

Title: Tangent/Intersection

Author: Biblio & PhoenixE

Rating: NC17

Pairing: Jack and Daniel

Category: Angst. Drama. Episode Related. First Time. Romance.

Season/Spoilers: Season 4. Missing scenes for Tangent.

Synopsis: With Jack near death and all pretence stripped away, will he and Daniel admit at last they're on the same path and move on together?

Warnings: None



Tangent/Intersection

A slash story by Biblio and PhoenixE

Jack

What is it I see in his eyes? Not the same feeling I've seen reflected shamefully in my own eyes so often over these past months. Not cool, calculating distance.

I guess that whole 'colleagues not friends' riff isn't entirely successful if you're not both in on the act.

Can't push someone away if they won't let go.

He'll never let go. Never quit. Never back down. Never act out.

He's a better man than me. It's past time I faced that. Faced him. Daniel.

His eyes are alight, his lips trembling. He's keeping his back to the others until he gets his reaction under control. I don't fault Daniel for that because I'm the only one who can see into his eyes right now and I'm getting the works. His face is never still, it's always vital, mobile, every fleeting expression written plain for those who care to see. I mean, he talks with his whole body, his hands and his eyes expressing every thought, every feeling. Now, though, it's more. Much, much more. Daniel - he's alight. I can't think of another word for this, for the joy blazing from him.

He takes my breath away. It chokes me some days, watching Daniel. Wanting him. I know I can't have him. I know that. It's eating me alive, this limbo. This needing and not

having. Sometimes, when he looks at me, when he forgets, when he needs to be near and I can't get him away from me, it hurts. It feels like this, like being on the brink, more death in me than life.

What is it with me? Why do I do this to myself? To him. I have to suffocate literally before I can see myself, before I can know my own soul?

God help me, I'm in love with this man and it's killing me. I can't deny it. I can't gut it out. I need Daniel. I need him. It wasn't until I was dying I knew how much. It all got burned away. A veritable crucible. There wasn't anything left but clarity. Fighting for every breath focuses a man's mind like nothing else can. Jesus, I knew the feeling, the burn in my chest, the weight, my mind leaden and dull.

I fight though. I fight hard and dirty until I can't fight any more. I have to be stopped, I have to have it taken away. I've been taken to this place. The life I've lived, I know it well. It's part of me. It's loss.

I made my peace with loving Daniel.

I didn't expect to live.

I was dying and Daniel was everything.

I'm fucked if I know what to do with that. This look on Daniel's face. He looks like I feel, like it hurts him to be in his skin and whole when he knows he's broken inside. I never knew he loved me too.

Everything hurts and this man is all I am. I have to reach out, just for a moment. Let myself touch his arm. I can't believe how hard it is to do this simple thing.

"Hi." I'd say more, say something, but it hurts me to breathe. "Hey."

His face melts into tentative softness, he knows I don't have the words even if I had the breath, all I can do is look at him. Maybe it's enough. His eyes are drowned, incredulous. I'm hurting him again but I think it's a good hurting. Clean. I've got nothing else to give.

I'm only aware of everyone else on the periphery, but generals and snakes seem to fill up every available space, getting in my face like they've a right to it. I can't manage to stand to attention for Jacob, but I can manage a tad less slouched as I reluctantly drag my eyes from Daniel.

"Thanks for stoppin' by," I wheeze laconically, every word an effort.

Daniel is still looking at me, still smiling but with an edge to him now, like he's about climbing out of that perfect skin.

Jacob grins. "What the hell. I was in the neighbourhood. You need a lift home?"

He's...What? Oh. Jacob. Still talking.

"Yes, Sir. Thank you."

Jacob nods, smacks me on the leg, which translates for guy-talk for 'glad you made it'. Whatever.

I was supposed to be dead and now I'm not I have this whole other problem. A very dear problem I don't know what to do with. I've been sweet on Daniel since I met him. Real sweet. I guess he knows what he means to me. How can he not? He and I, we're different. I'm different, with him. Stronger. Daniel brings out everything I have inside, the sometimes unsuspected good right along with the everyday ugly.

He takes it all, accepts everything I am.

Is he ready for my hands on his skin? Am I? I want to fuck my little brother, I want to take him slow, stroking into him everything I feel and can't find words for. I love him, though, and it's hard for me not to see this as anything but another loss. Sex is too cheap a trade for the certainty of Daniel's affection. I hope he understands that.

Hell, I need him to understand everything, get us both straightened out because right now I know nothing.

Carter is up there somewhere, giving me a smile, pleased I didn't buy the farm, but still managing the kind of detachment Daniel can't find on a good day. I've got her shins in my sights but anything else takes effort.

Teal'c is snapping off his helmet strap, letting it fall. He kind of bemused, in his stoic minimalist way. Guess we both must have nearly blinked and missed the nanosecond of tender concern Daniel lavished on him before he yelled out were alright.

Nothing personal, big guy. He just ain't in love with *you*. But you know that now, I think.

Daniel is looking at me and I'm looking at him and - and I'm scared shitless. Weird how living is always harder than dying. I drop my own eyes for a second, I need a second, something, my composure is gone with the wind. I try hard for dignity but that's too much like distance and I - I'm smiling up at him.

I was dying for Chrissake, I let it all go, it's out. I'm in love with him and I'm naked. Raw. There isn't an off-switch I can throw just because we have an audience.

Feeling like I'm reaching into a fire, I hold out my hand to him. I can't do this on my own and I don't mean getting off my ass and on my feet. I need him to be there but Daniel is - he's already more than meeting me half-way.

I'm sick with relief, my head swimming as he pulls me up. I keep hold of his hand longer

than I should. Daniel is in no hurry to let go, but then he's never worried about how things look, just about what they are. These private moments have been few and far between for a while now. I used to make time for them, for Daniel. It bothers my newly active conscience to see he'll take me any way he can get me these days.

I keep our gazes locked as I slowly, deliberately, stroke my finger down his wrist and onto his palm. And again.

It's stupid and dangerous but I can't help myself. I need him to know, I need Daniel to begin to see me as clear as I finally see myself. I need more than that. He has to know I need everything.

He's mine.

Daniel's eyes widen, his fingers shaking in mine.

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## Daniel

He's alive! Oh my god, he's alive. Jack!

It was so close, though, way, *way* too close.

I don't ever want to come that close to losing you again, Jack.

We went through seven different kinds of hell to get to you, but none of that matters, I'd do it all again and then some, whatever it took.

Oh my God, we made it, we did it, he's *alive*. I'm so sick and shaken with relief I want to throw up. I can't believe he's actually here, right in front of me. Warm and breathing. Safe.

You *ever* scare me like this again, Jack O'Neill, I swear to God I'll kill you.

I'm also only just becoming aware I'm probably making a fool of myself. Galloping over to him, touching him - hell clamping on to him and clutching him like I'm never going to let go. Don't want to, couldn't right now even if he wanted me to. I have to hold on - have to *feel* he's really here, safe, and not still out there, sailing through space forever in a cold, airless coffin.

God, Jack, I'm so glad you're safe.

"Hi."

One little word and I'm beyond hope. The second he looks at me, his eyes soft and welcoming and I'm losing it, not sure I can trust this, but I can't resist Jack. He can't help but see, he knows me too damned well and can read me even better so of course he can see, he knows, it's out there, screaming from all over me what I feel for him, but I don't care.

In one simple, unguarded second I've thrown away years of desperate concealment and subterfuge - blown every carefully constructed façade I've hidden from him behind, but I don't care. I don't. I've never been more grateful for anything in my life than having him here, all in one piece, breathing, alive, so damned alive, and looking like he can't believe it himself. He's drinking me in, his gaze so very warm and yet still confused like he's not quite entirely convinced he's really here as he melts me anew with a smile and a single word.

"Hey."

Hey yourself. I missed you, too. I guess you know that now, huh?

That and a whole lot more besides. I've well and truly blown my cover. Ooops.

Knowing I've come undone before him should be scaring me, and maybe once upon a time it would have. What am I saying, of *course* it would have, but now, holding it all back, hiding from him just seems - stupid. Was stupid - all those wasted years. What if he hadn't made it back? What if we hadn't been in time? Then he never would have...because I didn't...we didn't...

Life's too short for regrets. Too fleeting for the fearful. I'm not going to live like that any more. Not going to hide or hold back another second. I've lost too much already, had too many people I've loved taken from me.

I've lived so long being afraid to risk telling him I love him, but having the chance and never taking it? I'd rather go for it and take the risk than never know. Because never having from never daring is the worst cowardice of all.

Besides, unless I've got it wrong and I - I don't think I do, from what I am seeing in his eyes right now - I - I can hardly believe - he can't tear his eyes off me!

Jack is worth any risk to me but I think - I hope - the only thing I have to lose here is my loneliness.

Oh God, Jack. We almost blew it. Almost missed our chance. We've both been fools, but it's not too late to change everything for the better. For both of us.

He's afraid, I can tell. I know him too. He's frightened, yes, but he's not - there's no fight left in him, is there? That's the difference. That's what I'm seeing. He's - open. Accepting. It's all in his eyes, gentle and wondering on me. I - I'm in his eyes.

Is it any wonder I love him?

He rises to the occasion even though he's sprawling dazedly on his ass, making with the pleasantries with his patented O'Neill aplomb, a ready remark for every situation, even if it isn't always appropriate. He doesn't let anything slow him down or cramp his style, even when he's still so out on his feet he can hardly stand.

He's way ahead of me on points in the self-possession department; I can't think of a single thing to say, just like I can't seem to let go of him. Jack is leaning heavily against me as if he needs the support for a little while, his arm tight around my shoulders. I'm here now. I have him.

My friends want their piece of him and I'm suddenly, desperately wishing none of them were here right now. This is our time and they don't even see I need to be alone with Jack. I need to hold him, to feel him, cover him with kisses, I'm burning to tell him, tell him everything, show him just how much...

I need way more than I can have right now, it's their fault I can't have it and suddenly, I just can't stand it. Unanswerable need is an unbearable ache within me he somehow recognises and has to do something about. That's just the way he is.

His strong, callused hand is clenched convulsively around mine and suddenly there's this *look*. He isn't soft now, he's focused and glittering. Predatory. Hidden by the angle of my body, a gentle finger strokes slowly over the tracery of veins at my wrist, lingering warm on my palm. I don't have time to question, to doubt, my heart thuds painfully as Jack strokes deliberately again, a shock of excitement and desire coursing through me.

Jack feels my sudden tremor, his clasp on me tightening possessively.

I - I understand. I hear more than words can say. Jack is with me and he isn't letting go.

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Jack

If Daniel lets go of me, I'll be kissing the deck. Not exactly the kissing I have in mind.

I feel like shit. Got to get a grip here. Even breathing is getting to be an effort. My *head!*

"You bring the aspirin?" I demand in the general direction of my 2iC, who looks blankly back at me. I'm not kidding here, Carter! My head is splitting. I'm not gonna get the cure for what ails me, not while you're hanging here shootin' the breeze, so I need the friggin' aspirin. *Now*. You're kidding. You've got *nothing*? Who gives a *shit* what Doc Fraiser said about masking symptoms!

“So much for a dying man’s last wish, huh? Lucky I didn’t want a good steak dinner or anything. Seven and a half billion bucks a year, and the SGC can’t even spare twelve lousy cents for aspirin? Sweet.”

“Jack.”

That gentle murmur stops me in my tracks. I try to focus on his face. Recent near death experience no excuse for present rudeness, huh, Daniel?

My head hurts, kid. I’m bone weary. Old. I feel every minute I’ve lived weighing me down right now.

Went to the wire on this one.

Close. Too damn close. Came closer than I can bear to think about. Not getting this. Not getting you. Nobody but me to blame, either. Not your fault. Mine. All me.

“Sorry.”

It’s so hard to - to - nothing is working. Help me out here, Daniel? Please. Need you. Brain *pulsing* in my skull here. Not sure I can hold on.

Aah. He’s here, he’s with me.

“Sir? *Sir?*”

“Let me, Sam. Jack, come on. Drink. You’ll feel better, I promise.”

Don’t worry. Still with you. Drinking up right now, for you, like a good little colonel. Just a sip of water, but it hurts my throat like barbed wire. A kiss would make it slip down so sweetly.

Slip away.

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Got my head in your lap, Daniel. I’m feeling better already. On a point of information, how’d I get down here? Not complaining, you understand. Just curious.

“Jack.”

Love your voice. Coaxing.

“Hurts.” Understating the obvious here.

Isn't there *anything* you guys can do for me?

Aah. That thing - Oh God - that thing he's doing to my temples, jeez. Fels so good.

"Indian head massage? Good idea, Daniel!"

*Love.* It's love, Carter. You blind? Oh. Sorry. That's me.

"I'll - I'm going up front with Dad, I guess. You'll stay with the colonel, Daniel?"

Yep. Not letting him up any time soon. Got fingers slipping through my hair here. Fingertips gently working my scalp. We're pretty much set for the duration. Thanks for asking.

"Of course! He won't fully come to until the blood flow to his brain is increased. It'll take a while."

It'll take *forever*. Don't want to be the one to break it to ya, Daniel, but that blood flow? Increasing all right. It just ain't headed up.

"I will go with you, Major Carter. I am well. I wish to speak with Selmak."

Twenty-four hours in the honeymoon suite at the cheap motel of your choice, my brother, plus your own body weight in quarters. With tact like that, you get your own magic fingers.

"Yell if you need us, Daniel."

Not gonna happen, Carter. Dismissed. Move it on.

Alone at last. All perfectly innocent and above board. Had to kinda faint to get custody of this lap, but now it's mine, I'm keeping it.

Just gonna lie here and enjoy the ride. Those talented fingers have a little more work before I can enjoy the view as well, but I'm getting better by the second.

Mmm.

Think we got some stroking going on here, Daniel. You supposed to be playing with the patient's hair? I think not. You supposed to be kissing the patient's brow so tenderly?

I can think of something softer you can kiss. Just aim a little lower.

"Daniel?"

The tiniest whisper. Softly, softly, catchy Spacemonkey.

“Jack! Welcome back.”

Good boy. Nice and quiet. My poor, used to be aching head.

I listen intently. We’re clear. I lift my hand, gesture for him to come closer. This would *only* work on Daniel. He will keep forgetting I’m Special Ops trained.

I snap open my eyes as he leans over me, reach up my hand, cup it around his head, and pull him down to meet me.

Kept you waiting long enough. One kiss to tell you, so clear even you can’t miss it.

The barest brushing of lips.

One kiss - just one.

I’m up, fast, hard, turning toward him as he rears back from me in shock. Catch him as he falls backwards. He lies supine in my arms, stunned, piercing me with his eyes. He’s wanting this, needing this. Afraid to take it. Gonna get it anyway.

I never take my eyes from his as I lift him toward me, now, now he’s sure of his welcome, his arm reaching up to cling desperately around my neck. I meet him halfway, take the beautiful mouth offered up to me so eagerly. I’m lost the moment his lips touch mine. That strange clarity lends a crisp edge to what was dulled by pain. My body is pounding, I’m sick and shaking but you’re so sweet, Daniel. How can any man be so sweet?

You’re everything.

He’s consumed by my kiss, offering himself up to my touch, trusting me. God, if I don’t do something, I’ll be tumbling him down to the deck beneath me, loving him. Damning the consequences. Can’t. I *can’t*.

I straighten instead, lifting him, setting him on his knees in front of me, crush him to me. Knowing he’s not afraid of my strength, knowing he’ll meet the force of my passion with his own. He can’t be still for a moment, hands urgent on me, his mouth raging against mine.

Madness. Not enough. Too much. Hard to breathe, have to - *have* to stop! I break free, set him back from me. His eyes are huge, drowned in emotion.

My thumb tenderly grazes his swollen lips.

One kiss to tell you, so clear even you can’t miss it, Daniel. One kiss to tell you I love you.

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Daniel

"Let me, Sam."

She hovers, frowning, eyes narrowing as she takes in the sight of Jack in evident distress, his head resting heavily on my shoulder.

My shoulder, Sam. Deal with it. He's not looking to you. Not asking for you. Shoe's on the other foot, now.

Doesn't feel too shit hot, does it?

Believe me, I know.

I've enough of a shred of grace left to feel a faint pang of guilt as I glare at her and take the glass from her hand. I know I shouldn't be feeling as triumphant as I do, but I can't help letting a bit of it show as I take possession of what she clearly does not wish to surrender.

We aren't just talking about the glass, here.

I've had my moment, it was petty, I know, but it felt good. She's going to have to deal with this sudden reversal of fortune on her own time. I've got more important things to attend to right now. Jack needs help. He needs me. He wants me.

Omigawd, he wants...me. I mean, he didn't come right out and *say* so, after all, how could he? But he does. I know. He does.

Omigawd.

I turn my head away from her, turn to him as a sudden wave of violent emotion wells up in my throat. I don't want her to see how close I am to tears of disbelief and joy. I don't know how I'm able to babble my way through it, but somehow I manage mostly by keeping my attention fully on Jack, speaking gently and trying to comfort and assist him. Sam's not far away, though. Somewhere on the periphery of my complete and utter focus on Jack I'm dimly aware of the waves of her disbelieving annoyance impacting on the outer surface of the bubble of our oneness.

I hear you knocking, but you can't come in.

He takes a few sips of water at my urging, then makes a face and waves the glass away. I only just have time to set it hastily on the deck before his head slips off my shoulder, bound rapidly for my lap.

At least it would have been a faster trip than he'd probably have enjoyed if I hadn't caught him and cradled him gently the rest of the way down to the pillow of my thighs.

He sighs and murmurs something I can barely hear but knowing Jack, I'm guessing it's a complaint. Hurts, Jack? It still hurts? I'll do what I can. I wish it could be more.

You can't imagine how much I wish it could be more.

Sam is still standing over us, and now she's saying something to me I'm hardly aware of as I dare to touch the silvered head nestled so comfortably in my lap. I'm holding my breath, completely bowled over by my own audacity. Touching him, so blatantly - I - I - it feels like I'm doing something wrong and a thousand accusing eyes are fixed on me watching me commit a terrible transgression.

I'm not like him. Jack gives of himself in so many ways, especially the way he reaches out so freely, touches so easily. He's the one I've wanted to touch more than any other, and yet have found it so very, very hard to do.

Too scared to, I guess, Darned well scared too stupid to take the chance, close the gap, reach out, because I wanted it too much. And because I guess I always knew, what I'm discovering right now, if I'd let myself do it - if I'd touched? Oh Jack, you feel so good beneath my fingers. I can't believe how good it is, the spiking softness of your hair against my skin, the sheer, simple opportunity that's mine right now to stroke through it freely, to touch and rub. Just to touch you. I couldn't bring myself to touch you before and now I know why.

It just feels too good. Now I've done it. I've really done it - I've started something I can't stop. Touching. Touching you. I'm hooked, Jack. Having a little wouldn't have been enough. Isn't enough, I have to have it all. Have to have you.

Please go, Sam. Leave us in peace. Please. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I am. I know what you've hoped and I'm sorry. Can you be a friend, just for a little while, like we used to be, and let me have this? Let me have him? He's all I have. He's all I want. Can you find just a little bit of compassion and understand?

Thank God for Teal'c. He's sized up the situation in one and made his choice. Sam is getting the none too subtle nod her presence and services are no longer required in this particular situation. She still might not be too pleased about it, but she's got more sense than to argue with him.

With Teal'c, even a 'suggestion' is not optional. You see things his way, or be prepared for the consequences.

Thank you, my friend. I won't be forgetting this.

"Yell if you need us, Daniel," she calls loudly over her shoulder as Teal'c gently but firmly escorts her from the cargo deck, her mouth saying my name while her eyes are fixed on Jack. Teal'c gives me a parting look assuring me we will *not* be disturbed.

Once again, thank you, my large, loyal friend.

wasn't all too ridiculously tragic already I'm going to top my personal worst record for being a *complete* idiot by knocking myself out on the deck, here.

Have you ever had one of those days? If not, you want this one? I'm hoping for a 'do-over' myself.

Oh, wait a minute, perhaps all is not lost, after all. I may just have gotten luckier than I deserve. On a lot of different levels. I forgot about Jack and his lightning reflexes. Jack's on the move practically the instant I rear my stupid head and he's going to save me in spite of myself. I'm a gibbering idiot, but he's got me. He catches me before I smack my head and split my skull open, holding me up, pulling me back toward him, toward those eyes and that mouth. Love that mouth. Want it. He wants to give it to me. Yep, no doubts about that at all. We're definitely on the same wavelength here.

We both want to get nasty with each other as quickly as possible.

I think I'm over my touch taboo - thing. Let's just see, shall we?

I grab him around the neck and pull him the rest of the way to me and the fierce, exultant joy struggling to burst out of my chest breaks free. I'm lost the second his mouth impacts with mine. Any hope I may have harboured of holding back or hiding any particle of the want and need I feel for him - gone with the wind. Along with my scruples, sanity, principles, fears, inhibitions, reservations, doubts.

I'm gasping, sobbing with eagerness, shaking with violent, rampaging desire. His lips crush against mine and I yield willingly, grinding my mouth against his like I'm trying to climb inside him. I'm pinned to the deck by his enthusiastic, bucking weight, writhing unashamedly beneath his groping, clutching hands as he roughly fondles me, tugs frantically at my shirt, and then...

Stops.

What? He's stopped kissing me, stopped touching me. He's starting to get up - leave me. No, no, don't! You can't back out on me, not now! Forget about that little false start thing, I'm good now, fine, if you couldn't tell by the way I was moaning and writhing you can take it from me I'm totally okay with everything we were doing, so okay I'm gonna combust if we don't get back to it. Full steam ahead, here Jack, go for it. Let's do it, do it, *do it!*

I'm trembling uncontrollably with thwarted desire and bitter disappointment I'm completely unable to conceal from him as Jack gently bats away my clutching hands and pulls me up to my knees. He draws me into a rib crushing embrace, seeking to comfort and console, I know this, I know he means well and he's sorry but right now his gentle explanations as to why we have to put the brakes on are the last thing I want to hear.

I'm shaking, I feel like I'm going to come apart. I hear what he's saying but I can't stop - don't *want* to, can't stop kissing him, touching him, trying to pull him closer. I want it all.

To touch, taste, feel and I want to do it all *now*. Part of me understands what he's saying, why we can't, but I can't take it. Can't be logical. Don't want to be. I hate what has to be because of where we are and what we are but I'll try, God, Jack, I'll try, because you need me too.

Only for you. Just for you.

Not so easy, though to stuff the genie back into the bottle now the bastard's been uncorked and so have I. Jack gently pets me, trying to soothe the seething disappointment roiling inside me but I don't know if I can hold it back. Denied for so very long, my hidden, long repressed desires won't be so easily dismissed. They churn sullenly about inside me, a potent emotional cocktail threatening to spill over the sides of my secret well of sorrows like an unending scream which must be released or it will shatter me into a million pieces.

Losing it. I'm losing, Jack.

It's instinct that moves me away, I don't realise until I'm there, until all he has of me is my back. It's all I've had of him for so long now. I thought I was better than this. Stronger. I thought I could take it. I love him and he hurt me and it's so very hard to trust him now and he *knows*. Jack knows. I'm hurting him now but I'm frozen here, pinned to the deck by my own dead weight, harder to bear somehow than his.

I don't want him to see me like this. I just need a minute, Jack, please. Let me get my balance. I thought you were dead and I've been living in this fear for so long. We're moving too fast and I need - I really need that minute.

I desperately squeeze my eyes shut against them but it's too late, a couple of tears make a break for it and race down my face. My cheeks are burning with frustration and humiliation as Jack pulls me around to him and sees. His eyes wash over me, so tender and distressed, as he reaches up and flicks the salty traitors from my face.

"Hey," he coaxes with heart-rending compassion. "Just hang in there, okay? We'll get back to this later, when it's safe. When we've got lots of time. Promise. Hang in, Daniel. You can do that for me, can't you?"

For Jack, I can do anything. Hasn't that always been my problem?

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## Jack

So much in Daniel's eyes. God, those eyes. Blasting through every wall I've built to keep him out, keep him away. To keep me safe.

He's learned to live with my carefully posed indifference. Fought me when I've been wrong, been so strong for us both. He's held onto himself through all of it. Through the whole sorry, *damnable* mess I've made, he's thought only of me.

Me. Me, who's done nothing but hurt him, for the longest time.

Hurt him so damn much, I've made him weep for having me. He's torn himself away from me, turning his back, shutting me out. Maybe I deserve it, I don't know. I'm past caring. I just can't take it. I need this to be over, we both need an ending. A beginning.

I won't allow this distance.

Too much of a reality check for me here. I see how well I've done my job, how much I've accomplished. Doesn't even occur to you to come to me for comfort. Just got to get away from me. Fast. Perfectly executed learned response.

Guilt. Oh yes.

You could always turn to me. Always. Your friend was always here for you. Then your friend fell in love with you. I took even that from you. Too close for *my* comfort.

Not any more. You've just given yourself to me. Completely. I'm coming to claim what's mine.

I spy movement in the doorway. Teal's accusing gaze scorches across the cargo deck. Yeah, big guy. My fault. Fixing it right now. Don't let the natives get restless on me, huh?

Good man. The best. Nothing getting past him, long as I need it. Long as Daniel needs *me*.

Got to take care of my own.

I'm over by his side, lifting him, he's fighting me. I bring him safe into my arms anyway. Shudders wracking his body, his proud head hanging. Too much for him. One shock after another. Just too damn much. I kiss the silky hair so temptingly close, push his chin up. Face every private insecurity I've nurtured, in tear drowned eyes. His pain cuts me to the bone.

Ashamed? For Chrissake! Why, Daniel? Why? I've got those boots filled already.

Godawful shivering. He's trembling under my touch. I can't bear this, have to pull him so close he can feel my heart beating against his. See? Alive. My hand cups his head, settles him on my waiting shoulder.

I rock him like a hurt child. A soothing, wordless litany of comfort. I'm here. Safe. I've got you. Stroking his back, over and over. I'll hold him as long as it takes.

"Sorry, I'm so sorry, Daniel. I'm with you. With you."

I kiss his hair again.

"Love you. I have for a long time now. My fault, this, only mine. Let me in, Daniel. Don't freeze me out, here. I know I've got no right to ask. I understand. If you can't bring yourself to trust me, not after all of this, I'll understand. Promise."

That should fetch him. Not like I don't mean every word, I damn well do, but what I mean is rarely what I say. If nothing else, the shock will bring him back to me.

"Hel-lo," I breathe when his chin tilts proudly and he's *there*.

Like he's ever let *me* down. Jack needs reassurance, Daniel is there for him, huh? No question. I'm a lowlife bastard who made you cry, but what does that matter? Whatever Jack needs.

You're a bright guy. There's *two* of us in this bear hug and only one of us in tears. Work it out. You've to to learn to take a little, Daniel. I love to give and I can't keep sneaking it up on you like this.

I smile down at him, the best damn smile I've got in me. It hits him like a zat blast. I feel nothing but insufferable satisfaction and, regrettably, renewed desire.

My eyes shift over his shoulders for a moment, check out the action for'rard. Teal'c's got everything well in hand up there.

The glasses have to go. Daniel has a travesty of a smile, wavering all over the place as he searches my eyes. He's had so many mixed signals, he's not reading me so well these days. No, Daniel. I do *not* think you're weak for crying. There's no cause for shame or apology. None whatsodamnever.

You gettin' this? Or I gotta embarrass us both, spell it out for ya?

I see something ease in him, but I sense a little positive reinforcement won't hurt, and God, he's so damn hot. If one kiss can do *this* to him, I can't imagine what will happen when I make love with him.

Can't *wait*.

I know I should behave myself, but given my track record, I think it would only confuse him more. My hands snake down and cup his butt, haul him closer. He's a perfect fit under my unmistakably possessive grasp.

He gives a little gasp. My smile turns wolfish.

Nope, not a concealed weapon down there, Daniel. Just pleased to see you.

There are easier ways to stop the man you love crying, but I'm a short, sharp, shock kinda guy. I move my hips against him, teasing a little, and, oh, yeah, my archaeologist is very pleased to see me too. *Thrilled*, in fact.

I lean in and slowly lick away the tears, lapping a warm trail up his cheek. He's shaking again, a different kind of shaking this time. Stopped crying though. His face is working too hard on the blushing thing.

Shocker. Kinda figured out Daniel's expectations of sex are a *tad* more Disney than mine. Yeah, kid. Pretty hard to ignore reality, when he's alive and well and feeling you up.

I'm a *bad* man who's got a good boy offering himself up on a plate, no questions asked. Whatever I need, want, desire. He's there for me. He's going to *die* when I get him home and into my bed, but, oh boy, what a way to come.

"Jack?"

I know what you want. You're very welcome. We're safe enough for now. A little overwhelmed here, I admit, but trust me, I won't let this get away from us again. I'll never put you in this position again. My word on it. Not secret, not ashamed, you understand, just private. Trust me.

Come on in.

Elegant fingers slide back into my hair, stroking, rolling the strands between curious fingertips. Touch as tentative as the shy smile that's warming his eyes now.

Thank Christ. I haven't blown it.

Come *on*, Daniel. Touch me. We both want it. That's it, that's the way. Just do what feels right.

Wondering fingers trace my jawline, feather light. Dance across my skin to my cheek, my eyes, my brow. My lips. I can be good. I can wait.

He's closing in, eyes compelling me, his lips a breath from mine now. I *can* wait. His tongue slips out, delicately licks his luscious lower lip. Then licks mine. My breath catches. Such innocent, heart stopping sensuality.

Christ Almighty, why'd I wait so long? Months, I've wasted *months*. Time we'll never get back.

He whispers against my lips, "I love you, Jack."

His kiss is unbearably poignant. I respond to his lead willingly, showing him how much I approve without overwhelming him. Just encourage him. A little. When he laughs against my mouth, okay, maybe, just maybe, I'm being a little *too* encouraging.

I know we've got to stop but I cannot bear to part from him, not when he needs me close, needs me so much. Screw dignity. I want to keep him right where he is too. I compromise and settle us side by side against the bulkhead, draping a chaste arm around his shoulders.

Nothing to see. Nothing I haven't done before when one of my kids has needed it.

It's my lover and my best friend now who needs it, so I allow it when his hand slips up into mine, our fingers twining. I only smile when a weary head settles thankfully on my shoulder. How did he know? That's just where I want him to be.

Teal'c. Making another circuit. His eyes linger on Daniel, not me. Teal'c isn't one for effusive praise, but I see a measure of approval before the mask slips smoothly down and he turns again to his self-appointed task of guarding our privacy.

"Okay, Daniel?" I ask softly.

"Oh, yes, Jack, yes." He sighs.

Almost home, Daniel. Been a long, hard journey for both of us, but it's over now. I promise. It's finished. We won't be parted.

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Daniel

I've heard you shouldn't keep everything locked up inside. It isn't healthy to repress, cram it all down under wraps without dealing with it, hoping to God it'll stay hidden down in the dumper where you've shoved it. It's a way of getting through the day, but not the best. Or so they say. I dunno, it's always worked for me.

That is, until today.

Is it possible to hit critical emotional mass? Possible to max out your bullshit threshold? I think I'm coming very close to seriously upsetting the internal cesspool 'cause I've got shit flying up and out at me from every conceivable direction and I'm drowning in it.

Lucky for me I've got a tether to sanity and right now he's holding on to me with both hands and a pair of damned strong and understanding arms.

Even being the twit I continue to be I'm fighting the good he's trying to do me. I never said I was smart. Everyone else does, but me, I know myself a lot better.

I can't help it, I know he wants to help me but the habits of a lifetime are hard to break. I'm just so damned mad at myself for coming so close to breaking down, right in front of him. Blubbing for God's sakes. I'm so close to the edge I'm getting a nose bleed.

It's embarrassing. I've learned to keep the important stuff, the stuff that really hurts, that can do me the most harm, carefully to myself and far away from where anyone could possibly see it or use it against me. I won't say I don't trust anyone, but it's pretty close actually. I realise the new understanding struggling to blossom between Jack and myself, for all the fact we're not alone means it needs to be tabled for a bit - also means some things are going to have to change. Me carrying on all on my own - I'm sure that's one of those things.

But even Jack can't expect me to throw away the learned behaviour of a lifetime and lean on him just because he's there, and he wants me too, but then again, he does have broad shoulders, and kind, very soothing hands.

Ah, what the hey, what could it hurt?

Those hands I was talking about, they're on my shoulders, their strong, persuasive fingers working firmly into my knotted muscles as they try and coax me into surrendering my distress. Giving it up, as it were. And once again, as stupid as it sounds, my immediate reaction is to resist. I can't help it, it's just the way I'm wired, the whole 'I'll go my way by myself' thing - I'd have no problem if our positions were reversed and Jack was the one who needed the shoulder. I'd give it gladly and so much more but this receiving stuff, it just goes against the grain to let anyone *do* anything for me.

So yeah, to my shame I try and shrug him off, and pull away. But Jack's not taking no for an answer, there's a shocker, when has he ever, he brushes aside my protests, easily ignores my struggles and swoops me up into an embrace so all encompassing it couldn't be escaped by a brace of Jaffa hell bent for Happy Hour.

So it goes without saying I'm pretty choiceless at the moment. He's gonna make me take him if it kills me.

I hate myself just a little bit more because even though he's hugging me like hell, murmuring to me quietly as he strokes my hair and kisses my head I can't stop shaking. At least now he's got me I'm not going to break down and weep, but I'm still not out of the woods yet. It's like some vast, thick wave of putrid sludge is oozing out of me. Toxic waste? Now there's a nice image.

"Sorry," I gulp against his chest.

"For what?" he returns in a soothing, yet slightly scolding voice as he starts to rock me with an effective and confident regularity telling me he's done this before. I feel the

remedy beginning to subtly take effect as the gentle motion he's creating starts working on my shakes. It's true it helps, but not nearly as much as the words coming in a steady stream from the man holding me closer and dearer than anyone else I know.

Lips nuzzle the top of my head as he tells me he's sorry. For what he's done, for what he's never done and should have done. What I'm hearing is deeply distressing; he evidently thinks he's hurt me somehow and it isn't true, well, okay, we've had a bit of a rough patch recently, but that doesn't have anything to do with what's happening between us at the moment or the stupid way I've been acting, even. None of it is his fault and I don't want him thinking he's to blame. I don't want to be responsible for causing him pain in any way.

Self-hatred for my sake is the last thing I want to bring him to and I try and tell him so. And then he stills every protest I'm trying to mount on his behalf with two simple words.

"Love you."

Suddenly nothing else...matters.

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I love him too, so damned much it hurts. That sounds ridiculously sappy, but it also happens to be true. He renders me utterly speechless as he wipes the last, lingering traces of tears from my face with deliberate, intimate tenderness and I have to look away. I'm embarrassed again, this time by the magnitude of my own emotion. I love him so much it scares me. Yet, I can't back away from it, any more than I can stop myself from touching him.

He seems to instinctively understand how much I have to *feel* him and thankfully, doesn't seem to mind. It's an uncontrollable compulsion, like his face has suddenly become specifically magnetic, an irresistible attractor to my hands, and other, other parts of me that hunger for contact just as desperately.

He has the most beautiful mouth. I'm shaking again, this time with quaking need as I run my tongue slowly across his lower lip and then press forward to complete the circuit.

"I love you, Jack."

Chemistry, physics, I sucked at science. However, I'm expecting my biology grade is going to soar as I don't seem to be sucking at sucking his face off.

Contemplating sucking other things has my mind definitely plummeting south. As he moves against me once more to remind me I'm not the only one expanding my horizons.

That's quite a flagpole you're packing there, Jack. I shiver with a jolt of delicious pleasure as I think about him firmly planting his standard in virgin territory. *I claim this ass in the name of Jack O'Neill?*

Well, we are peaceful explorers, after all, so why not? His tongue circles lazily about mine and we both give ourselves over to a few more secretive moments of the only kind of mutual discovery our current situation will allow.

Every sweet second carries within it the promise the adventure is far from over.

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"Daniel? Ride's over, Daniel. Wakey-wakey. It's time to go home."

What? Where? Oh. The teltak. We're still on the teltak. In the cargo bay. Jack. I fell asleep by his side, my head on his shoulder. His arm is around me, supporting me. Why - what happened?

Oh, oh wait a minute. Before I - we were - that is, at least, I *think* we were. I - I hope!

Oh God, tell me I didn't dream the whole thing! Please tell me it really happened. This isn't another one of the sick, cosmic jokes the universe is so fond of springing on me, it really did happen, I didn't just dream Jack holding me, kissing me, letting me touch his face, his hair, kiss his eyes, his lips. Loved me. He said he loved me, I heard him say it. I know I did. It all felt so real. It can't have been only a dream. I'll die if it was all a dream.

I can feel my breath coming in panicked gusts as the terror of uncertainty seizes me. We've stopped. The others are coming. No time now to find out the truth, but even if there was how would I ask - how can I?

"Not a dream, Daniel," Jack breathes into my ear as he quickly nuzzles it. "Take it easy, it's okay."

I don't know how he knew, but I want to cover him with kisses of gratitude for what he's just done. I regretfully realise I'm going to have to restrain these generous impulses just a little longer until we can both adjourn to a more mutually convenient venue. As fast as time, circumstances and the SGC will allow.

The look in his eyes as he helps me to my feet tells me I'm going to be naked the instant his front door closes. I don't have a problem with that. Nope, not me. More to the point, I'm so okay with it I hope the shock of discovering the extent of my agreement with any and every possible physical agenda he might be secretly harbouring doesn't kill him.

I have plans.

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## Jack

I hate to wake him when he's resting so peacefully, but I know Daniel better than I know myself sometimes. I want him to have a few moments of privacy before he has to face the world, want to be sure he's going to make it through all the usual post-mission hoopla. He's ridden out one hell of a storm.

"Daniel? Ride's over, Daniel. Wakey-wakey. Time to go home."

He lifts his head slowly, shakes it a little, goes through the usual 'where what who' you get used to off world. A little 'Jack!' moment in there too, as he stiffens and his eyes fly to mine. When you're right you're right. Nought to panic in sixty seconds. I've got less than that to squeeze in a little reassurance.

"Not a dream, Daniel," I breathe into an ear so perfect my lips are making contact before I can stop myself. "Take it easy, it's okay."

I'm on my feet in one smooth movement, reaching down to help Daniel up. His look of gratitude as he slips his hands into mine is one I meet with a look of my own, one I know barely touches this raging all-consuming need in me.

All for you, Daniel. Only for you. Denied you so long, denied myself. You'll *know* it's real when I'm buried inside you.

Teal'c joins us as Jacob touches down on the same runway we left - Jesus, less than a day ago. Ignoring me completely, he strides over to Daniel. I sense I'm in the way. Short of knocking me on my ass on the way past, the big guy couldn't make it more obvious.

My brother reaches out confidently, his huge hands settling on Daniel's shoulders. Teal'c's massive strength makes Daniel's slender form appear almost fragile. Appearances deceive. Daniel is strong in ways I've never equalled.

"All is well with you, Daniel?"

What exactly do you think I've been *doing* to him in here? Er - apart from making him cry, that is. Nothing *else* went on! Panic is a perfectly ordinary - Daniel? Hey! That's DanielJackson to you!

Daniel glances at me, then he lowers his eyes. There's a sultry little pout playing about his lips as he says demurely, "I will be." Another sidelong glance to me, up through his lashes.

"If you are not, O'Neill will answer to me."

Thanks. Brothers, huh? How come I forgot nobody pushes your buttons quicker or meaner than family? I register a complaint.

"Am I in the *room* here?"

"Regrettably, yes. Your presence is not required at this point, O'Neill. I request you remove yourself, so I may converse with Daniel."

Okay. I walked into that. He's sneaking under my radar pretty good these days. And that's Jackson. *Jackson*. DanielJackson. I gotta write that down?

I'm just about to retort when Daniel bats his eyes at me from over Teal'c's shoulder.

"Please, Jack?"

Do you have *any* idea what that *does* to me?

"I'd like to thank Teal'c for...for..." Daniel hints broadly is obliquely that my presence is no longer required.

"It is my honour," Teal'c assures him superbly.

"Jack?"

I've *got* to get you to stop doing that, at least in public. Don't lick your lips that way. I mean it! You make me think of *way* too many ways to respond in kind. Most of them involving getting you naked ASAP. Like *now*...What?

"What? Oh."

Smiling, too? Gimme a break here! What am I? Made of stone? Bad example. Maybe I *should* book for a while.

"I'll go."

I can't actually think of anything to go for but I wave a vague hand suggests I've still got enough blood in my brain to actually function, and wander off towards the airlock.

"Jack."

I turn back to see Daniel and Teal'c standing side by side, both with arms crossed over their chests and identically smug grins.

"Yeah?"

We hear unmistakable noises suggesting Jacob's arrival is imminent, so of course my archaeologist chooses this exact moment to bat his eyes again. And blow me a kiss.

I turn to Jacob with relief.

"Can I get a ride back with you, Sir?"

Daniel isn't a big one for belly laughs, but I hear a delicious chuckle that sends chills down my spine. I don't have to look behind to know an eyebrow is being cocked at me right now.

When, exactly, did I lose control of this situation?

"Sure thing, Colonel. Brought you this far. I'll never live it down if we lose you on base."

Ha ha. Sir. The best I can manage is a kind of sick smile.

"Head still hurting? Better get Doc Fraiser to check you out."

Sure I will. Ole' Doc...

Fraiser?

*Fraiser?*

Jesus, Mary and Joseph. How could I forget!

"Coming, Sam? Now I'm here on Earth, how about I take a little vacation? Spend some time with my daughter?"

"That'd be great, Dad."

I can't relieve Daniel of the terrible burden of his virginity in the Infirmary. Can I? No. No! I promised. Myself. Never *said*...No. They got *cameras*. No.

I smile at Carter but it's a solo effort.

Have I got fences to mend here? I was a little out of it for a while there. I she still steamed about the aspirin crack?

Carter walks past without so much as a glance in my direction.

More than the aspirin, huh? Guess it saves me taking out a full page ad in the Gazette about my new domestic arrangements. I feel a lot of Meaningful Talks looming up in my immediate future.

Maybe I should just hoof it back to base. I've got a choice of spontaneous combustion or a jeep ride colder than the plane ride I just took.

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"I think I should keep you in for observation, colonel."

'I think I should' is Doc Fraiser speak for 'I am going to do this. Quit your whining. You still dressed?'

Daniel has been hovering protectively by my side. I'm aware of him deflating; God knows he's been on the receiving end of that tone often enough.

Teal'c rises magnificently to the challenge. "May I suggest an alternative course of action? DanielJackson's methods were most efficacious in dramatically increasing the supply of blood to Colonel O'Neill's..."

Okay. I think I'm not the only one blushing here.

"...Brain."

Bastard. He did that on purpose. You'll get yours, Teal'c. Just you wait.

"Indian thing." I supply helpfully.

"Indian head massage." Daniel corrects. "It helped tremendously with the headache."

"An excellent idea, Daniel. Treat the cause without masking the symptoms. Still, I..."

Teal'c's grave voice slips smoothly under her guard, "Then may I suggest you release Colonel O'Neill to DanielJackson's care? He has proven himself more than capable of meeting Colonel O'Neill's needs."

Is it warm in here?

While Fraiser is distracted I elbow Daniel in the ribs and hiss at absolutely minimal volume, "Do the eye thing! The look."

Daniel looks absolutely blank so I bat my eyes at him. He brightens up, which is cute, but not any kind of material assistance in the current crisis.

"Just look pathetic!"

"What?"

“You want to sleep alone?”

This dire threat is all the motivation Daniel needs. He gives Janet the works with the big, soulful, pleading eyes, the pout, some crap about her writing stuff down for my care and feeding.

The Doc is made of stern stuff. Even Daniel’s best only works if he isn’t actually the patient. I think it’s working now. I get up.

“Colonel!”

Who, me? I’m fine. Just fine and dandy here. Just gonna...

“Jack.”

I sit back down. Did he just tell me to heel?

Heaving a tiny, wistful sigh he turns to me and says, “Catch you tomorrow, Jack. I guess I’ll just head back to my lab. I’ve been putting off translating those Mayan pictograms for far too long.”

I have a moment of panic before I pick up my cue. “Couple of hundred pages of print outs to get through, huh? Try not to work *all* night. Eat. That’s not supposed to be optional.”

The Doc’s eyes dwell thoughtfully on Daniel. If she keeps me, tonight she gets an unhappy colonel angsting all over the infirmary sharing his pain, and possibly an exhausted, malnourished archaeologist on her hands tomorrow.

Teal’c chimes in with perfect timing, “If supervision is required?”

Daniel says innocently, “I’d be *more* than happy!”

I guess he’s the only one who doesn’t realise Teal’c meant *me*. As we all carefully refrain from comment, I give a tiny shrug at the Doc. I’m not making any promises on the exhaustion, but I will feed him.

He shoots, he scores!

Home free. After a few more tests and those staggeringly detailed instructions. Daniel shamelessly abandons me to my fate and heads off to his office. He’s got a definite spring in his step, which I admire very much until the Doc takes ruthless advantage of my distraction and I find myself with a needle in my butt.

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"You're - you're in *love* with him!"

I've never heard Carter use that tone before. Never heard her so angry. Teal'c takes one measured step forward but I stop him.

"My mess."

He doesn't rush to agree, considers, then nods gravely. "I will speak with Major Carter later. You cannot take responsibility for what others feel, O'Neill. Only for what you feel. This is not a time for blame, but for resolution."

On that slightly obscure note he takes off and leaves me to it. I walk into Daniel's office and slowly, carefully, close the door. Both the kids are rooted to the spot when they see me. Daniel is pale, vibrating with anxiety and tension. Carter is flushed and mad as hell. It's to her I speak.

"Did I miss the good stuff?"

Daniel winces automatically at my tone and I see a good deal of comprehension in Carter's eyes. She knows that tone too, very well, only now it's directed at her and she doesn't like it one bit.

I coolly walk to Daniel's side of the desk, settle myself casually at his workbench. This is not the conversation I would have chosen to have with Carter, and I would certainly never have chosen Daniel as a participant. There are still things he doesn't know.

Carter is a good soldier. She doesn't miss the significance of me moving to Daniel's side. That's right. A subtle signal she's reading clear as day: you want him, major, you've got to get through *me* first.

Carter is also a damn good woman, one I care very deeply about. She's angry right now. It's understandable, but those feelings should and will be directed at me. They will be, once she has all the facts.

"It's okay to answer the question, Daniel," I say to him quietly.

"Yes. I'm in love with Jack."

"Sir?"

"I feel the same."

Her stricken face tells me she hadn't seen *that* coming. Daniel takes a hasty step forward, already reaching out, but she waves him off.

"Sorry, Sam, sorry."

He means it too. He'd never wilfully hurt another person, let alone someone he cares about as much as he cares about Carter.

"How - how long? Sir?"

"That's not your concern, Carter." I know a chill is creeping into my tone but that is not a question I want to answer.

"I disagree, sir. The team dynamic," she argues.

"Has been unaffected where you and Teal'c are concerned." My voice is glacial. We *all* know who's been affected. He's had the grace to forgive me, but me, I'm not so hot on the forgiveness stuff. I told Daniel I've loved him for a long time, but I do not want him to ever know how long. Let's just say the timing sucked.

"Jack, I agree with Sam. If we're going to...for the sake of the team...it's a matter of trust."

"Sir, whatever you say to me, it'll go no further. You can count on me for that. I just," she hesitates, "*need* to hear it."

They're both hurting, but they're double teaming me, habit ingrained from years together. They recognise it, hostility easing down a few notches between them. I'm glad to see it.

Of *course* I trust Carter.

I just can't answer the question. I'm not prepared to humiliate myself by owning up my first clue was when Urgo rewired us. I kept fantasising about undressing Daniel. I swear, it wasn't about sex, just slowly peeling away all the barriers between us. Him being physically naked was cidental. I didn't know what the hell to make of it all and couldn't get rid of the little - virus - quick enough. 'Course, then I had to have three months all alone to reach the kind of emotional epiphany even I couldn't ignore.

No sooner do I get back through the gate than...There are times I have come close to hating Daniel for not just turning and walking away when I so obviously didn't want him in my house. Our friendship has no foundation, but hey, on the bright side, I am in love with you! Right. There never was a right time after that. I buried those feelings deep and...If Daniel levelled an accusation of acting out at me now, I wouldn't be able to deny it.

Daniel is already carrying enough emotional baggage, I won't willingly add to it. I say simply, "I've felt this way a while."

I'm in a position of weakness here, so I go on the offensive.

"Carter, can you think of *one* single incidence where I have ever jeopardised your life, or Teal'c's life, in preference for Daniel's?"

The answer being a resounding no.

Unfortunately, Carter's horrified expression tells me she can think of at least one occasion where I nearly offed Daniel. Not quite the clinching argument I was hoping for, but I'll take whatever I can get.

Daniel's a bright guy. He sees me looking like I'm stuffed, Carter's wide eyes, connects the dots.

"I've never held you responsible for that! I made my own decisions. I knew what I was doing, I went in with my eyes open. I accepted responsibility for my own actions. Jesus, Jack, let it go. It worked out just fine. For everyone."

I shut them both down royally on that one. Now they're both pissed at me instead of each other. Things are starting to look...

"You'd rather die than lose me?"

Worse.

I see those quiet words of Carter's, so obviously directed to me, impact on Daniel. Knew this would come back and bite me on the ass one day. Should have told him at the time. I was wrong to exclude him. My motivations were for the best; I was trying to protect everyone on my team. Not the first time I've tried that and it's blown up in my face.

Bad example.

Carter's been heroically dignified 'til now, but this is too personal. I owe her the truth on this one.

"The absolute truth," I say emphatically. "You *know* that. I do care about you a lot more than I'm supposed to." I add deliberately, don't want Daniel leaping to any wrong conclusions here, "I feel the same about Teal'c. You guys are the only family I've got. I'd do *anything* to keep you safe."

I never said I loved her. I do, but not in the way she's...not the way I love Daniel.

She's too smart for me, proves it yet again. "You volunteered to be re-tested! You knew the risks, took them anyway..."

"I was mostly thinking of you, not me, but I..."

"Needed to control the agenda. One unanswered question leads to many more questions, Sir?" Carter snaps, her angry eyes glittering. "You kept Anise focused on your feelings for me so you didn't have to answer questions about your feelings for Daniel. Your answer was true enough for me but it wouldn't have been enough for Daniel, would it?"

I can only shake my head. They would have questioned *everything* until they were absolutely certain we weren't zaytark. Everything. I wasn't prepared to pay the price for conclusive proof. Wasn't even prepared to deal with the truth myself.

I've watched the footage of my second test on the machine. I can hardly bear to see the misery on my face, or the reluctance in my voice as I reveal feelings should always have stayed private. It hurt me at the time, but it's hurting Carter more now, to know she was the lesser of two evils.

I didn't do anybody justice in that sordid business. I can't miss the disappointment in her eyes. She's had enough. The fight has gone out of her as she stares and stares at me. Trying to understand how she could have read me so wrong? Trying to figure out how Jack O'Neill could fall in love with a man? A swift glance to Daniel is all the answer she needs. Jack O'Neill is in love with one hell of a man and she knows it now.

She also knows now I was shit scared all along, I felt so deeply for him. Took all the fear and anger out on him, too. Bet she's starting to wonder what Daniel sees in me, though. What she saw. Look your fill, Carter. It isn't pretty. If Daniel wasn't the man he is, I'd stand no chance with him.

She understands the consequences of me pursuing a relationship with Daniel, understands I've made an informed, irrevocable decision and will take the consequences. I'm risking my place on the team for Daniel, but I wouldn't do it for her.

That's one realisation too many. She heads off toward the door without another word, but Daniel reaches her before she can pull it open.

"Sam. Are you okay...are...are we okay?"

"We are. I'm going to need a little time."

"Carter?"

She freezes, won't look back at me.

"I won't let the team down, Sir. You can count on me."

It isn't what I was asking but I realise it's all the answer I'm going to get right now. She and I are going to need a lot more work as friends than we will as teammates.

She pauses for a beat, and then she does glance back at me, eyes very bright. "So I guess this means you won't be calling me Sam."

A fleeting touch to Daniel's outstretched hand and she's gone. A strong, honourable woman and a damned good friend. I'm truly sorry it went down this way. Fear, desperation, loneliness. I took it all out on the person I loved, and accepted unquestioning

support where I should have refused it. I've got to accept the consequences of both those failings now.

I sneak a glance at Daniel. He's truly sorrowful for Carter's sake, but when he meets my eyes, I see growing confidence, not blame. This was affirmation he wasn't expecting. I risk a tiny smile and feel a load lifting when I get a hint of one back.

He closes the door again and walks straight back to me, into my waiting arms, hugs me as hard as he can. I hug him back and once again my hands fail to defy gravity. They reach their natural level, which is exactly the same level as Daniel's butt, by some bizarre coincidence.

"I hated that, Jack. I never meant to hurt Sam. Or anyone."

"You didn't. I did. Let it be, Daniel. Don't fret about Carter. She wants to stay with the team, she's not blaming you, she'll get over this. Teal'c is going to have a talk with her, too."

"What about you?"

"I've got a lot to make up for, but believe me, it's nothing compared to what I should be making up to you."

He's scowling at me. My hands are pointedly removed and he steps back. "Get off the cross, Jack," he tells me sternly. "Somebody needs the wood."

It shocks a laugh out of me. Daniel isn't big on self-pity but he's not usually so pithy.

"Let's go home, Jack."

"We putting this behind us then? Moving on? You want to talk some more?" We've covered a lot of ground today, if he needs to talk, I guess I'll have to.

"No. I've waited quite long enough for you. I want to have sex. Lots and lots of sex. *Hot* sex. If that's okay with you?"

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Daniel isn't happy. He's pouting and giving me attitude as I unlock my front door.

"We don't have to rush it, that's all I'm saying, Daniel. There's other things we can do."

"I want..."

I wave him in and he stalks past me, head held high.

"I know what you want! Jeez, you picked your time to tell me. That's a hairpin bend. Lucky there wasn't any other traffic, that's all I can say."

"Wuss. We've got three days medical leave, thanks to Janet. I want to spend them in bed with you, with *you* in..."

I slam the door behind me, yank him into my arms and stick my tongue down his very receptive throat as we stagger down the stairs and in the general direction of the sofa. We tumble down in a tangle of arms and legs, clashing lips and teeth.

I am *so* not going to win this argument. I kiss him until I'm breathless, but he's got astonishing lung capacity. I'm still wheezing as he insists, "I want the whole nine yards, Jack. Nothing less will satisfy me."

"N...nine..."

"I've seen you in the showers."

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## Daniel

Jack gives me far too much credit. He's made an erroneous assumption, based on the very gratifying effect it apparently has on him, I possess some mysterious ability to make friends and influence people with something he calls 'the look.' To hear *him* tell it I have but to bat my eyes and the sternest of hearts is putty in my hands.

While I know from recent empirical evidence this does indeed hold true for certain Air Force colonels, certain hard-hearted Air Force physicians are proving to be made of much sterner stuff.

Believe me, I'm giving it my all. I've done the math. One Daniel Jackson minus one colonel stuck in the infirmary for the night adds up to nobody getting any.

I really hate math, too.

Maybe I should try crying.

I settle for extortion. Janet knows a threat when she hears one and decides to relent on letting Jack leave rather than risk contributing to the future possible ill health of one of her other charges. Hey, everyone knows I need a keeper. Let me have him, please, or I can't be responsible for the consequences.

I know it's hitting beneath the belt, but hey, she started it.

And speaking of hitting below the belt, I...I have to leave now. Yes, Janet, hearing you, hearing every word you're saying. I'll do it, Uh huh. Swear to God, he couldn't be in safer hands. More eager hands. Willing hands. *Frustrated* hands.

I really, *really* have to go now.

I mumble something about needing to get something in my office before we leave and beetle out of there as fast as my shaking legs can carry me. I don't need a damned thing from my office, I just needed to put some sudden space between me and Jack. He was just looking...so...so - oh God... and I couldn't stop thinking about him. And me. Him and me. Together. No clothes. And...stuff. Doing...stuff. Lots and *lots* of...stuff...

Oh yeah. This worked. This is *much* better.

I hope Jack comes and gets me soon so we can get the hell out of here because if I do much more thinking I'm definitely going to be starting without him.

It seems there are a few *other* impulses I've been keeping locked down and bolted for far too long, and now they're out too they're not playing fair either.

I told Jack I was going to my office so that's where I'm heading. I briefly consider the idea of taking a cold shower but hopefully don't have the time.

I guess I'll just have to grin and bear it.

Stop it! Just...stop it!

"Daniel! I want to talk to you!"

Sam's voice stops me cold in the middle of opening my office door. If her tone wasn't enough to elicit a fair amount of apprehension, the sight of her barrelling down the hall toward me definitely makes my former pressing necessity for a cold shower a thing of the past.

"Sam," I croak as I paste a weak smile on my face and try to look like I'm glad to see her. I'm thinking this is another instance where my supposedly 'one look conquers all' blue-eyed charm does not apply.

She strides up to me, hands on her hips, chin jutting out aggressively. "You want to do this out here in the hall?" she challenges.

"Not especially," I sigh as I push the door open and wave her in. She stalks in like she owns the place and turns on me before I've even got the door completely closed.

"You want to explain to me what that was all about back there?" she bristles. I don't look at her as I cross the room and find a chair. Making sure the desk is between us.

"All what?" I return with a resigned sigh. It's not the most brilliant comeback in the world, but then I'm going in not really trying because I haven't got the heart for this discussion. I'm no psychic, but then I don't need to be to know someone in this room is going to get hurt in the not too distant future. I don't want to be on either end of the occurrence.

"I don't appreciate being shoved aside," Sam snaps. "None too subtly, I might add. I'm his friend, too, Daniel. Not to mention being his second in command, in case you've forgotten. I had just as much right to be there with him as you did. It was my place to be there. I was concerned. The colonel had just been through a terrible ordeal. He might have needed..."

"He had everything he needed," I coolly reply, and then desperately wish I hadn't, but it's out before I realise what I've said.

Oh boy, look at her face. I thought I was in trouble before but now, I'm really in for it.

"And what is *that* supposed to mean?" she asks with an edge on her voice that could slice through the iris like a laser. Kinda goes with the entirely pissed and spoiling for a fight sparkle in her angry eyes.

Well, she might want to scrap, but I sure don't. Unfortunately, I might not be able to avoid it. There's nothing I can say now without telling her what she can't know.

"Exactly what are you saying, Daniel? What's going on?" She's way angrier, more demanding. I've never seen her this incensed. At least, not with me.

"Nothing, Sam. Nothing's going on," I try to assure her, placate her, hating myself for the bald-faced lie I've just uttered. While hoping to be able to pull it off, for once in my life.

"Oh yeah?" she counters smoothly, her face alight with smug triumph.

Shit, she's seen right through me. Knows she's got me. Oh God, please just kill me now.

"Then why won't you look at me while you're talking to me?" she counters as she crosses her arms and glowers at me.

Nope. I still suck at the lying thing. Nuts. Okay, new game plan. Where do we go from here? She knows I'm hiding something, but she can't know what. So how do I put her off the scent? Defuse her with a shameless appeal for understanding? Try to draw on what might be the last gasps of our friendship?

Crying?

Begging?

I finally look at her with what I hope is an entreating expression. "Listen, Sam," I wheedle, "do we have to do this right now? We've been pretty worried about Jack and Teal'c and we're all a little stressed. I know I'm feeling a bit frayed, you must be too. Can't we just chalk the whole thing up to a stress reaction and forget about it?"

*Please?* Cut me a break here, Sam, for God's sake. You know I'd do it for you.

"No!" she exclaims, her eyes flashing. "I'm not going to forget about it. I can't. I'm deeply concerned about your behaviour on the teltak, Daniel. You were acting so strangely. Not like you at all. I need to know why and I need to know what's going on. Mission protocol -"

I'm on my feet before I can stop myself. "This has *nothing* to do with mission protocol and you *know* it! Besides, it's none of your business!"

Shit, did I really say that to her? At the top of my lungs? Oh yeah. I sure did. She's staring at me, her mouth set in a tight, white line. Oh boy, this is going to get ugly.

"That's where you're wrong," she informs me with cold calmness. "You've been a member of SG-1 long enough I *shouldn't* have to tell you this, but just in case it's *slipped* your mind - when the colonel is incapacitated I'm in command. I'm the one in charge, Daniel. Everything that happens on the mission is my business. Especially when it comes to the colonel."

Ouch! Drawing the line, she's drawing the line, daring me to step over. Don't. Don't go there. Don't do it, Daniel...

"You only work with him, you *don't* own him!" I hurl back at her.

Way to go, stupid, you went! Take a bow, moron.

"Oh, and you think you do?" she smirks, and then freezes. She's staring at me, her mind ticking over as she sees something in my face I know I shouldn't be showing her. Her eyes dissect me, I feel flayed alive and laid open to the bone as she does her own quick calculations, adding one and one and getting the answer I've been trying not to give her.

Getting the last thing she was expecting, from her stunned and disbelieving expression.

After all, she is way smarter than me when it comes to math. A fine time for it to slip my mind.

Her eyes widen in something akin to horrified dismay. She's close to stuttering with surprise and indignation. "You're - you're in *love* with him! She finally blurts.

Oh crap. Oh God. Oh Jack, if ever I needed you, it's right now.

Talk about the nick of time. There he is, like always. Just when I need him the most.

"Did I miss the good stuff?" Jack innocently inquires of the room as he ambles in right on cue like he hasn't got a care in the world.

My hero.

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We talk.

It's honest, it's painfully frank, and at times just downright painful for each of us in our turn. It's also no small testament to who we are and what we've come to mean to each other it's happening at all. There aren't too many subordinates who could speak to their CO the way Sam is talking to Jack - or get the respect and dignity of the uncompromising and possibly *very* compromising truth he's giving her back in return.

Neither of us can deny her that. She's certainly earned the right to know the score. She gets it. She asked for it. No holds barred. It's not what she wanted to hear, however, and I can tell from her reactions she wasn't in the least bit prepared for, or even expecting half of what she's finally finding out.

But I can also see our trust hasn't been misplaced. Because as hurt as she is by the truth, she can't help but be impressed by getting it from both of us. Because it tells her, above all, we *do* trust her.

Maybe Jack can't give her what she thought she wanted, but he can give her the next best thing. It might not be much of a consolation now, but I'm thinking, with a little time and understanding, it will be.

By the time she leaves she's not exactly prepared to do a dance of joy to celebrate our impending union, but she's willing to try to learn to live with it. As well as allow if she can't have what she thought she was eventually going to get, she can find a way to be happy for me that I can.

Eventually.

The road to renewed understanding between her and Jack isn't going to be *quite* as smooth, but that's not my concern. He's going to have to face what he's done and deal with it on his own. He'll get it sorted out with Sam some day, but she'll make him work damned hard for it.

It'll be good for him. Character building. I'll have a front row seat. It'll be fun.

Speaking of which...

The feeling of a pair of large, warm, very possessive hands clutching my ass brings me back to much more immediate - and potentially pleasurable concerns.

Can we go home, now?

Please?

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Jack's hands are clamped about the steering wheel. He's holding onto it as if the vehicle will fall apart around us if he relaxes his grip for just a second. His eyes are riveted to the road. He hasn't spared me a glance or a word since we left the mountain over ten minutes ago.

I'm feeling a little ignored, and more than slightly naughty. I don't have a steering wheel to occupy *my* hands and you know what they say about the devil making work for idle ones.

"Daniel!" Jack squeaks. "Have a heart! Driving, here!"

Well, will you look at that. One of my hands is in Jack's lap. Oh my. However did *that* happen?

"You can leave it there. If you want." Jack licks his lips, darting a swift, sidelong glance at me before wrenching his eyes back to the road again. "Just...just don't move it around, or anything. Not while I'm driving."

I can't believe what I'm seeing. A warm, red flush of colour is moving up his neck and spreading across his face. Blushing! Jack O'Neill is - blushing!

"Whatcha thinking about?" I archly inquire. I know it's awful of me, but I have to ask.

'Ah, listen, Daniel,' he starts in a very uncharacteristically uncertain tone. "Don't get me wrong, here, what I'm saying does *not* in any way mean I've changed my mind....about you...or - or us... or anything, but I've been thinking. Maybe we should, maybe we should just sorta, take things slow to start. Some things, anyway."

"What sort of 'things' are we talking about here, Jack?" Oh no you don't Jack O'Neill! You promised me sex, and that's what you're giving me. You are *so* going to give it to me.

"You know," he shrugs. "Things."

"No I don't know, Jack. Spell it out for me."

"Aha!" he crows and waggles a triumphant finger at me. " See! You see! That's why!"

Oh great. My big, strong, considerate, infuriating colonel is going all protective on me. Still thinking of me as that innocent babe in the woods he has to look out for and save from himself.

I think it's high time I shattered some of his deeply cherished but entirely erroneous illusions.

"Jack, for crying out loud, give me a little credit, here!" I grumble at him. "What do you think I am, twelve?"

"God, I hope not!" he snorts and flashes me a rakish grin, melting my heart and encouraging me to incite him all the more. "I'm not into children."

"But you're going to be into me," I grin right back at him.

"Je-sus!" he shouts as he briefly wrestles with the wheel. "Don't *do* that!" he chides me and then sets his jaw. "Not saying I don't want to, Daniel, but do you have any idea, I mean, you haven't? Right?"

"No," I tell him truthfully. "I haven't. But I'm not exactly clueless. I know what it's all about. I've done my homework. I've - I've read stuff."

Well, I have.

"You have?" Jack's expression is both incredulous and amused. "Read stuff, have you?"

"As a matter of fact, I have!" I retort indignantly. "I've been curious about," I pause, "things lately. I make it a point to keep myself informed. It never hurts to learn new things. Broaden one's horizons."

"Jesus, Daniel, reading about it isn't the same as doing it. Trust me on this one!"

"Oh and suddenly you're some kind of expert about this. My, my, isn't this an interesting piece of information!"

"It was a long time ago and that's all I'm saying about it," Jack grumbles as he glares out the windshield. "Hey! Asshole!" he yells suddenly at a car picking this particular moment to commit some sort of driving infraction right in front of us. "Where did you learn to drive! Did you see that! They're handing out licenses to any moron these days!"

"I trust you, Jack," I promise him softly. "I love you. I want you to love me. The full meal deal. And yes, I definitely want the super size fries with it as well."

"Aw, Daniel," Jack sighs. "I don't think, I mean, you might think you want it, but maybe you should think again. It's not everything it's cracked up to be. I know what I'm talking about."

"Give me a break, Jack," I snap. "I'm not stupid, and I wasn't born yesterday."

"That's *not* what I meant!"

"Let me finish!" I snipe back at him. "Your opinion of me to the contrary, I have been around the block a few times. Hell, I've been all over the damned galaxy, need I remind you! After what I've seen and done, I've got to tell you, I am not the least bit concerned or afraid of the prospect of being drilled up the ass by the man I love."

"Oh, now *there's* a nice image!" Jack's grin has turned wolfish in spite of himself.

"I have more."

"I'm sure."

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We're here, he's mine and while we're a little behind on the timetable for the getting naked part, at least we're horizontal. Great place to start. The other technicalities will be sorting themselves out in short order.

He's crushing me into the cushions, heaving hungrily into me as his former concerned reluctance evaporates before my eager show of confidence. I'm now fully assured I'll be getting everything that will soon be coming inside me.

Clothes. We're still wearing clothes. This won't do at all.

I'm fumbling with his shirtfront as his mouth fumbles down my neck. Sucking my skin, frantically licking down to the base of my throat. I groan as a sudden shock of pleasure makes me shudder and thrust myself up into him.

He growls and flings himself up from me, grabbing me by the shirt and hauling me with him. His dark eyes are wild with desire, burning with just the right hint of dangerous.

"Be careful what you wish for, 'cause you're definitely getting it," he chuckles as he pulls me toward the bedroom.

It's about time.

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**Jack**

“Be careful what you wish for, ‘cause you’re definitely getting it.” I should not be laughing at Daniel, but Jeez, *read* about it? Whatever next? Me, I just went ahead and did it.

I grab Daniel’s shirt and haul him off towards the bedroom, although haul isn’t quite the right word, ‘cause by the time we get to the stairs Daniel is in front of me.

“Eager beaver.”

Daniel is sticking his tongue out at me so of course I have to stop him right there, a couple of steps up, and kiss him. I’m trying for a light nip of his tongue but then he throws himself at me. Literally. I not only catch him, I get a good grip under his butt and lift him. Daniel’s astonished eyes stare down into mine as I laugh. Then he eagerly wraps his legs around my waist and lets out a delighted yell.

“‘Whoo hoo!’, Doctor Jackson? I’m not familiar with that language.” I speak into his chest, which frustrates his efforts to kiss me. Next thing I know, he gets a good grip on my ears and hauls my face up to meet his.

“How ‘bout speaking in tongues, Jack?”

He *ravages* my mouth, his tongue is everywhere, manic, dipping into every crevice in my teeth, swiping my palette, pushing down for my tonsils. Lot of moaning going on too, not all of it from him. I like to feel my linguist getting so much job satisfaction. Eventually he gives up on trying to extract my tonsils and offers up a brief performance evaluation.

“Holy shit!”

I’m still doing the wheezing thing when a look of deep cunning enters his eyes.

“Bedrooms are, frankly, overrated, Jack.”

Right.

“You ever do it standing up?”

“Not the *first* time, Daniel,” I say sternly.

Coaxing fingers slip into my hair. I have to be even more stern. “*No*, Daniel.” I get an Oscar winning pout, trembling lips, hurt little boy eyes, the works. My vertebrae are fusing; I need to put him down before we end up on my ass.

“How ‘bout on the stairs then? The bedroom is *miles* away.”

In exactly the position he wants. He needs to be distracted. Fortunately, I’m up to the task.

"If you let me put you down I'll tell you about my P3R118 dream. It's kind of a...wet...dream."

He's down before I get 'dream' out, hooked completely by 'wet', and steamed as hell.

"I *asked* if you had the same dream! About the pool of shimmering water. You said your dreams were about other things!" Daniel accuses furiously.

I take him firmly by the hand and lead him up the stairs.

"Actually, I said 'About you?' Subtle clue there, Daniel. Freudian slip? Ring any bells?"

This gets us onto the landing.

"Oh! Well, what other kind of wet...ooh!"

It takes him a while, if I distract him with context, but he usually gets there in the end.

"Which reference sources have you been dipping into, Daniel?" I enquire brightly. "The junior encyclopaedia of sex? How 'bout that Plato guy? Got an FAQ section does he? Handy hints? Email the author?"

"Bastard."

He gives me a sulky look but brightens up as he sees how close we are to the bedroom. In fact, he picks up the pace and we end up double timing it the rest of the way.

"I did dream about a pool of shimmering water, you and me *in* the pool of shimmering water."

"And?"

"We were doing it standing up."

"Ooh!"

If I didn't love him already, the sneaky, lust filled look he shoots me under his lashes would knock me clean over the edge. "Forget it, Daniel," I say meanly. "You do *not* get the same effect in a bathtub."

"Even if you -"

Jeez. No wonder I was so confused in that hellhole. The Urgo thing threw me for a loop the first time I fell for Daniel. The whole buoyancy thing added to a naked, needing Daniel, it's all too damn much for me.

“No!” I roar.

I should be asking Daniel if he’s sure he wants to do this, but given he’s almost dancing with excitement, it seems a tad redundant.

“Let me undress you, Daniel?”

He gives me a ‘will it take long?’ look and I melt him with a gentle stroke of his cheek, “A long held, very private fantasy.”

True enough, but I’m very conscious he hasn’t had real sex for so long...*years*...we need to calm things down or he’ll be coming before we get going.

A tender little smile and he’s toast, putting himself completely into my hands.

I slowly, reverently, unbutton his shirt, time and care taken over every single individual button. Ease the shirt back over his shoulders until it pools at his wrists. Then I lift each palm to my lips before I loosen the cuff and let the shirt fall. I think he was expecting me to be all over him, but like I said, this isn’t about sex.

Stripping away the barriers between us, worshipping every inch of his body. I love him to distraction and I want it to show.

I work his belt buckle loose, unbutton, start to ease his zipper down. I can’t help but notice something is missing.

Daniel is innocence personified, “I know how you hate a long debriefing, Jack. Just trying to help you out.”

He helps out a little more as a bit of wriggling frees him of his sneakers, which he promptly kicks across the room. With panache. I wince and he jumps as they achieve escape velocity and impact loudly on my closet door.

Daniel’s body language then insists effect has nothing to with cause, not when it comes to his sneakers. No matter what the laws of physics say. With just a hint of impudent, ‘so there’ thrown in for good measure.

Just for that I decide to give Daniel a hands on demonstration of effect, and see how easy it is to unzip another guy’s pants just by slipping your finger inside, then slowly, slowly pulling it down. It works, the zipper comes apart tooth by tooth. Admittedly, it makes the other guy whimper uncontrollably as he feels your skin against his heated, velvety hardness for the first time ever. Makes him lean his head against your shoulder and bite you as the hardness swells. And swells.

Daniel sighs when I free his *very* eager erection and slide my hands under the cloth to knead his buttocks, then push the pants down, my hands stroking down his butt in slow

steady sweeps, down the backs of his thighs, his knees, calf muscles. The pants pool on his bare feet, which I lift and free.

My hands rest for a moment on the tops of his feet, then I stroke up his shins, knees, the front of his thighs now. Such long, long legs. Rest my hands over his hipbones, thumb gently massaging his tiny appendix scar. I glide my fingers up his taut, flat abdomen, mapping smoothly ridged muscles. Up across his chest, the palms of each hand resting over his nipples. Then up to his shoulders. My fingers gentle at his throat, then trailing along his jaw line.

I learn every contour of his face, astonished by the softness of his skin. The luscious lips, kissing my fingers as I caress. I trace the arch of each brow, feel the flutter of his eyelashes against the lightest of touches by my fingertips. Work slow circles along his cheekbones. Finally slide my hands into his hair. As silky as the rest of him.

Every perfect inch of him. From head to toe, he's flawless elegance. Every mark of life on his body fits, feels right to me. So responsive, so sensual, offering himself up to me as he leans into my touch.

"Beautiful." I sigh.

Daniel shakes his head at me. "You are." He tells me softly.

I think he's nuts, but it's a delusion I find I can live with. I've got him naked in the sweetest way I could think of. No nerves, fear or embarrassment. His eyes are totally dilated, he's trembling with love and frustrated desire. To be honest, I think he's already had all the foreplay he can take. He *needs* release.

I can see he's wondering how the hell he's going to last long enough to return the compliment, undress me.

"Daniel, don't know about you, but I'm going to explode if we don't get horizontal real soon. How 'bout I just get myself out of these and you can feel me up to your heart's content on the bed? You mind? Not as young as I used to be!"

"N-no!"

I blithely ignore the relief in his voice, "Scoot over to the bed then. You can worship and adore me just as easily from over there."

This gets me a chuckle and gives me a chuckle as he dives onto the bed. I can't remember how long it is since I've seen Daniel this happy or, er, stimulated. Not to say awed, as I rapidly undress.

I'm forty-four, kid, nothing to write home about.

The glow in his eyes is making me giddy, I want to tell him I was kidding about the worship thing, anything, to cover up the rush of emotion I feel heating my cheeks as I realise Daniel Jackson thinks I'm the most amazing, beautiful thing he's ever seen in his life.

Oh, and, by the way, why am I still all the way over here when I should be all the way over there with him, having sex or something?

I trot over and dive on top of him, get comfortable, which necessitates quite a lot of wriggling and a lot of touching from Daniel, which I find very exciting to be honest. He seems to have more pairs of hands than me at any given time and he shows his appreciation for my humble body so enthusiastically I just lie back and let him have it.

Eventually, I realise I'm enjoying it too much and flip him gently onto his back. Back to the wriggling as I get comfortable again. Daniel gasps as he feels my full weight settling on him, his hands clamp to my butt as he starts to thrust up against me.

I don't think he has it in him to be subtle right now. He's squirming beneath me, every part of him trying desperately to maintain contact with every part of me. At all times.

I cheat outrageously and nudge his thighs apart, my erection taking a slow, deep glide against his. I get a very deep moan and then his legs lift and lock around the small of my back. I obligingly start to rock my hips and he pushes back against me with frenzied eagerness. His fingers are digging into my spine, flexing in time to my thrusts.

He reaches up and we kiss passionately, deeply, my tongue pulsing against his, matching the rhythm of my hips. Unfortunately, the moment I have to take a breath, Daniel blind sides me.

"In-inside. You pr-promised!"

I don't argue. I do however, stop moving, which annoys him intensely. I guess he wasn't so horny he wouldn't work out this was an ambush, pure and simple.

"Daniel, do you feel this?" I wriggle my hips just a bit. "You work out why I didn't actually need any fiddling under the hood? The motor was kinda running already. Why don't we just take the edge off..."

"No. In case you've missed it, I'm throwing myself at you. So damn well take me! Do it! Now!"

"My, I can almost hear those violins."

Daniel's eyes and voice plead with me, "Love me, Jack. Just...love me."

Okey dokey. I roll away and pad over to my bureau to retrieve the lubricant I bought. On a purely speculative basis of course. Daniel watches me like an insanely inquisitive hawk every step of the way.

Busted.

"All right already. So I've been wondering about," I trail off, wondering how to phrase this. "Stuff."

"Liar." Daniel looks endearingly smug as I climb back on the bed and stretch out at his side.

"Fantasising obsessively then." I snarl. I liberally coat my finger with the lube and scoot down his body.

"Er...Jack? While you're down there, just keep your mouth to yourself! I don't trust you an inch."

"Well, it's not gentlemanly to boast, but you're about to trust me with *way* more than that."

"Jack, trust me on this, it would be a *really* bad idea to - touch - anything else in the neighbourhood. Just go for it. You know? The finger up my...Jack!"

"Knock knock!" I chuckle malevolently. I've already eased the very tip of my finger inside him, hence the shocked gasp. My free hand immediately starts to massage his abdomen, working in deep, soothing circles.

"Just relax, Daniel. Push down against me. I may be knocking, but you've got to let me in."

"I know," Daniel snarls. "I *told* you. I've been reading up on this. The most sensitive erogenous zone on the body. I just have to stay relaxed and it will be *wonderful*."

I feel him relaxing against me so I push my finger all the way in. I hear a definite gulp. He says dreamily, "Wonderful. Ful-"

As I scrape his prostate, he arches off the bed yelling my name.

"Ful-"

And again.

Silence.

"I'll be good, Daniel. You were saying?"

“Ful-fulfilling.”

I ease out my finger, which makes him sigh bitterly, then I’m back with two lubed fingers. Go right back to the soothing massage as I slowly ease double the fun inside him.

“And how was your reading on the subject of pain?”

Daniel tells me with serene confidence, “There won’t be any. It’s down to love and trust. We’ve got that.”

I guess that was what was missing for me when I tried this, then. It hurt like *hell*. Strictly a one shot deal on the receiving end. I’m not about to fill Daniel in on my occasionally, enthusiastically, misspent youth. Or early career. I defy anybody to last two months at a listening post in Greenland without any kind of stress relief. Daniel just gets to enjoy the fruits of a lot of corrected mistakes from way back when. In some ways this is a first for me too. I’ve had a lot of easy sex but never made love to a man I’m in love with.

I’m moving my fingers easily inside him now, scraping his prostate with every stroke. He’s terrifyingly tight, but he’s also open, willing and wantonly rocking his hips. My massaging hand has slipped down to rub and fondle his erection instead, which gives him something exciting to play with at either end of his thrusts. The most delightful moans of appreciation are echoing freely round my bedroom.

“Ready for best of three?”

“Mmm. Hmm.”

I interpret that to mean ‘yes, the sooner the damn better’, ease carefully out of him Lube up, and slowly rock back in three fingers.

“Back to this informative reading matter. You have any preference for position?” Some are easier than others, especially when you’re new to...

“Mmm. On my back.”

“So, let me get this straight here. First time for us, first *ever* time for you. We’re forgetting about gentle and sensible, we’re striking out confidently for maximum penetration instead? Just want to be clear. Are you nuts?”

“Horny. Won’t be satisfied until I’ve taken every *single* inch.”

I have to swallow convulsively. Thanks for that image, kid. Resistance is clearly futile. He wants what he wants and he wants it *now*.

He’s killing me here, moving urgently against my fingers, desperate for more, deeper, harder. He’s as ready as he’s going to be. I’ve been more than ready for a while. I withdraw again and reach up to grab a pillow, kiss him hard while I’m in the general

vicinity, scoot back down and settle the pillow under his butt. I lube myself lavishly and have to ease just that bit more into him. Then I nudge his thighs and he lifts his legs and wraps them high around my back. He's breathtakingly supple.

"Any final demands?"

"Make it last forever, Jack."

No pressure or anything.

"Love and trust, huh, Daniel?"

"Absolutely."

I guide myself to him and push in as he pushes down to meet me. Our eyes are locked, each of us determined to share this, see exactly the power we have over the other. Love and trust. After a moment of absolute stillness I feel him relax around me and I can rock sweetly in.

He groans and arches his back. "Oh, God, Jack!"

I wait until he asks me, "More."

I push a little deeper and hold myself still as he adjusts. He's shuddering, astounded by the sensations arcing through his body. His eyes are awed as he nods, and I thrust in again.

"Ja-ack!" He bites his lip and urges me on, "Deeper!"

I thrust and we wait, thrust and wait until he gets all he wanted, every single inch of me sheathed in the hottest, tightest, silkiest welcome I've ever had.

I carefully lower my full weight onto him, the shift in position making him whimper again, then I can take the kiss he offers up to me. We lie that way for a very long time, arms around one another, kissing deeply, lips and tongues in constant gentle motion. First one of us leading the kiss, then the other. Daniel is the sweetest, most tender kisser I've ever imagined.

Finally, the moment I've been waiting for. He moves against me, wanting and ready for more. I withdraw and thrust back into him, a long, easy glide.

"Ja-ack, oh God, oh...love you. Love me."

"I do love you, Daniel. I'm loving you right now."

Another long, easy glide. And another. Another. I take my time, if Daniel wants this to last, I will make it last as long as it takes to give him the pleasure he craves. As I thrust

into him, over and over, he begins to move down to meet me, tentatively at first. Once he realises this only increases the pleasure, he tries to counterpoint every stroke.

“Easy, Daniel, easy. Slow and gentle.”

“Feels so-o good, Jack. So-o deep. Feeling it all over me now. Everywhere. Read it but...different...feeling. God, Jack!”

I’ve altered the angle of my thrusts, the gentle massage of his prostate becomes a scrape, shooting pleasure through him. He arches under me, moaning helplessly, trembling in every limb.

His eyes are dazed, overwhelmed with ecstasy and pride. I’m not hiding how much love I feel or just how much pleasure he’s giving me as I move deep inside him. He wanted me to love him, he wanted to make love. There’s all the difference in the world between making love and having sex. The difference is glowing in his eyes and his brilliant smile, in his mouth as we kiss over and over again. I make sure he sees it plastered all over my face too.

I’m feeling a tightness now, unbearable heat, know I won’t last much longer. A shiver runs through me and into Daniel as I begin to move against him with desperate urgency, must feel like I’m reaching his heart I’m so deep inside him. He’s almost thrashing on the pillow now, totally consumed by sensation. I go to reach between us but he stops me, “Don’t need it. Feeling too much, Jack.”

He’s reaching orgasm just from the sensations I’m arousing inside him, and Christ, aren’t I just smug enough to get off on that! Literally. He chooses this exact moment to drag his nails the length of my spine as he convulses beneath me, one endless, groaning “Ja-aack!” torn from him.

I find myself howling his name as the pleasure crashes through me and takes me with it.

I’m not aware of anything for a long time except the wildly beating heart beneath my own and hands sweeping up and down my back. I realise he’s not going anywhere while I’m still buried to the root inside him.

“Jack!”

“Not going far, just getting us both comfortable.”

I carefully pull out of him and roll us onto our sides in a warm tangle of limbs, Daniel wrapped in my arms. He’s glowing, sweat trickling down his face and spiking his hair. Eyes smug, and swollen lips curved into a satisfied smile. Utterly sated. I’m thoroughly enjoying the possessive way he can’t bear to let me get too far away from him.

“Love you, Jack.”

"Love you too, Daniel." Contrary to popular opinion, I am not some hairy-assed Neanderthal who falls asleep the instant I've come. I like to cuddle and talk too.

"You should get some rest, Jack."

My instinct for danger rarely fails me. I'm snuggled up to the original Mr Sensitive here. He wants to roll over and go to sleep? I think not.

"Why?"

"You're going to need *all* your strength. Quite soon."

"For?"

"Well, you felt so wonderful inside me, honestly, it was everything I'd dreamed it would be."

I'm not dumb enough to fall for soulful eyes at their widest and most innocent, or that heartlessly dishonest little boy voice.

"So? Spit it out!"

"And you seemed to be having such a good time too..."

I think I know where this is going.

"It seems only fair," he's the voice of sweet, wheedling reason. "I return the compliment!"

I'm utterly resigned to my fate at this point. Look how well I did in the last argument. I kiss the beaming, fatuous smile clean off his face. Jesus, I've created a monster. How soon is quite soon?

"Be gentle with me."

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Daniel

"Innocent, Jack?" I taunt him as I push my fingers deeply inside him, making him groan.

"Don't know my way around, Jack?" I drive my point home with another thrust, hitting the happy button and making him howl.

"Some things you just can't learn out of a book, Jack?"

"Okay, okay, you're good, it's good, oh God, it's really, really good," he gasps as his body spasms again in response to my intimate ministrations.

"So, I'm taking this to mean you're feeling better about this?"

He moans again and fights to get the words out. "I feel much better and you'll be getting the free facial."

At this point it's difficult to say which one of us is having a better time. I know Jack wasn't very keen on being on the receiving end. So to speak. His past experience having more to do with his lack of enthusiasm than he was letting on, I'm sure. I know he only agreed to try it to please me. Love him to death for it.

That's why it's more than my pleasure to be his. He's going to be loved within an inch of his life as I give him my all.

Literally as well as figuratively.

Convincing him to see the merits of his position has been time never more sweetly spent. We've had our differences before, but this is one time he doesn't seem at all sorry to be losing the argument.

I'm known for my persuasive powers and right now I'm feeling especially eloquent. True, it's been almost exclusively non-verbal communication, but he's getting the message. But then, I've always had a penchant for languages, and I think it's fairly safe to assume I'm swiftly adding another dialect to my repertoire. No problems with the vocabulary. Sentence structure and syntax - not a stretch. I'm particularly enjoying polishing up the phrasing. I definitely think I'm becoming fluent enough to start refining my translation.

He's almost ready for the punctuation.

I've played more than a little on his affection for me in order to get him to let me have my way with him, but he'll thank me for it. After what he did for me, I want to do this for him. Want him to feel this, to know the same world of shattering, unbelievable pleasure he opened up to me.

He deserves to feel as good as he made me feel. And dammit, he's going to!

I admit it, my motives haven't been entirely altruistic. I'm thoroughly enjoying the licence my always in control of the situation colonel is giving me to reduce him to a quivering, pleasure-sotted mass of mindless Jell-o. I'm also humbled by the trust he's showing me by placing himself so completely in my hands. It can't be easy for him to allow himself to be so unprotected and vulnerable. To literally lie back and letting someone else do the driving.

And haven't I just taken total and complete advantage of the opportunity? Relished every exhilarating second of the utter freedom he's given me to thoroughly explore and love

every inch of him. Shamelessly savoured every sweet, salty, luscious, lovely inch. Carpe diem, Jack? I've more than seized the day, I've taken everything you've given me.

Well, almost. Theoretical is about to become practical. I may not be going where no man has gone before, but I fully intend to boldly come. By the time we're both done there'll be no doubt in his mind there are some benefits to careful study and preparation.

I plan on being invited back. Frequently.

He's writhing uncontrollably, pushing desperately, frantically back against my fingers, making incoherent noises as he gasps and bangs his head into the pillow. I mercilessly mouth his swollen erection, the unexpected application of such intense stimulation effectively breaching the last bastion of his resistance.

He's incapable of speech, but by the way he splays his legs and abruptly draws up his knees I'm having no trouble getting the go ahead he's giving me. But just to be sure.

"Do you want it?" I murmur as I swipe my tongue across his lips. His tightly clenched eyes fly open; they're burning with mad passion as he seizes my head and crushes our mouths together, seemingly intent on utterly devouring me. My own barely controlled excitement is almost ripped from me by his crazed acquiescence.

It's definitely time. I don't go for it now, we're both going to blow.

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So tight, so different, so...so good. What was I saying about this being for Jack's benefit?

I've tried to keep things slow and gentle, but Jack's had other ideas. Great ideas, wonderful ideas. I'm not arguing as his hands fasten on my hips and he draws me in as he pulls himself down to meet me. I guess he needs to maintain a little bit of control after all but really, I don't mind a bit.

Our gasps and sobs commingle and counterpoint the furious rhythm of our pounding bodies. I don't think we have a coherent thought between us as I thrust into him with an intensity frightening me as much as Jack's matching madness excites me. His hands clutch and slide on my slippery skin. I pump harder at his grunting urging as he curses, fumbles and fails to renew his hold on me. He's trembling too much to be able to make his fingers work properly. He's close, so am I. He wants more. I slip free of the last restraints of reason as I slide into the depths of his desire.

A hand closes on my wrist, clenching about it with such vehemence it threatens to pulverise my bones. His back arches and he comes off the bed with a soundless, gaping scream as I seize his oozing hardness. He explodes at my touch, a warm, pulsing fountain streaming down my fingers as his howls of release echo in my ears.

I thrust again, and oh...oh God...the sensations...what he's doing...what it's doing...I knew what would happen when he... but oh God... JAAAACCCCKKKKKK!

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He's staring at me again. He thinks I can't see him, lurking in the shadows of the doorway, peeking out from his concealment, undressing me with his eyes. He's been doing plenty of the other kind of disrobing during the past month we've been lovers. Same here. Oh yeah.

Not that he's spent most of the time we've been out in the field engaged in lusting after me. He's too good at what he does for that. He told Sam he'll never allow what he feels for me to affect any of the other members of SG-1. The day he can't keep that promise is the day he'll walk away. For everyone's sake.

I'll be going with him. For his sake. And mine.

Teal'c knows how things have changed between us. I haven't seen the slightest indication his trust in either of us has altered in any way. All the more reason we're both determined to live up to it. You can't buy loyalty like Teal'c's. And you're damned lucky to be given it. Not something to be taken lightly, or for granted.

Sam's been cool and distant. Not letting much show of what's going on inside. Jack's been working the O'Neill charm on her overtime, and I'm sensing the beginnings of a thaw. A lot of it has to do with me and how I've changed. Because of Jack.

At first she didn't want to know and then, I guess, she had to. Yes, she was hurt and disappointed, but she does care. I guess, in the long run, we've all been through too much together for even this to tear us apart.

She came over the other night and we talked. Picked her moment. She knew Jack was going to be tied up till late getting caught up on a mountain of neglected paper work - entirely his fault for his 'why do today what you can ignore tomorrow' approach to the aspects of his job he enjoys less than others.

She showed up, we had a little dinner, we talked. The conversation went to some pretty difficult places, but also covered a lot of ground. I told her some things I haven't even told Jack. Not because I can't or won't, but because she asked me. And he hasn't.

As a result of that conversation if we accomplished nothing else by having it, she understands now just how much Jack means to me because of how happy he's made me. Because she's also learned, for the first time, how truly unhappy I was without him. She honestly didn't know. No one did. I was very good at hiding it. From her. From him. From myself, even.

Maybe learning how much more I need him than she does is making the difference. Helping her to see things not so much as losing out, but allowing for something greater than she aspired to. She admitted to herself and to me she wouldn't have been prepared to forsake what she had for what Jack might have offered her. She cared about him, but not enough to cross the line. Realising she *could* walk away from the possibility has given her a lot to think about.

She's very bright. She'll work it out. She's well on her way.

Speaking of which, it would seem I'm about to have a visitor. Jack's wandering in my direction trying to look like he's just returned from the campsite and hasn't been standing over there leering at me for the past ten minutes.

What the hell, I'll play.

"You just about done here?" he says in a slightly too casual tone. "Carter and Teal'c have almost finished packing. The meter's running." He flashes me a wicked grin. "Knowing how difficult it is to pry you away from this stuff," he indicates the wall of glyphs I've been studying with a dismissive gesture as he reaches out a helping hand to pull me to my feet, "Teal'c volunteered to lend an assist, but I told him I could handle it."

The second his hand closes about mine I'm hauled to my feet and into his arms. My notebook tumbles to the ground as his strong arms encircle me, crushing me to his chest.

"Uh, I don't think this was the kind of 'handling' Teal'c had in mind," I gasp. I can't manage to do much else, as the firmness of his affection is making it very difficult for me to breathe. In more ways than one.

"Oh God, I can hardly wait to get you home," he sighs, his lips achingly close to mine, almost touching.

"Well, you'd better!"

I kick him smartly in the shins. Howling, he releases me. "Come on, Jack!" I scold him without pity or remorse. "You know better than that! No nookie on the job!"

"Crap, Daniel, that hurt!" He casts a deeply affronted look at me as he makes an extravagant show of hopping about on the unaffected appendage.

"Yeah, well be thankful I didn't deal with the problem at the source," I return dryly.

"You are a hard-hearted man, Daniel Jackson," Jack shakes his head sorrowfully.

"Well, one of us has to be when you get like this." I retrieve my notebook and pen and shove them in my pack. "Come on Jack, they're waiting for us."

"We only hurt the ones we love?" he whines, trying to sound as pathetic as possible as he follows me.

"Only if you leave me no choice. You've only yourself to blame. And no, I'm not sorry, so I won't be kissing it better later."

"Wanna bet?" His tone oozes with insufferable self-assurance.

I don't dare look at him. He'll see right through me.

Yeah, gloat away, you smug bastard, you've got me there. Well and truly.

I love you too.

Jack is still limping as he emerges from the temple. Sam and Teal'c take in my slightly ruffled appearance and Jack's altered gait and exchange knowing looks.

"Do you require assistance, O'Neill?" Teal'c offers in his unmistakable version of tongue-in-cheek. "You appear to have sustained an injury."

"Just a flesh wound," he grumbles as he makes his way toward us. "I tripped over an immovable object. With a heart of stone."

Carter grins. "An unforeseen obstacle, Sir?" Her tone is light and plainly teasing.

Jack brightens as he picks up on it.

"Yeah, you could say that," he hesitates fractionally, "Sam."

Her smile gets warmer, and Jack beams back at her.

It's going to be okay. SG-1 is definitely coming back together.

FINIS