and into a fierce kiss.

"Morning!" Jack called cheerfully.

"Morning?" Daniel grumbled, making a half-hearted attempt to push Jack away. "Try the middle of the night."

"It's ten a.m.," Jack corrected him, hanging on tight. "And scorching outside."

"I'm on vacation," Daniel explained patiently.

"Your definition of vacation seems to be heavy on sleep," Jack judged disapprovingly, sliding his arm round Daniel's waist to drag him over to the cabin door.

"And?" Daniel asked politely. What else was he supposed to do? Lazing around was what vacations were for. He stopped as he took in the blanket spread invitingly on the grass beside the dock, along with what looked like a couple of huge BLTs and a thermos.

"You won't need these," Jack said happily, turning to face Daniel, hooking his trigger finger into the waistband of Daniel's jeans. His face was tight and...

"Hungry."

"Me too," Jack agreed solemnly. Between one step and the next, his cutoffs were loosened and dropping. With the third step he was clear of them and pulling Daniel's zipper down.

His jeans were tight, which meant Jack had to assist them to obey the laws of gravity which he did with great panache and palpable attention to detail.

Then Jack kissed him.

Daniel clasped his arms around Jack's neck and kissed back, not even noticing Jack was walking them off the dock until he was chest deep in glacier melt. Not that it mattered. Jack was already giving his all to heat Daniel right back up, lifting him off his feet. With the water holding most of his weight, Daniel wrapped his legs around Jack's back, groaning as his shoulders slammed into the dock and Jack's hips drove into his.

He writhed ecstatically as their erections grated, hooking his arms beneath Jack's, then up to curve over his shoulders. Jack reached behind him to grip hard at the boards of the dock, freeing them to pound into one another's bodies. They didn't kiss this time, Jack

burying his face in Daniel's shoulder, his breath gusting hot as he panted with exertion. This turbulent coupling was harsh and powerful, their shared gratification intense, immediate.

Daniel fretfully scrubbed his face against Jack's hair, arching helplessly, hot, aching pleasure boiling through him as they humped savagely. He was dizzy, white flashes wheeling behind his eyes as he climaxed, pumping shocking heat between their grinding, water-cooled bodies.

Jack's penis thumped hard against his belly. "Christ, I love you!" Jack roared triumphantly as he came explosively.

Daniel kissed him hard on the mouth, on his cheek, ear, hair, then hugged him tight. "You do, don't you," he whispered shakily as Jack let him drop to his feet, face still buried.

"There can't be anyone else for me," Jack snarled into his throat. "Not while you...Has to be you, Danny. Isn't room for anyone else. The job or you...It has to be you, do you get that?"

"I get it," Daniel promised. He stroked Jack's back soothingly, aware of some protests from his own, used and abused against the dock's edge. "I do," he promised again. "It's not the end of the world to fall in love with a man, Jack," he said gently.

For the first time, Jack lifted his head and looked at him. "It's not? I can't be who I am, I shouldn't be what I am. That cuts deep, deeper than maybe you know." Jack winced. "I'm not trying to patronise you."

"I know," Daniel assured him.

"What do I do? What do we do?"

"Grow."

Jack looked like he wanted to say something but swallowed it in a weary nod. He clambered up onto the dock, Daniel following.

Stricken, Daniel slid his arm around Jack's waist. After a moment, his arm came around Daniel and they walked that way over to the blanket and lay down on their stomachs, side by side, reaching for the sandwiches Jack had made. The thermos was filled with piping hot coffee. They ate their fill in greedy gulps, the sun baking into them, warming them through.

"I have to be with you," Jack said suddenly. "I have to make love with you to know this is real, that you're worth everything I am and everything I believe in. When you're with me, it's - Jesus," Jack pulled a disgusted face, eyes apologetic. "It's easy to believe it's worth it,"

he said flatly, almost in accusation. "So can we stop talking about it now and just DO it for Chrissake!"

"Jack, I..."

"You're KILLING me here!" Jack seethed.

"I..."

"Shut UP, willya?"

"I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU TOO!" Daniel yelled hard enough to make Jack jump. "God knows why!" he stormed. "You never listen to a goddamned WORD I say!"

"I do!" Jack denied the allegation indignantly, a vast, offensively smug smile splitting his face.

"Says who!" Daniel snapped.

"Sez YOU," Jack hooted triumphantly, kissing him exuberantly.

Daniel shoved him away.

Jack refused to go. "Want to go to bed with me?" he asked eagerly, making with the big, melting puppy eyes.

"No," Daniel refused unconvincingly, his heart skipping a beat. Maybe Jack didn't realise, but he'd said making love. Not sex. He'd meant it too.

"Just to sleep," Jack added ruefully. "I'm - er - tired," he admitted self-consciously. "That's why I like coming up here - you know. You just push yourself too hard but I..."

Daniel thought about the vigorous mind blowing sex they'd just had and shouldn't have. He directed a long, sceptical look at his wide-eyed, innocent colonel.

"It was worth a shot," Jack bitched when Daniel refused to budge.

"I don't trust you," Daniel informed him coldly. "Not when it comes to..." he gave a little shimmy.

Jack's eyes glazed. "You shouldn't," he agreed distractedly.

"No more than this, Jack." Daniel rolled onto his side, propping himself on his elbow. "I mean it. I'm not ready for more."

"This?"

"Kissing. Touching. Being with one another," Daniel explained rapidly. "Getting used to being close."

"No fucking?" Jack asked pathetically.

"No," Daniel refused emphatically.

"Damn," Jack groaned. "Sleeping?"

"Together?" Daniel asked cautiously, thinking adjacency in a big warm bed would inevitably lead to much fucking, since they could not, in point of fact, keep their damned greedy wandering hands off one another. He'd already nixed the no-touching deal with one stellar aquatic orgasm. The only thing that hardened his heart was that sharing a bed would lead to much fucking of him. "We're not living together. We don't have time and it isn't exactly discreet."

"We can stay over though," Jack insisted, not particularly enthused by suggestions he would have insisted on himself if he was in any mood to be reasonable. "Have hot sex as often as we want it..."

Which would be every night.

"And can manage it."

Which would still be every night if he let them have their way. "I have work," he reminded Jack. More work than he could get through even with the hours he put in at the mountain.

"You'll have company too," Jack informed him decisively. "A nice warm bed waiting for you. Lots of healthy aerobic exercise."

Fucking.

"Uh huh," Daniel drawled, politely disbelieving.

"I'll try," Jack promised, looking hurt.

"I believe you," Daniel agreed with absolute sincerity. "Which is why I think we need to establish ground rules if we're to become lovers, Jack."

"Lovers?" Jack propped his chin on his hand and tried out the concept for size. "Lovers." He sounded quite pleased, his swift sidelong glance surprisingly soft. "Lovers," he said with calm finality.

"It's your career we have to worry about," Daniel explained unnecessarily. He was flustered, deciding arbitrarily that he would think more clearly in his jeans.

"You'll never get to them before I get to you," Jack observed pleurably as Daniel glanced at the clothes littering the dock. "But I'd be thrilled if you gave it a shot."

"I can run faster than you," Daniel riposted. "Much faster," he added unkindly.

"Motivated, remember?" Jack prompted. "About the ground rules?"

"Yes?"

"What's your position on me letting you burn your ass cherry red?" Jack fondled the ass in question.

Daniel sat up glaring as Jack jumped to his feet and strolled over to grab his jeans before loping into the cabin. There were sounds of complicated searching, then Jack emerged triumphant, waving suntan lotion.

"Oh god," he sighed as Jack closed in, licking his lips in anticipation.

Jack's method of application involved him sitting on Daniel's butt as he gently rubbed the lotion into every accessible inch of skin. "Ground rules," he announced briskly. "Kissing is in."

"Yes," Daniel agreed, propping himself up on his elbows, quivering as Jack stroked his spine. Any lotion getting on him had to be incidental.

"Touching?"

"Mm-hm," Daniel bit his lip. The stroking was really distracting.

"Peachy," Jack approved. "I like touching. And the rubbing thing?"

"Frottage," Daniel corrected him automatically. "Aren't you worried we'll scare the fish?"

"Sarcastic shit."

"I didn't mean to..." Daniel hinted.

"Me either," Jack admitted. "I was trying to play by the rules but..."

"But?"

"You're very - er..."

Daniel tried to sit up, but Jack pushed him down again, kissing his shoulder in apology. Then he kissed Daniel's nape, making them both shiver.

"Lovers, huh? Shit." Jack sighed. Daniel heard him take a deep breath. "Attractive, okay? You're very attractive. Very," he muttered defensively. "Very," he said again, quite loudly.

"So are you," Daniel responded reassuringly, deeply grateful that Jack couldn't see the way he was blushing.

"Okay then." Jack sounded relieved, like the worst was over.

Daniel hoped so too. He didn't want to have to say that twice either.

"Hand-jobs are in," Jack summarised, ticking off available sexual options with kisses down Daniel's spine, several more kisses than there were actual options. "We do each other next time," he ordered forcefully, kissing right down to Daniel's butt for emphasis.

"Um...sure," Daniel said agreeably, arching his neck temptingly. He really liked it when Jack kissed him just there.

Jack gently nibbled at his nape, nosing into his hair. "Very," Jack sighed. "Turn over. I'll do your front side." He hitched up, allowing Daniel to roll onto his back, burningly aware of the warmth and weight of Jack's penis gliding over his skin. Jack straddled his hips, squirted more lotion and dabbed some on Daniel's nose, grinning.

There was a brief struggle for the tube, Daniel loudly insisting he could manage his own face. Jack won conclusively, and plainly had another 'very' moment as his brisk strokes over Daniel's cheek slowed and gentled. They stared at one another in silence, arousal coiling sweet and low. Jack recovered in a moment, but they were both a little shaken by the shared intensity.

Daniel laid his hands on Jack's forearms as he worked the lotion down his chest, thumbs flickering teasingly at his nipples, a definite pang of pleasure shocking down to his groin.

"No anal sex," Jack promised, bending to softly kiss Daniel.

Daniel stretched up to nuzzle his face against Jack's. "Thanks." Jack's only answer was another soft, serious kiss.

"Blowjobs?" Jack asked slowly, straightening up to look thoughtfully at Daniel. "No," he answered his own question regretfully.

Daniel stiffened, his tender mood evaporating at this sweeping condemnation of his sexuality. He happened to be extremely good at oral sex. Sarah had been partial to it. "Excuse me?" he coldly sought clarification.

"No, you don't do blowjobs," Jack answered absently, more interested in caressing Daniel's belly.

"You know this just by looking at me?" Daniel asked with awful politeness.

Jack looked at him again. "Yes," he announced with insulting simplicity. "Shame. I love blowjobs almost as much as...er..."

"So do I," Daniel announced defiantly despite the fact Sarah had not been fond of reciprocating and with Sha'uri he'd been wary of her willingness to try anything to please him. Getting Sha'uri to admit to what pleased her had been hard enough without worrying about...well...he'd - he'd thought they had time.

"Neither of us has given one before, though," Jack murmured dulcetly, eyeing Daniel speculatively. "Which means we can't make a fair assessment of the place of oral sex in our ground rules."

"What are you - OH!" Daniel's voice rose an octave as Jack scooted down and kissed his belly as he had their disastrous first time. He shook from head to foot as Jack nosed at his pubic hair, inhaling ecstatically. He was completely embarrassed by the way the blood slammed down, filling his penis before Jack's very eyes. Which widened.

"That's such a turn-on," Jack sounded surprised. "I had no idea it could be. A dick is a dick, but it's what I do for you, you know?" he muttered gruffly, flushing a little himself. "I told you I'd get better at this stuff. I just need to get accustomed. Do you want me to go down on you?" he asked abruptly.

Daniel's penis jerked.

"I'll take that as a yes," Jack snorted.

"No," Daniel said instinctively, stopping Jack's purposeful advance cold.

"Daniel?"

"We're supposed to be going slow, not coming like freight trains," Daniel fretted. "I can't think straight here. We're moving too fast. We weren't supposed to be touching and I didn't so much as whimper..."

"Yes, you damned well did!" Jack corrected him indignantly.

Daniel scowled at him. "In protest."

"You didn't protest. You did whisper into my ear, 'Oh yes, Jack, yes, please!'," Jack supplied helpfully and slightly smugly.

"I don't want to slide into what I didn't want because I can't refuse you," Daniel admitted with hurtful honesty.

"You've managed fine so far," Jack said edgily.

"No. I haven't."

Jack pulled a face. "Did it occur to you that I would enjoy going down on you?" he asked mildly.

"No," Daniel replied at once. "It didn't."

Jack winced and Daniel flushed miserably, very aware of what had prompted setting these rules in the first place. "I - I didn't mean it like that," he apologised awkwardly, his hand tightening anxiously around Jack's arm.

"I know," Jack relaxed. "I do know."

"Do you know I'm not going to bail on you?" This was a real issue as far as Daniel was concerned. This wasn't a power struggle or a game. He needed equality as much as he needed Jack's respect. That meant they both had to make their own choices freely. He had the hope now that they would choose to be together. He would give Jack every chance, he would see him, sleep with him, be with him. They might never want anal sex, either of them, but that would be okay too.

"I'm not going down for the Gipper, Daniel!"

Daniel choked with laughter, horrified at the terrifying mental image that evoked. Jack laughed too and they were okay again.

"I'd like to go down on you," Jack offered with quiet certainty.

"If you want..." Daniel accepted uncertainly, smiling shyly. "Tonight. In bed. No pressure!" he added hastily.

Jack nodded solemnly, his eyes dancing. "You're adorable when you blush."

Daniel's face fell. Damn! "You - um - noticed."

"The fish noticed," Jack informed him callously.

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"What?" Daniel asked as Jack started to laugh.

"Do you realise every time I look at you, you look over your shoulder trying to see what I'm looking at?"

No? Was this quote 'adorable' too?

"It's really cute," Jack said provocatively.

Daniel took advantage of the way they were each sprawled at opposite ends of the couch in a pleasant tangle of legs to retaliate. He pointedly moved his foot from its current location.

Jack snarled and snatched it back. "Get with the program!"

Smiling slowly, Daniel dropped his head to look up at Jack through his lashes. The impact was immediately apparent. He arched his foot as Jack got hard - well, harder - then resumed his maddeningly gentle rubbing between Jack's legs.

Jack caught his breath. "You're driving me crazy."

"I know."

It was weird to tangle like this, to have every word, look and touch resonate sex. Jack was stroking Daniel's bare feet as his toes massaged an increasingly eager erection. At least Jack wasn't pushy about it. As long as one foot was planted on his crotch at all times, Jack was easy about what Daniel did with the other, like, random example here, let it rest right there in Jack's free hand so he could play with that one too.

Not pushy. Right. Jack was about as shy and retiring as those wood ticks that burrowed into your ass and wouldn't quit 'til you drowned them in Jack Daniels or lit a fire under their little butts. Jack was more resilient.

Actually, Jack had a lot in common with those annoying little ticks. Not just the ass thing. He loved Daniel's nooks and crannies, he dug right in and he sucked blood. Daniel had a hickey that would raise Janet's eyebrows straight through her neat little chignon when he got back.

Daniel was puzzled by Jack's persistent, protracted and embarrassingly excitable podalic fondling. He didn't find feet attractive, even squeaky clean feet smelling of nothing but the soap he'd snuck into the bathroom and ferociously scrubbed them with after three jokes in a row about sucking. Jack seemed rather taken with Daniel's feet, soap-scented or not, and was using his palpable lack of enthusiasm to inveigle him into offering more of the quality time Jack craved.

Jack was rather enjoying the whole thing, so much so Daniel would have felt mean to reciprocate feet-wise and deprive Jack of the pleasure of making him suffer for being a selfish shit.

He glanced vaguely down at the chessboard, parked on the floor in front of the couch.

"I'm only interested in mating," Jack stirred lazily. "In fact, I'd like an early night."

"It's four in the afternoon," Daniel protested. "We can't spend our entire vacation eating, sleeping and having sex."

"Why not?" Jack asked reasonably.

"I'll make you talk," Daniel threatened mischievously.

"Acushla, throw in a promise to make me scream too and I'm yours," Jack responded instantly.

"Acushla?" Daniel queried.

"It's authentically linguistic," Jack smiled blandly. "So suck it up."

"Okay."

"What?"

"I said okay," Daniel smiled blandly.

"I know what you said," Jack snapped impatiently. "I want to know what you meant."

"I meant okay."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did."

"Don't pull that reverse psychology crap on me," Jack sneered. "It won't work. I aced the Special Ops training in resisting mind control."

Really? How interesting. "Let's go out," Daniel suggested. "I don't. Much."

"Out? Like a date?" Jack mulled this over.

Daniel sensed Jack was calculating how hard he had to work to get laid if he stayed right here. "It's your turn to cook," he pointed out truthfully.

"Peg's it is."

Wow. It was always a pleasure for Daniel to see cutting-edge military training in action. Jack held out for a whole millisecond there. Daniel chuckled as they tumbled off the couch, following Jack into the bedroom to change.

Jack went straight over to the wardrobe and pulled out the leather pants. He tossed them to Daniel along with the slinky teal shirt. There was a definite 'dare you' gleam in his eye.

Watching as Jack carelessly pulled out tight jeans and a soft blue-grey shirt, Daniel decided he dared alright, even if it was only to see the look on Jack's face when he took in the full horror of the pants.

He had to lie on the bed to get them fastened.

"I have the same problem with my BDUs some days," Jack joked.

Daniel stopped his struggle with the zipper to give Jack a slow, comprehensive once-over.

Jack shifted uneasily under his focused, blatantly appreciative attention.

"Wouldn't happen if you weren't such a horny bastard," Daniel grinned, finally getting the zipper where it should be and the button fastened. He attempted to sit up and found he had to stay put.

"Want me to help you up?" Jack asked after watching him lie there like a beached whale for some time.

"Would you?"

"My pleasure," Jack agreed with alacrity, taking Daniel's hands to pull him up and then stealing a kiss while he was adjacent and off-balance. Jack then assisted him into his shirt, managing to maintain a lot of skin to skin contact while he was fastening the buttons.

"You're very good," Daniel told him admiringly.

Jack winked at him and kissed him again.

Daniel slid his feet into his shoes and bent gracefully - if slowly - from the waist to tie them.

"Jesus," Jack breathed huskily behind him.

He straightened as Jack's arms snaked around his waist and pulled him back, Jack rubbing suggestively against his butt. Daniel reached behind him to cup Jack's head, resting his other hand over Jack's clasped ones.

They stood quietly, close.

"Are you glad?" Jack asked suddenly.

"Mm-hm," Daniel sighed. Getting a chance like this? He - they would have to work at it, but that was something neither of them was afraid of. They'd worked hard enough at their friendship over the years. "You?" he asked nervously.

"Getting there," Jack said simply.

"Good enough." He pulled away. "I'm driving."

"You can drive back," Jack offered generously.

"Not a chance!" Daniel argued indignantly.

Jack gallantly took his ass and escorted him from the cabin. "You can't hold your liquor for shit, Daniel. Give it up."

"I can't if you get hammered."

"I thought I just had to put my lips together and blow?" Jack asked lasciviously as he locked the cabin door.

They bickered amiably as they walked over to the truck, both of them knowing Jack would give Daniel the keys. He wouldn't risk Daniel driving back in the dark in an unfamiliar truck on unfamiliar roads. The big, bad colonel's big damn secret was he didn't take risks at all. Ever. Not unless they were calculated and only if he had no other choice. It went beyond discipline, it was so much a part of who Jack was.

Jack was chuckling as he stomped up to the passenger's side, daring Daniel to say a word as he tossed the keys over to him. Daniel caught them neatly, smirking. Jack's glare seemed to be missing something. Severity, for example.

"You're not going to put a foot wrong tonight, are you?" Daniel queried as he started the truck.

"Nope," Jack agreed briskly, wearing his customary pained 'Daniel is driving and I bitterly regret all the times I dissed his damned Volvo' face.

"Wow!" Daniel called perkily as they rolled gently down the track. "Listen to that engine purr."

"Daniel!" Jack warned him.

"Growl. Choke. Stutter," Daniel dissed happily.

"You're going to give me hell tonight, aren't you?" Jack asked as Daniel pulled out onto the main road.

"Why would I do that?" Daniel opened his eyes wide.

"Because you can."

It felt so normal, so right to bicker after all the heavy silences and hurtful words between them that Daniel went with it, relaxing into the easy, familiar banter. It was good to share their friendship again, not use it against each other. Daniel opened himself to his friend, time flying as he teased Jack mercilessly about *The Body*.

"How many states do you know have governors who come with their own action figures!" Jack defended Governor Ventura hotly. "He was a Navy SEAL for God's sake!"

"I'm more interested in how many state governors' action figures come with white spandex," Daniel said dulcetly.

"He was a Pro-Wrestler," Jack snapped defensively.

"O-kaay," Daniel conceded the point. "How does that explain the feather boa?" he asked interestedly.

Jack turned his back on him and refused to speak until Daniel pulled in to park in front of Peg's, presuming the lot would be full at this time of night. Jack jumped out onto the sidewalk, slamming his door behind him. Daniel chuckled as he locked the truck and meekly followed his offended colonel into the lobby.

There was music playing when Jack shoved open the door of the bar.

Daniel heard a distinctive guitar twang and bolted back the way he came. Jack caught him after a few steps and marched him back. Daniel tried out something he'd watched toddlers do in the supermarket, going limp and making Jack wrestle him along by main force. It was a surprisingly effective tactic, especially when combined with the high pitched whining. Toddlers clearly knew more about hostage situations than SWAT teams.

"Country!" Daniel accused.

"Uh-huh. Shift your ass, willya!" Jack retorted, giving him a hard shove.

Daniel dug his heels in. "AND Western!"

He was horrified. He'd rather have a session with Mackenzie than listen to this crap. Did they usually inflict this stuff on innocent tourists? This was Minnesota, not Texas!

"They have country and western bars everywhere, including Colorado Springs," Jack said un sympathetically.

"No, they don't," Daniel contradicted. "Not in any part of Colorado Springs I've ever been." He'd never set foot in a place where he had to listen to a band called - he snatched up a flyer as Jack steered him past. "'Hogsbreath'?" he read, appalled. One last vigorous shove sent him staggering into the bar 'n' grill proper.

Vinny waved unenthusiastically from behind the bar.

Daniel wasn't surprised. He and Jack made up Vinny's entire customer base. He unfortunately made eye-contact with the band, all five members looking very pleased to see him. They redoubled their efforts when Jack swaggered in behind him.

Naturally, Jack insisted on dragging him to a table right in front of them. Daniel felt horribly guilty when the singer waved to him, smiling broadly. Jack happily waved back, surreptitiously yet viciously elbowing Daniel until he waved too, somewhat limply. Everything was twanging. The guitars. The singer's generous bosom. His nerves.

Taking advantage of Jack's keen interest in said bosom, Daniel made a break for the bar. His need for inebriety was WAY greater than Jack's.

"Hey," Vinny grunted. "The usual?"

"Is that a trick question?"

Vinny looked him up and down in a way that made him scowl. "No."

Daniel had a weird feeling of déjà vu. "You can tell what I drink just by looking at me?"

"Yes."

"Can you also tell what I eat?"

"One well-done," Vinny jotted something on his pad, "hold the Dijonnaise."

"Dijonnaise?" Daniel asked despite himself.

"I'm holding it." Vinny glanced past him to Jack. "And one medium rare. Extra everything."

Daniel was slightly annoyed that Vinny was right.

"One pitcher of beer and a Gold Cadillac."

The song - whatever it was - which had been going on forever, stopped.

"Make that two large Southern Comforts, hold the bottle over each glass for a really long time," Daniel ordered briskly.

The singer announced the band was taking a comfort break.

Daniel could not agree more.

"Plus two - three pitchers of beer, a bottle of Jackdaniels," he added rapidly. It had occurred to him that a band that was drinking was a band that wasn't twanging. "And a Shirley Temple."

"For the lady?"

"For Jack. He's driving."

Vinny quirked an eyebrow. "And if he wasn't driving?"

"Do you know how to make a Peppermint Patty?" Daniel asked brightly.

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"You only have yourself to blame. You told me to do it," Jack callously informed him.

Daniel lay in an abject, shivering heap on the ancient rug in front of the fire, the only heat in him sheer incandescent fury. "I told you to drag me bodily out of bed, march me up the dock and throw me in the lake if I wasn't up by nine?" he snarled.

Jack prudently stepped out of range. "Yes."

"Why?" Daniel demanded.

"You needed to get to the church on time."

"What?" Daniel asked blankly.

"You promised to marry Brenda if she let you do the Shania Twain number."

"Who?" Daniel was drawing a complete blank here.

Blank?

Try blanker.

Or maybe he should just settle for blankest.

"Shania Twain," Jack said uncommunicatively, crossing his arms over his chest.

"I don't know who that is," Daniel said at last, slow coiling horror beginning to get the better of enraged hypothermia. Quite apart from vicarious humiliation, he was slightly thrown by the fact he didn't know who Brenda was either.

"This was immediately apparent." Jack eyed him pityingly.

"What...number?" Daniel asked painfully, putting his putative fiancée to one side for the moment. Allegedly engaged or not, his brain just wasn't up to dealing with Brenda.

"Do you really want to know?" Jack asked crisply.

"No," Daniel responded instantly.

"Man! I feel like a woman!" Jack informed him with considerable enjoyment.

"Oh, I didn't!" Daniel whimpered.

"To be fair, Brenda didn't know anything by Chaka Khan," Jack admitted reasonably.

Daniel pulled his sodden T-shirt over his face and whimpered some more.

"I on the other hand failed to get shit-faced, hit high 'C' and Vinny," Jack observed stonily, "or get laid."

"You didn't?" Daniel was amazed. He must have passed out cold the minute they got through the door if Jack made it through the night unmolested. "Why?"

"You threw up. You were hugging the can for two hours," Jack enunciated.

Daniel was in no mood to admire perfect diction. "Where were you?" And were you naked?

"Hugging you." Jack smirked. "Did I mention you drank my Shirley Temple?" he added ruthlessly.

Daniel fled, Jack's laughter hounding him through the bathroom door. Which he SO didn't slam.

Shower. Now!

Daniel set the shower away so the water would have time to heat and stripped off his soaked clothes. Still shivering, mostly from embarrassment, he wrapped a towel tight round his waist.

O-kaay. Next?

He sat on the edge of the bath and gathered his thoughts. It took some time. His mind was like the LA freeway at rush hour. Wall to wall smog and synaptic gridlock.

Shave? No. He wanted to live and have sex.

Teeth? God, yes! How much toothpaste was there? Daniel got up as carefully as he'd sat down and tottered over to investigate the contents of the elderly medicine cabinet. Half a tube? Who brought half a tube of toothpaste on vacation? Apart from Jack, obviously. That might not be enough. He neatly extracted Jack's Snoopy toothbrush, lavished on something that promised faithfully in big bold letters to be minty fresh, then scrubbed mercilessly and messily at his teeth.

An appalling thought struck.

Daniel yanked open the bathroom door.

"Tell me I didn't throw up on you!" he demanded apprehensively.

Jack put down his book and slowly looked Daniel up and down. "You didn't throw up on me," he answered distractedly.

Book? "What are you - er..." Daniel gestured with Snoopy for emphasis.

"Fly fishing' by J.R. Hartley. What are you - er..." Jack gestured with his book for emphasis, mostly at the towel.

Daniel held Jack's toothbrush in front of his eyes for some time. Was that a trick question?

Jack tossed his book and ambled over. "Do you want to?" he asked hopefully. "You know?" He shrugged as if it was no big deal.

Whatever the hell the deal was.

Jack shot another long significant look at the towel.

Daniel looked too.

"A little hair of the dog?" Jack prompted.

Daniel was hung over, dehydrated, damp in the drowned-rat sense of damp and smelly enough to make his own nose wrinkle, shivering, unshaven and dribbling toothpaste. He was pretty sure he threw up on Jack last night. He couldn't guarantee he wouldn't throw up again.

He grabbed Jack by the ears and kissed him hard. He met with no resistance until his nose jabbed painfully into Jack's. They both yelped and broke apart. Daniel re-established his grip on Jack's ears, hauled him bodily into the bathroom and kicked the door shut behind them.

Jack unbuttoned the top button on his shirt.

Daniel smacked his hands away and just pulled the stupid-assed, clingy, in-the-goddamned-way thing apart.

"Hey!" Jack protested, dropping his chin to glare at several buttons hanging by a thread. "I liked this shirt. When it was alive," he added witheringly.

Daniel slowly peeled a dangling button down to the end of its thread and let it drop, never breaking eye contact as it tinkled gently on the floor. He released his towel, which gracefully succumbed to the vagaries of gravity, pooling gently over his feet.

"I like that more," Jack admitted after a brief, contemplative silence.

Daniel snapped Jack's chin up and mauled him, doing his damndest to suck Jack's tongue clear out of his mouth. Jack seemed to have no fault to find this, and they both decided he was wearing too many clothes. Daniel tackled the zipper while Jack held his ass supportively, forcefully shoved Daniel's tongue back out of his mouth and tried a little mauling of his own. Daniel chewed ecstatically on Jack's tongue.

Jack's jeans required two pairs of hands to assist them on a downward trajectory, but Jack's penis achieved escape velocity all on its own to poke Daniel in the stomach. They redoubled their efforts to wrestle Jack free.

The instant Jack kicked the jeans clear they stumbled into the bath and Jack crowded him against the wall, the hot water making things slippery and interesting. Daniel told himself it didn't matter how he got water into him so long as it got there, wriggled out from under, darted behind Jack and shoved him against the tile.

Then he started licking.

The nape of Jack's neck, warm and sleek with water. His broad shoulders. The sharp point of a shoulder blade. Daniel kissed a trail down each knot of Jack's spine to kneel and press his face into the small of his back, slipping his hand around to fondle his balls, cupped hot and heavy in his fingers.

Jack moaned as Daniel bit and licked at his ass, fingers curling confidently round his penis, pumping him fiercely, without finesse. Primal. Just how Jack had shown Daniel he wanted it, needed it, his hips bucking roughly, demanding friction. Daniel's hand tightened and quickened as he pulled himself up to rest his other arm over Jack's, their fingers twining against the tile.

Daniel did what he'd dreamed of for so very long, licking Jack's shoulder as he threw back his head and came for him, came hard, crying out Daniel's name.

Jack turned and nuzzled into him caressingly, then brought Daniel's hand to his mouth and kissed it. "I'm such a fuck," he said soberly. "What's the dictionary definition of a bigot?"

"One blindly or obstinately devoted to a particular creed or..."

"Right next to a mugshot of yours truly, huh?" Jack interrupted.

"Oh, no, Jack, no," Daniel whispered, distressed. He hugged Jack protectively close. "No."

"Appreciate the thought, Danny, but yes." Jack gently patted the hand spread over his belly, then held it. "I'm sorry," he said simply. "I know in my gut you're it, that there's nothing and no one but you for me. Part of me...I hated that. Fought it for the longest time."

Daniel shifted awkwardly, biting his lip.

"That hurts you," Jack murmured regretfully.

"H-hurts you too."

"I rationalised wanting you." Jack laughed, low and biting. "Just like you said. Just like that. I thought I got to have it all. Got to keep my job, my team. Got to be with you as much as I need to be. Scare you how much," he promised, not teasing. "And I got to take you." Jack turned and took Daniel into his arms. "I got this." His hand clenched hard on Daniel's ass. "Got to bury myself balls-deep in you. I want you. I need you. I need this." He squeezed again, grimacing at what he saw on Daniel's still face. "I need to fuck you and still feel like a man."

Daniel flinched, pulling away, looking away as Jack angrily thwarted him, yanked him in close.

"I'm a fuck," Jack whispered into Daniel's hair.

Jack was shaking and it was instinct for Daniel to cradle him close, to lend him what strength he could.

"You can't change me, Danny. You're it for me. I gotta change me for you. And me," Jack admitted with difficulty. "As much as I love you - and I do, don't ever doubt that, EVER..." He shook Daniel. He shook. "I put that look in your eyes." Daniel lifted his head, Jack's hand cupping his cheek, thumb brushing over his lips. "This look. I thought I was a better man than this. I need to be."

"It doesn't matter about the sex," Daniel rushed into the leaden silence. "It doesn't. It's just us. As long as we're talking - as long as we're together...that's what I need. That's all I need," he promised. "You seeing me..."

Jack fumbled behind him to shut off the shower and they clambered out to towel off, watching one another. Nothing was said, but they held each other as they walked into the bedroom and got into bed.

Daniel opened his arms and Jack settled close, facing him. He smoothed Daniel's damp hair, smiling a little.

"You were saying?"

"We don't ever have to fuck," Daniel blurted. "It's so not the point! It was never the point...just...you took my choice away. That's not...it's not respect, Jack," he said gently. "This is enough for me. Everything," he admitted shyly, face flaming. They kissed, a soft promise of closeness, of comfort. Kissed again. His arms were clasped around Jack's neck before he knew it, the kisses flowing one into another.

Daniel didn't realise he was shivering until Jack was pulling back to search his face.

"Daniel?"

"You do love me," he said shakily. "That's the first time I..." He bit off the unkind words, horrified.

"Believed me?" Jack's face was tight.

"Sorry," he whispered regretfully.

"Don't be sorry. Just patient," Jack asked. "You're right. I've got to stop thinking that this isn't real until we fuck. What just happened...that was plenty real. And hot."

Daniel's ebbing blush surged again. He cleared his throat self-consciously. "Me too. I mean, I'm not used to this either. I can't tell you're coming on to me unless your pants are round your ankles."

"You still want the blowjob? I thought you...that whole song and dance..." Jack took a moment to regroup mentally. "What did you think I wanted? To wash your back?"

A man who sucked toes was capable of anything! Who knew what perverted pleasure Jack could wring from a soapy loofah and a wet, willing linguist.

"Do you?" Jack nudged him with his knee.

"Do I what?"

"Daniel! Focus," Jack ordered, taking Daniel's penis firmly in hand. "Blowjob?"

"Can you?" Daniel asked hesitantly. "If you can't...I mean...Look, I've done a lot of research. I've heard about supposedly straight men cruising gay bars for blowjobs, no strings and sure as hell no reciprocation." It went without saying this was complete anathema to Daniel. "Don't put pressure on yourself unnecessarily, Jack, please. Not for me," he pleaded. Ignoring the frown directed his way, he stroked his hand down Jack's arm and leaned in to kiss his shoulder. "I'm happy with what we have right now. We're both dealing with our sexuality. I don't think we should rush into things we aren't ready for, however much we want them. We may never be ready, and that's okay too."

Jack nodded thoughtfully. "That's mature."

Daniel smiled tentatively.

"Mature sucks!" Jack hooted, scooting down the bed laughing to tumble Daniel onto his back and take a long, lascivious swipe at his balls.

Daniel emitted a strangled yelp.

Okay.

A squeak.

Jack sat up, licking his lips. "Not chicken."

Daniel sat up and hit him.

Jack smirked and leaned in to steal another long, dreamy kiss. They tumbled back to the bed, arms around one another, passion beginning to heat the tenderness. Every time Jack lifted his head, Daniel strained up to deepen the kiss, to hold him, bring him close again. Daniel's hands were everywhere, feverishly stroking every inch of this man he'd coveted for so long.

He heaved up, shoving Jack hard onto his back and rolled on top of him, peppering kisses over his throat, chest, shoulders...the palms of his hands...Up again to cradle his beloved face in gentle hands and kiss each closed eye...nose...cheeks...the straight, proud mouth...

They kissed again, deeply, Daniel aching and unsatisfied, hips stirring restlessly against Jack's. Tantalising images of Jack going down on him danced through his mind. He wanted Jack desperately, but meant what he said about putting unnecessary pressure on themselves. Hot or not, it was better to wait until they both wanted to move on to that level of intimacy.

Jack's hips bucked up suddenly, knocking him, off-balance, the smooth follow-through leaving Daniel sprawling as Jack slid rapidly down to take an experimental lick at the base of his penis. Jack looked up doubtfully as Daniel shuddered from head to toe, shrugged philosophically and licked again, a little lower.

All he knew was Jack, the tentative swipes of moist, limber heat touching, tasting...testing. He reached out slowly, fingers clenching and flexing rhythmically, white-knuckled in the sheet, in answer to Jack's gentle, curious swipes. Though his hips were rigidly controlled, Daniel was restive, his shoulders curling up from the bed as he shook, his belly heaving with the effort to be still for Jack.

"Oh, Jack," he breathed, allowing himself a fleeting caress of Jack's head. His hand was caught before he could pull it away, Jack first kissing palm and wrist, then slowly sucking his finger into his mouth, eyes liquid with sin. Daniel quivered as Jack's tongue pulsed around his finger, easing clear to blow gently on the fingertip.

Jack watched him as he lowered his head to touch his tongue delicately to the head of Daniel's penis. He was painfully erect, his body tense and needy. He gasped at that first slick flicker, crying out helplessly, throwing back his head as Jack slowly took him into his mouth, engulfing him in sleek, demanding heat. Jack began to suck, somewhat uncertainly. Daniel's soft moan had Jack relaxing, his movements smoothing, mouth tightening now around Daniel, the subtle scrape of teeth against his sensitive skin drawing another moan of pleasure from him.

Daniel reached down to take Jack's hands. He groaned, arching once more from the bed as Jack took him in deeper, sucking in earnest now. Something shocked clear through him, intense, his body tightening as if in pain, but there was no pain, there was only Jack. His Jack. Undeniably his now.

The need that had been eating him alive for too long was answered now by Jack's explicit avowal of trust and commitment. He had Jack's promise to be with him in words, and now in the generous mouth moving on him like silk. Daniel's balls tightened reflexively because this was so good, so right...Jack's nose crinkled but he swallowed Daniel's bitter excitement without complaint, unlike Sarah.

Jack's fingers spread to take his between, his grasp close to painful as he first took Daniel in deeper, teeth tight and scraping, the exquisite pressure on his aching, exquisitely sensitised flesh making Daniel shiver. Then he slowly withdrew, sucking all the way. Daniel thrashed mindlessly on the pillows as Jack rested, tormenting him with teasing flickers of his tongue and gentle nibbling, only to engulf him again.

Daniel began to curl up on himself, knees meeting thighs, toes digging into the mattress, his shoulders lifting clear, throat working soundlessly as sullen pleasure coiled heavy and deep, electrifying his body. It was driving him out of his mind to be careful with Jack when he wanted to grab him and hold him just so, fuck that lovely mouth...

He respected the man, even admired him. He loved Jack with all that he was, all he could give, and so he lay still, wholly giving himself over to his lover, his senses swimming in ecstatic, unimagined intimacy. Having Jack so close to him, in this act so entirely his...it was almost more than he could take.

More than his body could take, certainly. The rhythm found them both, shook and stirred each of them profoundly. The intensity, the rightness of what they were sharing sang through Daniel, his body throbbing all over, shocking him with the knowledge that he was going to come in Jack's mouth.

Jack's tongue was hot and tight around him, slick and squeezing as he slurped and sucked greedily. Wild, blinding pleasure surged up from his curled toes to slam into his brain, his body convulsing, everything, everything he had exploding out of him with something close to a scream as his penis pulsed and jerked in Jack's mouth.

He came to himself, shaking and sweaty in Jack's arms. "Sorrysorrysorry," Daniel apologised in a thread of a voice, cupping Jack's face in shame and remorse. All he could do was pant and quiver and cling.

"Shit! I swallowed." Jack pulled a pantomime 'eww!' face. "How dumb was that?"

"So sorry, Jack," Daniel whispered. "I lost control."

"Me too. I guess..." Jack faltered. "It doesn't get any more real than this, huh? You just came in my mouth and I swallowed."

"You're freaked," Daniel acknowledged sadly, swallowing his guilt and disappointment to snuggle closer supportively, guessing they wouldn't be trying this again in a hurry. He was willing to reciprocate though, that went without saying. Whenever Jack wanted him...

"Youbetcha I'm freaked!" Jack agreed vigorously. "I just swallowed your sperm for God's sake, and I...er...I kinda...er..." Jack took a deep, difficult breath. "Enjoyed it," he admitted reluctantly, shooting Daniel a distinctly accusatory look.

"You did?" An incredulous smile broke out, joy tumbling through Daniel.

Considerably provoked, Jack kissed him soundly. If his intent was punishment, it failed miserably. "Mmm," he sighed as Daniel eagerly opened to him.

The faint salt tang surprised Daniel. He leaned back in surprise, reflexively licking his lips.

Still a little wild around the eyes, Jack yanked him straight back into the most tender, intense kiss they'd yet shared. They lay close in the rumpled sheets, arms tight around

one another, feasting on willing lips, aggressive tongues and arching throats, soft sighs sounding and quick panting breaths snatched as the slow sweet kiss inexorably deepened.

Daniel didn't notice when he was eased onto his back. He only felt that rightness when Jack's granite weight pinned him to the bed, knees roughly parting his legs so Jack could MOVE. He felt the tremor in Jack's legs as he pistoned into Daniel's tired, sated body and it shocked him. He kept telling Jack he wasn't used to this and it was true. He wasn't used to Jack messy, hot and wild for him, Jack's mouth asking sweetly and his body TELLING.

He felt the same tremor of pleasure in his own legs when it was really good and really right and he knew he'd never made any woman feel as good as he made Jack feel. Jack came so easily for him and showed him so much...it felt good to be so wanted, to open himself up to pleasure and the rush of rough, heated touch again.

He was with a man. Hot, hard, hairy. Greedy. Gloating. Gorgeous. Outrageous and offensive everything. His colonel, HIS, who was completely gone here. Far gone. Long gone and throwing everything he had at Daniel including the kitchen sink. He lifted his legs to wrap around Jack's lean waist, ankles hooking comfortably over the strong, sweat-sleek back, his body rhythmically pounded into the mattress by the power and stamina of the aggressive, almighty O'Neill.

"I. Love. You!" Jack snarled against his mouth, throwing back his head to let out a 'MINE!' roar as he came. "DANIEL!"

Daniel cradled Jack close as he shook and heaved, collapsing boneless and heavy on him. He ached from head to foot and after a sloppy, grateful kiss, the smug, snoring dead weight on his chest didn't give a shit.

"I love you too, you selfish bastard," Daniel whispered, smiling tenderly as he kissed the tufted grey hair tickling his chin.

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"Why are we going to a lake when you live by a lake?" Daniel asked as he drank in the beauty surrounding him.

"Echo Lake," Jack said softly. "My grandpa used to bring me up here when I was a boy."

Clearer than the sharp tang of pine, Daniel could smell Jack's sweat as they climbed in the breathless heat and hush of the wood. His scent was strong and clean. Undeniably masculine. Arousing. Heat and pleasure poured from Jack, walking so close by his side, arms brushing as they pleurably bumped hip or thigh. He groped Jack's ass, startling a chuckle from Jack and reproving swipe at his own butt.

When Jack looked at him, Daniel smiled. Something magical happened to Jack when Daniel did that. Daniel smiling - really smiling - tore through the man and left him shy-

eyed and vulnerable, yet still possessive, and oddly proud. It brought the heat now to Daniel's face. Jack chuckled again, elbowing him in the ribs.

It wasn't perfect, because nothing ever was, but it was good. Everything was easy between them again, they were flowing through, side by side.

There was never a moment when Daniel thought about it, his hand was just in Jack's between one step and the next and after a quick assessing look, that was it, Jack was with him. They were doing it.

Holding hands.

Two men who sweated and bled what they did and were beginning to know and share who they were, walking hand in hand through a wood scented with summer and wildflowers.

Two men in love.

"If a bluebird lands on my shoulder I'm killing the smug little fucker," Jack objected mildly. He fell into silence, his clasp loose and warm around Daniel's hand.

Daniel was happy to see Jack as relaxed as he could be, enjoying it too much to question it. Jack was taking him to Echo Lake thrill seeking, wanting Daniel naked, slippery and pliant. He was willing but doubtful Jack would follow through in a place thick with memories of his grandfather. He was hoping to get Jack talking, hungry for stories about him as a boy.

He smiled, a little wryly. He was hungry for everything he could have of Jack, wanting all the new possibilities opening before them as lovers. There were things they could share now and would, if Daniel had his way, things they'd held close before. As much as he'd missed being touched, Daniel had missed touching. Simply reaching out, and finding. He'd been alone for much of his life, but it was only when he was apart from Jack that he felt lonely. He missed talking...being with someone who cared how he felt. He wasn't needy, didn't ask much...just to have someone there...

"We're here!" Jack sang out.

Daniel ducked his head below a low-hanging pine branch and stepped from the trail onto a rock that opened out in front of him in a series of ledges climbing to a plateau high above the crystal clear pool below them. The sun refracted from the surface of the water, an ever-shifting dance of light playing over the rock wall.

"South-facing," Jack gloated.

Daniel stood at the rock's edge, Jack spooned up behind him, quietly content with his nearness. He rested his hands over the ones clasped at his waist and let his head rest against Jack's shoulder.

The air was warm and still, the sky a vault of blue above them, as far as the eye could see. The lake glowed pellucid in the strong, clear light, mirroring the sky. Daniel was entranced by the calm, depthless azure of the pool, encircled as it was by stone. He had a feeling this place had never echoed a voice raised in anger.

"It's lovely," Daniel admired sincerely.

They stood that way for a long time, letting the peace soak into them before they made their way down to the lower levels.

Jack shucked his pack and handed Daniel the lunch and drinks they'd packed while he spread out the blanket. Then he undressed without fuss, folding his clothes and piling them neatly to hand.

Daniel doubted he'd ever be as comfortable in his own skin as Jack was. He half-turned as Jack settled onto a rock to watch him. He felt stupid for being shy in front of the man he was having sex with, god knows he'd managed to flaunt his naked ass all over their bedroom last night. Being outside was different, but he made himself face Jack again. Unlacing his hiking boots and balling up his socks was pragmatic enough to make Jack 'tsk' impatiently. Daniel pulled off his white T-shirt, which had received a quick dunk in the bath by way of laundering. He found himself watching Jack watching him. Or rather, watching Jack's reaction to watching him.

It wasn't as if Daniel had never been erect himself. He knew exactly what prompted it, what it felt like. What Jack felt like right now. He just wasn't used to seeing it or being the cause of it. Jack's penis flushed and filled before his eyes, jutting proudly as Daniel peeled off his jeans. He dropped them distractedly behind him, wide-eyed at pugnacious proof-positive of Jack's attraction to him. "What are you thinking?" he asked nervously.

"About making love with you," Jack replied honestly after a perceptible pause. "That I agreed to wait and I will," he amended, his eyes wicked above a wolfish smile. "I'll try, anyway."

Daniel groaned silently. Jack was impossible! Gorgeous and principled wasn't enough for him. No, not for Jack. He had to be smart and funny, bad tempered and sarcastic, pushy and quirky and charming...so damned charming. Daniel's heart gave a great thump in his chest when the full force of Jack's smile hammered home, rocking him back on his heels. Literally.

They were supposed to be swimming, but Jack's slow, confident swagger belied that and Daniel let him take him down to the blanket in a sprawl of heat, weight and need. Jack kissed his shoulder.

"I am trying," he promised. "But I want you. God, how I want you."

Jack was over him, around him, everywhere, touching, kissing, holding. Daniel's mind flamed in the slide of hot skin over skin; Jack heavy on him, giving and taking his pleasure. Owning him. Gentle biting at hard nipples. Soft kisses pressed to the sharp contour of his hip. Jack's face buried into the soft swell of belly below his navel, just breathing him in. Daniel was hard, straining...lost. He was shaking and ached inside.

"I could take you," Jack whispered into his skin. "Right now. Lift your legs over my shoulders and fuck you slow and deep. You want it. You need it, don't you? Don't you? Need me inside you."

"Yes." Daniel's vision blurred and he blinked hard as Jack surged up to kiss him fiercely.

"I'm not quitting on you, you get that!" Jack flung the hard, angry words at Daniel, his eyes still tender. "I can't. I'm not a martyr and neither are you and life has fucked us over too many times for us to let go now. I shouldn't, I mustn't. Big fucking joke. I need it all and I'm taking it. You and my team. I can't rationalise the choice I've made, Daniel. I won't even try. Just gotta live with it."

"Jack," Daniel sighed, pulling Jack down to him to share a quiet kiss.

"I never meant to fall in love with you, never wanted it," Jack admitted with stark honesty. "It is what it is, Daniel. I can't change it. I won't. I have to have it all. I have to have you. All I can do is live it as hard as I fucking can, as long as I can. Just...don't let me be stupid," he pleaded.

"No," Daniel promised. "I never have."

Jack smiled suddenly. "What do you think it was hooked me in the first place?"

"Do you want to make love?" Daniel offered shyly, rocking his hips up suggestively.

Jack caught his breath. "I need to. You need to. So let's wait awhile, until reality bites and we get this, what we are now, and we only want to because it's right."

Daniel got the 'we'. He got his choice, and he got Jack. "Better cool those jets, flyboy." He rolled rapidly, taking Jack beneath him, then again. Naturally Jack held onto him and they both wound up in the water, howling. Jack ducked him and swam off laughing as he surfaced, sputtering water and dire Abydonian curses. Daniel chased after him and they happily made idiots of themselves until they were breathless and warmed through.

They got out and tangled pleasantly on the blanket to idle in the sun.

"You stole my life, you bastard," Jack accused Daniel softly.

Daniel thoughtfully nibbled his ear, tugging the lobe gently between his teeth. He pushed Jack flat and kissed every inch of his throat, quivering beneath the big hands stroking his back.

"Mmm," Jack sighed. "Apology accepted."

"Not," Daniel contradicted, lavishing attention on Jack's neglected shoulders.

"Hmm?"

"Not apologising," Daniel elaborated. Then he emphasised his point of view with some serious kissing and a spirited attempt to suck Jack's tongue clear out of his head. He raised his head to grin at Jack. "So..."

"You talk too much," Jack complained indignantly, yanking him back.

The usual happened, one of them got pushy, the other pushed back, Daniel wound up on his back with Jack on top of him. Staring. Staring and staring down at his mouth. Jack brushed his thumb across Daniel's lips. Then he lowered his head and blew on them. Daniel lifted his head for the kiss and Jack eased him gently back. Jack's breath warmed his skin and then he touched his lips to Daniel's. And again. Now Jack brushed his closed mouth over Daniel's, back and forth, over and over.

Daniel swallowed the urge to just reach up and yank Jack down by the ears and then he just swallowed, hard, as Jack's tongue softly traced the outlines of his lips. Daniel's turn to stare up at Jack, wide-eyed and beginning to tremble as Jack licked the very corner of his mouth then delicately touched his tongue to his lower lip in tiny subtle swipes. Jack licked every part of his mouth and began to suck dreamily on his lower lip, coaxing him to open.

He closed his eyes, cradling Jack to him as Jack's tongue slid over his teeth, gentle massaging pressure easing him past that barrier to stroke sensuously deep into Daniel's mouth.

Daniel moaned, his hips pushing insistently into Jack's. Maddeningly, Jack's body moved with him, not against, as he slowly drove Daniel out of his mind. Daniel moaned again, arching up to deepen the kiss. Jack pulled away, smiling confidently, his eyes hot, making it clear he would be satisfied with nothing less than surrender. Daniel lay down reluctantly, slightly self-conscious about his mouth, which felt - well, he seemed to be pouting here.

Guys did not pout.

Daniel certainly didn't.

Although, he had to admit the - um - swollen lips had been earned in a good cause as Jack slid back into his mouth as if he owned him. Daniel's embarrassing eagerness did nothing to disabuse his masterful lover of this belief and indeed encouraged him to passionately deepen the kiss until Daniel's whole body was pounding. His skin burned where Jack's hand curved over his hip and he couldn't stand it. How could Jack not take him when his whole body was screaming out for him? He pulled Jack's hand from his hip and rested it over his slick, throbbing erection, hissing his pleasure against the tongue wrapped around his own, Jack obligingly rolling onto his side to make him comfortable

Daniel groaned as Jack masturbated him as thoroughly as he was kissing him, opening dazed eyes to find Jack watching him intently as he explored Daniel's penis, his long, callused fingers gentle and curious as he stroked. Jack's face lit up when his forefinger rubbed circles over a spot on the underside of Daniel's shaft that had him gasping raggedly, his hips arching convulsively from the blanket.

"Easy, Danny, easy," Jack crooned as his thumb pressed into the head of Daniel's penis.

Daniel's mouth gaped in a silent scream, head thrashing at the unbearable stimulation, white flashes going off behind his eyes as Jack patiently rubbed him up just right, just there, God... "More!" Moremoremore. "MORE! Jack! Jesus, m..." Jack's mouth hushed his, a sob strangling in his throat. Just. There. Please. He was close, he was there, writhing desperately, wracked by pleasure so intense it edged towards pain as his body seized and he was jerking and spurting in Jack's waiting hand, still hard, still wanting...

Jack bit down on his tongue and shattered him...

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Daniel's weight settled on Jack's lap, long legs stretching comfortably to hook around Jack's ankles.

Jack grunted offensively. "Put that cheesecake right back down, Daniel," he ordered briskly, taking the plate. "You're getting porky."

Daniel noted with interest that his being porky didn't seem to put Jack off in the slightest. After gobbling down the cheesecake in three big bites, his colonel was roaming far and wide, hands busy establishing territorial rights over Daniel's ass. He reached behind and slid his coffee carefully to the table's edge to take a sip of rich, biting perfection, slipping silkily over his tongue.

Jack scowled at the mug of coffee. "I wish you looked at me like that," he complained, shifting his weight on the kitchen chair. Daniel straightened up at once, worried about Jack's knees. Porky or not, he was six feet tall and no featherweight. Jack's scowl darkened, his hands grasping Daniel's behind emphatically to pull him right back down. Apparently where he was supposed to be. His whole body gloated agreement. He took another slow sip of coffee then held the mug to Jack's lips.

Jack drank, eyes wide and laughing. "Consensual coffee? Cool!" he teased.

Daniel put the mug down and slid his arms around Jack's neck, idly stroking his hair, rubbing the thick, soft strands between his fingertips. "Think we can get through a couple of hours without having sex?" he asked lazily.

"Not a chance."

"Oh."

"We fly back tomorrow," Jack said regretfully, stealing a quick, commiserating kiss as Daniel's face fell. "I guess we have to start thinking about practicalities. Like where you're sleeping tomorrow night. And the night after that."

"P3R-795," Daniel supplied helpfully.

"Think Carter will notice if I zip our sleeping bags together?" Jack asked hopefully.

"We can't have sex off-world!"

Jack looked shocked. "Never crossed my mind," he insisted with a palpable lack of conviction.

Daniel sighed. Jack sighed too. Then they each offered the other a little oral moral support.

Jack gripped Daniel's arms and shook him a little. "Tomorrow night? Do we have nice sex in my bed or yours?" He reached up to slip Daniel's glasses off and set them safely on the table.

Daniel caved to temptation, gently skimming his knuckles down Jack's cheekbone. Jack seemed surprised but pleased. Encouraged, Daniel let his fingers dance over Jack's warm, whiskered skin, learning by touch the contours of a face he knew better than his own.

"Beautiful," Jack breathed.

"Yes," Daniel agreed, looking at the proud, strong features he loved. He could drown in those liquid eyes when Jack was in this mood, so filled with tenderness. Daniel was almost afraid to be this happy. He always paid for it with the people he loved. Always.

"Sex!" Jack prompted sharply. "Focus."

"Does it have to be sex? It's June. Baseball," Daniel offered vaguely, fascinated by the stubble bristling against his fingertips.

"Baseball?" Jack echoed incredulously.

"The Symphony? Movie? Dinner? Drop the presents off and then dinner?"

"Dinner then sex?" Jack pushed, obviously scenting an opportunity. "What presents?"

"For Sam, of course," Daniel muttered, busy now with Jack's strangely sexy scarred eyebrow. Jack really didn't seem to mind the attention. If anything he was, um, basking. "And Teal'c. Janet. Cass. George. You always buy presents and...and you're really cute when you blush. Why are you blushing, Jack?"

Jack buried his hot face into Daniel's throat and mumbled something that took a while to sink in.

"You only buy me presents?" Daniel asked eventually, slightly at a loss.

"I like you," Jack snapped, eyeing him sourly.

Daniel blinked at that. "You like Teal'c. And Sam." A thought occurred. "You definitely buy presents for Cass," he reminded Jack smugly. "You love her, so...oh. Oh." Daniel smiled shyly, rather pleased. He at least bought presents for everyone on the rare occasions they let him out of their sight. He only spent three times more on Jack. Maybe four. Or five. Um...

Jack shrugged. "Pathetic, huh? Loving you even before you started putting out."

Daniel felt embarrassed, obviously, but also...it was nice to know he wasn't the only one, that it wasn't odd to love another man so deeply you thought about him all the time, even before you wanted to...

Realisation dawned on Jack's face too. "Let's quit on this one while we're still ahead," he said slowly. "And get back to where we get hot and sweaty tomorrow night?"

"My place."

"Mine."

"I have work," Daniel reminded him.

"No, you don't. You've got better things to do," Jack contradicted.]

"I'm not sitting on your couch watching TV when I could be..."

"Having an orgasm?"

"How much time were you thinking of spending in bed?" Daniel asked feebly, blushing.

"In bed or having sex?" Jack asked keenly.

Um...Daniel actually couldn't think of an adequate response to that, especially when he remembered how long it took him to work out Jack wanted sex when he was standing in front of the man half naked and glistening. A man who was really looking! The potential for embarrassment was incalculable. "Can we do stuff?" Less embarrassing stuff. "I mean, go out," Daniel clarified hurriedly, trying to head Jack off at the pass that led to Humiliation. The man sucked toes. It was a short step from that to say, dress-up. Role play. Sex in the study booths in the basement of the university library; those ones on the left hand side were right by the desk so the librarian never checked them of course, she always walked the other way, and...not that he'd spent a whole lot of time thinking about sex with Jack in the stacks. Or the booths. Or over the issue counter for that matter. Um..."Date. Shop. Go to games."

"You don't go to games now," Jack said impatiently. Then he caught Daniel's slightly suggestive look and whooped in triumph, snatching an exuberant kiss. "Oh, man! This keeps getting better and better. Sex, food AND sports!" he gloated.

"Do you want to be with me every night?" Daniel asked tentatively, smoothing his fingers anxiously over Jack's shirt.

Jack frowned. "You don't?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, but..."

Jack kissed him. "But me no butts. Unless they're..."

Daniel clapped his hand over Jack's mouth. "Don't!" he warned. Jack mouthed 'butts' against his hand. "Prick." 'That too' tickled against his palm, which Jack smirked against and kissed. "It's not discreet," he reminded Jack apologetically.

Jack removed his hand, kissed it again and held onto it. "Fuck discreet!"

"Don't be stupid and don't look at me like that. You told me to stop you being stupid," Daniel explained rapidly. "I mean it. Don't look at me like that. Jack. Jack!" Daniel gasped as Jack got a good grip under his butt and stood up. He wrapped his legs round Jack's back, instinctively trying to make himself lighter. Honestly. Not because he...Really. Lighter. "I hate when you do this stuff," he complained bitterly, having to tighten his clasp around Jack's neck to steady himself. Or something.

"Only because you love it when I'm masterful and you'd rather die than admit it," Jack observed complacently as he carried Daniel towards the bedroom. "You must be one big hard-on when we're in the field," he added, eyeing Daniel speculatively.

Daniel blushed furiously and buried his face against Jack's shoulder. "Bastard," he muttered.

"There, there," Jack crooned, not entirely without sympathy. "You'll get everything that's coming to you the moment I hurl you onto my bed."

"I hope you stub your toe and drop me," Daniel told him unkindly. "I doubt I'll survive the Harlequin romance phase of this relationship."

"Does the ruggedly handsome Special Ops-trained hero slake a lot of lust on the quivering body of his gorgeous young archaeologist in those things?" Jack asked interestedly.

"Young? I'm thirty-six!" Daniel protested. "And not unless the archaeologist was quivering with suppressed laughter."

"If you were a chick," Jack hooted derisively, "you'd be wearing a bun and those glasses with plain lenses. AND sensible shoes. Lace-ups. With a tweed suit. Driving a Volvo. And you have no sense of humour," he added maliciously as he kicked the bedroom door shut behind them. There was a loud crash from the living room.

"I think your crappie just fell off the wall," Daniel observed pleurably.

Jack snarled wordlessly, not so much hurling Daniel onto the bed as falling on top of him, winding him and generally mashing him flat. By the time Daniel had enough breath to wheeze out a protest, they were both naked and Jack was investigating the contents of the oppressive skincare regime gift bag.

"Looks like you get the free facial with your next orgasm," Jack announced happily. He waved a tube temptingly. "I'm good with this stuff. Years of practice."

"With make-up?" Daniel asked sweetly as he scrambled towards the dresser and temporary refuge in flannel. Jack vaulted athletically onto the bed, planted his foot right where Daniel was about to roll, and sat on him.

"With cammo, you sarcastic shit." Jack dropped the gift bag at Daniel's side and leaned forward to plump his pillows. "Does Sir care to try the acid peel face mask? Loaded with something called..." Jack read the tube. "AHA. Plus strawberries for that extra kick." He looked up. "They have fruit that can peel the skin off your face?"

"You're asking me?"

Jack opened the tube, sniffed it, brightened a little, glanced at Daniel and tossed it. "No," he announced decisively. "If it can do that to your face, god knows what it would do to your..." He trailed off as he delved into the bag again.

Daniel decided desperate need demanded desperate measures. After that sour grapes remark about his sense of humour, just because he never laughed at Jack's alleged jokes, he was willing to be mean. "There's a movie I'd like to watch tomorrow. I think you'll enjoy it too," he added ingenuously.

Jack grunted something, still very focused on the gift bag.

"It's about the Marines."

Jack went very still. He slowly sat up straight and turned to face Daniel. Also slowly. He was smouldering dangerously. "Excuse me?" he asked with exquisite politeness.

Daniel was annoyed when a few treacherous hormones kicked in and his penis perked right up. He and Jack both looked. He didn't blame Jack. He was poking him in the stomach, after all.

Jack smiled, a disastrously engaging, charming smile. "You love when I do this stuff," he said sweetly.

"Menace me with fruit acids?"

Jack read the packaging on the latest free gift with purchase. "Are Swiss Botanicals fruit?"

"Swiss what?" Daniel's interest was piqued. He sat up and tugged the tube away from Jack. "Botanicals?" He frowned. "That's an imprecise...Jack!"

Jack tossed the tube he'd just rudely snatched from an already annoyed linguist. Daniel admitted Swiss Vegetable Drugs wouldn't attract quite the same customer base, but imprecise use of language, particularly in advertising and cultural studies, aggravated him. Nothing got him going in combat like recalling a few choice quotations from an essay on post-modernism. "Maybe I should phone Sam," he wondered. "She'll know about Botanicals."

Jack staged a lightning coup, deposed the oppressive regime and banished it to the floor. Then he grabbed Daniel's wrists and slammed him flat.

Daniel curled his lip in what he hoped came off as sneering contempt. Jack bit it, which suggested not. Daniel flexed his wrists questioningly and Jack amiably took a break from smouldering and menacing to let go and just double check there weren't any bruises that needed kissing better. Jack must have been positively vicious, because he didn't stop kissing better until he'd reached Daniel's shoulder. Both arms.

Jack also graciously consented to reversing their positions so Daniel was on top, though it was instantly apparent that this change of heart was due to the ease of accessibility of e.g. Daniel's ass rather than any fundamental respect for Daniel's masculinity.

"I thought we were going to get through the evening without having sex?" Daniel queried as he nibbled Jack's collar bone, which they both quite enjoyed. "Be sensible. Make plans."

"You thought that. I disagreed. After mature consideration of the problem from every angle, we went with horny and fucking like Viagraed-up Duracell bunnies every chance we get," Jack crisply contradicted. "At your place and mine, with emphasis on which place has the bigger bed, and in the event of a tie, which one I live at and has that nice garden to roll around in having lots of alfresco sticky quickie sex."

"I have a balcony," Daniel said resentfully.

"You don't even have a plant out there."

"I have a pot," Daniel protested. "It's ten thous-" Jack reared up like he was spring-loaded and kissed the shit out of Daniel. "-mmmph."

"You know," Jack observed conversationally some time later while Daniel sprawled sleepily on his chest. He hunched irritably. "Don't go to sleep."

"M not," Daniel yawned cavernously. "Mmm." He breathed Jack in, lulled by the steady heartbeat beneath his cheek.

"You know!" Jack said again, loudly. "Every time I look at you, I wonder why the hell you're single, and every time you open your mouth, I know."

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Daniel awoke to find Jack sprawled face down across the bed and his face nestled in the small of Jack's back. The moonlight streamed in through the window, bathing the room in flattering blue-grey shadow. He gently kissed the dimples in Jack's ass before stretching out to spoon up behind him, though he kept his hand over the sweet curve of Jack's nape. His two favourite spots on Jack's body, the ones he lusted after, his nape and the small of his back, hinting at vulnerability amidst the depth of bone and powerful musculature. Jack was a big man; tall, broad, heavy and strong.

The reality of that was so much more than Daniel had been prepared for. He guessed that Jack was as physically aware of him as he was of Jack. Each time they made love he was struck anew by how easy this was...for their bodies at least. Daniel knew what it did for him to be touched in this way, in that place...he reached out confidently to Jack, made his hand firm here or his lips soft there and it was easy. They made it so.

The emotions were less familiar. It was difficult to look at his friend and feel not the familiar comfort of Jack's warm, solid presence at his side, but a bewildering, consuming confusion of vital, immediate desires. Love. Fear. Excitement. Arousal. Shyness. Hesitance. Fierce joy. Protectiveness. He needed everything this man had to give. Had to give of himself in return.

He didn't know what they were going to do when they got home. They couldn't be together off-world, or on base. They couldn't spend all their time at his place, or Jack's, or out. They couldn't be together that much and someone not notice, not look and see. Jack spoke of court-martial, but Daniel felt that wasn't a realistic possibility. The Air Force couldn't afford a trial by Jack's peers. No one could know about the Stargate programme. Maybe Jack was earning a court-martial, and Daniel respected Jack's refusal to sugar-coat what being his lover meant, but if they were caught, the need for absolute secrecy would mean forced retirement. It would mean Jack having to cut a deal with the very people he fought against and it would mean disgrace in the eyes of those Jack respected.

Daniel couldn't be touched either way but Jack was defying everything he knew about himself and risking everything he believed in to be with him. Jack couldn't give more than he was giving. He couldn't give more than himself.

Daniel wasn't strong enough to refuse the man who meant everything to him. Even if he was, he couldn't disrespect Jack by taking his choice from him. All he could do was try.

He leaned in and licked Jack's shoulder, warm and sweat-dewed from the heat of the night and their bodies. Jack sighed and stirred sleepily, rolling to drape a lazy arm around Daniel's shoulders and draw him into a drowsy kiss. Just kissing him was enough to get Jack hard and wanting, throwing his leg over Daniel's to draw him close, hips pushing compulsively into him.

They had each chosen to be with the other and all they could give was themselves.

"I want to make love," Daniel said clearly, sure at last of what he wanted.

Jack leaned back, looking searchingly at his face. "We agreed to wait," he offered mildly, but his body gave the lie to the kind words, his penis twitching slick heat against Daniel's belly.

"I was wrong, I think," Daniel murmured quietly, lost in thought, running his hand down Jack's arm to take his hand.

"You were right."

"I was hurt. Not any longer. I'm - I am afraid," Daniel confessed. "This will be hard enough on us both, having to hide right out in plain sight, among our friends, taking the risk...I never get it right, Jack. Never," he admitted starkly. "With Sarah, it was a mess because I couldn't, I just couldn't...I wasn't what she needed. Didn't give..." Didn't take. Didn't lean. Couldn't let her be the one person he turned to, the one who brought out everything in him she believed he had to give. In the end, he'd withdrawn, folded in on himself, only seeing his work, because she'd tried to take what he wouldn't give and they had been about control, not love. "And Sha'uri..."

Jack's arm curved round him tight, hand clasping his shoulder, drawing him into a deep embrace.

"I remember those few days with you more clearly than that year with her," Daniel whispered, impatiently scrubbing at his eyes with the heel of his hand. He so did not want to blub all over Jack, who was looking worried and obviously didn't have a clue what to say that. Daniel didn't blame him. He didn't know what it meant either, only that he'd never come near the sometimes frightening intensity of his feelings for Jack. He had been in love with his wife, he had no doubt of that, but...he needed Jack.

Daniel Jackson had never needed anyone except himself, not since he'd lost his parents. He'd reached out once, to Nick, and never again. It hurt too much to need. He'd learned that lesson and he'd learned it well.

He had survived without his beloved wife, he had even been happy.

He thought now it was because he had been with Jack. He was supposed to be with Jack. They couldn't be without each other, not now. With everything there was between them, there was no room for anyone else. It felt to him as if their becoming lovers had always been simply a matter of time and realisation. As if the intent, the rightness of it had been there all along, they'd just needed to know.

Jack smoothed Daniel's hair back from his brow, something he seemed to like to do. "What is it, Daniel?" he asked gently, clearly concerned.

"You were right," Daniel said softly. "And so was I. We really can't not. We have to give this everything it takes because the alternative..."

Jack stiffened, hands tightening on Daniel.

"Exactly." Daniel leaned in for a kiss and Jack rolled, pulling him on top of him. They fit together perfectly, the hard planes of their bodies complementing, skin sliding over skin, warm satin over sleek, hard muscle. Daniel's breath caught and he shuddered deliciously at the voracious pressure of Jack's erection swelling against his own, the strong hands grasping his ass, pulling him hard against Jack as he strained up, wanting...demanding.

There was only pressure on them if they allowed it. They trusted, they loved...this was it for them. Daniel had to let go of his fear. If he didn't, he denied Jack the choice he'd made, to try, to change himself because he needed to, wanted to, for his sake and for Daniel's.

"Make love to me," Daniel asked. A wild shiver ran through Jack, shocking against Daniel's skin. "I want you. Please, Jack. For me."

"I promised you...but not yet, Danny. I'm not ready," Jack said urgently, cupping Daniel's head. "I'm not."

Daniel hushed him with a finger over his lips. "It's okay," he promised. "I am. For the rest...I trust you, Jack. How can I not? I - I'm in love with you," he shyly assured him. "Sorry," he whispered. "I was so afraid to lose you...but I had to refuse. I had to walk away. I need myself, Jack. I'm all I've had..." Gawd, could he sound any more self-pitying? "Now I - I have you." Woo. Big improvement there, Jackson. Self-pity and uncertainty. It had to occur to Jack sooner or later that the reason he always said he was fine even when he manifestly wasn't, and everyone knew he wasn't, was because he utterly, totally, abysmally sucked at explaining why he wasn't fine. The linguist had no words for how far from fine he was.

"Got me like a rash," Jack's voice gusted relief.

Daniel rolled off him and made his way over to the dresser to retrieve the tube of lubricant Jack had hidden in his sock drawer. Out of sight and never out of mind. He climbed back onto the bed and sat on Jack, laying the tube neatly on his chest.

"Oh, god," Jack groaned, looking pathetic and malleable. "You know I can't refuse you anything, least of all that." He waved the lubricant accusingly.

"It cuts both ways," Daniel said seriously. He couldn't refuse Jack, either. The trick would be asking for what it wouldn't hurt the other to give. Daniel had made his decision. He wanted this, Jack wanted this, and for once, please, just for once, Daniel wanted to get it right.

Actually, he wanted to get it so right he blew Jack's mind and ruined him for anyone else, but realistically he'd settle for getting it just right enough they were both willing to give it another shot some day.

He flopped dramatically onto his back. He was gone. He was there. He was doing this. "The myopic middle-aged archaeologist is quivering, so get with the slaking, already!" he ordered.

"You look about fourteen and a half. Get over yourself," Jack snorted, making no active move to slake anything.

Daniel prodded him indignantly. Then he realised he wouldn't get very far if his, um, business end was clamped to the sheet and rolled onto his stomach. His penis found a fold in the comforter that felt great and he moved against it, rubbing luxuriously.

"Don't mind me," Jack said sarcastically. "Just start without me if I'm not moving quick enough."

Then Jack was there with him, a gentle hand resting on his shoulder, mobile mouth warm in his hair, on the skin of his neck, his shoulders, his spine. Jack lifted him, and with Jack's arms around his chest came Jack's weight on his back.

"Easy," Jack whispered into his ear as he stiffened involuntarily and felt stupid. And embarrassed.

"Is this how you want it, Daniel?"

Burning face buried in pillows? Yes!

Another soft, understanding kiss was pressed into Daniel's shoulder, then Jack stopped with the supportive 'I'm about to take my lover's virginity and I swear to God I am not totally getting off on that' hug and went for it. He slid down Daniel's back, shoved his legs apart and licked his ass. Daniel just had time to remember that the gift of tongues was 'glossolalia' when Jack reminded him the real gift of the tongue was that it was a muscle and you could do stuff with muscles. He pushed his tongue into Daniel's ass.

Daniel screamed.

Like a girl.

He snatched one of Jack's pillows and pulled it over his head because even his ears were burning, and gave up on everything but sobbing ecstatic shock into the muffling folds of percale and trying to remember how to breathe. He'd gone thirty-six years without ever knowing he had nerve endings in his ass that could feel like THAT.

Daniel trembled and writhed desperately beneath the onslaught as Jack pushed into him softly. Wet, limber heat thrusting inside, deeper, harder, stronger, on and on and on. Like Jack loved eating Daniel alive, like he had all the time in the world. Like he...he was in love and completely happy with that and who he was with.

Daniel felt hot and cold all over, tight and achy and tense, like his skin was too small for him. His whole body was throbbing with each thrust of Jack's tongue inside him, pulsing up his spine, shocking through his penis, his legs trembling as they did when it was good. Really, really good.

He was relieved all his research showed that he needed to be relaxed for intercourse because what with the long, patient strokes of Jack's tongue opening him up inside and the way he was screwing the comforter here, he would be coming before Jack got going.

Daniel didn't want to make love like this, drooling embarrassment in his pillows, but he hadn't wanted to look. He...he was a little afraid of it. He wanted to feel, and learn, and not freak Jack out if he was hurting and not be freaked out by watching Jack fuck him. He didn't want to see Jack as he moved inside him.

He was wrong. As usual. Feeling was plenty bad. Uniquely bad. He could close his eyes but he couldn't shut down his body, couldn't not feel Jack's tongue eating his ass or the

comforter he was boning rubbing him up just right. Or rather, what he'd always thought was just right before Jack's tongue rubbed him up way better.

Jack stopped rubbing, patted his ass fondly, and his weight shifted.

Daniel tossed his pillow and surged up snarling for blood. Who said Jack could stop? Just because he owned this quivering archaeologist, and he had to know that didn't mean he could...Daniel looked at Jack, who was coolly and liberally coating his forefinger with lubricant. Um, Jack obviously did know that he owned Daniel. He knew exactly that. He was very good about the quivering thing too, because he cuddled Daniel in close and held him for a while, and his own hands weren't exactly steady. There was a lot of nonsense whispered into Daniel's ear about how sweet he was, which he took without a murmur, because his colonel heroically refrained from referencing any screaming that may have gone on.

Jack's arm came around his neck and Jack's mouth was on his, and they were flowing down to the bed, and it was okay, they were close. Could be closer...Daniel hooked his leg over Jack's back and caressed his face with nervous, shaking fingers. They touched tongues, flickering and teasing. Jack's hand was heavy over Daniel's hip and then there was slick cool pressure against those sensitised nerve-endings. Jack sucked Daniel's tongue into his mouth as his finger pushed into Daniel's ass. Daniel's body held that finger, clenched tight against it, then went with his mind and his trust and opened to Jack. The finger plunged deep with shocking ease as Daniel's tongue plunged towards Jack's tonsils. They moaned simultaneously.

Daniel was doing this, he was there and Jack was with him. He hitched his leg higher around Jack's back, focused on the wildness of the kiss, not the patience of the preparation, though Jack got his attention with two long, skilful fingers nudging something that arched Daniel's back, snapping his head back in shock that anything could feel so good, sharp pangs of pleasure flaring deep, shaking him apart. Jack's fingers stroking pleasure out of him stole the last threads of his composure and he clung to his friend without shame.

He went onto his back when Jack pushed at him, aching and bereft until Jack slid between his thighs, his knees pushing Daniel's legs further apart, urging them to lift. Jack's fists planted themselves hard into the mattress either side of Daniel and then he felt a hot, slippery, snub touch at his anus, pushing. Oh, god. Pushing.

"Danny?" Jack, looking wild around the eyes, screaming need from every pore but still asking.

"Oh, god. Oh, god. Oh. Okay."

Jack had the sense to take what he could get and pushed right in.

"Holeee shiiiiit!" Jack howled as the head of his penis was grabbed and squeezed.

OwOw!OW! Talk about a blunt instrument! OW! Daniel's body reluctantly remembered that he trusted this man and happened to be completely in love with him, and that he basically owned this ass and the ass in question caved categorically. Jack slid in a fraction.

"Daniel!" Jack asked anxiously, sweat dripping off his nose. He was shaking with the effort to hold still. He didn't look wild any more. He looked terrified. "Time for a strategic withdrawal," he said grimly. "I was not prepared for this."

"Me either," Daniel blurted before he could stop himself.

Jack was flushed with effort, but at this he went brick red, mouth working soundlessly. The colonel obviously had no words for how pushy and stupid the virgin was.

Daniel winced and worked out what to do with his legs, which were just embarrassing him because he rather thought Jack was supposed to put them over his shoulders and he, um, hadn't liked to say. It was unkind to tell a man he was doing sex wrong before he'd even started, something Daniel could vouch for from the earliest days of his relationship with Sarah. She hadn't cut him much slack for being a virgin. He hooked his legs round Jack's hips and dug his heels encouragingly into Jack's ass.

Then he curled his hands around Jack's arms and started to stroke him soothingly, though he was ambushed almost immediately by how hot Jack was with his biceps bulging like this and was almost spontaneously unfaithful to the comforter when his colonel growled at him.

"How do you...er...how do I...feel?" Jack asked sternly and somewhat awkwardly.

"Pressure," Daniel answered honestly.

Jack nodded and thrust again, the muscles in his arms and ass bunching as he powered into the smooth, supple roll of his hips that was driving him deeper by degrees into Daniel's body.

Pressure. God, yes. His muscles burned and quivered against the hot, slippery skin slowly sliding inside him inch by inch. The last thrust brought Jack's balls hot and velvety against his ass and Jack lowered himself, the ridged muscles of his belly rubbing against Daniel's.

Jack's mouth was tight and he looked a little pale despite the sweat, but his fingers were gentle, wiping away the sweat standing on Daniel's brow.

They fit together. Perfectly. Exactly. Daniel was stretched tight and throbbing around Jack, a little scared by the searing sense of Jack filling him. How deep Jack was in him. How helpless he was against the power and strength of this man his body had yielded to.

Jack kissed him then, that maddening brush of closed lips over his, back and forth. "I'm sorry," Jack whispered, his eyes wide and drowned with emotion. "You feel so good and I need you so much."

Daniel wanted to tell him it was okay, it really was, but Jack's mouth stifled the words and Jack withdrew and stroked back into him, stroked deep and despite his best efforts, Daniel whimpered into the kiss. Jack slid into his mouth, his tongue tenderly covering Daniel's, curling sweetly around him in reassurance while the supple roll of Jack's hips drove him up the bed and into Daniel.

Jack moaned helplessly, throwing back his head as he thrust again.

Daniel was transfixed by the slick heat slowly sliding inside him, hard, heavy and rhythmic. He hadn't been prepared for the sensuality of that voluptuously sleek slide of skin against his, laying him open for Jack. He lifted his legs carefully to hook his ankles around Jack's back, wincing as his muscles burned and gave.

In all his fantasies, Daniel had never come close to knowing Jack. His body was melting with Jack's gentleness, the tenderness in his eyes and in the kiss they were sharing. Daniel cradled Jack's head to him, totally done in when Jack fumbled for one of his hands and held it tight.

"Good?" Jack asked anxiously, never faltering in his smooth stroking so very deep inside in Daniel's body.

"Oh, yes, Jack, yes," Daniel whispered.

"You know I love you."

Daniel moaned low in his throat as Jack's thrusting found that place inside and he couldn't help it, he rocked his hips up into the touch he felt throbbing through the whole of his body. His erection had faded when Jack had penetrated him, but he was erect and aching in seconds as Jack generously stroked slow, sweet, heavy pleasure into him, compulsive, constant pressure inside and out rubbing him exactly right. His Jack inside him and over him, his erection grinding between his belly and Jack's.

"I love you too," Daniel sighed as the right rhythm found them, and they flowed together. This was right, so right. He knew Jack loved him, it was here in the way he moved and that look on his face, like Daniel was giving him something utterly amazing and he was losing himself in it, opening up to this as much as Daniel was.

Jack was good at this, he was great, he was mind blowing and he was ruining Daniel for anyone else. Daniel didn't mind that he'd never measure up to this, because Jack wouldn't mind. If Daniel could show Jack what he meant to him, even a little of what Jack was showing him right now...

Daniel felt his eyes fill and gulped noisily. He managed a pathetically wavery smile and kissed Jack passionately, his confidence only slightly dented by the fact Jack had to wipe his nose for him after a minute or he would have been sucking snot as well as Daniel's tongue. Daniel sniffed hard, Jack licked away a few of the tears, and they fell back into the kiss.

Slow and sensuous was getting rougher and longer and deeper, Jack was losing it, driving into him, his breath ragged and panting into Daniel's mouth. Jack began to use his knees to rock his hips up into Daniel to strike against his prostate, Daniel moaning passionately as sullen pleasure ripped through his body each time.

"Come for me, Danny, come for me," Jack whispered. He reached between them to fiercely pump Daniel's penis, his thrusts sharp, deep jabs hard against Daniel's prostate.

Daniel shuddered convulsively and couldn't stop, arching up as Jack slammed into him and he erupted in Jack's hand, his ass clenching hard around Jack inside him. "Ja-aack," he called.

"Ahh, Danny! DANNY!" Jack screamed out as he came.

Daniel gasped in astonishment as heat pumped into him, each forceful pulse and throb of Jack's penis shaking him. He'd never felt...never even imagined the power of those spasms.

Jack collapsed on him, boneless, sweaty and shaky. "Jesus Fucking Christ," he breathed reverently into Daniel's throat. He rested for a moment, then planted his fists and carefully withdrew from Daniel, which made his ass burn anew. Jack toppled onto his side, pulling Daniel in close, rubbing his belly lingeringly into the sticky mess that covered them both.

Daniel didn't know about the etiquette of these things. Should he thank Jack for deflowering him so comprehensively? Apologise for screaming, crying, dribbling snot and not being very good at any of it?

"I can't believe what you just gave me," Jack shook his head in wonderment. "I had no idea. None." He kissed Daniel gently. "Acushla," he said caressingly. "Thank you." He rested his hand low over Daniel's belly, unmistakably possessive. "I didn't have a fucking clue." He kissed Daniel again. "I'll try," he promised soberly. "Believe me. I will try."

Daniel melted against him, completely happy for the first time in forever.

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It was great to wake up in a warm bed that seemed way too small, mostly because Jack was hogging everything from the headboard down, including Daniel, whom he was using

as a pillow. Daniel's butt was numb, and a little sore, but other parts of him were waking up nicely.

"Jesus, you're insatiable," Jack chuckled, greeting the new dawn with a long, lazy lick at Daniel's navel. He surged up and aimed a sloppy kiss at Daniel's lips.

Daniel wound up with Jack slobbering on his chin, but it was the thought that counted. Jack gave it another shot and scored a touchdown.

"Mmm," Jack hummed appreciatively.

"Hey." Daniel slid his arms beneath Jack's and clasped his hands around Jack's back, wriggling until they were both comfortable.

"I plan to get used to this," Jack informed him, eyes twinkling. He hushed Daniel with a kiss as he tried to speak, rolling away and holding his hand out to Daniel. "Haul ass, Dr. Diction. Let's enjoy the lake while we can. Shower now, talk later."

They showered together, washing each other with rough, curious fingers, laughing and a little embarrassed over the incongruity of it. Daniel lingered so long over Jack's broad back and firm, toned ass that Jack turned to take him in his arms and kissed him hard and they jerked each other off, fast, furious and savagely satisfying.

"No way I'm not having this," Jack swore as he towelled off rapidly and strode out of the bathroom to boil the kettle for shaving.

Daniel ambled out clutching his towel haphazardly at his hips as Jack turned back, eyeing him speculatively. "No sex," he said clearly. "Packing."

Jack sneered.

Daniel's ass was tender, but he dressed in the black leather pants anyway. And the teal shirt. Might as well send Jack home with a smile. He packed what he could and left his bag open ready for the last few things, then went out just as Jack was finishing. They kissed, then it was Daniel's turn to shave as Jack sauntered off to dress.

He made a pot of coffee and set the last of the ham and eggs to fry while he shaved. Astonishingly, he didn't burn breakfast or slice into his carotid artery and decided on the strength of that to risk dining alfresco. He set the plates, the pot of coffee, the last of the bread and preserves, the OJ and the mugs on Jack's one and only tray, which featured a pike with more teeth than the Great White in 'Jaws'.

Minnesotans tended to, um, overcompensate in the piscine department.

The morning was clear, bright and already pleasantly warm. Daniel sat down carefully at the end of the dock, letting his bare feet dangle over the rippling water. He sipped at his

coffee and stared at nothing in particular until a soft footstep behind him announced Jack. He looked up as Jack's ass gracefully hit the dock and Jack turned to face him, resting his foot over Daniel's.

Jack reached behind to grab his waiting mug of coffee, took a noisy gulp and dove into his ham and eggs like he'd been starved for a week. Taken with the fact the man reeked of smug satiation, he could not make it more obvious he got some last night, and got it good.

Daniel ate his own breakfast, enjoying the fresh air and the easy, companionable silence. They needed to sort things out, but like Jack, he wanted to keep the mood as long as he could. After the second cup of coffee, Jack's arms snaked around him and he rested his chin on Daniel's shoulder, unwontedly serious.

"I have no intention of sitting on my own eating my heart out when I want to be with you, Daniel. Equally, I have no intention of making love and leaving you to sleep alone, so we're going to be careful," Jack said gravely.

"Of course," Daniel agreed at once. There was nothing he wouldn't do to keep Jack safe.

"No rotas. No schedules. No predictable patterns. Your place, my place, we stay in, we go out as we please," his colonel ordered rapidly. "We screen all calls. Get people used to it as of now. I'm buying a laptop when we get back so we can both email. Carter thinks it's cute and if you stay in touch that way, she won't be calling you five times a night."

Daniel tried to speak and Jack kissed him.

"I'm not keeping my distance at work, we go right on there just as we always have. We hang out like we've always done. We hide right out there in plain sight, like you said. Nothing to see, nothing to know. We keep our hands off on the base and off-world. We take no risks, ever, because I am not losing you or my team. I'm a selfish bastard and now I have it all, I am goddamned keeping it," Jack promised. "Questions?"

"How long have you been thinking about...I mean..." Daniel stared at Jack, who'd just ruthlessly threat-assessed the shit out of their lives.

"Since we kissed."

"I walked away from you. We fought..."

"Carter interrupted us," Jack contradicted. "While you were grabbing me by the balls on Shreve. I may have been bleeding cammo, Daniel, but trust me, I couldn't get it up unless I was thinking of you." He glanced suspiciously at Daniel. "Does that make you happy?"

"Impotence?" Of course it does! Get a grip, Jack! "No," Daniel said soothingly, patting Jack's knee. Whoo, momma!

"Cause you look pretty goddamned happy there."

"Wincing in sympathy," Daniel answered promptly.

"Not smirking?"

Daniel shook his head vigorously.

Jack didn't seem wholly convinced. "And the violent, silent shaking?"

"Wind."

"And then you kissed me. Smacked me upside the head with my dirty little secret," Jack went on slowly, staring hard at Daniel. "I figured there had to be something there, you couldn't kiss me like that and not feel..."

Daniel made encouraging noises. "Like...what?" Not that he wanted a performance review or anything, but it would be nice to know...he thought it was a great kiss for his first time. Second. The first kiss was just embarrassing. He could kiss his hand better than he'd managed to kiss Jack. First time obviously didn't count. A little compare and contrast would...

"I had it all planned," Jack went on loudly, ignoring the way Daniel's face fell. "I was going to seduce you and have it all. Have it all my way," he admitted ruefully. "I'm a dumb fuck."

"You're a terrific fuck," Daniel corrected absently, brooding darkly over just how desperate Jack was if he'd taken Daniel on despite the guy thing and being an apparently lousy kisser.

Jack leaned back and stared at him, his mouth falling open. "I have no idea what to say to that," he said weakly.

"Thank you?" Daniel suggested meanly. Then he felt guilty as an annoyingly sharp pang of conscience struck. He sighed and confessed the terrible truth. "I was never stoned. I had one sip of that poison and threw the rest on the aspidistras. I never meant to kiss you, Jack, I swear," he assured him earnestly. "You were just..."

"Such a fuck?"

"Exactly!" Daniel said gratefully.

"Thank you," Jack choked, deeply moved. "You're like, THE worst liar I ever met. If I hadn't been gallantly covering for you in front of Carter, I'd have told you straight. You were just so sweet I couldn't bring myself to...well, you know how you are," he sighed. "I tried to give you a graceful out next day, but you went with playing hard to get so I..."

"I what?" Daniel snapped, outraged, wondering how he was. "I was trying to give you a graceful out, you shit!" He rather ruined the effect of this rigorous rebuke by returning Jack's passionate kiss with marked enthusiasm. "Hard to get?" he sniffed disparagingly, caressing Jack's thigh.

"I had to hide in the men's room. Laughed myself sick over that amnesia thing," Jack informed him heartlessly. "Only you could get away with a line like that. Lucky even Fraiser and the general get all gooey and sentimental when you make with the baby blues, and no one wanted to make it worse for you than it already was."

Daniel thawed slightly. He did have good friends.

"Everyone knows you have a drink problem," Jack added callously. "I made a lot of assumptions, most of them wrong," he added hurriedly as Daniel's tender mood evaporated and he pointedly removed his hand from Jack's thigh. "I swear, I did think you were sober when you kissed me. I...er...freaked," he admitted self-consciously.

Daniel made supportive noises, still wondering how he was and how he could get Jack to tell him.

Jack took fresh heart and plunged on, even though he was desperately embarrassed. "It was bad enough I couldn't jerk off unless I was thinking about you without having to deal with the possibility of jerking off WITH you. I kind of figured...if you were gay..." He looked uneasily at Daniel. "It didn't matter if...I...er...wasn't," he added feebly, looking miserable, and at anything but Daniel.

"The whole 'both the guys are gay if they're fucking like bunnies' thing must have come as a terrible shock," Daniel said kindly, patting Jack's knee in commiseration.

"Are you laughing at me?" Jack asked suspiciously.

"Oh, yes."

Jack looked quite deflated.

"Gay, straight, bi? Just labels, Jack. What does it matter? It is what it is," Daniel reminded him gently, smiling a little.

"I get that NOW," Jack complained like it was Daniel's fault. "After last night," he added, looking almost shy.

Jack? Shy?

"That went deep," Jack said dreamily.

Daniel blushed to the roots of his hair.

"You went deep," Jack amended, chuckling. He took Daniel's hand. "Like Sara did." They sat a while, looking out at the lake. "We kissed, we made love, and nothing will ever be the same again. Especially me. That's what this is, Daniel. I love you. And you're stuck with me," he added malevolently.

"Despite how I am?" Daniel asked involuntarily.

"Yeah. I try to work around you being..." Jack shrugged easily. "You." He took advantage of Daniel thinking about this harsh indictment to drape his arms round him and generally molest him.

"Me being me...what?" Daniel prompted.

"You."

"What?" Daniel asked blankly.

"You know what you're like."

Daniel looked at Jack for a long time. A certain glint in his colonel's eye suggested the impotence debate was fresh in his mind and the nearest archaeologist was going to pay. "What I'm like?" he asked interestedly.

Jack went very still and found something absolutely fascinating in the depths of the lake. "How did it feel?" he asked suddenly.

"What?"

"When I was..." Jack seemed at a loss for words. "You know. Inside you," he asked, looking painfully embarrassed.

"Good," Daniel muttered, going as red as Jack and looking just as hard at the lake. He did rest his toes over Jack's though.

"I didn't hurt you? You're not sore, or...anything?"

"A little," Daniel admitted.

"Sore?"

"Both."

Jack's face tightened. "I hoped..."

"Look, you told me you weren't ready for me to make love to you and it's fine," Daniel told him soothingly, hitching his butt a little closer to lean into him. "I didn't cave, Jack. I just realised that you were making a choice already, a choice that was harder for you than for me, and you couldn't undo a lifetime of social conditioning in a day. You asked for the time you need, and I'm happy to give it. You put your trust in me just by being with me. I couldn't do any less for you."

"You're sure?"

"Yes." Daniel smiled affectionately. "Yes, I am."

"How was I?" Jack cringed. "I mean..."

"I...um...get what you mean. I felt you...your skin moving," Daniel explained awkwardly. "I-inside. I didn't expect...I didn't know what the hell to expect," he confessed. "I didn't know I would feel so much, so strongly, or feel it everywhere. The sensations...I had no idea how good it would feel."

Jack was listening intently, weighing every word, deep in thought.

"Were you ever attracted to another man?" Daniel asked gently.

Jack looked at him sharply, as if he would refuse to answer, but then his face softened. "I don't think so," he answered at last. "How would I know? I'm Air Force. You get tight with your buddies..." He trailed off into another silence, looking away from Daniel. "It's just...you," he said simply. "You're the only guy I've looked at and wanted."

Consciously wanted, Daniel guessed. It wasn't that different for him. He just accepted instead of judging.

"Really wanted," Jack sighed. "It got so I couldn't even think straight." He glared when Daniel chuckled. "Baring my soul here," he said reproachfully, lips quirked.

"I'd rather you bared your ass," Daniel retorted mischievously, remembering an earlier conversation.

"You may be the most annoying man who ever lived, but despite my better judgement I'm in, I'm with you," Jack announced, trying and failing to scowl at him. "I love you. I just...don't know what to do with that. I've got to take control out of it," he snapped, frustrated. "I don't know what the hell I'm doing, and my instinct...you know what I'm like. I've slapped you down hard enough."

"And what happens when you do?"

Jack snorted, reluctantly amused. "You could try kissing my ass instead of kicking it," he complained.

"Never happen," Daniel replied with calm certainty. "Not in the line of duty, anyway." He reached down to stroke Jack's ass, grinning when Jack shifted irritably. He got off on the attention, they both knew he did. "And if it doesn't happen in the field, why would this be any different? Let me ask you something. If I'd told you to stop, would you have stopped?"

Jack shot him a shocked look; all the answer he needed.

"What if I told you to go slower or deeper or harder?"

"You're trying to tell me the guy on the bottom has all the control. I think I've grasped that now, thanks," Jack said dryly.

"I'm trying to tell you we both had trust. When it came down to it, Jack, I understood that was all I needed." Daniel smiled and stretched up to kiss Jack gently on the mouth.

"I trust you," Jack insisted. "But...not...this," he said haltingly.

"I don't feel any different," Daniel promised, realising at last what Jack was having so much difficulty asking him. The answer was no. He didn't feel any less of a man. "It was good to be so close to you."

"Good?" Jack nodded, some of his tension relaxing.

"Intimate physically as well as emotionally. I want to be that close again, and I want you to understand it, Jack."

"I'm trying." Jack rubbed his cheek against Daniel's, then took his face between his hands and looked into his eyes. "I'm not ready, Daniel, but I'm...open, and I do trust you," he said gravely.

It sounded like a promise to Daniel. He didn't need any more than this; equality, respect, choices shared and accepted. He didn't need any more than Jack, and now he had him, he was keeping him.

"Whatever it takes," Jack sighed, unconsciously echoing Daniel's own thoughts.

Maybe they were both confused, stumbling through making it up - and fucking it up - as they went along, but they were also committed. More than anything, they were seeing clear, and they did trust.

"I promise."

FINIS