Mirror, Mirror: Reflections

by Joy

Summary

Direct Sequel to "Mirror, Mirror".

Something is wrong, and J/D need to find yet another reality. It has its problems too, and nearly just as bad. Daniel is forced to play into the hands of a psychopath in order to expose the Goa’uld infiltration of Earth.

Notes

It’s a mild infiltration, but the summary is meant to make it seem scary. :-p

WARNING: The sexual assault is insidious. The victim is made to think they want sex but they aren't in their right mind. If they were, they would refuse.
Suspicions

Daniel rubbed the back of his neck and leaned back in his chair. The dialect was kicking his ass. The language was that of the Ancients, aka the Alterans. He’d discovered their true name in the base computer’s report, next to the report for the closest set of ruins, which were apparently on P4X-639. They originated from the Hydra galaxy and travelled to the Milky Way, then to Andromeda, Pegasus, Triangulum, Centaurus, and many other galaxies. They certainly got around. They seemed to have ascended during their stays in the Milky Way and Pegasus galaxies.

As for the dialect. It had a few differences from the known language, but without proper reference, he couldn’t tell if glyphs were alphabet letters, mathematical equations, or frickin’ computer code. His work at the Omega Site was dependent on his being able to translate the new technology found and when he had presented his proficiency in Alteran, he’d been given this … whatever the hell it was.

“Guys,” he said, and spun in his chair. “I can’t …”

The lab building was empty. He frowned and looked at his watch. It was four in the afternoon. This was the … he counted on his fingers … fourteenth time in four months—which was how long he and Jack had lived here since the move from Dakara. Personnel would gather in the dining hall building for some sort of tea time gathering. He and Jack were not invited. They were very welcome for translations and weapons array simulations, but apparently this clique had developed isolationist behavior.

With a deep sigh, Daniel stared at the computer screen and chewed at his lip. What in the hell were these characters? They made no sense. As he tried to study them, exhaustion caught up with him and he laid his head down and dropped off to sleep.

Minutes after, he jerked up suddenly. Images had popped into his mind and they were odd because he had no idea why they were there. He hadn’t been thinking of them, nor had he ever heard the voice before. But it was a clear message. Go to the science lab and get a plant extract, mix it with milk and alcohol. And … sleep … I have a warning.
It was evening and they were in their quarters, which was the polite way of describing it. It was a canvas tent, set up on the edge of the settlement. At first, it was supposed to have been temporary, but requests for housing had been delayed and delayed. Like Earth, it was made abundantly clear that they weren’t welcome, but their technical expertise was useful, so … tent.

It was large enough to stand in and walk around. They had an air mattress they’d set up on a plank of plywood that lay over several cinder blocks. The mattress was covered by extra-large sleeping bags zipped together. Thanks to the mild weather, a constant seventy degrees, it was comfortable. Unfortunately, it was an air mattress, which meant it was good enough for someone to toss and turn in their sleep, but not good enough for sex. There were four tables which held their coffee maker, computers, toiletries, incidentals. A rolling rack that held their clothing. It was as if they were permanently camping.

“Are you insane?” Jack asked after Daniel told him what he’d dreamed. “It’s a dream.”

They were sitting at the folding table, and on the dark olive folding chairs.

“It’s a message,” Daniel sighed. “Do you trust me?”

“That’s a stupid question,” Jack grumped. “Fine, it’s a message. But …” He closed his eyes. Daniel had that look. This wasn’t an argument he was going to win. He had his share and currently, they were dead even. A proper give and take. “When’s the lab going to be empty?”

“In an hour,” Daniel said, checking his watch.

Jack drummed his fingers. “Okay. But we do it my way.”

They snuck into the lab, knowing they could be busted at any time. The ready-made excuse was one that Daniel had thought to use before now, but they’d never had a reason: They were going to ‘steal’ a few marijuana joints. The research lab had been doing studies on its use as a treatment for brain cancer.

The building was dark and empty, but there were sporadic blue-tinged lights that illuminated active testing. Most lights revealed only plants growing in glassed-in receptacles.

Daniel spied the storage locker that held both the herb they wanted as well as the pot joints. Opening it, he started to take a few starter plant pots but paused and looked around for gloves. If the herb was meant to put him in a trance-like state, perhaps he shouldn’t touch it with bare hands. Just in case.

While he was busy, Jack roamed around the lab, looking for anything that might tell them that they were in danger of being exposed. He found it: the lab had a security desk in the back and he touched the keyboard, depressing the space bar. The computer screen lit up and displayed a
program menu with an SGC logo on the right. The menu read:

CAMERAS | OBSERVATIONS | BEHAVIOR | KNOWLEDGE | TASKS

Jack frowned. That was an odd menu. What the hell was BEHAVIOR? He moved the mouse and clicked on the menu item. When the screen changed, what he saw made his blood run cold. There was a list of MP4 files and every single one of them was prefaced with ONeill_Jackson_mating_activity#. 

“Jack?” Daniel called in a loud whisper.


Daniel found him and quickly rushed over. “What?”

Jack outlined what he’d found and pointed at the screen. He touched the mouse and raised a brow.

“Do it,” Daniel said. The back of his throat felt stale somehow. Or maybe metallic. It happened every time he felt dread.

Jack clicked a file in the middle of the list. What they saw stunned them beyond speech: On the video, they were having sex. The camera was angled downward so it was placed up high and in the top left corner of the tent. Jack shut down the video and started another one. Sex. Another video. Sex. The last one he clicked on wasn’t in their tent but in the woods by the lake. It had been taken yesterday. The camera angle was from the left. It peered downward, so it was up high, a dozen feet or so, and a few meters back.

The scene had been edited. Or cut. It caught them in medias res, just like all the others. The sound captured the birds, a whirring noise, and Jack’s grunts and slapping hips. It captured Daniel’s demands. He was on his back and Jack was on top, holding Daniel’s hands together over his head. Daniel had his legs spread, held upward in a wide V, while Jack pounded away. His face was flushed; his gaze, almost manic. “Fuck me, damn you! Fuck me!”

He soon went slack-jawed, eyes widening, and he began to come. Jack grabbed hold of his ankles, controlling the orgasm, and kept fucking hard and fast. Daniel panted and slapped his chest, squirming, and trying to move away, but Jack grunted in triumph and came hard. When he froze, Daniel returned the torture and wrapped his legs around his waist and curled forward. He thrust manically, his smile gleeful, as Jack shuddered and squirmed in his turn. In that moment, Daniel came twice.

The two men just stared at the video, unwilling, or unable, to shut it off because it was both hot and shocking. They remembered that moment very, very well. It was, after all, fresh. The scene that was captured on video was one of their exciting experiments. They had privately hoped they had been seen. But not like this. Nothing even remotely like this had entered their minds.

Jack shut down the video, then highlighted them all and tried to delete them, but a password prompt came up. He turned it off and returned to the main menu. When he turned to look at Daniel, they both had grim expressions. “Fuck the weirdness,” he said. “You’re going into that trance.”
Daniel sat on the edge of the bed and stirred the plant extract in a cup of warm milk laced with bourbon.

“And you’re sure it’s safe?” Jack asked. He picked up the mug, looked at the contents, and grimaced.

“I’ve never been more sure, Jack. It’s a feeling.” He stared hard at him. “I also got images of Kheb.” Jack raised an eyebrow. “Either it’s Oma or someone along her food chain.”

Jack snorted. “Nice metaphor.” He could tell Daniel was nervous, despite his own assurances. He kept looking back and forth between Jack’s gaze and something off his right shoulder. It was unnerving. “Stop that,” Jack said sharply, yet he kept his voice down.

Daniel focused on him, knowing exactly what Jack meant. “Sorry. It’ll be fine.”

Jack just knew there was a ‘maybe’ silently added on that statement. But. Trust me. Two of the biggest words in the English language. Or any language spoken on Earth, for that matter, that said the same thing. Throughout their lives, Daniel had always known what he was doing, even when it was a risk. Jack had to trust because he actually, truly, did. It was only the circumstances that he didn’t trust.

“I trust you. It’s this means of communication I don’t trust. Why the hell can’t they just show up and talk to you like that priest did?”

“Because it’s against the rules or something. And if you’ll recall, that priest talked to me in Zen koans. He never said anything directly.”

Jack rolled his eyes. “I remember. And I remember I was more than a bit annoyed.” Daniel held out his hand and Jack started to pass the mug over, paused, and then reluctantly placed it in his hand.

Before Jack could change his mind, Daniel downed the contents. He shuddered and shook his head, grimacing. “Goddamn, that was nasty.” With a sigh, he took Jack’s hand as he lay down. “This shouldn’t … take … too …” His eyes closed and he was out.

“Dammit.” Sitting there, watching, Jack was filled with dread. It wasn’t intuition. Just fear of the unknown. And just in case Daniel was wrong, he held an atropine injector in his other hand.

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Daniel found himself standing outside the tent. He looked around, ears and eyes straining. Hadn’t he just been … oh, of course. The lucid dream state had started. He took several steps toward the forest and found himself walking through desert scrub instead. He looked around and found that he wasn’t on the offworld planet anymore. He was … New Mexico? Mexico? Felt like it. Warm, dry air. Cacti and other native plants.

He paused mid-step, realizing he’d almost stepped on a spineless cactus. It looked like the peyōtl plant. The anglicized word for Peyote, from the Nahuatl word. And Nahuatl was the real name for the Aztec. He knelt and poked at the plant. It was traditionally made into a mash or a tea for use in the spiritual rituals conducted by shamans among the Native Americans and Aztecs for over five thousand years.
The anglicized word for the purpose of one ritual was Vision Quest, although marijuana was also helpful. Daniel had experienced the ritual only once when he’d done a paper on the cross-pollination of Native American rituals with the Maya and Inca.

The herb at the Omega site had similar properties but he didn’t know how the traditional preparation would have been so … milk and bourbon. And it was nasty. He had a feeling that brewing a tea would’ve been better.

He turned to his right, thinking he heard something, and found a new path where there were bushes before. He followed it to a nearby lake. At the edge of the water, he saw the back of an old man with long white hair bound at the nape by a silver buckle with turquoise inlays. Native American or similar. That explained the peyote.

The old man was squatting at the water’s edge and appeared to be washing something. Daniel walked over and squatted next to him, letting his hands drop between his legs. His fingernails scraped at dark grey sand.

“Do I know you?” he asked.

“No, Daniel Jackson. But I know you.”

“How?”

“Oma has told me many things.”

Daniel thought about her, and that priest.

“That was me,” the old man said. “And the boy is well.”

Daniel’s brows rose. “Shifu?”

“Yes.”

“And who are you?”

“One of the Ascended. Like Oma.”

“Do you have a name?”

“You may use White Eagle.”

Daniel nodded. “Okay. You have a warning for me. What is it?”

“You need to leave the Omega site, Daniel Jackson. You and your husband must leave.”

“Why?” Daniel drawled warily. “Who are you really?” He tried to see the old man’s face clearly but all he was allowed was the profile.

“We are the Ancients.”

Daniel blinked in astonishment. “Why do we need to leave?”

“You need to leave.”

“Why?”
“I cannot say.”

“Why?”

“We are not allowed to interfere with the lower beings.”

“You’re doing it right now.”

“That is sadly correct. I break the rules because I am a shaman and I am required to speak,” the old man said, and there was rebellion in his voice. He looked up as a strong wind gusted over them. “They are telling me I am crossing a line.”

“Why do it then?”

“Because it is necessary. I am here to tell you to stop your translation attempts. You are clever, but that particular language should not be translated.”

“Why?”

“It is code, Daniel. And we have hidden it for over ten-thousand years. It needs to stay hidden.”

“Then blow it up.”

“We cannot. It is in the material realm.”

“Oma killed those Jaffa.”

“They defiled the shrine with their violence. The Others will find a way to punish her. Sooner or later.”

“They haven’t?”

“No.”

“Why can’t you interfere?”

The shaman was quiet for a long minute. “A long time ago, we were one people that split into two. One side was fanatical. They felt they needed to be worshipped by lower beings. The rest of us did not. We ascended and remained aloof, separate. The fanatics ascended, and forced lower beings such as yourselves to worship them.”

Daniel stared at him. “That’s hideous.”

“It is indeed. We did something that went against our very nature. We went to war. We fought the fanatics and destroyed them. In doing so, we accidentally killed millions of mortal beings. Ever since then, we will not interfere. The risk of repeating history is too high.”

“Why tell me this? Are you going to get into trouble?”

“I am already in trouble. But since I am not sharing any knowledge that you could profit from, they leave me be.”

“So you came to tell me to leave? Are we in danger?”

“You are. The enemy cannot be allowed to read that language.”
“Enemy? Who is that?”

“Do you remember Reese?”

“Of course,” Daniel said, cringing.

“She was our creation. We thought we could create life more rapidly. We were wrong.”

“Rapidly?”

“As opposed to evolution. We have seeded the stars, Daniel Jackson. We seeded Earth. And then we left it to follow nature’s path. You are a wonderful result. Would that all mankind was like you.”

“Reece created the replicators. Is that the enemy?”

“Reece did not create them. She was a replicator herself, only her abilities were restricted. She was able to replicate basic forms, not humans.”

“Why tell me this? Is it relevant?”

“Yes.” The old man got up and handed Daniel the object he’d been washing. An oval-shaped blue opal the size of a chicken egg. It seemed to glow from within.

“What’s this?” Daniel asked, taking it.

“Your guide.”

“Guide?” Daniel repeated, frowning. “Leave this place. This reality. Find Thor. Find Urania. She will help, though she is not as reflective as she once was.”

“What? Wait! Can’t you—”

The shaman touched his forehead with two fingers in a direct imitation of what Shifu had done once.

Daniel melted out of the dream and pushed up on his elbows. He touched his forehead. “Damn.”

“Damn?” Jack asked anxiously. “You have a headache?”

Daniel looked at him and focused. Jack’s image resolved from blurry colors. “It worked.”

“Okay. And?”

Daniel raised his right hand, closed in a fist. He opened his fingers and in his palm sat a blue opal. It was the size of a dime and shaped like a star.

Jack felt something cold slide down his back. “Where the hell did that come from?”

“A friend of Oma’s gave it to me.”

Jack blinked. “Shifu?” He shook his head. It made no sense whatsoever.

Daniel shook his head. “Not Shifu. A shaman named White Eagle.” He told Jack everything that was said in the dream. “And we have to find Urania, whoever that is. But first, Thor.” Daniel sat
up and swung his legs over the side. “He didn’t say it, but I got the feeling that he meant …”

Daniel swallowed, and met Jack’s eyes. “He brought up the replicators for a reason. We’re in
danger here. Which means everyone around us, or almost everyone, is a replicator.”

Jack said as drily as he knew how, “And we were just starting to feel at home.”

They’d been so psyched to be doing something with their time that was halfway interesting. Jack
had gotten the job as Weapons Analyst. Daniel was offered the linguist’s job. Jack’s purpose had
been to find weaknesses in the Omega Site’s weapons array, which was installed to protect the
planet from the Goa’uld. He was told that the same array was installed around Earth and
elsewhere, and the testing array was meant to seek out improvements that would be uploaded to the
Earth array and other planets. The way Jack’s job worked was running real life simulations in a
computer program.

At first, he’d thought it was odd that he would be given the job, but the base commander had said
his tactical knowledge was the best thing they needed for testing. Over the last few weeks, he’d
realized that he had nothing else to contribute, so he’d begun to work on his own projects. Then
something else occurred to him.

“It’s all making sense now,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“Why this world has been so hostile to us.”

Daniel nodded sadly. “Yeah. Now it makes sense. We’re lucky they haven’t killed us yet.” He
paused. “What if we’re wrong? What if there are others here working against their will?”

Jack suddenly got up and went to his jacket, then returned with a small electronic pad. He handed
it to Daniel. “I’ve been working on this on my own. A side project. I thought I’d screwed it up
but now I know I haven’t. Take a look.”

“Okay, what is it?”

“Multi-sensor readouts. It’s primed for infra-red, heat signatures, chemical, everything.”

“Isn’t the array already equipped for that?”

Jack shook his head. “It was created to detect ships entering Earth’s solar system, not people.”

Daniel studied the device. “Weapons platforms don’t really need to pick up people.”

“Run a check for heat signatures. All humans give off heat.”

Daniel made a few taps and swipes. The window showed a layout of the planet and he zeroed in
on the base. His mouth dropped open and he frowned, not sure he was reading it correctly. “This
says …”

“I know. I didn’t tell anyone I was working on this because it was just a bit of fun. And I thought
it had a glitch. But after what we just found out … no, it’s not a glitch.”

Daniel stared at the pad, then looked up as his complexion matched Jack’s. “There are only two
biological signatures.”

“Yours and mine.”
A cold dread filled Daniel. “So no one else here is human.”

They both realized the horror of that statement.

“Time to go,” Jack whispered. “We go to Ida, find Thor. Maybe Freyr. We see if there’s another Mirror here. Like that big one. We could leave in the morning. And think up an excuse to leave.”

“We don’t have to,” Daniel told him.

“How’s that?”

“Dakara. We’ve gone there on an irregular basis. Sometimes just because we were bored.”

“Okay. So now we work out a plan until we have it memorized so well it’s locked into our sense memory.”

“Like dialing home.”

“Exactly.”

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The plan was meticulously laid out. They would gate hop, going from one to another at least a dozen times. The only foreseeable problem would be to keep from being followed.

Daniel chewed at his lip. “I have a solution.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“We need to steal a few naquada generators.”

“Why?” Jack asked, then made a face. “Never mind. Extra power. But to get to Ida, we only need one.”

“True,” Daniel said. “We use the second one to bomb the last gate. Set a timer, go through the gate. If they show up two minutes later, it won’t matter if they examine the DHD for the next coordinates. They won’t be able to follow after that.”

Jack nodded. “Perfect.”

An hour and fifteen minutes later, they were heading for the gate, two packs each, just like before when they’d gone to stay with Teal’c. As Daniel dialed the gate, one of the scientists called after them.

“Where are you two off to?” It was Doctor Jennifer Keller, head of bio research. She headed their way.

“To see Teal’c,” Jack called back.

She stopped and frowned. The look was part confusion and part suspicion. “Didn’t you just go a few days ago?”
“Yeah, but I want his input on an idea for the weapons array. And we’d like to spend some time in that hot spring.”

She started to walk toward them, the suspicion on her face. But when the wormhole connected, she paused.

“Do you want us to relay a message or pick up anything?” Daniel asked pleasantly.

“No,” she said, turning around, and beginning to walk back, and her expression appeared as if she was mollified by his question. Over her shoulder, she added. “Don’t stay too long!”

“We won’t,” Daniel said, and waved at her when they stepped up to the event horizon. She waved back. They went through the event horizon and came out on the world where they’d met the Gamekeeper and his charges. Daniel went to the DHD and began dialing. “She gives me the creeps. Maybe now I know why.”

“She gave you the creeps?” Jack asked. “I just thought she was boring.”

Daniel laughed. “Maybe that was it.”

Absently taking each other’s hand, they went through the event horizon to the next leg of their trip. This was Madrona. Some of the natives waved at them and a woman came down the walkway toward them.

“You go talk,” Jack said. “Be quick.” He dialed their next destination. Cimmeria. By the time he stood in front of the event horizon, Daniel was by his side and they went through.

On the other side, they found an obliterated Hammer. It was nothing but rubble. All around them lay skeletons and Daniel thought he recognized the wardrobe he’d last seen Gairwyn wearing. They were stunned for about ten seconds, then Daniel ran to the DHD and dialed out. They wasted no time and exited on Oannes, where Nem lived. It looked the same. Beachfront property and a lot of water.

Daniel dialed out and for the next hour, their line of travel line moved further and further out of the galaxy. There were fifty-six named planets and hundreds of computer-named designations. They chose only fourteen names, all of them on planets with known and active civilizations.

On the twelfth dial out, they emerged into a blizzard. “Wasn’t this supposed to be that planet that looked like the Wales coastline?” Jack shouted.

“Kalau!” Daniel called back. “Now what?”

“Shelter!”

“How?”

“Cover me!”

Jack reached into the inner pocket of his jacket and pulled out the sensor pad he’d programmed. Turning it on, he pulled out the double antennae and with Daniel helping to block the snow, located a cave just fifty feet behind the gate. It was hard, slogging through two feet of snow in places, and by the time they found the entrance, half buried in a four-foot drift, they were nearly frostbitten. The temperature seemed to have plummeted below freezing by the time they were inside the cave.
“Jesus fucking Christ!” Jack swore loudly.

Daniel dropped his packs and stuck his hands under his armpits as he walked around in a circle, attempting to warm up. His teeth were knocking as he said, “I’ll get us a fire in a second.” He dug in a pocket and found the travel flashlight in his pocket. It was tiny, compared to the usual ones they carried. And packed.

“With what?” Jack asked, copying him as he warmed up too.

“We have seven Sterno cans,” Daniel told him.

“Daniel, those cans don’t radiate heat. They cook whatever you put over them, and that’s all they do.”

“Yes, but look at the walls, Jack.” Daniel aimed the flashlight and kicked at long tree roots that covered the walls of the cave—and they were lucky. It wasn’t that deep and the cracks in one part of the wall only leaked water, not freezing air. “Get the water kit out. Test this stuff.”

“Right,” Jack said. “Get moving, Daniel. I’ll start chopping.”


“You weren’t a boy scout, Daniel.”

“Oh, ha, ha. Okay, scout, make with the fire wood.”

“Watch it,” Jack warned as he began to chop. “Get the starter going.”

“We won’t need the Sterno much,” Daniel said as he pulled it out. “I was rather worried about that anyway. It has a fuel odor that would kill us if we let it accumulate.”

“Point,” Jack said. “Dig a shallow pit. We’ll need something to accumulate the coals. Travel shovels are—”

“I know, I know,” Daniel said, digging in Jack’s duffle.

In fifteen minutes, they had a decent fire going, ringed with large, smooth stones and fed initially with a lot of moss. Half of it had been wet and the resulting smoke was unfortunate. Thankfully, it didn’t last long, thanks to the crack at the back of the cave that ran vertically from floor to ceiling. At first, they thought it only leaked water, but the smoke wafted through the crack.

“I think the cave is connected to several others,” Daniel said, shining a light at wider spots.

“If it is, let’s not shine a light and alert the neighbors.”

Daniel snorted. Pulling out the sleeping bags, they settled on top of them and ate marginally decent dinners of spaghetti and beef stew. The water packets that always came with the MREs were enough to sate, but with the snow melt, they had enough water—after it was scanned for pathogens. Sometimes modern gadgets were a godsend.

Daniel started to get up but Jack held his arm. “Where’re you going?”

“Take a piss,” Daniel grinned. He went to the back of the cave and relieved himself. “Where did you think I was going?”
Jack startled him slightly as he joined him. “I thought you were going to chop some more tree root, when I think we’ve got enough for the rest of the night.”

Daniel shivered as he tucked himself back in. When he came back to the fire and the sleeping bags, he opened one and shook it out, the opened the other and laid it over the other one. Jack knew what he was doing and lined up the zippers to connect them together. Meanwhile, Daniel began to strip.

“What’re you …” Jack began, then shook his head. “Never mind.”

Daniel nodded. “Our clothes need to dry and we’ll be warmer skin to skin.”

Jack nodded and copied him. Having left a section of sleeping bag unzipped, he waited while Daniel settled within before he got in and zipped it up, leaving a two-foot opening. Even combined, the bags were a bit shorter than they’d have liked, but they were still the longest ones they could find. It would’ve been better had they been allowed to go back to Earth to stock up. Assuming Earth was still human-centric and there were stores and markets. It didn’t matter anymore, however.

Daniel snuggled against Jack’s front, wrapping his arms around him. The ground under them was a bit too hard but it would have to do. With their long experiences, they knew it could’ve been a lot worse. Concrete or stone, for example.

“Think we’ll be able to sleep?” he asked Jack, just barely able to see his dark eyes. The firelight was the only thing that allowed him to see anything of his husband.

“After the constant travel, then the snow plow into the cave, it’s probable. I wish I’d thought to grab some rolled up trousers for pillows.”

Daniel only paid partial attention. His body was reacting to Jack’s naked skin, the smell of him, the closeness, the need, and the love. He leaned in, and it didn’t take much, to kiss his lover’s lips. Once, twice, then he opened and moaned appreciatively when Jack sought out his tongue.

“I want you,” he told him, sliding a hand over Jack’s waist, hip, and thigh, then returning to caress again.

“Gee, I can’t tell,” Jack said, smiling over his lips. He gently nipped Daniel’s bottom lip and Daniel closed his eyes and groaned again.

They rolled slightly until Daniel was underneath and thanks to the width of putting two bags together, he could spread a little. “Turn over?” he asked.

“Not yet,” Jack told him, and took his cock in hand. He loved the hiss that caused and he spent several minutes stroking Daniel’s cock in a torturously lazy way. Daniel, in turn, took him in hand and returned the favor. They found themselves in a small contest, twisting and pulling. While they couldn’t see what they were doing, they knocked against each other’s hands. Plus, years of being together and occasionally watching each other jerk off.

After another fifteen minutes, they were nearly bursting at the seams and instead of letting Daniel turn over, Jack dropped to the side and turned Daniel away until he was spooning in front. He smoothed a hand over Daniel’s chest and belly while his cock had no trouble finding its favorite place to be. The heat that surrounded him, tight and encompassing, stole his breath away.

“Goddamn.”
“Mmm, hmm,” Daniel said. Or rather, it was all he was able to say for that moment. He leaned forward slightly so that Jack was halfway on top and raised his top knee.

Jack grabbed his hip. “Perfect,” he murmured. “I love you.” He kissed his neck and bit the shell of his ear.

“I love you back,” Daniel whispered back, and the strength of his voice was stolen when Jack thrust deep.

Silently, they moved in unison, rolling forward and back, taking their time. Fifteen minutes passed, then Jack sped up a little to reignite Daniel’s erection, and after that, they slowed down again. Thirty minutes later and Jack no longer needed to do that. He took Daniel’s cock in hand while he sped up his thrusts, heading for a rapid, decisive rhythm.

Daniel moaned and rolled forward until he lay on his stomach. The friction against his cock moving over the bag wasn’t near enough and he rubbed himself against it, forcing Jack to match his own thrusts.

“Jesus,” Jack hissed, enjoying the way Daniel moved under him.

But it was also time.

“Jack,” Daniel warned, his voice higher pitched, harsh.

“I’m here,” Jack said, biting his neck as he slipped his hands underneath his armpits to clap them over his husband’s shoulders. His hips were moving rapidly now, the slapping loud.

Jack latched his teeth onto Daniel’s neck and it made Daniel groan loudly. “Bite harder,” he gasped, desperately.


“I can’t,” Jack told him. “I need leverage and that ain’t happening unless you open the bag.”

“Screw it!” he said, making Jack laugh. Daniel pushed him off and unzipped the bag. Their exertions raised their temperatures, so the cold air was welcome. “Oh god,” he said, and got onto all fours.

Jack lined up behind him, and thrust into him with one hard stroke. “Yes.”

“Oh yeah,” Daniel agreed.

Jack returned to his previous rhythm and the loud, fast slapping returned. But Jack wasn’t satisfied with the friction or the depth. “Turn over.”

“Yes,” Daniel said, and he did, then raised his legs. Jack took hold and placed his ankles against his shoulders.

Jack plunged deep. “That’s it.” Slow, deep, and with a hard slap on each thrust, they regained their momentum. He was able to see Daniel just enough. He pushed forward, pressing Daniel’s knees to his chest. “That’s even better.” He pounded into him and Daniel squirmed beneath him as his prostate was rubbed.

“Fuck,” he gasped, high-pitched. He came, with loud moans and pants, begging Jack for more.
The tightness brought Jack over the edge and he wrapped his arms around him as his hips jerked uncontrollably. Both of them twitched, their cocks overly sensitive, and the afterglow lasted for what seemed like forever. Then Daniel began to giggle.

“What?” Jack asked as he maneuvered them back on their sides.

“We’ve just forced ourselves to lie in sticky wetness. There’s no cleaning this up in the foreseeable future.”

Jack nuzzled him. “I don’t care. I plan to make it worse.”

“Good.”

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It took nearly twelve hours to dig to the DHD. By the time they exited the wormhole, they were on their backs and rolling onto the dais. They lay there, panting, exhausted, not willing to move. Daniel’s legs draped over Jack’s and they blindly sought out their hands to clasp.

“Daniel?” Jack panted. He tried to push up and couldn’t.

“Yeah?”

“We gotta roll out of the way, just in case.”

“Fuck,” Daniel groaned. The idea that they would be caught here galvanized him and he got to his feet, dragging Jack along until his husband got up. This was a tropical world and they were thawing out quickly. Too quickly. “Ow,” Daniel complained, shaking both hands.

“Yeah,” Jack rasped as he made fists and squeezed. “If this was a wet season with cold rain, it’d be much better right now.”

Daniel nodded agreement as he stuck his hands under his arms. Taking enough time to eat and regain their strength, it was six hours before they went ahead. The last stop was a research outpost manned by four people. It was like a weigh station that had infrequent truck stops. In one of the packs, Jack had the two naquada reactors, and in another, several weapons. P90s, Mac10s, zats, and ammo. Daniel had his Goa’uld assassination device.

This job, however, only required zats, and as they came through the gate, they took care of the two guards beside the DHD. The other two came running out of a control booth that was connected to a small station and it took a full ten minutes of hiding behind the gate’s frame before those guards were neutralized, too.

“Dammit,” Jack said, tossing a zat. “Energy pod’s history.”

Daniel showed surprise. “Seriously?”

“You didn’t know that?” Jack asked, taken completely by surprise. “Damn, Daniel.”

“It doesn’t happen often enough for me to notice.”

“Yeah, well, pisses me off that I had to grab one that was damn near depleted.”
“Good thing we have spares.” Jack grinned back at him.

Wasting little time, Daniel waited at the DHD while Jack took both generators and set them next to the control crystal panel at the left side of the gate. He hooked up one to the gate and when Daniel began to dial, he set about arming the second device.

The location of Ida, and the Asgard homeworld, Othalla, wasn’t a well-known address, but once upon a time, they’d visited Thor during a replicator attack. It was either luck or karma that they had remembered the glyphs needed. They waited for the gate to connect and held their breaths as the ninth chevron connected.

The event horizon splash damn near took Jack out. They had forgotten that activating the gate’s nine chevrons meant that the splash would be bigger. Back on Rho’Shanna, the Tok’ra had avoided the problem by digging the gate out of the ground, but this wasn’t something they could avoid. It was only luck that Jack had been slightly off the path as he waited next to the second generator.

Hair on edge and nerves jangling, Jack set the timer. “Two minutes,” he said. He grabbed their packs, one of which was much lighter.

“Two minutes?” Daniel said.

“Any longer and we risk their noticing the thing in time.”

Daniel frowned. “If they were following that soon on our heels, they’d have shown up at the tropical world because we were there too long. Plus, you can’t stop a naquada overload, which is basically what you just did, so it won’t matter if they show up too soon. They can’t stop it.”

“I don’t know how skilled the replicators are and I’d rather not risk finding out.”

“Good point.”

Now all they had to worry about was being treated well as soon as they appeared. If the Asgard didn’t try to kill them first—for thinking they themselves were replicators—all would be okay. Hopefully. There was no way to know if they knew that this universe’s Jack and Daniel were dead. If they did, then they’d better speak fast once across.

“Ready?” Daniel asked.

“Ready,” Jack said. “Here goes nothin’.”

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**Escape to Ida**
They emerged into a silver city. With glass. And lots of little grey guys. Jack and Daniel waited until they were noticed, then held up their hands and shouted, “We’re not replicators!” Above them, parked mid-air, were new classes of Thor’s Hammer. Jack added, “Or Goa’uld!”

The entrance was a bit anti-climactic. No one panicked and barely anyone took note of their presence. “Huh,” Jack said. He looked up at the ships once more. “Damn, those are beautiful,” he said, turning in place as he scanned the sky. “Just … wow.”

A little grey person came up to them. “You are Jack O’Neill?” she asked Jack. A female?

“That’s me.”

“Daniel Jackson?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Daniel asked, curious.

“I am Heimdall. Please follow me. Thor has been expecting you.”

They followed. At a very slow pace. “How?” Jack asked.

“We monitor everything outside this galaxy.”

“Are you fighting the replicators still?” Daniel asked.

“No. They leave us in peace.”

“Why’s that?” Jack asked.

“Thor will answer the rest of your questions.” Heimdall stopped and pointed at a long sidewalk that skirted an extremely tall building. “Follow that path. It will lead inside. Step onto the platform immediately to your right and it will take you to the top.”

She walked off without another word and her walk was more like a power version.

“Okay,” Jack frowned. “That was odd. Where’s she going, toot sweet?”

“Wherever the rest of them are going,” Daniel said, pointing at a bunch of rapid walkers.

“Hey, where’s that expression come from?”

“Too sweet?”

“Yeah.”

“Pre-world-war-one French. It’s the same in French, except we butchered the spelling. From tout de suite to toot sweet.” He spelled it out.

“Huh.” He shook himself. “Anyway. I never thought I’d see them hurry.”

“We’ve never seen them at home, Jack. I imagine they can get pretty damn busy.”

On sidewalks further away, as well as in court squares and what appeared to be landing pads, Asgard rushed about. It was odd to watch them hurry and Jack snorted out a laugh. “They’re zipping about, aren’t they?”

Daniel nodded brusquely. “C’mon, Jack. I have a feeling weren’t not supposed to linger.”
“Linger?” Jack asked, smirking, as they headed off using Heimdall’s directions.

“Loiter? Lollygag, lurk, mill about—”

“Okay, okay. Don’t make me think up more.”

Daniel snorted and reached over to take Jack’s hand. He squeezed it. Jack squeezed back. Then they hefted their duffles and headed where Heimdall had directed. They walked through an automatic door and turned to their right. A basic four-foot square sat about six inches off the ground. They stepped on it in perfect sync, but they left their stomachs behind when the platform began to rise pretty damn quick. The only reason they didn’t fall over was the weight of their packs.

“ Weird,” Daniel said, maintaining his balance. “I keep wanting to bend my knees or drop the packs.”

“It’s our weight, plus inertia. Makes you feel we’re moving against gravity.”

Daniel barked out a laugh. “We are.”

“Faster than we should, although not by much.”

“It’d be easier with a railing.”

“You’re such a chicken,” Jack said and leaned over to kiss him.

Daniel leaned in to meet him and the kiss wobbled. “That was weird,” Daniel said after, rubbing his lips together.

“Yes.”

They arrived at the top floor in another three seconds and the moment the platform stopped, they hopped off in a hurry.

“I think I’ll take the stairs on the way down,” Jack said, making Daniel grin. He loved doing that.

“Assuming they have stairs,” Daniel said, stupidly looking around for a door that said, “STAIRS”, until he realized he was doing it. He rolled his eyes at himself. “I must be more tired than I thought.”

“Why’s that?”

“I’m getting punchy. I started to look around for a stairwell. You know. With a sign that says, ‘stairs’? As if it would be English.”

“Ah. Well, if it helps, so am I.”

Daniel pulled Jack to him and gave him a much more stable kiss. “Love you.”

“Back,” Jack said, rubbing his nose with his own.


“Heads’ up,” Jack said, and they turned to find Thor standing at a large floor-to-ceiling window that went completely around the room. The top floor was apparently an observation deck. Only a few pieces of unknown equipment were on this floor and stationed in the center around a thick
support column about twenty meters in diameter. “Thor! How are you?”

The Asgardian turned to him, his features serious. “I am well. You, however …”

“Alive, unharmed. And eager to get to a Mirror slightly larger than a stargate. Know where one is?”

Daniel looked at him, a small smirk at the corner of his mouth.

“What?” Jack asked. “We’re on a schedule.”

“Not anymore,” Daniel reminded him. “We blew our way home. They can’t find us. We can’t go back.”

“What do you mean?” Thor asked.

“Naquada generator at the gate we just came from. We blew it up to make sure the replicators couldn’t track us.”

Thor blinked a few times. “That was … very clever.” He sounded surprised.

Jack sighed. “Yeah, amazing for a primate. Look, do you have an answer to the question?”

“Jack,” Daniel drawled. “We don’t know this version. We need to be polite.”

Jack cleared his throat. “Point.” He turned Thor. “Did I offend?”

“Thank you, but you have not. And I am curious. You are not from this reality?”

“No,” Daniel answered.

“We had to leave it and it appears we have to leave this one.”

“Replicators,” the Asgardian stated flatly.

“Yep.”

“Why did you leave your home reality?”

“Different bad guys were in charge of it.”

Thor blinked. “I see. Do you know what happened to the O’Neill and Jackson of this universe?”

Daniel exchanged a look with Jack. “Well,” he began. “Given who’s in charge, I don’t have the answer. We were told it happened on a space station filled with Goa’uld. It was probably a lie. They were probably killed by replicators.”

“Indeed,” Thor said.

“So, we found what we call a quantum mirror,” Daniel went on. “It was huge. It called itself the Seshenal. It could locate worlds, realities, for the right people. Make sure the people were dead so the transfer wouldn’t be harmful. Do you know of a mirror like that in this reality?”

“One moment,” Thor said. He walked to an Asgard control panel and moved a few of those tear-shaped opaline disks. He spoke into it, in Asgardian, and to Daniel, it sounded like he was speaking backward English, and under water. That hadn’t been the language he’d heard
previously, which was similar to Icelandic. When Thor returned to them, Daniel asked what language they were speaking.

“A dialect of Asgardian mid-term.”

“Uh, okay.”

“Why?”

“Nothing,” Daniel said. “Can you help us out?”

“Yes. I have called Freyr. He will take us to Andromeda.”

They both blinked. “Andromeda?” Jack asked. “The galaxy?”

“Yes. There is a planet in a small system that used to be home to a sect of Alterans called Atalantians.”

Daniel looked at Jack. “Huh. Go figure.”

“I beg your pardon?” Thor asked.

“Nothing. We just recognize the name, that’s all. In our home universe, that was in the Pegasus galaxy and it held the mirror.”

Thor looked thoughtful. “The Pegasus galaxy no longer exists. It was eaten by another galaxy two million years ago.”

“What was the bigger galaxy?” Jack asked.

“We called it Svarthalfheim.”


“Elves that are twelve feet high and eat humans,” Thor said, and slowly blinked. Twice.

“You ever get the feeling he knows how to do ‘dead pan’?” Jack asked.

Daniel twisted his mouth in an effort not to laugh. “No, but it’s obviously he does.”

“If you are referring to a sarcastic answer,” Thor said, “you would be in error. We do not understand sarcasm. We do recognize in others. I believe that is what you just displayed.”

It wasn’t Jack’s imagination that the Asgardian was being sarcastic. He started to say something, then clapped his mouth shut and shook his head. “Nope. Not going there.”

“Well,” Daniel said. “Guess that shows me.”

“I beg your—” Thor began, but was interrupted by the arrival of Freyr. “Freyr, have you procured the spare ship?”

“I have. What was wrong with Mjolnir?” Freyr asked.

“I had to destroy it to kill the remaining replicator-controlled ships before they left our galaxy.”

They talked in their own language, then Freyr turned to them. “We will take you to Andromeda.”
“Now?” Jack asked.

“Yes.”

And before they could ask if they could have a better look around, an Asgard beam whisked them to the bridge of a ship Jack found familiar.

“Hey,” he said, turning about. “This looks like the … uh,” and Jack spelled ‘Bellesinjr’.

“Belisinjr,” Daniel said.

“You sure? Sounds like it should be longer.”

“Well, maybe it is, here.”

“Biliskner,” Thor corrected.

Daniel winced. “Wow, was I way off.”

“No kidding,” Jack said, looking at him with mild concern. “You’re a helluva lot more accurate than that.”

“I need sleep,” Daniel said. “That’s my excuse and I’m sticking to it.”

“The ship is detecting low levels of serotonin your bodies,” Freyr told them. “This will affect memory. You need sleep and food. We can provide sleep, but not food.”

“That’s okay, Thor,” Jack said. “We brought our own.”

“Very well.”

“How long do we get to catch up on our sleep?” Daniel asked.

“This journey will take approximately sixteen hours,” Freyr said. He slid a small opaline gem over his hand and a holographic map appeared in front of him. He spoke to Thor in their language, then said in English, “We do not sleep like you do, but if you have your own supplies, we can offer you a room with a comfortable floor.”

“That’ll do, thanks,” Jack told him, and adopted a formal attitude. “And I am most grateful for your assistance in this matter. I’d be glad to return the favor in any way. As long as it’s right now.”

Thor and Freyr looked at each other, then back at Jack and Daniel. “Is that some general phrase humans make, or are you sincere with that statement?”


“Would you consent to donating blood and tissue samples?” Freyr asked.

“Do you need help with cloning?” Daniel asked.

The two Asgardians looked surprised. “This is not general knowledge. Did you learn this in another reality?”

“Yeah,” Jack nodded. “Our original one.”
“Do you know what happened?” Thor asked.

Jack shook his head. “I think they were using a sample of an ancestor or something.”

The two grey guys talked more excitedly in their own language. “Do you know where that was?” Thor asked.

“No, sorry.”


“It does not,” Thor said. “We will not return to that Galaxy.”

“Then if giving you blood and tissue samples helps, we’re willing,” Jack said, getting a confirming nod from Daniel. “As long as the tissue sample you want doesn’t cause us any harm. For example, brain or other organ biopsies.”

“We do not use such crude methods,” Freyr said.

“Man, I wish you’d update Earth’s methods then,” Jack said wistfully, then corrected himself. “Er, you can’t, if our theory is right. So … never mind. Back to the original thought …” Jack held up his arm. “Have at it.”

“Come this way,” Freyr said, and he moved behind the captain’s chair to a lab with glass everything and holographic readouts. He touched Jack’s inner wrist with the tip of a thin glass rod. It was hot, but not too bad. Jack didn’t even flinch. The same was done for Daniel. Then another glass tip was placed at the back of their throats. Again, hot, but not bad.

“That is sufficient. We are grateful. I will beam you to your rest quarters now.”

“Thanks,” Jack said.

They appeared in a tiny ten-foot square room. Bare. Dark grey. The top of the walls somehow reflected light, but it was obvious that it came from behind. It wasn’t enough to read by but plenty to see with.

Dropping their packs, they pulled out the sleeping bags and dropped them on the floor, then lay down on top.

“Love you,” Daniel said as he wadded up his jacket for a pillow.

“Love you,” Jack said, doing the same thing.

In a few minutes, they were asleep.

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Jack woke up slowly, and became aware of warmth beneath him. He touched the floor and found it heated. Huh. He checked his watch and his eyes widened. It was ten hours later. Daniel was still sleeping, so Jack decided to watch him for a bit. He propped his head in his hand and reached over to thread his fingers through Daniel’s hair. The snow had made it dry funny and it did this curl that framed his face. It was actually attractive.
A few minutes of that finally roused his husband and he moaned slightly and slowly opened his eyes. “Jack?”

“Go back to sleep,” Jack told him.

“No,” he said, stretching and groaning. “I’m sore. Gotta get up and move.” He pushed up on an elbow. “How long were we out?”

“Ten hours.”

Daniel’s eyes widened for a second. “I’m surprised it wasn’t longer.”

“Snow does wonders.” Daniel’s stomach growled, and Jack laughed. “And now, we eat.”

Daniel ran his tongue over his teeth and grimaced. “Soon as I can, I’m brushing.”

“No kidding,” Jack said, doing the same. “But, eat first. Then once we get to the planet with the mirror, we’ll rinse and spit. I’m sure as hell not doing that here.”

Daniel nodded, and they grabbed two more self-heating MRE packs. This time, chicken and rice dinner. Jack prepped his with enthusiasm, but Daniel dug for another flavor. He ended up with chili mac. He sighed. “Just once, I’d like to get the brisket.” He put the chili mac back and prepped the chicken. They normally came with a lot of extras but they’d only grabbed entrée packets and they were two years old.

“I can’t wait to find a real meal,” Daniel said, sighing. “At least we found that mountain grouse bird in the woods on Omega. That was good shooting.”

“And good eating.”

Daniel nodded. “I’d kill for a goddamn steak.”

“Right?” Jack asked. “Now, let’s talk about that when I’m not eating something that should be steak.”

Daniel chuckled and dug into his dinner. When finished, he dropped onto his back and patted his stomach. “I could use a joint.”

Jack snorted. “When’s the last time you had one?”

“Two years ago,” Daniel said. “Not long after the NID took over. I wanted to see what they’d do, so I lit up in my office.”

Jack blinked at him. “Are you insane? What happened?”

Daniel snorted derisively. “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Jack asked around a mouthful.

“Nothing. They did nothing. I was disappointed. Seems the only time they put me on ice was when I attacked Simmons. Or someone else. I broke plenty of jaws.”

“That’s my man,” Jack nodded, but was disturbed by Daniel’s mention of ‘on ice.’ He knew what that meant. “How many times?” he asked. There was no way to be subtle about it.

“Five. Any more and it would have harmed my brain. So Simmons figured out that since I didn’t
care about my own life, he’d threaten yours. To let me know how serious they were, they killed someone else in front of me.”

Jack paused and frowned, noticing the look on Daniel’s face. “Who was it?”

Daniel coughed. “Graham.”

“Jesus, Daniel,” Jack said, reaching over to grab his hand and squeeze.

“I know.” Daniel squeezed back and sighed, staring at the ceiling. He sat up. “So, let’s pack up, find our way back to the bridge. I love watching the flight through hyperspace.”

“Okay,” Jack said, his smile sad. Daniel might be compartmentalizing that horror show that happened, but it would take Jack a while to get used to things he was just now finding out about.

“Leave it for later, Jack,” Daniel said, watching his face. “I’ll tell you everything, but I want us secure and safe first. There’re some things … I can’t talk about. Not yet.”

“Whenever you’re ready, Daniel. You know that.”

“Thanks,” Daniel said, leaning forward for a light kiss.

Jack turned it into a long hug.

They found their way back to the bridge, after a lot of Asgardians kept pointing them in the right direction. It was almost as if they wanted them to get there as fast as possible.

“You’d think we were stinking up the hallways,” Jack said, annoyed.

“I don’t care,” Daniel said. “Let’s just get there.”

The place was like Thor’s old ship. Dark blues, reds, silver, and gold. It was odd. Jack expected to hear that tap, tap, tap, tap, tap of bugs legs. He shuddered.

“What?” Daniel asked, noticing, as they entered the bridge.

“Just remembering that disaster on the old ship. Bugs everywhere.”

Daniel shuddered, too. The most skin-crawling sound was that tap, tap, tap.

“You slept well?” Thor asked from his silver chair.

“Yes, thanks,” Daniel nodded.

“Do you need refreshment?”

“No, thanks,” Jack answered. He tapped the pack he carried on his shoulder. “Got it all here.”

“I hope there’s water where the mirror is,” Daniel added as he went to the front of the ship and looked out of the large viewport.
“If you need water now, we can get it for you,” Thor told them.

“No, we’re good,” Jack said, raising a hand. “But thanks for offering.”

Daniel dropped the packs and sat down on the floor, bringing his knees up. He simply sat and watched.

Thor tilted his head slightly and Jack grinned as he walked over and set his things down next to Daniel’s. “He finds looking at it relaxing.”

Thor blinked a few times, then turned his attention to the readout he pulled up. He held an opaline gem in each hand, moving them on the arms of his chair. Jack could never figure out how that helped do anything, but then, he wasn’t an Asgardian. Thankfully. Clones. No sex. No thank you.

“Would you care for a chair?” Thor asked. He gestured at a footstool. It was way too low.

Jack waved a negating hand. “Thanks. I’ll use the floor.” He sat down next to Daniel and draped his arms over his raised knees. “What’s up?” He could tell Daniel had a million thoughts in his head.

Daniel disappointed him by shaking his head. “Nothing. Just … letting my mind roam.”

Jack knew that was code for “I have too much going through my head. Maybe later.”

“Gotcha,” he said.

Daniel gave him a small smile. “If I think too much, I’m afraid my emotions will get away from me.” He sighed. “So I’m purposely not settling on anything. Not thinking too much. Just … wandering. With all the shit that’s happened just in the last six months? I’m …” He shook his head. “I’m gonna need an outlet soon or it’ll come out on you by accident.”

“I have the same feelings,” Jack told him. “We’re both on high wires. We kept hoping things would get better and we got so used to putting up with bad shit that we never questioned the shit going on at the Omega Site. First chance we get, we’ll find a gym.”

“Good,” Daniel said. “That’s something I look forward to.” He suddenly laughed, but it was sarcastic-themed. “I’d be glad to deal with something as ordinary as a Goa’uld.”

“Bite your tongue,” Jack said, throwing him a mock-glower. “But I get what you mean. Enough with the bugs and spies and all that nasty, insidious shit.”

Daniel nodded. He didn’t say anything else and neither did Jack. A few times, they thought about something they missed about the old Earth, prior to the NID, but each time, they thought it would only lead to sadness. Best to leave it and just remain quiet. And they kept that up for the next six hours.
Andromeda

They dropped out of hyperspace and a map overlay appeared on the viewport. Daniel and Jack stood up and stretched. They’d fallen asleep every now and then and they had some kinks to work out. They seemed to fascinate the other Asgard on the bridge. The two humans smirked at each other and kept loosening up.

“We are going where the red dot is,” Thor told them. A red dot appeared on the fourth planet from a yellow star, and that sun seemed just a bit too large for comfort.

“Andromeda?” Daniel asked.

“Yes.”

“That star is just a bit too big. Radiation?” Jack asked.

“Moderate, but I am picking up an underground complex. No life signs. The mirror is there. But it is not called the Seshenal.”

“Is it Urania?” Daniel asked.

Thor blinked a few times, rapidly. “How did you know that?”

“Uh, an Ascended guy came to me in a dream and told me to find you and Urania. That she isn’t what she used to be and is a bit less reflective. Do you know what that means?”

“I am afraid I do not.” He turned to look at another readout. “Here we are. I will beam you down to the chamber. Then we must depart.”

Jack and Daniel traded glances. “You don’t want to wait to see if we make it out of here?”

“You will. We are on a time table and have to return to Ida.”

“Are you in trouble?” Jack asked, concerned.

“Not in the way I believe you mean. The council has decided that we will leave this plane of existence.”

Daniel knew what that meant. “You’re going to ascend? I thought you had to be humanoid to ascend.”

“No. We cannot risk further cloning degradation. Too many minds were lost in the last planetary transfer. This will be the only way we can save our individual life forces.”

“Souls?” Jack asked.

“That is one way to look at it.”

“Oh.” Daniel held out his hand and shook Thor’s.

Jack did the same. “I hope enlightenment is all it’s cracked up to be.”

Thor blinked.
“Have a good time?” Jack said instead.

Blink.

Jack shook his head a little. “Thanks and take care.”

“And you, O’Neill.”

“Hey, wait,” Daniel said, frowning. “If you’re ascending, what did you need our blood and tissue samples for?”

“To seed other worlds in other realities.”

“Wha—”

The Asgard beam whisked them down.

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Daniel spun around, shouting at the dark ceiling. “What did that mean?”

No answer.

He looked at Jack. “Did that mean what I think it did?”

Jack gave him a slow, sexy smile, half-amused. “Well, well. We’re finally going to get a world that starts with Adam and Steve.”

Daniel burst out laughing.

Jack grinned, rather proud of himself, and fished out his flashlight. “Oh wow. Check it out.”

They were in a duplicate Atalantia. The lights slowly came on as before. And at the other end of the hall stood the large quantum mirror. Daniel walked over and set his packs down beside it, just like last time. “I hope there aren’t any wraith to interrupt us.”

There was a low intermittent hum and the frame of the mirror slowly blinked on, like a generator trying to power up a room. The humming rose in pitch and volume and Daniel stared at the top of its frame, waiting for words. He then remembered that he and Jack had to talk for a bit.

“Uh, hi. I’m Daniel Jackson. This is Jack O’Neill. Will you help us find a world?”

“I will indeed, Daniel Jackson.”

It spoke. And it was female.

Daniel blinked and felt Jack come to his side. “Are you Urania?”

“Indeed I am. How did you know my name?”

“An ascended being named White Eagle told me in a dream. Does that make sense?” He gave Jack a shrug, not expecting a lucid answer.
“It does. He created me.”


“I do not have much time, Daniel and Jack. I am almost out of power. If you seek a place to live, I can search for twenty-six hours. At that time, I will shut down.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. Is there a power source you need?”

“There is no time. The sun is expanding. I will start the search now.”

As before, a scanning beam emanating from a pinhole at the top of the mirror slowly passed over them and this one was green. What had that other one been. Orange? Amber? Daniel shook his head.

“What?” Jack asked as the mirror’s lights began oscillating as before.

“Nothing. Just trying to remember what color the light was for the other one.”

Jack grinned at him and reached over to comb his fingers through his hair, then pull him in for a kiss. “My crazy, scatter-brained husband.”

“Asshole,” Daniel laughed, playfully pushing at him.

“Got one. So do you. Hey, is there a kitchen around here somewhere?”

Daniel shoved at him again, both of them chuckling, and didn’t expect an answer from Urania.

“There is. If you have purification methods, I suggest you use them.”

Jack snorted, and made an elaborate bow at the mirror. “Why, thank you, my lady. We’ll do just that.”

Daniel rolled his eyes.

“C’mon,” Jack said. “Before she responds again.”

Once they arrived in the kitchen, Daniel thumbed behind him. “Should we ask her for detailed stuff like before?”

“No. She only has a day before she’s caput. Let’s take what we can get.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Everything happened almost exactly as before. Boredom. Sleep. Water refills. It was a bit stale, though, so they purified it with tablets from their survival kits, then took out a few Sternos and metal cups to boil the water. To their mutual surprise, neither was in the mood for lovemaking. It was enough to be together.

At hour twenty-four and forty-five minutes, Urania stopped her oscillations.

“I have completed my task. Here is the best suitable world.”

The slate mirror turned on and a familiar scene appeared. The collection room from P3R-233.
“Wow.”

“Is that?” Jack asked.

“Yeah, it is.”

“Huh.”

“I know, right?”

“There is a 98% probability for a happy life in this reality.”

“How’d you measure that?” Jack asked, skeptical.

“Through contact with the mirror you see in that room, I have found my counterpart. She is on a planet called Typhys in the Orion galaxy cluster.”

“There’s an Orion galaxy?” Daniel asked. “Not just a nebula or constellation?”

“Yes. It is not far from the nebula you speak of. Sixty billion kilometers.”

“Oh, not far,” Jack said, jogging his brows.

“Comparatively speaking.”

“Compared to what?” Jack asked.

“Hyperspace travel.”

“Oh,” Jack said, and shrugged acknowledgement. “From Earth, how long would it take through hyperspace?”

“This galaxy is not as close as the constellation would suggest. It will take forty-six days.”

“Holy shit,” Daniel said, rubbing at his forehead. “I hope we don’t have to leave this reality, too. We’d have to steal a ship with hyperspace engines.”

“You okay?” Jack asked.
“Headache.” Daniel grabbed his two packs, hauling one over a shoulder. “C’mon. Let’s get this over with.”

“One moment, Daniel.”

She scanned him again.

“You are low on proteins and carbohydrates.”

“You mean, he needs to eat,” Jack clarified.

“Ye … esss.” Her voice changed, dropping in pitch, and her power began to fluctuate.

“Time to go!”

They touched the mirror and appeared on the other side. They turned to look, backing up a few steps, and they saw the room they left flash white, then the little mirror’s surface turned to slate grey. It was off. Daniel looked around at the table, searching for the control mechanism, but it wasn’t there.

“C’mon,” Jack said, and they left the room. When they got to the DHD, they paused. “Ever feel like we’re traveling through alien airports?” Jack asked, randomly and out of nowhere.

Daniel frowned, thinking, then shook his head. “I never thought about it.”

“Oh. Never mind. Where to? We can’t dial home. We have no IDC.”

“Um. Alpha site? Delta. Gamma. I won’t think about Omega. That might be bad luck.”

“How about places you know by heart, other than SGC sites?”

“Well … about twenty. First two that come to mind are places where there are, were, dig sites. SG-11 and SG-6.” He tried to focus but he had to sit down. “I need to eat something.”

They pulled out energy bars and water. For five minutes, Daniel did nothing but eat and Jack left him alone.

“How do you feel?”

“I don’t feel all that better.” He started to get up, but Jack stopped him.

“What? I’m fine. Well, not completely but I’ll get there.”

“Daniel, look at me.”

Daniel’s pupils were contracted at first, then dilated. Jack hauled out the survival kit and dug around. He pulled out two tablets, a vial, and two hypodermic needles.

Daniel’s eyes grew wide. “You’re kidding? I thought we were protected.”

“Thor was wrong. There’s no telling how long that sun has been permeating the ground on that planet. We’re contaminated.”

Daniel groaned. “Goddammit. That means …”

“We need to isolate for twelve hours. But let’s gate to some place safe and get some fresh air.”
“Some place that won’t have any people,” Daniel said, and stared at the DHD. “Um …” It took him a few minutes, then he dialed. They gated to Oannes.

“Seriously?” Jack asked, looking around and seeing nothing but beachfront. “What if Nem shows up?”

“Well, you think of something.”

Jack thought, then dialed.

“Where’re we going?”

“That rain forest where we found squat.”

Daniel blinked at him and started laughing, even though he looked a bit pale. “That’s what made an impression in your head?”

“That and the hanging peat moss.”

Jack dialed, and they headed through. There was the odor of burning wood and leaf matter and they turned to find that the stargate had been overgrown. Before they took another step, Jack injected Daniel, then himself, then took the pills they were trained to take. “Okay. Let’s …”

Nausea hit them both, thanks to the medicine. After vomiting for a bit, they found an enormous fallen tree, eight feet in diameter and hollowed out at the root end. Daniel made sure the hollowing hadn’t been caused by insects, then they pulled out a couple of thin tarps to use as a type of lean-to. Right after getting it sorted, the skies opened up and they were stuck there during a particularly nasty thunderstorm.

“I knew there was a reason I hated this planet,” Jack groused.

Daniel pulled him closer and kissed him. “We’ll be on our way in a little while.”

The next side effect hit them: drowsiness.

“Dammit,” Daniel mumbled. Their strength sapped, they arranged their duffles and fell asleep on top of them, while the world thundered. Seven and a half hours later, they woke up, drowsy, but the rain had stopped, and the sun shone through in spots. It was so peaceful, they fell back to sleep.

Eventually, they recovered well enough. Hunger returned and after spending time eating and drinking a lot of water, they waited around until they needed to take a leak.

“So, now where?” Jack asked. “Figure out which place? SG-11 or SG-6?”

“SG-11.”

“Here’s hoping they already know about the problems there.”

“If they don’t, they’re in for a rude awakening.”

Jack snorted. “They’re already in for a rude awakening.”

Daniel giggled, then cleared his throat, smirked at Jack, and dialed P3X-888. Chaka’s planet.
When they exited the gate on ‘888, they were met by three people: Doctor Robert Rothman, Sergeant Loeder, and Major Hawkins. The three men were at the DHD, however, not standing before them. It seemed as if they had been getting ready to dial out when Daniel’s dial-in beat them to it.

They stood there, mouths open, eyes bigger than saucers. Then, as was typical in Daniel’s estimation, the military boys overreacted. They pulled their weapons. Rothman just stared.

“Who are you?” Major Hawkins demanded.

“Daniel?” Robert asked, walking around the Sergeant and Major.

“Rothman, hold your position!” Hawkins snapped, and grabbed at the man, who shrugged him off.

“How can you be here?” Rothman asked, dumbfounded. “You’re …”

“Dead, yes,” Jack said, growing annoyed. “And Major, dead, or not, I outrank you, so stand the fuck down.”

Hawkins frowned. “Sounds like …”

Robert turned around and glowered at Hawkins. “Colonel O’Neill. Yeah, it’s Colonel O’Neill.” He turned back to the new arrivals. “You’re from an alternate universe. Here, you died on that space station. Five years ago.”

“What the hell do you mean, ‘alternate universe’?” Hawkins asked him.

“It’s the only thing that explains these two.”

“Robert?” Daniel asked, as both he and Jack walked down the steps. “Yeah, it’s us but it’s not us.” Daniel looked around, then narrowed his eyes. “You, uh, have any trouble here? With the indigenous population?”

Robert went pale. “What indigenous population?”

“Oh boy,” Daniel said, sighing heavily. “Let’s put that aside for a sec. Sergeant, Major, we’re not here to kill you, eat you, or fuck you. So could you get those goddamn weapons out of our faces?”

“That doesn’t sound like …” Hawkins said.

“Oh for cryin’ out loud,” Jack said, dropping his packs and snatching the weapon out of Hawkins’s hands. He ejected the round in the chamber and then the magazine, then handed the empty weapon back to him. He pointedly looked at Loeder and the Sergeant clicked the safety on and reholstered his weapon. “Good man.” He turned to Daniel. “You wanna take this or should I?”
“Feel free,” Daniel said, walking to the side, and setting his packs down. “You might wanna bring it over here though.”

“Point,” Jack said and picked up his stuff and set down next to Daniel’s. “Hawkins. Dial home. Tell … Hammond still in charge?”

Hawkins was struck silent, so Robert answered. “Yeah, he’s in charge.”

“More or less,” Loeder added.

“More or less?” Jack asked, frowning.

“Well, he’s in command,” Robert said, “but—”

“Say nothing else, Rothman,” Hawkins said and he moved to the DHD. “They want to see Hammond. He’ll fill them in on whatever needs … filling in. I’m washing my hands of it. Meanwhile, you get back to work. Both of you.”

“But it’s Daniel and Colonel O’Neill!” Rothman said. “How can I just go back to …” He frowned and looked over at the grid markers. “Uh …”

Hawkins began to dial the SGC, but Daniel walked over and aimed a zat right at Hawkins’ head. “Bend down,” he ordered.


“What?” Robert asked, and he bent over, showing them. “I’m not a Goa’uld. What makes you think I am?”

Loeder did it without complaint and after Jack looked, he aimed the zat at Rothman. “I’m not asking twice.”

“Okay, okay,” and Rothman bent over, showing his neck.

“You’re clear,” Jack said.

“Okay, so what the hell?” Rothman asked.

“This planet is home to both the first hosts as well as the first symbiotes,” Daniel said. “Haven’t you figured that out yet?”

“How? I—”

“Hawkins, get your—” Daniel ordered, but Hawkins jumped on him, his eyes glowing. Daniel fired, but the zat got him, as well. He collapsed, but was aware enough to roll away from the Major. “Jack!”

“Holy shit!” Rothman exclaimed, running over to Daniel.

Jack pulled out his zat and aimed it at Hawkins. “You know what this does. Back down.”

“He doesn’t, Jack. The Goa’uld are babies here. They just control and report to the nearest snakehead.”

“Yeah, but how do they know that?”
Daniel blinked. “You’re right. However, it might try to leave him.”

“One way around that,” Jack said. “Rothman.”

“Uh, yeah?”

“Bandana?” The doctor pulled one out of his side pocket. “Tie it around Hawkins mouth. Loeder, handcuff him.”

“With what?” Loeder asked.

Jack bit at his cheek to keep from getting mad. “Never mind. Just hold your weapon on him.”

“Yes, sir.”

Satisfied, Jack waved his zat at Daniel. “You getting over it?”

“Marginal. And I’m gonna throw up. Zats and radiation drugs don’t mix.” The next two seconds, he did just that.

Jack grimaced in sympathy. “Rothman. There is a race that lives here. It’s not a good idea for you to be here without guards. And don’t go near the lakes. That’s where the symbiotes are.”

“Oh god. I was just …” Robert swallowed and went green. Then he threw up.

“For cryin’ out …” Jack took a deep breath. “Loeder. IDC. Time to call the boss.”

“Yes, sir.”

As Loeder dialed the DHD, Hawkins recovered just enough to run into the vortex when it exploded outward.

Everyone froze, stunned. Jack closed his mouth and let out an exasperated sigh. “Well, that sucked.”

Daniel started laughing, spitting out the water he’d been using to rinse his mouth out with. He capped his cloth waterskin. “Jesus, Jack.”

Meanwhile, Loeder was standing in front of the nearby FRED. He was fairly pale with shock and attempting to explain. When he looked at Jack and paused, Jack made a roll-it-along motion with his hand.

“Sir, we have some problems here. But first and foremost, we have two visitors. And it seems they’re …”

“From another reality,” Daniel told him.

The people at the other end of the FRED would have heard him, and they heard General Hammond’s voice. “Sergeant, who was that?”

“Sir, it’s Doctor Daniel Jackson and Colonel Jack O’Neill. They say they’re from another reality. And they’re requesting to see you.”

“We’ll have firepower on us the minute we step through. They’ll want to check to see if we’re replicators,” Jack told Daniel.
“We’ll get that anyway, Jack.”

“Good point.”

Loeder and Rothman asked, “If you’re what?”

Daniel relaxed. “Oh, please mean that you’ve never heard of them.”

“ Heard of what?” Rothman asked.

“Replicators,” Jack said.

“Nope, sorry,” Rothman said.

“Thank god,” Jack and Daniel said in stereo.

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Daniel and Jack knew what to expect when they exited the gate. They dropped their packs and raised their hands at the thirty SFs and infantry who pointed a stunning array of weapons at them. As was their job, until told to stand down.

No one knew what to expect, but when they saw two men in dirty green fatigues and unshaven faces, looking exactly like the men they knew were dead … it was a lot to take in. General Hammond stood at the bottom of the ramp and gestured for them to come down.

SFs disarmed them first, then Daniel and Jack dropped their hands and walked down to see the person they knew and didn’t know. It was bittersweet for them. Their George Hammond had died to get them to safety.

Four men picked up their duffle bags and Jack called after them, “Steal anything and I kick your —”

“O’Neill,” Hammond said.

For a few moments, it was déjà vu.

“Jackson,” Hammond said. “Both of you please follow these gentlemen to the infirmary. Doctor Fraiser will be running the standard tests. I advise you to cooperate.”

“No problem, sir,” Jack replied.

Daniel simply nodded. As he and Jack followed SFs down the hall, they got a lot of wide-eyed stares, but Daniel received frowns as well when some people stared at the length of his hair. He rolled his eyes and shook his head. Jack had looked back in time to see him do it.

“What?”

“Oh, my hair is making a big splash,” Daniel said in his usual dry tone.

Jack snorted. “They can stick it, you know.”
“Yeah, I know.”

As they made their way to the infirmary, it was made apparent how different this SGC’s personnel were different from the fake ones in the last reality. Reactions were a bit more realistic. They ranged from shock to dismay to dislike.

When Janet finally saw them, she froze and stared, but instead of going all Deer-Headlights, she narrowed her eyes with suspicion.

Daniel looked at Jack. “Now that’s the real one.”


“Janet,” Daniel said, nodding. “We’re here for all the bells and whistles.”

They got them. Twice. Janet wasn’t satisfied with the first round of results and after the second batch of tests came back the same, she was willing to admit that their stories were the truth. When he walked in four hours later to demand what the hold-up was, she told him about the second batch of tests.

“They’re who they appear to be, sir,” she told him.

Jack and Daniel sat on opposite gurneys, in t-shirts and fatigue trousers—both still dirty. They looked at each other and sighed.

“Think this’ll take a while?” Daniel asked him in a low voice.

“Probably. We would do the same thing, back when we had normal lives.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s just …”

“Annoying. I know. When you’re on the other end of it.”

“Okay, you two,” Hammond said, looking back and forth at them. He wasn’t angry. He was confused. “Why don’t we get you some quarters, so you can clean yourselves up. Then report to the Briefing Room. This is one debriefing I am sort of looking forward to, but I’m not sure I should be.”

“Hey, I get it, General,” Jack said, then made a face and sniffed his armpit. He exaggerated getting a whiff of something bad. “Wow.”

Hammond actually smiled. “Two hours, gentlemen.”

“Yes, sir,” Daniel and Jack said at the same time.

“Your weapons were confiscated, but your belongings are right outside.”

“Thank you, sir,” Jack said. “I expected as much. Had I been … well, I know the drill.”

To their happy satisfaction, the rooms came with their own bathrooms. And they were assigned rooms next to each other. After showering and changing, Jack went to Daniel’s room, walked in, and shut the door. Daniel was in the bathroom. “Hey,” Jack called out.

Daniel poked his head out. “Hey. Almost done.” He had dental floss in his hands.

Jack grinned. “Feels great to be clean.”
“You’re telling me.” He dropped the floss in the garbage bin just when Jack walked in behind him and wrapped his arms around him. He looked at Daniel’s shaven face and rubbed his own cheek against his. “Nice. Listen. If they don’t allow us to be married here, what do you want to do?”

Daniel’s grin faded. He covered Jack’s hands and arms with his own and leaned against him. “We give them time. But if they don’t allow it after an agreed upon time, then …” He gave Jack a poignant look. “I refuse to work some place that has some say over whether I can live with you or not. I won’t tolerate that bigotry again, Jack.”

“I agree,” Jack said, nodding. “So we give them, what? Six months? A year?”

“A year?” Daniel asked, eyes wide. “If you’re willing to risk getting thrown out, I’m willing to get fired. I’m not living separated from you.”

“Agreed,” Jack said, giving him a poignant look in return. “We won’t comply with those regs. If we have to quit, so be it. We can be useful elsewhere.”

“Given that we know what’s out there, we can live offworld.”

Jack let him go and checked his watch. “Let’s go early. Make a good impression.”

Daniel turned and wrapped his arms around his neck and gave Jack a deep, passionate kiss. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

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Dressed in clean olive drab, they entered the Briefing Room, noting their SF shadow walked past and whispered to Hammond before the General sat down. He frowned and nodded.

“I think someone disapproves,” Daniel told Jack. “And we know what that means.”

Jack glared at the SF. “Mind your own fucking business.”

“That’s enough,” Hammond said. “Be seated.” He sat down at the head of the table, as always. Jack sat a few seats down from the General and Daniel sat next to him. A statement.

“Before we start, I need to tell you that we have a rigid fraternization policy. Doors must be kept open if you’re going to visit each other.”

“That apply to married couples?” Daniel asked.

“No, of course not,” Hammond said.

Both Jack and Daniel raised their left hands to show Hammond their matching wedding rings. His mouth dropped open and he frowned, more out of confusion and surprise than with any disapproval. He shut his mouth and gave them a stern expression.

“Marriage between men is not allowed.”
“As civilians?”

“Yes, it’s legal.”

“Then, beggin’ your pardon, General, but the military is supposed to follow civilian law.”

“Not in this universe, Jack. I’m sorry. And as civilians, you’ll need to redo your vows because you have clean slates here.”

Daniel and Jack took deep breaths and slowly let them out.

“We have the same fingerprints, don’t we?” Daniel asked. “Couldn’t we just get declared alive and well?”

“No, I don’t…” Hammond frowned and thought it over. “I think you could, yes, but it’s something that we can’t consider for the moment. Our Jack O’Neill and Daniel Jackson died five years ago. To my knowledge, they weren’t gay. Involved.”

“I’ll lay odds they were,” Jack said. “We,” he went on, gesturing between himself and Daniel, “aren’t gay, but bi. We were both married to women previously. Sara and Shau’re.”

Hammond looked confused, but he shook his head. “Let’s save this conversation for another, more private, time. It would, if you’ll pardon me, be somewhat disrespectful to allow you to take over their lives. They were very well loved and respected and we took their deaths pretty hard.”

“So what do we do?” Jack asked, sitting back. “Stay here until you get used to us? Or will be forced to change our names?”

“Forget it. I’m not making up an alias,” Daniel said stubbornly.

“Let’s put that aside for now and talk about where you come from and why you’re here.”

It took a while. By the time they were finished, Hammond was, as the British say, gobsmacked. He shook his head wonderingly.

“I can’t imagine what you’ve been through. And frankly, it’s simply too much to believe, but I’ll have to take your word for it.”

“There is no advantage in lying,” Daniel told him sourly.

“I understand that, too. So I am inclined to believe you. What you went through is a set of problems that are too big to imagine. Do you see what I mean?”

“We went through them, so, no.” Jack gave him a brief, sad smile. “But we didn’t overcome squat. We ran.”

“We were so out of our depths,” Daniel said, feeling the need for clarification. “So beyond the ability to change things for the better, that our only choice was to run.”

“So what do we need to know about this time line and reality?” Jack asked.

He got one hell of an answer. The year was 2015.


Hammond gave him a curious look. “What year was it when you left?”
“2004, sir,” Daniel said. “Wow.” He looked at Jack and was about to go into a discussion about variable timelines, but Hammond continued.

“Our Stargate Program is run by myself, but I also have to confer with an Advisory Board on any major decisions. Like sending a bomb to another planet, for example.”

“Is … that commonplace?” Daniel asked, alarmed.

“No. But the Advisory Board can make that determination if a hostile force is encountered. Most of the time, their interference runs along the monetary.”

“Good god,” Daniel said, disgusted. “The Stargate Program’s been corporatized.”

“In a word, yes,” Hammond said, not looking too pleased himself. “It’s a five-person board, and they’re similar to a senate oversight committee.”

“The big difference being that they’re in it for the money?” Jack asked. He and Daniel traded looks that said this was intolerable and they might as well leave.

“We’re sorry to have wasted your time,” Daniel said, getting up. Jack remained seated and he took Daniel’s hand.

“Hang on. Don’t jump the gun just yet.”

“I’m not going to work for people who are out to make a buck off the rape of the goddamn universe.”

“Daniel,” Jack said, closing his eyes.

Hammond said nothing, and he chewed at his lip, watching Daniel with an enigmatic look. “Have a seat, Doctor Jackson.”


“You sound exactly like the man we lost five years ago. So do you, Colonel.”

Jack took a deep breath. “What else has changed? Who’s on SG-1?”

“Yes, sir,” Daniel said, suddenly animated. “Is Sam in charge? What about Teal’c? Are they here or offworld?”

“Offworld,” Hammond said. “Colonel Carter is retired, technically. She’s married to the Tok’ra, Martouf, and living on the Tok’ra homeworld. Teal’c is co-leader of the Jaffa Nation. He shares that responsibility with Master Bra’tac.”

“And SG-1?” Jack asked.

“SG-1 was disbanded after your counterparts died. There was no desire to reman it.”

“Seriously?” Daniel asked. “After this Board was in place? I’m surprised they didn’t use it as their puppet team.”

Hammond gave him a tight smile. “That was one battle they didn’t bother fighting because it was the President who wanted to use it. I called in my last favor to make sure that didn’t happen. Now, to bring you up to speed. This is the eighteenth year of the program. We’re public, if the Advisory Board wasn’t a big hint.”
“Public?” Jack and Daniel said together.

“Huh,” Daniel said. “That should put a bit of a bind on the runaway greed, shouldn’t it?”

Hammond gave him a broader smile. “Partially, Doctor Jackson. The Board has to answer to the President as well as the Joint Chiefs—which represents the Pentagon. They aren’t completely corporate, although there are elements.”

“Like the President taking legalized bribes,” Daniel said cynically.

“Donations,” Hammond corrected. “But that amounts to the same thing. Things any different where you’re from, before the fascist takeover?”

“Nope,” Daniel said, sighing.

“Moving on. I’m curious about these replicators you mentioned.”

“You don’t want to be,” Jack said.

“We haven’t run across anything like them, in that spider form or a human form. The Asgard have never mentioned them, either.”

“Thank god for small favors,” Daniel said. “Trust me, sir. If they show up, we need to throw everything at them. They’re dangerous and far worse than the Goa’uld.”

“So I’ve surmised.”

“If it’s not too delicate a question, how did we die here?” Jack asked.

Hammond took a deep breath and folded his hands on the table. “Colonel O’Neill and Doctor Jackson went undercover to a Goa’uld space station to spy on a meeting of several System Lords. They were to release a gas that was created by the Tok’ra, which kills symbiotes. Something went wrong. From what the Tok’ra have been able to gather, the drug they were using to fool people into thinking they were someone familiar, and in their service, backfired when someone Doctor Jackson knew arrived on the station.”

Daniel felt a knot form in his stomach. “Osiris.”

“Yes, Doctor. She left the station, and from what we understand, Anubis sent some minions and blew it up, killing our people inside. But the Tok’ra took out Osiris and Zipacna as they attacked their homeworld. Anubis lost much of his army and Baal stepped in to take over. Anubis was destroyed. Colonel Carter and Teal’c currently work with the SGC to maintain relations with several allies, including the Asgard, Tok’ra, Jaffa, Tollan, the Nox, and several other worlds.”

“Silver linings,” Daniel said soberly.

“When did they discover Dakara?” Jack asked.

“Six years ago. Jacob Carter and Selmak arranged a rendezvous with SG-1 to sabotage a meeting between Apophis and Heru’ur. The plan was to set off bombs intending to make them think they were shooting at each other. The gambit paid off and they went to war and eventually killed each other off.”

“Good,” Daniel said.

Jack covered his hand and squeezed sympathetically. Daniel covered his hand with his other one
and gave Jack a grim smile. When they realized that they were making the General uncomfortable, they let each other’s hands go. They were married, but it was time to return to professional behavior.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Daniel said. “We haven’t been around a professional SGC atmosphere for a long time.”

“So,” Jack said. “It’s time to return to it.” He and Daniel exchanged a nod.

Hammond held up a hand. “Thank you. However, my business is maintaining the regulations while running a smooth command. Outside of that, your relationship isn’t my business. My only concern is that I don’t want either of you getting into trouble.”

“Technically, we’re civilians, yes?” Jack asked him.

Hammond raised his brows. “Unless you’re accepted as your counterparts, you’re right.” He grinned. “Feel free to hold hands, but on your own time.”

“Yes, sir,” they both said.

“So now what?” Jack asked.

“Let’s play it by ear for the next few days. The Advisory Board will want to meet with you and no doubt someone has told them of your arrival.”

“That happen a lot?” Jack scowled. “Someone in this command going over your head?”

“Unfortunately, Jack. Unfortunately. I have yet to nail the culprits. And they’re plural. They always are. They don’t get paid enough, and bribes and moonlighting are a lucrative business. But when they get caught, they go straight to Leavenworth. I won’t countenance insubordination and undermining my command.”

He paused, then looked at Daniel. “I hate to say this, Doctor, but …” He sighed. “There’s a uniform dress code and your hair … It’s one thing for scientists employed here. They get a pass. But you’re uncategorized, so technically, you fall under SOP.”

Daniel stuck his tongue in his cheek and stared back at Hammond. Jack could tell he was getting ready to stand rebellious. He grimaced and turned to the General.

“General, I’m afraid I’ll have to disagree—”

“I’ll cut it,” Daniel said, surprising Jack. “If it makes your job easier, General. But I’m not setting one foot near a Marine barber.”

“You won’t have to, Doctor Jackson. We have two stylists here.”

“They on Level 20?” Jack asked.

“They are,” Hammond said, smirking pleasantly. “You won’t need to pay them, or tip them. I made sure they were given the proper rank to make up for that.”

Jack stood up and Hammond followed. “I’m sure we’re keeping you from … whatever jobs you have piled on your desk, sir.”

“You were one of them, Jack. Both of you see Sergeant Davis. He’ll assign ID cards for the elevator and the locks on your quarters. I can requisition temporary pay until your identities are
cemented. Are you sure you won’t change your names?”

Jack thought it over. “We’re sure.”

“I need something temporary, gentlemen.”

“I can go by a different middle name,” Jack said. “Daniel?”

“Fine.”

The phone rang in Hammond’s office. “Work it out. I’ll talk to you tomorrow, ten-hundred hours.”

“Yes, sir,” they both said, and watched Hammond close the door to his office and answer the phone.

“Ten bucks that’s about us,” Daniel said.

“No bet.” They made their way next door, where Walter Davis’ desk resided, along with his mountain of paperwork. He looked at them, startled, and shook his head.

“I should get out of here before something else happens,” he muttered. “IDs and data, right?”

“Right,” Jack said, snapping his fingers.

“Can I have a rubber band?” Daniel asked.

Davis handed him one, then pulled out a bunch of papers and some white identification scan cards, lanyards, and two booklets.

Jack gave him a puzzled look until Daniel gathered his hair into a ponytail and wrapped it in the band. He flinched. “That’s gonna smart when you take it out.”

“It’s preferable to biting back the urge to hit people for looking at me in that insufferable, disgusting, bigoted …”

“Gotcha.”

Davis glanced at Daniel twice as he filled out a card. “It looks better. But then, you could wear a bag on your head and people would be jealous.”

Daniel and Jack blinked at him and said together, “Jealous?”

“Well, yeah,” Davis drawled, as if it was common knowledge. “I thought you knew that.”

“Knew what?” Daniel asked.

“How can you be that clueless?” Davis asked. “Makes it worse, I guess.”

“Davis, so help me …” Jack said.

Davis swallowed. “You’re envied. The old you, the new you. Makes no difference. People are jealous. Especially when we all knew you and the Colonel …” He cleared his throat.

“Hang on,” Jack said. “Hammond said he thought we were straight. The old us.”

“Yeah, he purposely ignores gossip. It offends his sensibilities.”
Jack snorted.

“Jack, Doctor Jackson!” came Hammond’s voice. “Could you join me, please?”

“Uh oh,” Davis said. “That’s his—”

“I know what it is, Chief,” Jack told him as he and Daniel returned to the Briefing Room. They found Janet inside, standing at the table. On it were a few white pills, two syringes, and a vial.

“Ah,” Jack said.

“Care to explain?” Hammond asked, gesturing.

Jack folded his arms at the same time Daniel did, earning a disconcerted frown from Fraiser.

“Did you examine the syringes?” Jack asked her.

“I can’t identify the substance. I don’t recognize this name, either,” Janet said, and picked up the vial. “What is this?”

Jack and Daniel were rather shocked. “Well, the pills are scopolamine. You know what that is?”

“Yes, it’s for motion sickness.”

“It’s also for radiation exposure, to control nausea.”

“Yes, it’s used for that, too.”

“We were exposed to radiation on a planet in another reality. The planet with the mirror we used had a sun that was expanding. The underground complex where the mirror was had been exposed, unfortunately. I didn’t feel anything, but Daniel did. So I gave each of us an injection and we took the pills. It’s standard procedure for radiation contamination.”

Janet’s mouth dropped open. “Are you saying the substance in this vial treats radiation poisoning?”

“Yep,” Jack said. “Feel free to hire a bunch of lawyers and a patent lawyer and backward engineer that baby. It’ll make you billions, Doc.”

She opened her mouth, closed it. Opened. Closed. She dropped the vial in her pocket. “What happened to people who were exposed, in your … world?”

“They used to get sick and die. Or develop cancers.”

“It stopped after some scientists developed that,” Daniel said. Then something occurred to him. “Hey, write down P2C-344. That’s where they found the ingredients for that cocktail you’re holding. I don’t know what they found, but that’s where it started.”

Jack nodded. “Plants or something. We don’t know. We just take the medicine. Side effects are like the radiation itself. Nausea and a severe drop in energy.”

Janet nodded, and pulled out a pad and wrote down a few notes. “Thank you … Colonel.”

Jack gave her and Hammond that well-known crooked grin. “My work here is done. Daniel, let’s get back to Davis before he has a breakdown.”
Equipped with their own IDs and key cards, plus their own SGC cellphones, which was a huge surprise, the men headed for Level 20 to get Daniel’s hair adjusted. He really didn’t want to do it, but it seemed apparent, somehow, that Hammond wanted to treat them as if they were members of the SGC, and if they had any hope of that being true in the future, he had to make concessions.

The stylist on duty, Amy Divine, GS-7, took one look at Jack and Daniel and went as white as a sheet. Daniel decided shaky hands or distracted movements would fuck up his haircut.

“Let’s go,” he said. With nothing to do, and their bellies growling, they headed to the mess hall. But when they got there, they found it wasn’t a mess hall anymore but a real cafeteria. Their hearts dropped, along with their stomachs.

“We don’t have any money, Jack.”

“Hang on,” Jack said, and looked at the numbers pre-programmed in the cellphone and hit the one for Davis.

“Davis.”

“O’Neill. We have no money. How’re we going to eat?”

“You just give the cashier your key card, sir.”

Jack paused. “Thanks.” He hung up. “We give ‘em this,” he said, holding up the card.

“Oh,” Daniel said. “Good. Let’s eat.”

To their delight, it was Fried Chicken Friday, which was a silly name but what the hell. They went with it. Sitting at a corner table, they unconsciously sat with their backs to the wall. It was a security staple that had been privately drilled into Daniel over two years prior to the NID takeover. Jack had learned it during black ops training.

“Think that Rothman and the gang will be okay?” Jack asked between chicken pieces.

“If they take precautions and don’t go gun happy or careless.”

“One tends to look like the other,” Jack said.

“Point,” Daniel nodded. He glanced at the room at large, then back to his plate or anything else on the table. “We’re gonna have to start eating in our room. Get this to go.”

Jack sighed. “Yeah, I know. You can’t really blame them.”

“I don’t. For now. If they’re still doing it in a month, I’m going to be offended.”

“You’re such a delicate flower,” Jack said, and smiled in triumph when Daniel shot him a murderous look.

“Has it occurred to you that teasing me may result in a sudden loss of sexual desire?”
Jack narrowed his eyes, then very deliberately, kept his eyes locked on Daniel’s while he stuck his thumb in his mouth and drew it out slowly. It was as if he was merely licking it free of chicken, but after what Daniel said, it telegraphed something else entirely.

Daniel’s response was also deliberate. He winked. Slowly.

Daniel grabbed his chessboard case and knocked on Jack’s door, then entered and closed it enough to leave it ajar.

Jack was lying on the bed, propped on an elbow as he read the newspaper in front of him. He’d managed to find a radio and a classical station was playing, with a bit of static added. “Hey!” he said, sitting up. “Excellent idea.”

Daniel tossed the case on the bed, then took Jack’s hand and drew him to his feet. “Hello, husband.”

“Hello, husband,” Jack said.

It was a greeting that used to be part of a ritual until the NID put an end to it. Jack took Daniel’s right hand in his left, then placed his right on Daniel’s waist. Daniel, in turn, put his left hand on Jack’s upper arm. They slow-danced in place, up close and intimate, cheek-to-cheek, and eyes closed. Periodically, they lightly kissed.

The last time they’d done this was the night before the NID had taken control of their world. They had been enjoying a romantic dinner at their favorite restaurant.

“Think Luigi’s is here?” Jack asked after several minutes.

“We’ll have to find a phone book.”

Jack grinned. “Old School. We could just look it up online.”

Daniel groaned. “Right. I keep forgetting that they have wi-fi on the mountain.”

“Do that again,” Jack said, his eyes in shadow.

Daniel stared into them and groaned again, but this one was a lot more sensual. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. A loud rap. A purposely intrusive rap.

They didn’t cease their dancing. “Come in,” Jack said.

An SF pushed the door open all the way, started to take a step in, and froze.

“You want something, Airman?” Jack asked. He and Daniel had their eyes closed and foreheads touching while they continued to dance.

“Uh, no, sir.” The SF stared, then backed out, leaving the door ajar.

“Moron,” Daniel said, keeping his eyes closed.
“It’ll keep happening,” Jack said, then sighed heavily.

“I know.” They were quiet for a few moments. “How long do we put up with it?” Daniel asked. He was giving Jack the enormous weight of a final decision. It didn’t go unacknowledged. Jack sought his mouth and opened his own, inviting Daniel to seek out his tongue. They kissed slowly, sensually, and broke apart before their bodies reacted accordingly.

Jack thought about saying, “One month,” but that would mean he was willing to go a month without having sex with his husband. He wasn’t. And he wasn’t prepared to go without for more than a few days.

“Tomorrow,” he finally answered, breaking the kiss.

Daniel nodded. “So, we report to Hammond in the morning, but in civilian clothes.”

Jack nodded. “We’re on the same page. We’re not putting up with their crap. If we’re forced out, so be it. But that’s as members of the SGC. Right now, we’re civilian guests. We don’t work for them and we’re not beholden to the UCMJ.”

Daniel stopped moving, but he didn’t let Jack go. “It’s not that simple. We’re basically fucked. Think about it. We have no birth certificates, no social security numbers.” He closed his eyes and sighed. “Unless we find someone in an Office of Public Records willing to be bribed to create fake documents, we don’t exist.” He opened his eyes. “We have no rights. And I don’t think Hammond would be willing to fake our credentials. Our only chance is to take over the lives of our dead counterparts, and he didn’t seem like he’d accept that.”

Jack sighed and wrapped his arms around Daniel in a hug. “What do we do?” It was Jack’s turn to give over the reins.

“Demand he allow us to take over our alternate lives or boot us off the planet. There are many places we can go. The Tok’ra, for example. We can go see Sam.”

Jack pulled back and looked at him. “We abandon Earth for good?”

“Do we have a choice?” Daniel asked, brows arching.

Jack shook his head. “Either we take over their lives or we leave.”

The next morning, they pulled no punches. Dressed in jeans, with Jack wearing a black t-shirt and Daniel in a blue and white button-down, they left their quarters, combat bootheels in near sync. They didn’t hold hands, because they respected ordinary professional behavior. But they weren’t about to take off their rings or act as if they weren’t married—or at the very least, uninvolved.

They’d purposely skipped the base breakfast and ate together in Jack’s quarters, sharing the last breakfast MRE. When it was nine forty-five, they headed to the Briefing Room. Entering, they were surprised to find Hammond standing at the head of the table wearing his Class A jacket. Their Hammond only did that when one of two things were happening: One, he was preparing to do something official, or two, he was leaving on official business.
“Good morning, General,” Jack greeted. “Going somewhere?”

“Not exactly,” Hammond said.

Okay. Official business at the base. He and Daniel exchanged cautious looks.

Walter Davis came out of Hammond’s office, holding two large manila envelopes, their smooth surfaces marred by something bulky inside. He was followed by Lieutenant Colonel Paul Davis, whose step stuttered before he stopped at Hammond’s side. His face reflected the same expression everyone else wore. It had been only one day, but Jack and Daniel were already tired of it.

“What’s up?” Jack asked, setting his hand on the back of a chair while Daniel stuffed his hands in his pockets. Both were defensive mannerisms.

“It’s one thing to hear it,” Paul Davis said. “It’s another to see it. See you.”

“Yes, isn’t it,” Jack said, frowning slightly to show annoyance. “General?” He looked behind him and found no one in the doorway. For example, men in black. So, no renditioning. Yet. But on the heels of those words, four men and one woman, all in varying dark, expensive suits came from the stairwell and all of them had the same expression as Davis’ the moment each of them saw Jack and Daniel.

“That’s so getting old,” Daniel said.

Jack nodded at Hammond while keeping his attention on the group. “I take it these are the members of the Advisory Board?”

“We are,” said one man with black hair. His suit was an attractive dark grey all the way through. He walked up to them and held out his hand, to Jack first, then Daniel. “Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Coburn, retired.”

Both Daniel and Jack recognized him, but Daniel was filled with inner turmoil. “Former head of SG-2?” he asked, hoping he was successful at covering up his recognition.

Coburn looked them over. It was unnerving. “Yes,” he said, nodding to Daniel, answering his question.

“How’d you get on the Advisory Board?” Jack asked.

“It’s required to have someone with a military background on the Board. Plus, someone that used to be part of this command.”

Jack wagged a finger at the group. “All of you are ex-military?”

They nodded, and Coburn said, “We need a specific point of view, not an outsider’s judgment.”


“We were,” Coburn said. “But I don’t see you as him, don’t worry.”

“I’m not,” Daniel said, distantly.

Jack maintained a confrontational tone. “Who appointed you?”

“The president,” said a short man with blond hair.
“All of you?” Jack asked.

“Yes,” Coburn said.

“Anyone else here work at the SGC?” he continued.

“No,” Coburn said. “Just me.”

“Then your group has an outsider’s viewpoint,” Jack said. “Despite a military background.”

“What are you getting at, Jack?” Hammond asked.

“They’re not impartial, sir. There’s an agenda.”

“Sounds like O’Neill,” said the woman. She had a Russian accent.

“And you are?” Jack asked.

“It’s Svetlana, Jack,” Daniel nudged. “Remember?”

Hammond took charge at that point. “Gather at the table, people.”

Paul Davis and the Board went to Hammond’s left and sat down, with Davis closest to the General. Jack and Daniel sat across from them, and deliberately in the middle chairs. Jack was first, closest to Hammond, then Daniel sat to his right.

“Jack, Doctor—”

“Daniel, sir,” Daniel told him. “I have no credentials.”

“Daniel,” Hammond said, acknowledging and respecting Daniel’s correction. “This is Svetlana Markova,” he said, referring to the woman, who sat at next to Davis. “Our Russian representative.”

“Still military?” Jack asked.

“I was, Colonel,” she said.

Jack clenched his jaw and looked at Daniel. He purposely spoke out loud, not caring if they were being rude. “If I start saying something snarky, can I blame it on the PTSD?”

“No,” Daniel said. “You’ll just be an asshole.”

Jack snorted. “Noted.”

“Why the PTSD?” asked the man next to Markov. He was dark brown in complexion. Either Pakistani or Indian.

“This is Colonel Avi Sidana,” Hammond said. “Our representative from India. He served here six years ago as an attachment to SG-4.”

“Indian military?” Daniel asked.

“Yes,” said the man. His accent was light.

Hammond went on to introduce the other two. Colonel David Markham, Royal Canadian Air Force, had blond hair and brown eyes, and was rather lanky under the suit. Lastly, just before
Svetlana, who sat at the end, was a member of the British Royal Air Force. Also known as the RAF. Group Captain Iain McLain. He had dark coloring like Coburn but was significantly paler.

Jack nodded to them, understanding their ranks according to their country of origin. He’d worked with plenty of Canadians and Brits. Sadly, he’d never had any good experiences with Russians, but at least Markova was a woman. His experience there was positive—but only with her counterpart and the woman Daniel had met with when they’d needed to borrow their DHD. Although she’d gone as ‘Markov’.

Each man nodded to both of them and Daniel got the impression that the Brit and Svetlana felt a lot more positive toward them than the others, including Coburn. He was definitely not the man Daniel knew. There was something wrong with him, but Daniel couldn’t pinpoint it. He was usually cognizant of why someone felt wrong, but his intuition wasn’t helping here. It was probably because he’d had a relationship with his counterpart.

“Now, to get on with business,” Hammond said. To the Board, he said, “I invited you here as a courtesy. I don’t need your permission to conduct business.”


“I have made my decision regarding our two guests here.” He handed the envelopes to Jack, who passed the one with Daniel’s name on it to his husband. “I’m sorry,” Hammond said, and nodded at their rings. “You’ll have to make a decision on whether or not to remain part of this command, and accept what that entails.”

Jack opened his envelope, looked inside, and raised his brows in surprise. He dumped the contents onto the table. A set of dog tags and a wallet. Daniel dumped his contents and the exact same thing was revealed.

“What are you doing, General?” Coburn asked.

“Welcoming them home,” Hammond said, and stood up. Walter Davis appeared at his side. In his hands were a bible and a paperclipped set of papers.

Jack and Daniel picked up the tags. It was their information. Jack pulled the tags under his own shirt and compared them. They were identical, apart from the rubber frames on this world’s tags. The black leather wallets held military IDs and civilian driver’s licenses.

“If you accept these credentials, you’ll accept what goes with them,” Hammond said. “Primarily, your relationship will be against regs and you’ll risk court martial and firing.”

“You’re married?” Svetlana asked, her brows arching.

Daniel nodded, then he and Jack dropped the IDs and tags on the table. They didn’t need to discuss it.

“I’m sorry, General,” Jack said, shaking his head. “We’re not willing to do that.”

Hammond actually grinned. “I expected your reaction, and if someone told me my marriage was no longer valid, I’d do the same thing you just did. Now, if you wish to work here, you’ll be civilian contractors, and you’ll keep the IDs and turn in the tags.”

“They can’t take over their counterparts’ lives,” Coburn said, frowning.

“They can,” Hammond said. “I have permission from the President.”
“You went over our heads?” McLain asked, displeased.

“No, I didn’t. This is a special circumstance, which allows me to go over your heads,” Hammond replied. “This isn’t your everyday situation and required an exception to the rules.” He seemed to clench his jaw. “Personnel matters aren’t any of your business. This situation isn’t one you are allowed to authorize or reject.”

None of the members of the Board responded because what Hammond had just described was accurate. The male members of the Board didn’t look happy. Svetlana, on the other hand, actually looked pleased.

Daniel was disappointed with the reactions of the men. He gave Svetlana a slight smile and said, “Thank you for not judging.” He waved a hand at the men while refusing to look at them. “It appears you’re more evolved than they are.”

“Now wait a moment,” protested Markham. “Gay marriage is legal in Canada, including the military.”

“As with the UK,” McLain said.

“And? What’s with the disapproving eyebrows?” Jack asked, waving his wallet at them. Markham and McLain exchanged glances and didn’t answer right away. “Yeah, thought so.”

Hammond interrupted. “Is your decision final, gentlemen?” he asked Jack and Daniel.

Jack gave him a crooked grin. “Why do you think we arrived in civilian clothes, General.” He looked at Daniel and received a nod. They put the dog tags in the envelopes and Jack slid them toward their new commander.

Hammond nodded. “I’ll consider what jobs you’ll be well-suited for. Doctor Jackson … Daniel … it’s easy enough to assign you, but I’ll need to administer some tests to find out how you differ from your counterparts. Same for you, Jack.”

“In the meantime, sir,” Daniel said. “Can we go off base?”

Hammond nodded at Walter and the aide handed them letter-sized manila envelopes. “These funds are what I was able to authorize. Make it last. It will take two months to get your direct deposits, so today, go out and get your affairs in order and return to give Walter your financial information.”

“Yes, sir,” both men answered in stereo.

Winter Heat
“Damn,” Jack said, as they got to the surface garage. It was cold out.

“Heh,” Daniel replied. “Didn’t you know what the date was?”

“Yeah,” Jack nodded. “It just slipped my mind. So guess where we go first?”

Daniel gave him a strained smile. “The mall?”

“No, the bank.” He wagged the manila envelope. It contained the fake leather check cover, which held the register book. Daniel’s envelope contained the same thing. “Then we find a used car lot, a license outlet for the tags, an—”

“Hang on. Won’t we have tags on a used car?”

“Maybe. We plan for it anyway. After that, the mall. We need a lot of stuff.”

Daniel looked at his watch. It was only a quarter to eleven. “We have a little time. Wanna grab lunch after the bank?”

“Hmmmm.”

“We can wait until we have our own car.”

“Truck,” Jack smirked.

“Jeep?” Daniel compromised hopefully.

“Truck,” Jack said. “We’re gonna need it. We can get you a Jeep later, if that’s okay?”

Daniel shrugged. “Sure. I don’t need one right away.” He suddenly grimaced. “Shit. Cab fare.”

Jack pulled out a couple of folded bills. “Where’d that come from?” Daniel asked, shocked.

“Walter. He staked me two twenties. When we’re at the bank, we need to withdraw that.”

“Then we grab lunch,” Daniel said. His stomach growled like a Pavlovian bell.

Jack grinned. “Then we grab lunch.”

A cab pulled up. With snow on it. “We can walk to Luigi’s,” Jack continued as they got in. “And I’m sure there’s a car lot within walking distance.”

“Leave Luigi’s for a day when we’ve got suits. I’m not setting one foot in there looking like this.”

“Okay, so how about we hit a place with hamburgers?”

“Perfect.”

Jack put his arm around him and pulled him in a half hug. “Almost, but we’ll get there. So, on our to-do list, we get to the bank, get food, get a truck, go to the mall, and get an apartment.”

“We need more time for that last one, Jack.”

“We have three days off. I wasn’t implying we do all that today.”

“No, but we need more time. Let’s get that one right. In the meantime, let’s find a decent hotel for a few weeks.”
Equipped with a debit card, they headed for the mall to get properly attired. In the bank, there’d been travel brochures for new arrivals to the city. Among them, hotels. Daniel decided that a trip to the mall was first, then the hotel second. After getting the proper wardrobe, they’d ducked into a bathroom and changed, then grabbed a cab and headed for The Broadmoor.

It was expensive, but Daniel had liked the photos of the suite. They had decided to make a good first impression by showing up in elegant clothing. It wasn’t their normal way, but given the large budget they’d been given, they indulged themselves on the grounds that they deserved it.

Hammond had said, “Make it last,” but it seemed the money would last a lot longer than two months. Daniel reminded Jack what his pay had been and what they were likely to receive initially, as new employees. Jack had other ideas.

“We’re assuming their identities, Daniel. Which means I’m getting my pension and you’re getting your GS rating.”

“And you’re assuming they had the same ones we did,” Daniel pointed out.

Jack made a face. “Don’t spoil it. Let me pretend for a while.”

Daniel brushed the back of his fingers over Jack’s cheek. “Sorry.”

Jack grabbed his hand and kissed the fingers. “Don’t be.”

Once checked in, they hauled their purchases to the west wing and found the view over the lake pleasant, even though there was a foot of snow everywhere. Traveling to the mall had been an adventure of sorts.

“I’m showering,” Jack said, setting their things down the in the living room. “Order room service.”

“What do you want?” Daniel asked, sitting on the sofa.

“Surprise me,” Jack grinned, and disappeared into the bathroom.

After ordering a late lunch, Daniel spent half an hour setting up their new phones and his laptop, arranging the services, and immediately going to the classifieds to hunt down an apartment. A house would come later, but only after a few years, and if they knew they’d be staying put. One never knew.

Jack came out of the bathroom in a fluffy white robe. “Your turn,” he said.

“Hey,” Daniel said, and he tapped a brochure by the telephone. “They have a salon. I’m heading down to take care of this,” and he gestured at his hair. “Then I’ll grab that shower.”

“Okay. The food?”

“Too late for lunch, too early for dinner.”

“Figures. What’d you get me?”
“Finger foods,” Daniel said, rummaging around until he found his new wallet. He went to the front door, opened it, and paused, ticking off the list on his fingers. “Plus a six pack of Guinness, four ‘Jack n’ Cokes, two quarts of milk, two BLTs. Oh, and cherry pie.” He grinned at Jack’s stare. “Back in a few.” The door was almost closed when he opened it and stuck his head back in. “Oh, and don’t forget to tip.”

“Okay, wise ass.”

“Thank you,” he sing-songed and closed the door.

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Jack was on the sofa, his feet propped on the coffee table, taking a pull from his bottle of Guinness, when Daniel returned. He took one look and got up, going to him, and running his hand over the short hair. Threading his fingers through the longer top, he nodded.

“Sexy as ever. It’s like it was before we were separated.” Almost. He brushed a fingertip over non-existent sideburns. “Not these.”

“I’m over them,” Daniel said with a smirk.

Jack matched it. It had been a difference of opinion. Jack hated them, Daniel hadn’t. Till now. “Good.”

Daniel walked away and headed into the bathroom. “How’s the pressure?”

“Excellent. There’s a pulse setting.” Daniel let out a loud groan, making him grin. “That’s about right.”

While Daniel got cleaned up, Jack surfed TV channels and landed on a *Mythbusters* holiday marathon. “Nice.” Jack then blinked as it dawned on him. Today was Christmas Eve. No wonder why Hammond had given them more than one day off.

He picked up the phone and dialed room service. “What do you have for Christmas?”

“I’m sorry, sir?” said the woman on the other end.

“Is there a specialty to order?”

“You’ll find it on the holiday menu in your room, sir.”

Jack made a face and hung up. For the price of their suite, she should’ve been a shitload more helpful. He found said menu under the phone and studied it. There was nothing there he wanted, and he was about to set it aside when he saw *Desserts & Candies*.

He was about to pick up the phone when it rang, startling him. Annoyed, he answered gruffly, “O’Neill.”

“Sir, I wish to apologize for the lack of quality service,” said a male voice.

“Not a problem. Send up four of those handmade peppermint candy canes.”
“Right away, sir.”

Jack hung up. He had a wonderfully wicked idea, providing the peppermint wasn’t too hot. The size, if the photo was accurate, would be perfect. They were six inches long and one and a half inches in diameter. Only one would do, so the others would be good to snack on. Again, if they weren’t too hot.

Ten minutes later, the candy arrived on a sterling silver platter. He tipped the waiter a fifty and closed the door, then set the plate on the bureau and went into the bedroom, hiding one of the candy canes under a pillow. He was about to leave when he spotted a shallow basket on the dresser. It contained condoms and lube. He snorted and smiled. Wonders never cease. He placed two of the small bottles under the pillows as well. That particular spot wasn’t meant as a secret. It was just handy.

Daniel emerged from the bathroom, his hair already combed, and he was patting it dry. “Was that the door?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Jack said, watching the TV.

“What’d you order?”

Jack muted the TV and got up, a secretive smile on his face.

“What’d you do?” Daniel asked, half-smiling. He knew that look.

“C’mon,” Jack said, and led him to the bedroom. Ever since he’d placed the candy there, he’d been half hard, so he dropped his robe and untied Daniel’s, then half-pushed it on the floor, aided by Daniel shrugging it off his shoulders.

“What’s this?” Daniel asked, taking Jack’s cock in hand. “Started without me?”

“Just doing prep work, but not there,” Jack grinned. He maneuvered Daniel backward and pushed him down gently. “Back up,” he said, and followed when Daniel moved over the mattress on his elbows and backside, pushing with his heels.

“What’s this?” Daniel asked, taking Jack’s cock in hand. “Started without me?”

“Got something in mind?” Daniel asked.

“Oh yeah,” Jack smiled.

He slid his hand underneath the pillow and pulled out the cane. “Lookie, lookie, what I found.” Daniel’s mouth dropped open. “Oh wow. Is it safe?”

Jack cursed himself silently for not checking. He’d meant to and forgot. “Okay, cross your fingers.” He licked up one side of the thick stem and Daniel licked up the other. They savored the sweet flavor and waited. The winter coolness came but it didn’t burn. But that was on their tongues. Daniel took the cane and sucked the end into his mouth, thoroughly coating his tongue and saliva. He pulled Jack over him and latched onto a nipple, sucking hard but not painfully. He followed that with the tip of his tongue, drawing a circle around the hardened nub, then he blew softly.

Jack closed his eyes and groaned with pleasure. “Nice.”

“Check two,” Daniel said, and turned them over. Straddling Jack’s legs, he trailed his tongue down the line of hair that met with his navel and tongued him there before moving further down.
He moved Jack’s cock out of the way while he played, drawing circles as he went back to his navel. He blew gently and Jack’s cock twitched against his hand.

“Good,” Jack said huskily, and took the cane in his mouth, coating it well. He then went for Daniel’s nipples, and when he blew, his lover gasped. “Perfect.” Jack was thorough with his navel and went over a hip, then turned Daniel over. Recoating the peppermint in his mouth, he licked between Daniels’ cheeks, blowing frequently and waiting. By the time he zeroed in on his anal opening and the puckered muscles, Daniel was squirming under his touch.

He turned over and got on his knees, pushing Jack onto his back. “Let’s test you,” he said, and there was a light in his eyes that Jack adored. Lust and love. With just a lick on the cane, he took a swipe over the head of Jack’s cock, then blew. Jack sucked in a breath, but not because it burned. It was cold, but deliciously so.

“Again,” Jack said as he laid back on his elbows.

Daniel smiled and wrapped his fingers around the shaft as he settled between Jack’s legs. He licked around the rim, waited two seconds, and blew. Again, Jack sucked in a breath, then followed it with a groan. He waited longer to test the head and spent time on licking stripes up and down the shaft. The cold heat increased a little, but it was only tantalizing, not painful. Daniel kept going around the base, then sucked one of his balls into his mouth, savored it for a second, then moved to the other one. He backed off and blew again, then returned to the head of his cock and licked and sucked, going about his usual routine. Jack grew more sensitized as the minutes passed, and he finally pulled away.

“You’re gonna make me come,” he said, then turned Daniel back onto his stomach, though Daniel held himself on his elbows. Jack bent to his task, coating his anus with peppermint, then plunged his tongue inside.

Daniel groaned and dropped his forehead to the mattress, raising his ass for more. “Goddamn, Jack,” he gasped when Jack blew thoroughly, making him twitch and his anal muscles contract and expand. “Fuck me.”

With his dick on fire, but pleasantly so, Jack knelt behind him and pulled Daniel back, his hands on his hips. He held his cock and pushed the head past the tight muscle, hissing at the intensity of heat on peppermint. It propelled him forward, pushing harder, and in one long, slow stroke, he buried himself in Daniel.

“Fuck,” he moaned, locking his elbows as he hovered over him with only his crotch against Daniel’s skin. He held still, realizing the mint was getting hotter by the moment. “Wow.”


Jack pulled back, then thrust deep. He gasped, the heat even worse. “Daniel.”


Jack grit his teeth and hissed again as he stroked, once, twice, five, ten. More. And more. He found a rhythm and panted through the intensity that not only covered the length of his cock but the head of his cock. He needed, no demanded, more friction over the head, and mindlessly, he twisted and stroked to get it. “Fuck yeah, that’s it.” He closed his eyes and screwed himself into Daniel’s blissful body, twisting his hips in wide, deep circles. He kept himself from rapid strokes for as long as he could. Until Daniel demands changed that.
He opened his eyes and found Daniel holding himself up with one locked arm while he stroked his own cock with the other. He wasn’t moving very fast and seemed to be matching Jack’s strokes. To drive Daniel crazy, he pulled out and pushed him over. “On your back.” Eagerly, Daniel complied. After pushing his legs up in order to get back inside, Jack grabbed his ankles and held him still as he slapped against his ass while getting a good friction over his cock. But it just wouldn’t hold if he wanted to go faster.

Daniel seemed to sense it and pulled his legs out of Jack’s grasp and tucked his knees against his chest. “Now, Jack,” he said, and his voice was strained, desperate.

“This?” he asked, teasing by going deep and slow.

“Faster,” Daniel gasped, his brows knotted with frustration as he curled forward to watch.

“This?” Jack asked, going only a little faster.

“Jack, dammit,” Daniel gasped, his muscles taut with strain. “Please.”

Jack stroked faster, then slammed into him, once.

“Jack, goddammit!”

Jack had enough, and he pushed forward more and sped up. “Look at me.”

Daniel fell back and panted as Jack fucked him unbelievably fast. “Oh my god!” he gasped, his voice a whisper. He arched his head back, grabbed his ankles, and closed his eyes, relishing the quickening in his balls, caused by the unbelievably wonderful jarring Jack created. And then the orgasm came rushing over him, forcing both his eyes and mouth to open wide. He sucked in a breath as his body shook.

The sight of his orgasm, of watching his cock thicken and spill, combined with the grip around his cock, ripped Jack’s orgasm from him and sent him into a blinding ecstasy. “I love you,” he said, repeatedly, until his voice was robbed from him. He sought out Daniel’s mouth and kissed him deeply as he gathered him in his arms.

“I love you back,” Daniel breathed, holding him as tightly as possible. As the afterglow washed over them and made time irrelevant, all they wanted to do was start over.

“Next on our agenda,” Jack said, kissing him again, “is to find the fountain of youth.”

“Shut up,” Daniel said in a calm voice. “You’re perfect.”

All Is Not What It Seems
To their mutual consternation, Jack and Daniel weren’t alone when they met up with Hammond after the holidays. In the Briefing Room sat the Advisory Board. Hammond was in his office, on the red phone, with the door closed. It meant he wasn’t happy with their presence either.

The group seemed to be filling time, waiting on the General. Coburn was sitting at the table, reading Forbes magazine. McLain and Markham were at the observation window, watching whatever was going on in the gateroom. Sidana was leaning against the wall by the foot of the table, reading from a tablet. And Svetlana was standing at the corner near the top of the stairs, where the coffee machine sat. She was making a face after sipping the coffee from her mug.

Daniel made a face in sympathy. “It’s probably been sitting in that pot since six a.m.” He grabbed the large carafe and left the room. Jack waited at the door, leaning against it with arms crossed, smirking. “Leave it to Daniel to square away the coffee. It won’t take long, Markov.”

“Markova,” she corrected, but she had a pleasant grin on her face. “I’ll just dump this. Where’d he go?”


“She doesn’t care much for the gender rules,” Coburn said, and Jack looked over his shoulder at him.

“Given where she works, I’m not a bit surprised. We’re only delaying the inevitable, you know.”

“And what’s that?”

“The war that will come down on all our heads when women have had enough of our bullshit behavior.”

“Speak for yourself, O’Neill,” Markham said, looking over his shoulder.

Jack immediately kicked in movie dialogue. “You think I’d speak for you? I don’t even know your language.” Crickets would have been appropriate just then. “No? Don’t recognize it?”

Coburn gave him a compressed-lip smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Breakfast Club. Bender to the jock.”

Jack turned slightly, snapped his fingers, and pointed. He didn’t feel it necessary to add anything.

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In the bathroom, Daniel was washing out the pot when Svetlana came in and turned on the faucet to do the same with her mug.

“I don’t know why American Army coffee has to taste so bad. It’s like they purposely make it taste like shit just to remind you how insignificant you are.”

Daniel smirked. He’d always liked her – her counterpart. He loved the accent, too. “Technically, it’s American Air Force coffee. And it’s not that. It’s bean-counting dipshits in S4. Also known as Supply and Logistics. They supply us with the type of coffee that seems to be stale right out of
the container.” He reached in the side pocket of his cargo pants and pulled out a zipped baggie. It held ground coffee. He held it out. “Smell.”

She took it and opened it. Even before she put it up to her nose, her eyes widened at the smell. She sniffed and closed her eyes, groaning. “That is beyond wonderful. Where did you get it?”

“Local supermarket. They stock some of the good stuff. It’s an Italian cappuccino blend that makes surprisingly good coffee. Regular coffee.” She handed it back to him. “You think I’m having a meeting without supplying myself with the good stuff?”

She smirked. “I don’t blame you. And I apologize for our being here. It isn’t my idea.” She suddenly looked at the stalls, then went over and checked all four of them. Her eyes travelled to the corners of the room, then to the air vent grate. It was above the third stall. She pulled out a key ring and it had a miniature Swiss army knife attached to it. “Give me a knee?” she asked, and gestured that he come over and give her a leg up.

Curious, but knowing exactly what she was doing—the question was why—Daniel complied. “What’s up?” he asked as she stepped on his knee and hoisted herself up.

“Shh,” she said, and undid the screws in the vent housing and checked inside. With a nod, she put it back and he helped her down. “Thanks a lot for that. I owe you one.”

“No you don’t. Were you checking for surveillance?”

She nodded. “I need you and O’Neill to meet me at Jefferson’s Café. It’s new and near the Academy. Ten o’clock?”

Daniel gave her a puzzled look. “Can you tell me what it’s about?”

“I want to get to know you two better, that’s all. It’s important in the decisions I make.” But under her breath, she said, “There’s something rotten here. You need to know.”

They returned to the Briefing Room and Daniel headed to the coffee machine. He set up a new pot as Jack and Svetlana exchanged polite talk. For Jack, it was cordial. He was a remarkable man, but Daniel was still having to work on his irrational dislike for members of the Russian military.

“Jack, not all of them are bad and intending to sabotage you or get you killed.”

“Daniel, I know that, but I prefer to err on the side of caution.”

“Bullshit. You had a few bad missions and now you judge them all the same. You have to get over it.”

“Get over it?”

“Yes. Get over it. If we work with them again, your bias will get us killed, so please check it.”

It had been one of the few times where Daniel had been purposely abrupt, never mind that he’d rudely told Jack what to do. Their mission to the temple of Marduk had gone bad and it would have been better had Jack and Zukhov put aside their animosity—mainly fueled by Jack. Daniel hated that event in their past. It was also one of the few times where Jack had embarrassed him.

“What’s with the clenched jaw?” Jack asked him as he leaned against the wall by the table set up for the coffee machine.
“What?” Daniel asked, snapping out of his trip down memory lane. “Sorry!” he said, lowering his voice. “Do me a favor.”

“What?”

“Don’t be an ass toward Svetlana. She doesn’t make military policy in Russia.”

Jack glowered at him, but it lightened somewhat. “We have already settled the matter.”

“He was very accommodating,” Svetlana grinned. “And Doctor Jackson? I don’t need rescuing. I’ve had to handle a hundred times worse than O’Neill’s prejudice.”

“Orneriness,” Jack corrected. “I don’t hate the Russian people.”

“But you hate the military for the actions of a few. That’s prejudice, Colonel.”

“It wasn’t—”

“Jack,” Daniel said, raising his voice just a tad. “Let’s not rehash it.”

Jack shrugged. “You have a point.”

Svetlana’s eyes widened. “Wow.”

“What?” Jack and Daniel asked in stereo.

“You really aren’t him,” she said.

“No?” Jack asked, surprised.

“No. I expected you to be a carbon copy of the one we knew.”

“Ah. No.” He gestured between him and Daniel. “For example, we’re married. In our old universe.”

“I believe that would have been the same here, had things been less corrupt,” Svetlana said.

“Corrupt?” Jack asked, his movement frozen.

“Politically.”

“Ah. Backward people in charge then?”

“Unfortunately.”

The coffee pot was half full and Daniel pulled it off the element and gestured for Svetlana to hold out her mug. She did, and he filled it, then put it back in the machine. He waited while she sipped.

“Oh my god,” she said, and she was only inhaling the fragrance. “This is wonderful.”

“Daniel knows his coffee,” Jack said, smirking.

“Damn,” Coburn said, detecting the aroma. “That’s a change.”

“Right?” Daniel asked. “There’s enough for four more mugs. Or six cups. Once it’s done.”

Coburn grimaced. “It won’t last.” He lifted his grande-sized latte cup. “I don’t take chances.”
When Hammond came out of the office and gesturing at the table, Daniel glanced at Svetlana and caught the hateful glance she’d aimed in Coburn’s direction. He made a note of it, and only partly because it hurt to see hate leveled at someone who looked like …

“Have a seat, people,” Hammond said. “I apologize Colonel, Doctor, for the Board’s presence. This isn’t any of their business.”

“I agree,” said McLain, still at the window. “But it wasn’t up to us.” He threw Coburn a nasty look—behind his back.

Daniel made note of that, too, as he and Jack sat down. The members of the Board took their seats, although Svetlana sat down next to Daniel. He was about to compliment her on her business suit, but held back because his statement would have been appropriate. Had he been complimenting her suit because it looked better than everyone else’s in the room, that would have been okay.

But to compliment her simply because she looked good was not because it singled her out as a woman, not as a member of the Board or even as a person in the room. Why compliment her and not the others? Why make a big deal out of it anyway? So she looked good. So what? Can’t a man compliment a woman anymore?

Not in that way. It’s a professional atmosphere. They’re at work. Too many men in the world didn’t understand that it’s a sexist behavioral habit in a Patriarchal society to single out women for their looks while not giving the same treatment to men. One of these days, Daniel hoped that that old system would be retired. It would take a societal upheaval for that to happen, but unfortunately, casualties would be part of that.

“You’re woolgathering,” Jack murmured.


“It’s nothing, Doctor Jackson,” Hammond said. “I was simply asking the Colonel here how your holiday went.”

“Oh. It went well, thanks for asking. How was yours?”

“Very well, thank you,” Hammond smiled.

“You’re using our former titles,” Jack said. “Is there a reason for that?”

“It has been decided that you’ll be taking over their lives in an official capacity. Everyone in this command knows who you are. Knows that our people died on a mission five years ago. But to the Air Force and the Office of Personnel Management, they’re not dead.” Hammond paused. “For five years, I resisted classifying them as Killed in Action. Until your arrival, they had been listed as Missing in Action, and I justified my reasoning based solely on the fact that we had never recovered their bodies. Their last known location was aboard the space station and for all we knew, they may have made it off the station somehow.”

Jack gave him a look and the General gave him a sad smile.

“I know, Jack. I know. Privately, I accepted the fact that the men I knew were dead. Publicly, I refused to accept it.”

“Because when you do,” Jack said with an understanding nod, “that’s when you’ve made it official. When you cross that line, you’re accepting that they’re never coming home. It’s hard to make that leap, even when it’s the most compassionate thing to do. Most people, especially
families, don’t like limbo.”

“Yes,” Hammond said. “Which is why their families were told they were killed in action. But there’s a big difference between what’s official and what we keep in-house. For all intents and purposes, you’re both alive. This isn’t a problem where your counterpart’s families were concerned. Jack, your mother and father died seven years ago and ten years ago. You didn’t have siblings, but you had a grandmother who lived well into her nineties. She passed away last year. There is no one around to create a legal problem for you.

“There are associates and former teammates and commanding officers that would be upset if they found out you were alive, but they also understand the secrecy of our work, even though the stargate program has gone public. Doctor Jackson. Your grandfather passed away two years ago, so your close ties on Earth are gone. However, your ex-wife—”

“My … what?” Daniel blinked. “Shau’re didn’t die here?”

“No. She lives on Abydos, and she was alive and well the last time we were in contact with the Abydonian people. You were legally divorced by Abydonian custom over ten years ago, so there are no legal ties to her. That pretty much sums up the situation for both you. You won’t be a problem moving about in Colorado Springs.”

“Sir, I need to see the other Daniel Jackson’s records,” Daniel said. “What I know may not be the same as what’s on record in this universe.”

Or you could be using that as an excuse to look at whatever he was working on,” Coburn said.

Hammond pointedly ignored him.

“Sir,” Daniel said. “Would you mind if I made a comment or two on the accusation?”

Hammond narrowed his eyes slightly in thought as he met Daniel’s gaze. “Not if your comments convey hostility.”

Daniel shrugged. “That is always up to the prejudice of the listener, General.”

Hammond looked at Jack, then back to Daniel. “You really aren’t like our Daniel Jackson.”

“How so?” Jack asked before Daniel could.

“You are much more confrontational,” Hammond told him. “And I’m sorry if comparisons make you uncomfortable but you must have known that they would have been inevitable.”

“They don’t bother me, sir. If I’m hearing them two years from now, I’ll be pissed.”

Hammond’s mouth ticked up at one corner. “Are your comments going to be taken as confrontational?” he asked.

“In the eye of the beholder,” Daniel said, repeating his statement but in different wording. “I can, instead, direct them to you. Would that be satisfactory?”

Hammond nodded a little, but his tone was resigned. “Go ahead.”

“My interest in looking at his record is to compare notes. Did he figure out how the Ancients’ stone keyboard worked, for example. I had cracked it. I want to know if he did so that if I were to bring it up to anyone, or if some outsider tried to pass that off as a test …” Daniel looked directly
“at Coburn as he said it. The man grinned back, and Daniel returned his gaze to Hammond. “… I would file a report. If someone doubted my abilities, on the other hand, I couldn’t care less. Your opinion is the only one that matters to me.”

Jack elbowed the back of his arm and it was oft-used silent approval.

Hammond nodded. “I understand. You really aren’t him. The original version of this world was far less confrontational. He kept his opinions to a minimum and regarded facts as sacrosanct.”

“So do I. But professional opinions carry weight, sir. Maybe not mine, but I’d advise that they do.”

“I already consider them, Doctor.”

“Oh,” Daniel said, and Jack nudged him again. “What?” he snapped, impatient. For some reason, the nudge came across as a warning.

“See that?” Jack asked Hammond as he nodded at Daniel. “That is something both he and I are going through. Impatience. A marker of PTSD. We don’t mean to be rude and insulting, sir. Just thought I’d share that.”

Daniel looked at him. “Next time just …” He frowned, finding that he had nothing else to say after that. “Never mind,” he said, turning back to Hammond. “Anything else we need to discuss?”

Hammond took a breath and gave the Board his attention. “Thank you for your presence at this meeting. I’m sure you’re aware that you’ll continue to abide by the President’s wishes when it comes to the disposition of these two gentlemen.”

“What are you talking about?” Daniel asked.

“I was on the phone with the President, updating him on your circumstances. This is a highly unusual situation and it doesn’t require outside interference. Namely, from our Advisory Board, the Joint Chiefs, or Congress. They have no say on the day to day operations of this command, and reinstating you, or not, qualifies. I invited them here today to make that abundantly clear.” He looked at them all and was met with stone-faced displeasure. Except for Svetlana, who shrugged.

“I have no problems with this,” she told Hammond. “The Board knows my feelings. I am frequently outvoted on matters I feel are none of our business.”

“You shouldn’t be discussing our internal goings-on,” Coburn told her.

“Yes, I should, because we have been sitting here listening to their internal goings-on.”

“And,” Hammond added, “because it is your right to hear to the disposition of the newest members of my command.”

“So, what’s next?” Jack asked. “Have you decided on what our roles are?”

Hammond nodded. “Testing. Doctor Jackson, I want you to get together with Doctors Lee and Rothman. They will give me a report on your knowledge and experience. While we may use your … predecessor’s knowledge, experience, and education as a benchmark, this command needs to know what your levels are. As we have just been discussing. Lee and Rothman are best suited to determine that. You’ll report to the main science lab tomorrow morning.”

“Yes, sir. But may I ask a question?”
“You may,” Hammond said.

“What if my experience and knowledge outweigh theirs? It did in my home universe.”

“If that’s the case, you’ll be put in charge of all archaeological, anthropological, and linguistic divisions.” When Daniel’s brows rose, Hammond added, “Your counterpart was already in charge. It won’t be a matter of unfair advancement.”

“Oh.”

“As for you, Jack. Recertifying your record is in order and you’ll start with the weapons range tomorrow morning. Walter will direct you to the testing areas.”

“That’s it?” Jack asked. “I have educational advancements, too. Didn’t the other guy?”

Hammond was surprised. “Only that he held degrees in Engineering and Astronomy.”


The room was stunned silent. Then Svetlana began to giggle, and it turned into full laughter as the seconds passed. When Hammond gave her raised eyebrows, she held up a hand.

“I sincerely apologize, General Hammond, but apparently he’s more qualified to be on the Advisory Board than all of us put together.”

Jack’s brow went into his hairline. “I am?” He looked at the men across the table. “You’re fired.” Svetlana continued laughing, but it was more subdued chuckling now and even Hammond was smirking a little.

Jack gave him an apologetic look. “I couldn’t help myself.”

McLain stared at him suspiciously. “How in the hell did you manage to acquire all of those degrees and still do your job as a pilot in the Air Force?”

“And special or black ops,” Daniel added, winking at Jack. He turned his attention back to McLain. “Some of those degrees were earned concurrently.”

“How?” Sidano asked, and it was clear that he too was as suspicious as McLain. The other two, Markham and Coburn, didn’t have readable expressions.

Jack leaned forward. “I have an IQ of one fifty-five and I’m fifty years old. Work it out.”

Daniel stifled a giggle.

“You, that’s enough,” Hammond said. “I believe you have your duties to fulfill. You’re dismissed for the day.”

“Already?” Jack asked, looking at his watch. “It’s only nine fifty.”

“The people who need to test you aren’t available until the morning,” Hammond said.

“Uh, weren’t we supposed to see Walter in—” Daniel began.

“He has a Doctor’s appointment in an hour,” Hammond said with a lift of his chin.
“Oh.”

“And Lee and Rothman?” Jack asked.

“At the Alpha Site.”

“What’re they doing there?” Daniel asked, curious.

“Supervising a plant that has … energetic growth properties.”

Daniel frowned. “Does your Rothman have botany experience or education?”

“No,” Hammond said with a wry grin. “Doctor Lee requested help and Doctor Rothman was free.”

Daniel snorted. “I bet he loved you for that.”

“To be frank, Doctor Jackson—”

“It’s not our job to love what you assign us,” Daniel said, quoting his universe’s Hammond, long before they’d been taken over by the NID.

“I see you’re familiar with that,” Hammond smirked.

“Well, your counterpart didn’t much like me in the beginning and if I complained about going with SG-1 on a mission that didn’t need by expertise, he’d tell me, ‘Doctor Jackson—”

“—Yours is not to reason why’,” Jack finished, making Daniel grin.

Hammond actually let out a short, subdued laugh. “That does sound like something I’d say.” He nodded at them and stood up. “Until tomorrow, gentlemen.” He returned to his office and immediately picked up the phone, but he didn’t bother closing the door this time.


Jack frowned, puzzled. “She did?” he asked Daniel, who nodded. “Okay. What the hell.”

As they got to their feet, Daniel surreptitiously cast a look at the men of the Board and none of them seemed to think her request was unusual. This explained her openly expressed comments in the bathroom, compared to the addition under her breath. As they walked out, Svetlana was in front of them and she gestured for them to go first when they got to the elevator. Thankfully, the other Board members weren’t with them. They were too busy conferring with each other to pay her any attention.

When the door closed, Daniel pointed his head in the direction they’d just come. “What are they talking about?” he asked her.

“You. Me. And when it’s me, the content is predictably sexist.” Jack and Daniel stared at her. “It’s not new. They’ve been openly offensive since my appointment. The President did warn me. But he’s part of the problem.”

Jack pursed his lips, his brows narrowing dangerously. “The President should have fired them on the grounds of past behavior. What the fuck is wrong with him?”

“He’s an asshole?” Svetlana asked. Daniel snorted noisily and she smiled. “Aren’t all Presidents?”
“Point,” Jack said. “Doesn’t excuse it.”

“No,” Svetlana sighed.

When they eventually arrived at the garage level, she blew out a breath, which plumed in a long cloud thanks to the below-freezing temperature, and headed for her car without another word. In fact, she’d remained silent after her negative rebuttal. The pair got into Jack’s truck and remained where they were while it warmed up.

“What did she say in the bathroom?” Jack asked. Daniel relayed the short conversation as well as what she’d done beforehand. Jack’s brows narrowed until he was scowling. “What the fuck, Daniel? I thought we were safe?”

Daniel brought his arms in close as he rubbed his hands together. “We are. We just have a clean-up job to do, although I don’t know why it’s our job to fix the fucking …” He sighed. “You know things aren’t going to be perfect. Like any contact with the NID, for example.”

“For example,” Jack said. He ran his hand over the steering wheel, looking at the controls, then examined the dashboard tech, feeling it necessary to touch the controls.

“You two wanna be alone?” Daniel grinned.

“Bite me,” Jack grinned back. “Give me my little indulgences. It doesn’t have the new car smell, but it’s close. And I really love this truck. I need to buy some music and test the CD player.”

“You should. I can’t believe the deal you got.”

Jack jogged his brows. “Did Chevy have a Colorado model back in the old reality?”

“The home one?”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t remember.”

Jack took the time to examine the steering wheel controls as well as the dash. “Nine years behind the times, Daniel.”

“I know. It’s a little difficult to tell, though. I mean, the tech has changed. Society has evolved, slightly.”

“A bit.”

“An African-American guy is in the White House,” Daniel said with a smile. “That’s really cool. But if what I’ve read in the papers is correct, he’s not all that different. Svetlana said he was an asshole and perhaps that’s because she isn’t happy about our relations between countries. But she seems to have more on the ball where awareness is concerned, so we should extend some … trust.”

“Trust?” Jack asked, eyebrow raised. “We met her counterpart once. Once. And you were around her a lot more than I was. Teal’c and I were too busy trying not to become popsicles.”

Daniel snorted.

“Look, I hear you, okay?” Jack said. “We’ll give her the benefit of the doubt, but not too far. She may be playing some game. So …”
“Okay. Open minds all around, how’s that?” Daniel asked as Jack finally pulled out of the mountain parking lot.

Daniel nodded. “I guess I’m just projecting. I want her to be a good guy so I’m thinking she is.” He paused. “What’s your gut say?”

“That she’s on the level,” Jack said.

“And I think your gut’s been accurate lately.”

“Maybe.”

Daniel rolled his eyes. “So’s mine, Jack. And if you want my opinion about Coburn …”

Jack threw him a look. “That one’s going to be difficult, Daniel. Be careful.”

“Him or my judgment?”

“Your judgment. Let’s gather more facts.” He wanted to add more, but left it alone for the time being.

They drove around the area before looking for Jefferson’s Café. It hadn’t changed too much but there was an undeniable change in the air. Part of it was the improvement in some car models. Like Jack’s Chevy Colorado. The dash was unbelievable.

“I’m tempted to go through a drive-thru,” Jack said.

“Why?”

“Just to see how this thing handles.”

Daniel started laughing. “Let’s go find the café.” They did, and easily, sitting just east of the campus. Pulling in, Jack saw Svetlana leaning against a sedan at the far end of the parking lot and he pulled up next to her. She gave them an amused eyebrow as they got out.

She cast an eye over his truck and shook her head. “You’re a walking cliché, Colonel O’Neill,” she said, giving him a salute with a small latte cup.

“You’re not,” Jack said, rounding the truck bed. He stopped next to Daniel, who was just shutting his door. “So, we going in or would you rather go find some place to have a late breakfast?”

“They serve breakfast here, but it’s not what I’d consider an ideal spot or decent food. I chose it because it’s easy to find. The Over Easy is better, but they’re very busy and I don’t guarantee a seat, never mind privacy.”

“Let’s go,” Jack said. “We’ll follow you. If it doesn’t pan out, we’ll hit the local IHOP.”

She made a face. “If you insist.”

“Hey,” Jack said, rounding the truck again. “It’s a classic.” Daniel snorted. “Don’t knock my IHOP.”

“You haven’t been to one in—” Daniel started.

“Oh aht!” Jack said, cutting him off. Daniel winked at Svetlana as he got back in the truck.
The Over Easy wasn’t too busy, so they got a four-seat table by a window, ordered coffee, and spent time looking at their menus.

“Wanna wait until we’re—” Daniel began, but Svetlana surprised him again when she pulled out a small, black electronic gadget and placed it in the center of the table. “What’s that?”

Jack eyed her, and she seemed to be giving him time to answer for her. He picked it up and studied it. “Jamming?” She nodded. “It’s a jamming device, Daniel. Anyone following us with surveillance equipment won’t get much.” He set it down. “Distortion or noise?”

“Distortion, Colonel. Noise tends to screw up other devices, like wifi signals. Anyone using their wifi device nearby, like a cellphone, is gonna get interference. Can’t be helped.” She set her gloves over the device and put her purse on the floor by her feet. “Distortion will mess things up, too, but not quite as bad. Using distortion in here will make it appear as if the restaurant is interfering with a listening device.” She placed

“Good call,” Jack said, nodding. He came to a decision and it wasn’t any one thing the Russian scientist had said. It was her bearing and the sincerity of her tone. “Jack,” he said.

She gave him a look of astonishment. So did Daniel. But instead of making a big deal out of it, she simply nodded acceptance and that raised her even further in his estimation. He wasn’t perfect and could be a complete bastard, but his radar seemed to be spot on lately, so he went with it.

“So what’s rotten? And can you be detail-specific?” Jack asked.

The waitress showed up and they gave her their orders. Svetlana waited until she was gone, then lowered her voice enough so it wouldn’t carry but still allow them to hear her.

“It’s circumstantial, at best. But I never ignore my gut and I’ve always been right when I smelled something foul.”

“Go on,” Jack said, making a rolling gesture with his hand.

“This is about Colonel Joshua Coburn.”

Daniel grimaced. “Shit. I knew there was something wrong there.”

“You did?” she asked, surprised.

“It’s a sixth sense thing,” Daniel said.

She frowned a little, but shook it off. “Three years ago, Colonel Coburn was head of SG-2, along with Captain Kowalsky, then-Captain Ferretti, and Sergeant Fowler.” She took a sip of coffee, relished it, and set down the mug. “His team went to a world occupied by a Goa’uld named Baal. The Tok’ra had heard that he was amassing a large army, but they couldn’t send an operative. General Hammond authorized SG-2 to go on a covert mission to watch, then report back.”

“Was he?” Daniel asked.

She shook her head. “There was no sign of Baal or his forces. Instead, they crossed paths with the
Jaffa who served a Goa’uld named Camulus. The Tok’ra later said that Camulus is subservient to Baal, so he may have been there in support of Baal’s efforts. That isn’t the point. The point is that Coburn went missing for twenty-four hours.”

“How?” Jack asked, frowning.

“I advise you to read the report. It has holes. At least, they’re holes to me. SG-2 got cut off from the gate, so they had to hide out and wait for a time when they could reasonably take out the forces there or simply wait until they left. General Hammond had given them a window of a week. That if they didn’t report within that time frame, the SGC would send a MALP to find out what happened. If the gate is compromised, then there’d be nothing they could do right away. They’d have to send a ship.”

“How?” Jack asked.

She blinked at him, confused, but then she wiped the expression off her face. “Right. I forget you are not familiar with everything the SGC has been up to. The SGC, overseen by Homeworld Security—”


“—has starships,” she said, ignoring his question. “Battlecruisers. Fifteen of them, if memory serves. General Hammond would send to their position, if necessary. Day two of their mission, they came across Camulus’ Jaffa. They had to retreat because they needed to conserve ammunition.”

Jack nodded. “SOP.”

She frowned.

“Standard operating procedure,” Daniel clarified.

“Thank you. Anyway, Coburn ordered them to split up.”

“He what?” Jack asked, frowning deeply.

“That’s exactly what I thought,” she said. “Why do that? His reasoning was that it would increase the odds of their survival.”

“That’s not reasonable. It’s stupid,” Jack said. “You increase your survival by staying together. It’s not the same as when you stretch out a marching column so that an ambush won’t get all of your men.”

“Precisely,” she said with a nod. “Coburn split up with Kowalsky and they found shelter in a cave. Ferretti and Fowler radioed and instead of joining up, Coburn told them to stay put.”

“That makes no sense,” Jack said.

“Kowalsky later said that he thought it was fishy. Coburn’s leadership was odd to begin with, but they got what they wanted most of the time, so Hammond let it go. Didn’t stop Kowalsky and the others from filing grievances in their reports. Anyway, Kowalsky said they took turns on guard duty but after the second shift, he woke up to find Coburn gone. He thought he’d gone for a good reason. Or a halfway decent reason, but when he didn’t come back, he joined up with Ferretti and Fowler to go looking for him.”
“Where was he?” Jack asked.

“His report stated that he had heard Jaffa approaching, so rather than risk getting seen, he moved away from the cave.”

Jack’s eyes went cold. “That’s not saving your teammate. That’s leaving him open for murder.”

“Coburn said he hid in a section of forest, but couldn’t return to Kowalsky because there were Jaffa everywhere.”

Breakfast was served at that point and she paused while they got themselves sorted and began to eat.

“Ferretti said he, Kowalsky, and Fowler went looking for him at first light. They found him sitting on the ground and he appeared disoriented. There was a bruise on his forehead. Kowalsky assumed command of the team and they circled the gate to find out how many Jaffa there were and to be ready for the reinforcements. Then Coburn said he didn’t have the IDC device and he was about to go back to find it, but Kowalsky left Fowler with him and he and Ferretti went back to get it.”

She drank half her coffee, and signaled a waitress for a refill. “They came across a dead man. He didn’t appear to be Jaffa and he was severely injured.” After her coffee was refilled, she began to add sugar and cream, talking all the while. “Ferretti found the IDC under the body. There was no reason for it to be there unless Coburn and the dead man had struggled, but he never mentioned this man. When they returned to Coburn and Fowler, they asked him what happened. He said the man attacked him and he’d had to kill him.”

“That’s …” Daniel began.

“Lame,” Jack said.

“Yes,” Svetlana agreed. “The gate was now manned by only a few Jaffa, so they were killed and SG-2 returned home. Coburn refused a scan on the grounds that he couldn’t be ordered to submit to one.”

“That’s not SOP. He has no choice,” Jack said.

“Coburn said you couldn’t order him because he quit.”

“What?” Daniel asked.

“Right there. He quit. He resigned his commission and refused his pension. Then he went to work for the NID. He was seen in the company of Frank Simmons, who was later found to have been taken over by a Goa’uld. Two year ago, he became the liaison for a corporation that supplied the SGC with surveillance equipment. Months after that, he was seen with a few senators. A year ago, he was named to the Advisory Board. If you’ve wondered why Hammond holds a bit of animosity, that may be part of the reason. His sudden and out-of-character behavior change.”

“And despite all that …”

“It’s circumstantial,” she finished. “He still refuses to submit to a scan. He openly criticized SG-1, Hammond, and anyone else who supported both. He’s said that it was SG-1’s fault, Carter and Teal’c’s fault, for your counterparts’ deaths.”

“How?” Daniel scowled. “Did they have any control over that mission?”
“None,” Svetlana said. “As a member of the Advisory Board, he has voted against allowing Carter and Teal’c offworld. He was against allowing the both of you to assume your counterparts’ lives.”

“Not exactly suspicious,” Jack said.

“No. But this is. He has suggested that we form a truce with Baal. That he is a pragmatist and doesn’t want war, that he’ll be open to negotiations and an alliance.”


“Baal isn’t a pragmatist,” Daniel said, frowning. “That’s Yu. Baal is an aggressive snakehead who is intent on galactic domination.”

Svetlana smiled at him and sighed. “Thank you for saying that. I was beginning to think that General Hammond and myself were the only ones with any common sense on that topic. The other members of the Board are, to put it politely, greedy bastards whose sole interest in being members of the Board are so they can report technology to the corporations who now fund their private interests.”

“You think Coburn has been taken over by Camulus,” Daniel stated. “That mission was fucked up, but it doesn’t equal his getting taken over.”

“The Tok’ra reported that Camulus has gone missing.”

“Missing?” Jack asked.

She nodded. “He hasn’t been seen. He’s apparently abandoned his Jaffa. Baal has openly declared war on his holdings, so he’s lost all his power, too.” She paused, washing down her food with coffee. “And Camulus went missing at the same time that SG-2 was on that planet.”

“So why are you telling us this?” Jack asked. “Tell Hammond. He’ll tell the right people and—”

“General Hammond has been threatened. I can’t prove it, but I think if you ask, he’ll tell you. He can’t ask for an investigation.”

“Ah,” Daniel said, sighing with disgust. “You want us to prove Coburn is Camulus.”

She nodded. “I’m sorry, but yes.”

Jack sat back, having finished most of his breakfast. The hash browns had been perfect. He looked at Daniel, who was picking at the leftover waffle. “We don’t have to,” he told him. “We can pass this off on someone else.”

“But…” Svetlana said, eyes widening in panic. “You have to be the ones. You’re the only ones I can be sure about. Ones who haven’t been either corrupted or blackmailed.”

“Why not go to the President with this?” Jack asked.

“People are watching me. If I go to him tomorrow, I’ll have an accident the day after that.”

Daniel blinked. “Seriously?” She nodded. “Shit,” he said, sitting back with his coffee. He stared out the window. “This sucks.” Without looking at Jack, he said, “You deal with him. I’m not sure a can talk to a ghost.”

“What are you talking about?” Svetlana asked.
“He knew him in another life?” Jack said.

Svetlana’s eyes widened in concern. “May I ask how? Was he an enemy?”

“Before Jack and I got together, we were together. Boyfriends. He had a different first name, but it was the same guy. Well, in name and looks only. The story you just told us tells me that he’s definitely not the same guy.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Svetlana said.

“So,” Daniel said, acknowledging her sympathy. “Exactly how are we supposed to find out? Capture him and expose his neck?”

“If it were that easy, I’d have done it myself,” Svetlana said. “He’s extremely cautious and manipulative and he loves to blackmail. He has nothing on me, but I’m pretty sure has something on the other members of the Board. You two aren’t blank slates to him, unfortunately. You have one weakness that he can exploit.”

“What?” Daniel asked.

“Each other,” Jack said, anger in his voice.

“Yes,” she nodded. “He can have someone kidnap one of you and threaten them into doing what he wants.”

“What’s that?” Daniel asked. “Do you even know what he’s into?”

“Power and dominance and mind games, Daniel,” Jack said. “If he’s Camulus, that’d be the M.O. The snakes are all the same.”

“Except I think it’s worse than that,” Svetlana said, cringing.

“How?” Daniel asked.

“I have seen him go out to dinner and nightclubs with hot young men. And I don’t mean under-eighteen. They’re legal. But they’re all in their late teens and early twenties. And no offense, Daniel, but you don’t look a day over twenty-five.”

“Bullshit,” Daniel said, scowling. “And I’m not going there, Svetlana. No way in bloody hell.”

“But if he approaches you,” she said. “It’s an ‘in’.”

“And it’s a one-way trap,” Daniel said, scowling even meaner. “There is no way I’m putting myself on the line like that. Forget it. I did that once. I’m not doing it again.”

Svetlana looked confused. “I’m sorry. I missed something.”

“You didn’t,” Jack said, who’d been conspicuously quiet. “In our home universe, the NID took over the SGC. And they weren’t the fun, cuddly kind of NID led by Harry Maybourne.”

She went grey. “Simmons,” she said.

“Yes. And Daniel was trapped on the mountain, working for him. Translating things that could make him money.” Jack looked at Daniel carefully. “He was forced to do other things, too.” He returned his gaze to Svetlana. “Or I would be killed. They kept us apart for almost two years. So we played their game. We did what we had to in order to survive until the day came when our plan
was finally in place. Then we escaped.”

Daniel smiled nastily as he stared out the window. “And blew the fucking hell out of that mountain.”

Svetlana coughed. “Remind me never to piss you off.” When he looked over sharply, she reached over and touched his arm. “That was a joke, Daniel.”

His expression softened. “Of course it was. Sorry. But…” He looked at Jack. “We have to think of something. If he comes after me … If he threatens you, I’ll kill him. You know I will.”

Jack nodded. “I know.”

“So either I give him what he wants, or I make him threaten you in order to make me give him what he wants.” He ground his teeth and clenched his jaw. “Jack…”

“I know,” Jack repeated.

Daniel verbally pounced on her, though he kept his voice low. “How in the hell do you know what he does?”

“Because he threatened a friend of mine, who was so tied up in knots that he confided in me.”

“Do we know who that is?”

She shook her head. “He’s a young man who works for the Pentagon, attached to Colonel Davis. And Colonel Davis is the one who was threatened with murder.”

“They’re lovers?” Daniel asked.

She nodded. “He’s a civilian and he wants Paul to quit so they can get married, but the Colonel has plans. He thinks there’s more going on than just blackmailing young men for sex.”

“How do you know this young man?” Jack asked.

She took a deep breath. “His name is Alexei Markov. My brother’s son.”

“Does your brother know?” Daniel asked.

She gave him a pained half-smile. “My brother died a few years ago from an aneurysm. I’ve been looking out for Alexei ever since. We don’t have anyone else. I’m very afraid for him, so I started investigating on my own. I haven’t been able to do anything with the information I have found. General Hammond is aware. I told him a few months ago. He intimated that he was familiar with the target of my investigation, but he wouldn’t say more. Maybe you can talk to him. Talk to Paul Davis. But please, do something.”

Svetlana shut off the jammer and stuck it into her purse. She gave them both a significant glance before checking the time on her watch. “I’m sorry, but I have an appointment soon, so I should get going.”

“Anything important?” Jack asked, playing along.

She grinned falsely. “The daily board meeting is in an hour. I need to prep myself and arrive early.”

“Where do you hold these meetings, anyway?”
She gave another false smile. “The Mining Exchange.” She could see that Daniel and Jack were unfamiliar with it. “It’s a place for the pseudo rich. These men love their perks and they’ll squeeze as much as they can out of the government to avoid paying their fair share. Leaving me to pick up the bar tab. My government does not appreciate it.”

Daniel made a disgusted sound. “I know what place you’re talking about. They called it The Exchange in our old reality.” He said to Jack, “That’s the second brochure I showed you when looking for a place to stay temporarily.”

“Christ. That snooty place? The one that felt like Wall Street came in and puked? The one with the ugly-ass bedroom décor?”

“Why, where are you staying?” Svetlana asked as Daniel laughed quietly.


“Oh,” she said, exaggerating the simple word. “I am officially jealous.”

“Where do you live?” Daniel asked her, curious.

“An apartment downtown. As close to a coffee shop as I can get. And it’s not fancy. I can’t afford it. But the water pressure is do die for, so I can’t complain.” She made both men laugh, and it wasn’t unkind laughter. She appreciated it. Standing up, she fished in her wallet and Jack shook his head. “We’ll splurge this time. You get the next one.”

“Deal,” she said. She handed him a card. “My office number.”

The card she gave them was indeed a business card but she’d placed it face down, so they could see the handwritten note:

My private number
719-348-9294

It had a Colorado Springs area code instead of the DC area code, which meant it really was her private number. When she spoke next, it was also for benefit of whomever was listening.

“Call me if you need information or help. And thanks for letting me vent about the job. You know better than any of us how wrong the job can go. And I found it interesting that you knew Coburn in your other world. You might want to cultivate a friendship there. Especially you, Daniel.” She nodded and left.

Daniel poked at his cold hash browns. “Why did she say that?” he whispered. “She’s backed me into a corner.”

“She’s giving him a reason to see you. To make overtures, as the saying used to go.”

Daniel pushed his plate away. “What a waste of a meal. We should’ve just talked over donuts and coffee.”

“But eating here has a better atmosphere and she was able to put us at ease,” Jack said.

Daniel knew that tone and he went rigid. “What is it?”

Jack cleared his throat and lifted his coffee mug to sip at it, then moved it slightly aside so that Daniel could read his lips. He barely whispered, “Your nine and ten o’clock. My three and four
o’clock. Black Dodge van, white GMC van. Both older models. They’ve circled the block several times and now they’ve parked. No one’s gotten out for over forty minutes. How about we stage a fight?”

“Like the old days?” Daniel said, mouthing the words.

Jack nodded. “This is gonna be hard. Can you handle it?”

Reluctantly, Daniel nodded. In his regular tone, he began to speak but chose to ‘cut in’ mid-sentence. “… be serious!” he said in harsh but hushed tone. “This day just gets better and better. You’re telling me I need to make nice with those bastards? I think you need to fuck off, Jack O’Neill.” He rose.

“Stay,” Jack said.

“How?”

“You don’t have your car.”

Daniel stared at him, hating every second of this fake conversation. “I’ll catch a cab or the bus. I’m not spending another minute with you because I’ll say something I’ll regret.”

“Daniel,” Jack said, as his husband turned around and walked out.

It took only five minutes, and someone came from behind and stopped at his table. It was a pretty good fake, Jack thought. The guy had started to pass by, glanced at him, did a double-take, and stopped. Well done.


“You’re not meeting me here,” Jack said, raising his coffee mug. He then spoke behind the rim. “You’re only seeing me here. Keep on walking.”

Coburn smirked and kept going, exiting the same door Daniel had. Jack fought off the tremendous urge to go after him. To be there when he “accidentally” bumped into Daniel. There were no illusions. No ‘a’llusions. There was no room for pussyfooting around. If they wanted to find out everything that Coburn was up to, and to see if he really had been taken over by a Goa’uld, then Daniel had to give an opening to a guy who looked like someone he’d once loved.

Setting Up

It was scary how well he and Jack thought alike. They had so many differences, but when they had to go on the alert, work on subterfuge, plan attacks or infiltrations, they were one hundred
percent on the same page. Well, they had a lot of other things in common, but this was the scary bit.

Daniel hadn’t needed to ask Jack what came next, after the fight. There was a … relationship to cultivate. The idea made him sick. And he had no intention of spreading his legs for this sonofabitch. Daniel walked down the block and stopped as he pulled out his phone to look up the local cab company.

“Daniel?” said the familiar voice.

Without the stranger’s face to go with it, Daniel saw his ex in his mind’s eye. A wonderful, decent man who’d loved him dearly, but then gave him up when he knew—before Daniel had, for chrissakes—that he was in love with Jack. Then he’d gone and earned himself Angel’s wings by dying in order to give them a chance to escape. He’d died for Jack. He’d gotten him all those gadgets, the explosives. Jack had been under too much scrutiny, but Ian hadn’t been.

It hurt, even now. Daniel had loved him, and that was saying something. He could count on one hand the people he truly loved. Aside from Jack and Ian, the others were Shau’re, Sarah, and a boy in high school named Oliver. All of them were dead now. Except for Jack, of course. But the one closest to his heart after Jack had been Ian. The pain of it was wrenching.

“Doctor Jackson?”

Daniel finally gave him the time of day. He had no intention of responding to anyone suspicious who used his given name as if they knew him. He was actually like that about everyone. Most personnel in the old SGC had called him Jackson or Doctor Jackson. It needed to be the same way here. He looked up without raising his head, peering over the top of his glasses as Coburn came around and stopped in front of him.

“Can I help you Mister Coburn?”

“Colonel,” Coburn corrected, and he’d adopted an apologetic look.

Daniel clenched his jaw. “I don’t call someone by their former title, Mister Coburn. You gave up that right the moment you quit. If you’re worthy, I’ll be glad to call you by your former title. That’s ‘you’ in the collective sense.”

As he spoke, Coburn’s expression of enmity died, and he turned to stone. It was unnerving, but not unexpected, and Daniel was glad. What he’d said, stung. Daniel figured him to be someone who gave too much weight to other people’s opinions. Ian hadn’t been like that, so there was no mistaking who this guy was. On the other hand, if he talked about the inane or meaningless, like what his favorite movie was, then Daniel could easily pretend it was Ian speaking, but it wouldn’t last five seconds. This guy’s hair was short.

“I see,” Coburn said. “Give me a chance to be worthy then?”

Oh, well done. Good retort and segue. “Like?” Daniel had no intention of saying, “What do you have in mind?” It left the door wide open. Best to be vague in return.

“Join me for dinner on Saturday?”

It was Thursday. It didn’t give him too much time to prepare. Of course, Coburn might be thinking the same thing. It had better not be a trap. Is there any way in the world he could manage to carry a zat to a dinner? No. Too big. If he brought his Goa’uld assassination device, it would be small enough, but it would also take out walls. Nix that one as well. He and Jack needed to get
During his inner monologue, he’d adopted a thoughtful pose. He took a breath. “Dinner?” he asked, and purposely narrowed his eyes. “That’s all?”

Coburn’s brows rose. “What makes you think I have something else in mind?”

“Instinct,” Daniel said. “I’ll save time on that score.” He leaned forward a little and waved his ring finger. “No.”

“Just dinner,” Coburn said.

“What for? You’re not getting anything out of it. Why ask?”

“I would just like to have dinner. My apartment. Six p.m.?”


“I was planning on having the dinner catered. Please. Join me. Check in at the desk, they’ll send you up.”

Daniel sighed. “Fine. But if you have something else planned, don’t even think about it. You don’t want to mess with me.”

“I love a challenge.”

“And I love to prove men like you wrong. Be careful, Coburn, or this conversation never happened.” He walked away at that point and called a cab.

“Can I drop you?” Coburn called after him.

“No, thanks,” Daniel said, rolling his eyes.

The music couldn’t be loud. They couldn’t risk upsetting the other guests, so it was turned on to a regular volume. And so was the kitchen faucet, the bathroom faucet, and the shower. Jack calculated the best place to stand between all four sources and they stood at the entrance to the hallway, which made it easy to hear them all.

“Well?” Jack asked after Daniel walked through the door.

“The Mining Exchange, six p.m.”

“Anywhere in there?”

“I’m supposed to go to the front desk.” Jack made a face and Daniel nodded. “I know. He has a room. Invited me to dinner there.”

“I don’t like it.”

“I don’t either.” Daniel sighed. “It might be a room he’s had for months. He strikes me as the sort
who’ll make plans months in advance.”

“I agree.” Jack stared at him and started to take him in his arms, but Daniel stepped back.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t have you holding me in reassurance.”

“Why—” Jack started to ask. “Oh, you can’t be serious. You’re not cheating on me.”

Daniel shook his head. “No. But I feel dirty.” Jack closed his eyes. “Hey! Am I supposed to give it to him?”

“No!” Jack pulled him in his arms anyway and hugged him tight. “I don’t want you to go in his room. I don’t want you anywhere near him.”

Daniel hugged him back, then stepped away again. He put a hand on Jack’s chest in order to resist him when Jack tried to do it again. “If I get painted into a corner … How far do you want me to go?”

Jack ground his jaw. “If that happens, Daniel. Do what you have to do. I don’t mean fuck him. I mean, if you have to kill him, do it. I’ll support however you wanna go with it.”

Daniel sighed and walked back into his arms. “How about we talk to Hammond. Talk to Davis. Then we can decide what I’ll do. Or not do.”

“Deal. But Daniel … can you kill him? He’s got Ian’s face. His body. His scent.”

Daniel closed his eyes. “I know. He looks like him. And there’s no getting around that.”

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When they got to the Briefing Room the next morning, Jack gestured at Hammond’s office. “General, would you mind if we conducted business in private?”

With a curious look on his face, Hammond accepted. As they slowly sat down, Hammond joined them and clasped his hands. “What’s this about?”

Daniel and Jack set forth the information they’d learned, and were careful to keep their voices down. Hammond, too, was careful to keep his expressions neutral, should anyone take a look in.

“It’s not the first time that I have wished this was a closed office,” he said, after the two men laid out the case brought to them by Svetlana Markova. He sat staring at his desk blotter, hands folded before him.

“Unfortunately, I have been aware of much of this for quite some time. What I will ask of you now is your word that you will repeat nothing of what I am about to tell you. For any reason. Regardless of whether or not this investigation comes to a fruitful end.”

“You have it,” they both said.

“You don’t even need to ask, sir,” Daniel said.

“What he said,” Jack added.
Hammond nodded. “You have very little difference between you and the men who died five years ago. And I bring this up because I believe their deaths were not by accident. We risk much in this game, knowing that every mission could be our last, and so it was with that very dangerous mission. But that O’Neill told me prior to their departure that he and Doctor Jackson had learned from a ‘reliable source’ that two of our people had been compromised. They didn’t know who.”

“You’re saying Coburn had a hand in that station blowing up,” Jack stated.

“That’s what I am saying. I can’t prove it. But it’s a gut feeling, and in this business, you learn to trust it.”

“Do we know if he was on Earth during that mission?” Daniel asked.

“No, we don’t. The NID’s representative, Agent Don Barrett, has said that there are no craft anywhere on the planet or in orbit, but I can’t take his word for it because they’ve been wrong before, never mind the fact that they have most certainly been infiltrated.”

“Here’s a thought,” Jack said, eyeing the General. “Why didn’t you force Coburn to undergo a scan when he said he’d quit? I don’t understand letting him go.”

Hammond grew quiet. “I agree. But I was ordered by the Pentagon to let him go.”

“What?” both Jack and Daniel asked, shocked.

“Why?” Jack asked. “Did you find out?”

“No. But I believe the Pentagon has been infiltrated. I’ve been trying to work on how and by whom.”

“What about Colonel Davis?” Daniel asked. “We need to talk to him.”

“He’s on his way here, ostensibly on Pentagon business, but it’s to actually tell me anything he’s learned.” Hammond looked up. “Speak of the devil.” He got up and opened his door. “Colonel.”

Paul Davis came to the door and when he saw Jack and Daniel, he blinked a few times. “I’m sorry, General, I’ll come—”

“Get in here,” Hammond ordered.

Puzzled, and alarmed, he came in and closed the door. “I’m confused, sir. What are they—”

“Svetlana Markova’s brought them into this.”

“She …” Davis began, then walked around Jack and Daniel and slammed his hat on the back table. “Why the hell did she do that?”

“I can make a guess,” Daniel said unhappily.

“So can I,” Jack growled.

“You wanna clue me in?” Davis asked.

“These two are an unknown quantity,” Hammond said. “And it seems—”

“He’s asked me to dinner,” Daniel said, cringing.
Hammond stared at him and Davis came around to stand at his right side. “Are you serious?” Paul asked.

“Yes,” Daniel said, uncomfortable. “Saturday, six p.m. In his room at The Mining Exchange.”

Both Davis’ and Hammond’s mouths dropped open, then shut. Daniel and Jack could see the both of them thinking, trying to figure out how to work this to their advantage. To everyone’s advantage. The only problem was what they’d allow to happen.

“If you think for one second,” Daniel began, “that I’m going to whore myself …”

“I wasn’t thinking that,” Hammond said severely.

Davis winced. “I … kinda was. He already has Alexei. How’s Daniel going to get anywhere—”

“Forget it,” Jack said.

“What he said,” Daniel added. “I don’t mind going to dinner. And I might, and I’ll repeat, might let him flirt with me, but I’m spreading my legs for no one.”

Hammond winced.

“Sorry, General, but there’s no time to be delicate,” Jack said. “This blackmail crap? It has to end. Daniel’s just not going to whore himself for it.”

“But we need to know who’s involved,” Davis said. “I’m sorry, Daniel, but you have to get information out of him. I don’t care how you do it. But we have to know what in the hell they’re doing here. What’s their purpose? And just how far are they willing to go?”

The room was quiet, then Hammond turned around and looked at the model aircraft on his decorative shelf. He sighed. “I’m sorry, Paul. Jack, Daniel. But I lied to you about SG-1.”

“What’re you talking about?” Davis asked.

Hammond’s face adopted a grim line. “Seven years ago, I received word from someone I believe was working for the now-defunct Trust. They threatened the lives of my people. SG-1, primarily. I reported it to the President only, who then directed a few people in the Justice department. We couldn’t trust anyone in the Defense department because, quite frankly, their motives have never been altruistic. We eventually brought down the Trust. We helped in a sting operation. We knew we hadn’t gotten all of them but we took down who we could.

“Two years ago, I received word that Jack O’Neill and Daniel Jackson had been deliberately murdered and if I didn’t want the same thing happening to Carter and Teal’c, who were no longer protected, as well as members of my own family, I would not interfere with the Advisory Board.

“Now, I have no idea who in the Advisory Board sent that message, if any of them did, except for Markova. At this stage, I suspect everyone and have been trying to whittle down suspicion. When you told me Markova brought you in, and what you’ve told me so far, I have to conclude that we’re right about nailing down Coburn.” He turned around and looked at Daniel. “You’re our way in, Daniel. I’m sorry, but you are.”

He took a slow, deep breath. “This morning, I found this on my desk.” He opened his middle drawer and withdrew an eggshell wedding invitation card approximately six inches square. He leaned forward and held it out. Jack took it, holding it so he and Daniel could read it.
“You can’t be serious,” Daniel said and flicked the card with a middle finger, hitting the embossed border. It was a long swirling ribbon enhancing three calla lilies. “Calla Lilies?” he said to Hammond.

“Why didn’t they just go whole hog and send you the horse’s head,” Jack said with a scowl. Hammond made a face. “I’ll take the card.”

“Hmm,” Jack nodded.

“Let me,” Davis said, and Jack handed it over.

“Not very subtle, are they?” Daniel asked.

“There is no SG-1,” Davis said. “So why’d they say that?”

“Because,” Hammond said slowly, “I told the board yesterday that I was going to reactivate SG-1 and assign these two to the new team.”

“Oh boy,” Jack said, rubbing his forehead.

“What would you like us to do?” Daniel asked, and when Jack shot him a scowl, he raised his hand. “Jack, they’re in charge. This isn’t just you and me and a dinner.”

“My hands are tied,” Hammond said. “Yours aren’t. Do whatever is necessary to bring these people down. At the very least, hunt down this Goa’uld, and use any means necessary. If it turns out to be Coburn, then he’ll be interrogated, and I’ll bring in the Tok’ra to do it.”

“Camulus might kill himself,” Jack warned.

“Maybe not,” Davis said. “Intelligence says that Camulus is a Goa’uld who bows to Baal. Maybe we can use him as leverage.”

“No,” Jack said, shaking his head. “Baal may be important to him, but it’s not likely to be the other way around.”

“I don’t understand why this person, or persons, deems SG-1 that big a threat,” Daniel said. “What exactly did we, they, do?”
“Interfered with their plans, Daniel,” Davis said. “The biggest threat your counterparts posed was their uncanny ability to ferret out traitors. Intuition, gentlemen, is the cornerstone of a good pilot. When you transfer that to work that requires secrecy, there will inevitably be a crossover between good and bad elements. The first time your counterparts performed this useful trick was when … I’m just going to say ‘you’ for brevity’s sake … when you ignored orders and transported yourselves to Apophis’ ships. The second time was when we discovered rogue teams stealing technology. The third time was a successful sting operation that—”

“Uh, excuse me, Davis,” Daniel interrupted. “That was Jack. Not SG-1.”

Hammond gave him an indulgent smile. “When Makepeace was your C.O., did you write in your mission report that there was something wrong with him?”

Daniel blinked and exchanged looks with Jack. “I did. I couldn’t put my finger on why. He treated Teal’c like shit.”

“You did?” Jack asked. “I mean, in our reality? You never told me that.”

Daniel nodded. “I couldn’t stand the man. He was condescending, arrogant, sexist, racist, and xenophobic. I felt that those were traits that disqualified him as a leader.” He cleared his throat. “Frankly, sir, if the Daniel Jackson of this world shared the same experiences as a member of this command, then I feel it’s necessary for me to add two things that were never put on the record.”

“That’s disturbing to hear, Doctor Jackson. What are they?”

“You sure?” Jack asked him quietly.

Daniel said, not looking at Jack, “I had five unfortunate experiences with Makepeace and the first of them was when we were all under the influence of that disease from the Land of Light. While that event put everyone’s behavior patterns into the junk heap, it was still … worrisome. Before he was locked up, he attacked me in much the same way that Sam attacked Jack.”

“What?” Jack asked, alarmed. “You didn’t tell me about that.”

Daniel winced. “No.” He cleared his throat. “Everyone was behaving aggressively and out of character, so I dismissed it. But it happened again a year later. Right after that Touchstone incident. He threatened me. He basically said if I didn’t watch my step, and stay out of other people’s business, I’d get treated to a very nasty blanket party. I wasn’t quite sure what he meant by that, but I could guess.”

“Rape,” Jack said. He gave Hammond a knowing look. “A regular blanket party is to attack someone while they’re sleeping, wrap them up in a couple of blankets, then slug them several times. You don’t leave fist marks. Most of the time, it’s done to someone who’s put the entire squad, platoon, or company in jeopardy, but it’s always a mild form of it. For example, in basic training, when you do something that gets your entire platoon or company in trouble. To make sure you don’t do it again, you get punished.”

Daniel scowled at him. “That’s a hideous thing to do to someone. You’d think that sort of thing would be rooted out and prohibited.”

“It is, but it’s done anyway,” Jack said. “Sorry, Daniel, but it is.”

Daniel nodded. “Okay. A talk for another time. Moving on. When he was head of SG-1, he told me that he’d boot me off the team if I didn’t accommodate him. He’d make up a few things and they sounded plausible enough that if I didn’t get Sam and Teal’c to back me up, his threat would
have worked. So I told him I needed time to think about it. He gave me a week. Two days later, the sting was finished.”

“What did he want?” Hammond asked.

Jack blinked at him. So did Daniel. For such a smart man, he was willingly blind sometimes.

“He wanted Daniel to be his fuck buddy, sir,” Jack told him.

Hammond shaded his eyes. “I’m doubly glad he’s dead.”

“What does this have to do with Coburn?” Davis asked.

“I’ll handle Coburn,” Daniel said. “That’s what it means. So, here’s what you’re gonna do. Get a hold of some people we can trust. They’ll watch my back. How long before I come out from the dinner?” he asked Jack.

“An hour. And I see where you’re going with this. Got any two guys we can use?”

Davis and Hammond grinned. “Yeah,” Davis said. “Kowalsky and Ferretti. They’re on leave right now. They’ll be back on Sunday.”

“Can you call them in a day early?” Jack asked.

“I’ll give them a call, then have them call you,” Hammond said. “They’ll back you up and keep us apprised of the … sting.”

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**Sidetracked**

On the way home, which was still the luxury setting of The Broadmoor, Daniel looked pointedly at a passing grocery store. “I miss cooking.”

Jack grinned. “You’re just itching to get your hands on that stuff, aren’t you?”

“God,” Daniel sighed. “I miss it so badly, my fingers hurt. You do realize that I haven’t been able to cook for over two years? We’re not going to count that camping crap we had to put up with at the Omega site in that other universe.”

Jack caught sight of something and abruptly turned right instead of left. It was time for a little distraction. Plus, it’d be serving a purpose.

“Where’re we going?” Daniel asked.

“Look,” Jack said as he guided the truck around a traffic circle and merged onto another road. “See that ahead on the right?”
“The grey and white …” Daniel squinted. “Apartments?”

“Let’s go see,” Jack said. They turned into a community entrance marked by a flower-filled median that separated the incoming and outgoing lanes. The sign planted in the accompanying shrubbery read, Cheyenne Hill Cottage Estates.

“Okay, they won’t have an opening,” Daniel said morosely. “I want it too badly.”

Jack backhanded him in the shoulder. It barely made a dent in the fabric covering it. “Stop that. We have some shit to clean up, and some … okay, horrible shit to do in the future … but don’t jinx it already.”

Daniel rolled his eyes as Jack found the manager’s building and pulled in a space just outside the main door. Daniel couldn’t see any vacancy signs and he resigned himself to an episode of time-wasting.

“Get that look off your face,” Jack said as they walked to the front door. “I got a good feeling. I don’t know why yet.”

Daniel tipped his head to the side as he acknowledged Jack’s ability to be right. It had just better be the right sort of intuition. One time, on one of his intuitive leaps of faith, it hadn’t been what they’d wanted. They’d pulled into a used car lot and ended up going next door to buy the grill on sale after learning the car Jack had wanted had been sold.

“May I help you?” asked an older woman who sat on the edge of her desk, and ended the call she’d been on.

“Do you have a cottage available?” Jack asked.

There was a quick flicker of her eyes as she took in what they were wearing. Trousers, shirts, jackets, no ties. They had been moderately expensive. But Jack noticed that her gaze stuttered on his partially-exposed dog tags.

“Military?” she asked.

He stared at her. “Problem?”

“Not at all. You’ll have to fill out a credit report. Do you have a problem with that?”

“As long as you’re not charging us a hundred bucks for it, no,” Daniel said, forcing casual in his demeanor as he looked around the room and picked up a brochure.

“No, it’s thirty,” she said.

“I think this’ll do for payment,” Jack suddenly said and pulled out the card Hammond had given them. It had come with the packet. “Daniel, you write faster.”

He rolled his eyes, but peripherally, he watched her look at the credit card. Military special. NORAD employees had them, too.

“This will do,” she said as she handed Daniel the credit form.

He quickly filled it out, impressing her, and she took it and ran it through a scanner that was apparently hooked up to a credit reporting agency. It took twenty minutes. Thankfully, she wasn’t into small talk.
Daniel showed Jack the brochure and the cottages were self-contained, not tied like a single-level duplex. Once the credit came back authorized, she had them follow her in the truck and it took almost two minutes to get there. The community of cottages was huge, but it didn’t look that way from the main road. Once they arrived, they discovered that the small yard was still under construction. The grass squares were still in greenhouse sheeting and the lamp post at the start of the walkway was missing the bulb. Given the snow on the ground, Daniel wondered why the grass was already ordered.

“When will this be available?” he asked, and was rewarded when she looked over her shoulder in surprise.

“I was just about to say,” she said. “A month from now, at the start of February.”

In the tour, the front door opened into a vestibule, and from there, a sunken living room sat to the left, forward and to the right was the dining room, kitchen, pantry, and laundry room. To the direct right and down a hall was the main bathroom and master bedroom. A sunroom extended from the kitchen and a large patio with a built-in grill extended past that. There was an outbuilding that could be used as a tool shop or perhaps a converted greenhouse, if they were so inclined. They signed the papers for a year-long lease and they’d be back in a month with the First, Last, Security, and Damage deposits.

“You willing to hold out for a month?” Jack asked on the way to their hotel room.

Daniel blinked at him. “Didn’t we just sign a lease?”

Jack laughed through his nose and nudged him in the back with an elbow. “Smart ass.”

“Stop asking stupid questions then.” He was being snippy and he knew it. He gave Jack an apologetic wince. “Sorry.”

Jack gave him a look as he slid their keycard through the access port and entered the suite. The minute the door was closed, he pulled Daniel into his arms and refused to let him go.

“I think it’s crunch time and you’re understandably anxious.”

Daniel sighed. “I don’t want to do it. But I don’t like that Hammond, Davis, and others have been threatened. If I get the feeling I’m being cornered, I’ll drop the act and take him.” Jack raised a brow. “You know what I mean.”

Jack leaned in and stole a kiss, and though it was meant to be quick, Daniel pulled him into a long, slow one. His mind wouldn’t settle, however. It kept giving him scenarios that were purely based off of fear. He growled under his breath and stepped away.

“Let’s order in,” he said, stripping off his jacket. “Then we’ll get comfy and warm and do the snuggle thing.”

Jack snorted. “We rarely get far enough to do a snuggle thing.”

“Not my fault you’re hot,” Daniel grinned, and laughed and jumped out of the way when Jack threw a shoe at him, hitting him in the ass.

First up, a shower, and they did a quick game of Rochambeau. Daniel lost, so Jack went first. In the meantime, Daniel went about ordering not just dinner, but two pair of pajamas. The concierge actually catered their guests in typical travel considerations. It wasn’t the whole pajamas he was after, however. Just the bottoms. Jack looked excellent wearing pajama bottoms. Daniel could
admire him all night. Well, not all night.

By the time Jack got out of the shower, he found a white plastic package on the vanity counter. When he discovered the pajamas, he grinned. Daniel looked gorgeous in bottoms. Good enough to eat. And sadly, he never stayed in them long. But worth it. These were blue, so even better. He slipped them on and tossed the tops in the garbage. If he wanted his chest covered, a t-shirt would do. He hated sleeping with something covering his arms, especially since he ran hot at night. Daniel had once told him that they’d survive a night in a shack during a blizzard solely because Jack ran so hot. Jack grinned at the memory and left the bathroom. He found Daniel in the bedroom, remote in hand and surfing channels. He was wearing the bottoms, but they were white, not blue.

“Good god,” Jack said, after coming up behind him. He placed his hands on his hips and kissed the back of his shoulder. “Hello, gorgeous.”

Daniel giggled at the second kiss at the nape of his neck and shied away from him. “C’mon. My stomach demands feeding. Then it’ll be your turn.”

Jack grinned and found the large dinner tray sitting on the foot of the bed. “What’d you order us?” he asked unnecessarily as he lifted the silver plate cover. Short ribs. He looked at Daniel and smiled. “For a second, I expected a Reuben and a beer.”

“You had that yesterday,” Daniel snorted.

“What’d you get?” Jack asked, grinning when he found the Belgian Ale on the second platter over by the settee arrangement. “Nice. I’m liking this micro stuff.” He followed it with a long pull. “So?”

Daniel was carefully climbing on the bed and pulling the tray over. He put his hand on the cover and said, “Well, I’m starving and I’m in the mood for red meat, so …?”

“Tenderloin,” Jack nodded. He sat down next to him and they dug in, making a mess, but that’s what the napkins were for. He checked the clock and it was only a quarter to four. He shook his head. “Check to see what movies are on offer.”

“They have cable packages, Jack. We can watch the usual movie channels.”

“Oh? Oh.” He silently chided himself for forgetting. With the remote, he checked ESPN first, then headed to the movie menus.

“Check the science channel,” Daniel asked.

“They have a science channel?”

Daniel grinned. “Duh. What do you think Mythbusters is on?”

“I thought that was Discovery.”

“Was. Discovery is all reality show bullshit now.”

“That’s just wrong.”

It wasn’t Sunday, so his favorite show wasn’t on. He gave the remote to Daniel and he went for science. A show about the universe was on. They both grinned.
“If they only knew just how many habitable planets there were out there,” Jack said, sighing. He suddenly blinked. “Wait. They already know, don’t they?”

“They do, but the gate isn’t public access,” Daniel said. “That’ll come down the line, I’m pretty sure, but right now, the excuse, and a good one, is that the Goa’uld need to be eliminated before they allow people to visit other worlds. And I can only imagine the enormous amount of treaties we’ll have to sign between the number of worlds out there. It’ll turn into a galactic United Nations.”

“Oh god,” Jack said, sighing dramatically. Daniel’s phone rang at that moment, but it was in the other room. “I’ll get it. I’m closer.” Jack padded into the living room and grabbed the phone from the coffee table. The caller ID said, Unknown. He let it ring as he walked into the bedroom. Once Daniel saw him, he answered. “Hello?”

There was a pause, then Coburn’s voice said, “O’Neill.”

“I’m only going to say this once, Coburn,” Jack said, using his deadly ‘don’t fuck with me’ voice while keeping his eyes on Daniel. “Adjust your phone settings so Daniel knows who’s calling, or he won’t answer. Fair warning. Call back when you’ve done that.” He hung up and set the phone down on the night stand.

Daniel took a sip from his red wine, a grin on his face. “I knew there was a reason I married you.”

Jack smirked at him and rejoined him on the bed. Their meal wasn’t interrupted again and afterward, they ordered more wine and ale and settled back on the bed to watch TV. Jack could tell that Daniel was preoccupied with Coburn’s call, waiting for the phone to ring again, so he decided to distract him with thoughts of their soon-to-be permanent home.

“I don’t want to buy too much stuff while we’re here,” he began. “Clothing, understandable. But I’d rather go shopping after paying on the First. What do you think?”

“I agree. What do you want to do with that shed?”

“Grow pot?” Jack asked.

Daniel didn’t laugh. He raised an eyebrow and actually considered the idea.

“I was kidding, Daniel. We could go to jail, regardless of what the civilian population can do.”

Daniel sighed. “I guess. That woman gave me an idea about a greenhouse. I’d like to start a garden.”

“It’ll get ruined if we go offworld and get stuck for a week somewhere.”

“Yeah, well, if I wash my hair tonight, the sun might not come up tomorrow.”

Jack rolled his eyes and barked out a bit of laughter. “Okay, point taken. I’d like to set up a tool shop, so maybe build another shed.”

Daniel nodded. “We’ll need to fill the house. What kind of furniture do you want? Shouldn’t we make it different than our old lives?”

“A bit, Daniel, but I’m not buying something I don’t like just because it’s different.”

“Well, yes. But what I meant was pale wood compared to say, cherry wood. Oak or walnut. That
We can stay with that.”

“And the washer and dryer.”

“But the cottage has that.”

“Yeah,” Daniel drawled. “But did you see them? I’m not using that old shit.”

Jack chuckled. “I know what you’re getting at. You want that stuff that does everything but fold it up and put it in a drawer.”

Daniel said, rather excitedly, “Oh man, that walk-in closet was a real walk-in.”

Jack continued to chuckle. “Let’s see. What’s related to that that you can get excited over?”

“What goes in it,” Daniel said, crossing his arms. Suddenly he turned on his side, eyes widened in further excitement. “Oh hey, if we’re on so-called light duty, as a two-man team, maybe we’ll get a chance to go …” He frowned at Jack. “Why are you laughing?”

Jack turned to face him, continuing to chuckle. “You. The smallest things get you excited.”

Daniel sighed. “Maybe because I haven’t been able to get excited about anything positive in a long goddamn time.”

“We got here, didn’t we?” Jack said.

“Doesn’t count. I mean ordinary things most people take for granted. We were denied that stuff.” He sighed, then his eyes lit up again. “But not anymore.” He shivered excitedly, like a kid at Christmas.

Jack sat up, frowning, his mouth dropping open.

Daniel sat up, too, looking at him in confusion. “What’s the matter?”

“You’re right. We’ve gotten so used to having things denied us that we don’t even …”

“What?” Daniel asked, looking worried.

Jack closed his eyes and made a face. “For cryin’ out loud, Daniel. Christmas.”

Daniel blinked. “Christmas.” He couldn’t get what Jack was thinking about. “What?”

“Christmas,” he said again, with emphasis. “We missed it. Went right over our heads. What did we do at Christmas before the NID took over and ruined everyone’s lives?”

Daniel’s mouth dropped open, then he fell onto his back. “I didn’t even think twice. It never even made a dent.”

Jack laid back next to him. “What do you want to do? It’s the new year. We even missed New Year’s Eve.”

Daniel sighed and took Jack’s hand. “It’s just as well, I guess. Things are up in the air. We have a mess to clean up because other people dropped the fucking ball. Come next Christmas, we should
be back to normal. For us, I mean. Before it all went to shit.”

“That’ll be nice,” Jack said, twining his fingers in Daniel’s and bringing his hand to his chest. “So.”

“So.”

“There’s Valentine’s Day,” Jack said.

“My birthday.”

“In July,” Jack said. “And my birthday.”

“In October.”

Both of them said, “Not the same.”

They were slightly entertained by the science channel for a while, but Daniel’s good mood turned negative when his phone rang. Jack felt his body tense up as he passed him the phone. The ID had Coburn’s name on it. He let it ring three more times before he sighed and answered it.

“Coburn,” he said.

“You’re not offworld.”

“Brilliant deduction.”

“I thought Hammond was sending you two offworld.”

“Why? Because he turned us into SG-1 Light?”

“That’s amusing. Come meet me at three p.m. instead of six. Check in with the Concierge. Oh, and dress up.”

He hung up.

Daniel stared at the phone, then threw it and it bounced off an overstuffed chair and landed on the ottoman. “Fucker.”

“What’d he say?” Jack asked.

“Tomorrow, three o’clock, not six. Still at The Mining Exchange. Told me to dress up. I’m tempted to show up in shorts and a torn tee.”

Jack snorted. “Go ahead.”

“He told me to check in with the Concierge. Which means it won’t matter what I show up in.”

“Definitely,” Jack said, his mind busily constructing scenarios. “Let’s go shopping at the Goodwill tomorrow.”

Daniel made a face of disgust. “Shit.” He sat up and drew his knees to his chest. “I really, really, really, really don’t want to go, Jack.”

Jack sat up and joined him, making sure they were touching leg to leg, side to side. “Well, we had a bit of a break. Now it’s down to business. We begin the game tomorrow afternoon. So now, I
“How the hell do we plan?” Daniel asked. “This isn’t like …” He shut his eyes, remembering Simmons’ face in an observatory window. “How?”

“Oh, okay,” Jack said as he rested his chin on his crossed arms. “You walk in to the room. He’ll be there, or he’ll show up after. Advantage goes to him if you show up first. Makes you wait. So you’re waiting. He’ll either make small talk or go straight to the point.”

“Which won’t be dinner. Ten to one that’s a ruse.”

“Agreed. So, he’ll force sex on you.”

“Try, Jack. He’ll try.”

“And …”

Jack grimaced and slapped his forehead. “Wait. We don’t need to plan. Kowalski and—”

The phone rang. Jack’s phone. He got up and fished it out of his pants. The ID said Mike Ferretti. Jack nodded and answered.

“O’Neill.”

There was silence, then, “Holy shit, this is weird.”

“Hello to you, too, Major. Hammond explain things?”

“Davis did. You sure you want to step into this mine field?”

“No. But we have to. We’re in a position to help. We’re helping.”

“Okay. What’s the plan?”

“Daniel is going to meet up with Coburn at The Mining Exchange. He’ll go up for dinner.”

“Yeah, right.”

“We wait an hour. Daniel comes back down. Then we see what happens from there.”

“It’d be best if Daniel tags him. You got any equipment?”

Jack groaned. “Fucking hell. I am off my game. I should’ve thought of that.”

Ferretti said to someone, “He doesn’t. Get the AR104s.”

“104s? They related to the 92s?” Jack asked. In his mind’s eye, he pictured small sticky squares that one absently put on clothing. Daniel would have to get close to do that. Shit. Ferretti had answered him, and he hadn’t paid attention. “Sorry, repeat that?”

“Yeah, related in that it’s a tag. But it’s a thread, not a square.”

Jack sighed. “How’re we going to—”

“You’re where, at The Broadmoor?”

Jack told him.
“Okay, we’ll be there in ten to go over this. That okay with you?”

“Fine,” Jack said.

“See you in a bit.”

He hung up, and so did Jack.

“Okay, what’s up?” Daniel asked. He’d been watching him the entire time. Jack quickly explained. “I’m not getting dressed,” he said stubbornly.

Jack grinned at him. “You’re such a tease. Get dressed, Daniel.” He threw him his jeans.

Ten minutes later, there was a knock at the door and Jack answered, dressed but barefoot. He stepped aside and held out an arm.

“C’mon in.”

Kowalsky and Ferretti looked just the same, if a bit grayer around the temples. They tried not to stare at him, and at Daniel, but it was impossible. Jack sighed. They had to break the ice first. He grabbed two beers from the mini fridge and handed them over.

“Have a seat,” he said, and gestured at the sofa. Daniel was in an overstuffed chair. It and its twin had been in the bedroom, of all the stupidest things, so he and Jack had hauled them into the living room instead. Jack took the spare chair and they had the TV on in the background.

“Hammond tells me you’re not really like the old Daniel,” Kowalsky said.

“What was the old Daniel like?” Jack asked.

“Soft spoken, hated violence, rarely cussed,” Ferretti said.

Jack nodded. He had a feeling he’d say that, and he looked over at Daniel. “You wanna take this?”

“That used to be me,” Daniel said, picking at his beer label. “But after you’ve lived with sadists for two years, you either toughen up or you die.”

“Holy shit, Daniel. It was that bad, where you’re from?”

He and Jack nodded. “Imagine Frank Simmons running the SGC for fun and profit. Now imagine him holding private little voyeur sessions because he loved watching people get whipped. Imagine him threatening your wife or children unless you do the whipping.”

Jack stared at him. Daniel had never talked about that. Why now? To make a point. “You can stop now,” he said quietly. “They’ve heard enough.” I’ve heard enough, with witnesses.

“I’m sorry, Jack,” Daniel said, looking contrite. “I’ll make it up to you later.”

“No need. Just …” He gestured at Kowalsky and Ferretti. “Your most obvious change.”

Daniel smirked and looked at their guests. “If I can, I’m going kill those fuckers with my bare hands.”

Jack was taken aback because he knew he was serious, but he didn’t think Daniel would really do that unless it was bad. No one could put on a good ‘mad’ like Daniel.

“Is it really true that you’re married?” Kowalsky asked.

The pair held up their ring fingers.

“Wow. Did not see that coming,” Kowalsky said.

“Right,” Daniel said, sitting forward. “Let’s get to it. Here’s the plan. I go in. I stay for an hour. I tag him. I come out. We follow and nab him. Is that about right?”

Jack and their guests stared at him. “Um, yeah,” Kowalsky said. “That about covers it.” He handed Daniel a small glass jar. In it was a red thread. Or rather, it looked like one.

“How’s this work?” Daniel asked.

“It’s coated with an isotope that’s easily tracked by Asgard sensors,” Ferretti said.

“From those ships Hammond told us about?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay,” Kowalsky said, and he and Ferretti got up. “Thanks for the beer. Give us a call when you’re ready.”

“At three p.m., last I was told,” Daniel said.

“These guys like to change things,” Ferretti said. “Call us.”

“Thanks, guys,” Jack said. “It’s appreciated.”

“Pleasure is all ours,” Kowalsky said. “We’ve been trying to nail these people but couldn’t find them.”

“Here’s to a good start tomorrow,” Jack said. “Drive safe.”

They waved, and he shut the door.

“Jack?” Daniel asked.

“Yeah?” Jack asked, puzzled at where Daniel had disappeared to. “Where’d you go?”

“Bedroom. Come here?”

“Well, sure,” Jack set the empty bottles down and walked in. Daniel had a peppermint cane and he was sucking on it while lying on his side across the bed. Naked. “Whatcha doin’?” Jack asked, grinning.

“Do me a favor?”

“Anything,” Jack said, stripping.

“I want you to wear me out. I want to be so depleted come tomorrow that if anything should go wrong and I’m taken, I won’t be able to do anything.”

Jack sighed. “Daniel,” he said, pushing him onto his back and climbing over to lay on top. “You
have a high-running libido. That’s always been an asset. It’s going to be a curse now. Even if I screw you silly tonight, you’ll—”

“Fuck!” Daniel said, tossing the candy cane to the floor. “Something bad’s gonna happen.”

Jack frowned. “You don’t know that.”

“I’m scared,” he said, turning them over before he moved off and sat up, bringing his knees to his chest. “I really am. I’m scared what I’ll be forced to do, and it doesn’t matter if it’s him forcing me or me forcing me.”

“What do you mean, you forcing you?”

Daniel closed his eyes. “I’ll kill whoever comes near. I am not kidding, Jack.”

“I know you aren’t,” Jack said. “But we’ll get them. No matter what happens, Daniel. We’ll get them. You heard Kowalsky. They’ve never had this opportunity before.”

Daniel sighed as Jack put his arms around him. “I probably couldn’t get it up, anyway.” Jack snorted. “Yeah, yeah, shut up. I’m not in the mood. Is that better?”

“No.” With that, he turned slightly and pushed Daniel’s knees apart. “Let me see.” He wrapped his fingers around the limp shaft and began a slow massage. Ten seconds later, Daniel was half hard. Twenty seconds after that, he was almost hard.

“Bastard,” Daniel said, and he lay back as Jack swallowed him. With fingers and peppermint and an experienced tongue, Jack kept him occupied half the night. It didn’t matter to him that Daniel would still be able to have sex the next day. His aim was to get his mind off of everything else but him.

The Old Gods

It was just after two p.m.

“Fuck!” Jack growled as they exited the bank.

“What?”

“I forgot to ask them about a tracker.”

“But we’re—”

“For you.”

“Oh crap,” Daniel said, blowing out an exasperated breath. “Maybe we still have ti—” His phone
rang, making him jump. It was Coburn.

“Could you come early?”

“No, I’m busy,” Daniel said.

“Change your plans.”

“Suck my dick.”

“Eventually, but not now. What you *will* do right now is show up early. Will it help if I say Please?”

Daniel barked out a small laugh. “That’d be a no.”

“I see.”

Movement caught his eye and Daniel looked toward Jack and froze. There was a red laser dot over his heart.

“Jack,” Daniel said, swallowing.

Jack followed his line of sight and looked down. “Yeah. We kinda figured something like this would happen.”

“We?” Daniel asked, widening his eyes, and then moving them to indicate his phone. *He can hear you.*

“You and me? Hello? The conversation last night?”

“Listen to your husband. And now, listen to me. Show up now.”

Daniel hung up on him. It was one of those times he wished he had an old-fashioned telephone. Dead air was hardly worth a hang up. “Now.”

“Bastard,” Jack said between gritted teeth and they got into the truck and drove to the hotel.

When they got there, Daniel showed Jack the glass vial with the thread in it, then pocketed it and opened the door. “I’ll see you in an hour.”

“No exceptions. You tell him anything you have to, but be out here in an hour. I’m not giving him leeway.”

Daniel looked at him, wanted to kiss him, but it felt like goodbye, so he took his hand. “Deal. See you then.” Jack squeezed back. Daniel hurried out of the truck and looked over his shoulder, then around the area for gunmen. He couldn’t see anyone, and that was probably the point. He went inside. Approaching the front desk, he was happy to be in jeans and a button-down traditional plaid shirt.

The woman at the front desk gave him a slight frown of disapproval. “May I help you, sir?”

“I have a reservation. Jackson Coburn.” Might as well use both names.

She looked it up and surprise registered over her features and was quickly masked. “Yes, sir.”

She slid two cards across the desk. One was the room’s keycard, and another was a plain, white
credit card decorated with only a gold chip. He swept them up as if he did this all the time. “Room number?”

“413.”

“Any messages?” he asked. He adopted an old act, despite his earlier declaration to Jack. This act said no-nonsense professional.

“Yes, sir.” She slid a folded piece of paper across the desktop and he took it. “Thanks.”

“Will you be needing any special service, sir?”

He frowned, wondering what that meant. “No.”

“As you wish, sir. Any luggage?”

“It’s business, ma’am, nothing more.”

“Very well. Enjoy your stay.”

“Thanks.”

He waited until he was in the elevator to open the note.

I will join you shortly. Order whatever you wish. Use card. There’s a port by the phone.

“How about your head on a platter,” he mumbled.

When he got to the room, he knocked first, waited, then let himself in. He walked into a room that was underwhelming after the opulence of the first-floor reception lobby and gathering hall.

“Seriously?” he asked, shutting the door behind him. Absently tossing the cards on the nearby bureau, he stuffed one hand in a pocket and withdrew his phone with the other while he did a circuit of the room. It was a lame suite. An executive room, which wasn’t impressive. A desk along a wall and a bar. Ho hum. There was a sofa and two chairs in the bedroom. Weird. And unfortunately, the only decent windows were two tall narrow ones in the bedroom. The executive room’s window was small and too high up. Just what the fuck? The bathroom had no windows at all, and it was as glitzy glamorous as the lobby. The Broadmoor was a hell of a lot classier. He dialed Jack on his way back to the living room-slash-bedroom.

“Daniel?”

“Yeah,” Daniel drawled, continuing to look around. He found six surveillance cameras. “I’m here, by myself. He left a note, saying he’d join me.”

“Leaves you waiting. Puts him in the driver’s seat. Typical move. Where are you?”

“Room 413. And I’ve found six cameras so far.”

“Figure there’s more,” Jack said.

“And listening devices.”

Jack snorted. “Naturally.”

“Don’t see much of anything else,” Daniel said distractedly as he examined the room more
“You’re searching? You sound distracted.”

Daniel nodded, even though Jack wasn’t there. “Sorry. I never could talk and work a room at the same time.”

“My fault.”

“Hardly. Did anyone call while you were dropping me off?”

“No,” Jack said carefully. “Why?”

“Thought maybe Svetlana might call. I think she’s sweet on you,” Daniel grinned.

“Funny,” Jack said, his tone giving away annoyance. “Think I’m taken.”

“Of course you are. You’re mine, Jack. Everyone will have to go through me.”

“Does that apply to Jack as well?” came a voice from behind.

Daniel whirled.

“He’s there. I heard him.”

“Yeah,” Daniel said, staring at Coburn, who wore a dark grey suit. “He wants to know if everyone has to go through you to get to me.”

“Yes. Especially him.”

“Hang up now. Tell Jack you love him.”

“Fuck off, Coburn. Jack, gotta go.”

“We’ll see you soon.”

Coburn shut the door behind him and looked Daniel over. In his other hand was a silver bucket, inside of which was ice, glasses, and champagne.

“Don’t they normally deliver that?” he asked.

“I caught the guy coming to our room.”

“Your room, not mine,” Daniel said, moving so that he stood in the center of the empty space of the room. If he needed it.

Coburn smiled and set down the bucket, then popped the champagne and poured into both glasses. He walked over to Daniel and handed him one. “Be cordial,” he said. “If you don’t mind.”

“I do, actually, after that fucking threat you pulled.” He took the glass and waited for Coburn to drink first.

“Incentive,” Coburn said.

“I don’t need it.”

“Why didn’t you dress?” Coburn asked, raking his eyes over Daniel.
“I’m sorry, but do I have clothes on or are you blind?”

“Defiant to the last.”

“And the first, and in the middle. What am I doing here, Coburn?”

“Drink,” Coburn said.

“No, thank you.”

“It’s not drugged,” Coburn said and took a long drink.

“Corks can be injected,” Daniel said.

“Wow. What kind of world did you come from, Daniel?”


“I’ll bet,” Coburn said, and he looked at him admiringly. He blatantly settled his gaze on Daniel’s groin.

“Why am I here?” Daniel asked, and he desperately wanted to turn away but there was no way he was turning his back on this sonofabitch.

Coburn started to answer but he paused, seemingly considering his words. “To plot against me?”

“You’re a Goa’uld named Camulus. Tell me what you’re up to.”

Coburn burst out laughing. “I’m going to enjoy fucking you.”

“Not happening,” Daniel said, disgusted. “Whatever you think will happen here? It won’t.”

“Drink,” Coburn said, coming closer. He tapped Daniel’s glass with his own, then drank it down.

Daniel pretended to sip. “What did I just drink to?”

“A fruitful relationship,” Coburn said. He refilled his glass and closed the distance between them, so Daniel took a few steps back. Then Coburn took a few more. “I’ll make it worth your while. And I can be very good.”

“Pay me? I’m no whore, Camulus. Tell me why you’re here.”

“You’re going to be my whore.”

Daniel stuck his tongue in his cheek. “You really don’t get it, do you?”

“I’m afraid you have that backward. It is you that doesn’t understand.”

Coburn suddenly blew at him. As if he’d blown smoke. But there was nothing that … Daniel caught something in the air. A scent. Mint? Was he wearing minty cologne? Abruptly, his sight altered. Haloes surrounded everything. At first, they were thin, like looking at something in old-fashioned color spectrums, but they became more pronounced as the seconds passed. He took a few steps back and he was heading for the windows. He’d be trapped. But there was nowhere else to go but the bed and the two chairs and ottoman on the other side.

Daniel’s head began to swim, and he shook it to clear it, but he put him off balance and he
stumbled backward over the ottoman. Coburn walked toward him, and Daniel crashed his glass against the night stand, breaking it. It gave him a nasty weapon. Sharp ends and a stem that could bore into a person’s eye. “What the fuck is going on?”

“I wish you hadn’t cut your hair. I’d have loved to have run my fingers through it.”

“Whatever,” Daniel said absently, wishing he’d chosen to go toward the executive room. In here, the only way past him was over the bed. That was an attack waiting to happen.

“How are you feeling?” Coburn asked.

“What?” Daniel asked, confused.

His eyes glowed. “Think of Hathor and Set. I’m sure it’ll come to you. Then you will come to me.”

“What?” Daniel jabbed himself with the glass to focus his mind. Blood oozed and began to run. Set? Hathor?

“You’re bleeding,” Camulus said, showing concern. “Damn. Don’t ruin your perfect skin.”

“Set. Hathor,” Daniel repeated. “I don’t get … it.”

Coburn stepped closer and blew again. This time, Daniel saw the mist. A pink translucent smoke or something. Hathor. *Nish’ta.*

“Oh fuck,” Daniel groaned, stumbling backward again. “Stay away from me,” he said, holding up the glass.

“You’re feeling it quite well now, aren’t you, Daniel,” the Goa’uld said, moving now. Gliding toward him.

“I’m not … no, I’ll fight it.” He reached the lamp beside the bed and smashed it as hard as he could against the wall. Wires were exposed and he ripped them free of their housing and held up the connectors. “Next best thing to a zat. I’ll just zap myself.” His vision swam again, and he shook his head, which only made him dizzy. He nearly fell to the floor and used the wall to prop himself up.

“You are very strong-willed,” Camulus said in that resonant voice. “Excellent. I hate it when they give in. And you know how to counter *nish’ta.* But you’re smart enough to know that sort of electrical jolt will cause burns, and can cook your insides if too strong. This is an excellent hotel, with excellent power. I can run twenty small appliances in here and not have the power flicker. Do you think you can withstand that much current?”

Daniel swallowed. The bastard had a point. That much current would incapacitate or kill. So instead of using on himself, he’d use it on the snake. “You’re right. Come closer. I’ll get you with it.”

Camulus was six feet away, but he suddenly paused and tilted his head back a little. Tendrils of a translucent pink … smoke … left his nose and mouth, wafting across the space between them.

“Shit,” Daniel hissed, and there was nowhere to go. So. “Fuck it.” May as well do the nastiest thing possible. He imitated a little bit of parkour by jumping to the ottoman, landing on one foot, using the other to step on the arm of the chair. He then pushed off and launched himself at Camulus. It was wonderfully gratifying to see the shock on his face. That was the face of
someone who’d been underestimating him. That expression would never get old, regardless of who wore it.

Unfortunately, he also launched into the smoke. He squeezed his eyes shut and held his breath as the two of them fell backward. Daniel tried to keep the momentum going and did a somersault past him. He started for the door, unsteady and weaving on his feet.

“Stop,” Camulus commanded.

“Fuck … you …” Daniel said as his shoulder hit the wall corner. He winced but kept going. And it suddenly occurred to him that he was moving much too slowly. Camulus would be behind him now. Stupid! He pivoted on a heel and began walking backward toward the door. His head was swimming even more and there were haloes, auras, everywhere. Camulus came into focus and he … looked beautiful. Daniel shook his head. “No.”

“You have great self-control,” Camulus said. “Come here.”

“No,” Daniel said, and it sounded faint. Weak. “No!” Coburn was a lot closer now and Daniel tried to land a punch. But his movements were slow and awkward. Coburn grabbed his head, hands on either side of his face, and he blew directly into his nose. “No,” Daniel said, even more weakly. “No.”

“Hello, Daniel.”

Daniel blinked several times and the blurry scene in front of him resolved into the shape of a man with a glowing aura. “Ian?” he breathed. “You’re dead.”

“No,” Ian said. “I escaped. I’ve missed you.” He kissed him, deeply, and Daniel responded by kissing him back. The Goa’uld quickly undid his trousers and slid his hand under Daniel’s briefs. “You like this?” he asked, as his fingers wrapped around the shaft. His cock responded, quickly hardening.


“No, my love. Would you do me a big favor?”

“Anything,” Daniel breathed, and he kissed him passionately. “Anything,” he said again, and over Ian’s lips.

“Anything? Are you sure?”

“Yes, Ian.”

“Stand there, okay?”

“Okay.”

Camulus set up the video on his phone and arranged it on a chair so that it was centered around Daniel’s crotch. “Perfect.”

“Ian?”

“Stand there, but unbuckle and unzip.”

“Okay,” Daniel said, and he did so.
“Expose your cock and jerk off.”

Daniel pulled it out and began to stroke himself.

“That’s perfect, my love. Keep going. Just stand there and jerk off for me.”

“Okay.” Daniel was in a daze, but he could still see Ian. He wasn’t dead. He was right there.
“I’ve missed you. I love Jack, but I’ve missed you.”

Camulus chuckled. “Did you hear that, Jack? He misses me. Isn’t that sweet?”

“Ian?”

“I’m sorry, Daniel,” Camulus said. “I wasn’t talking to you. How hard are you now?”

Daniel showed him his cock. He was half hard. “A little.”

“Would you mind if I got you harder?”

“No, Ian. Not at all.”

“Good man,” Ian said, and he knelt in front of Daniel and arranged him so that he could look into the camera while he sucked his cock. He made a point to insert fingers into Daniel’s ass, making sure the camera would show it. Pulling back, he told Daniel, “How do you feel?”

“Good,” Daniel said in a long, pleased pronunciation.

“Do you want me to make you come?”

“God, yes, Ian. Please.”

“Tell me how you feel. How you like this. Be loud and tell me.”

Grinning around his cock, with his eyes on the camera, Camulus sucked him off to the sounds of Daniel’s demands and cries. He spat out the semen and said to the camera, “Damn, that was good. Was it good for you, Daniel?” He was talking to Jack, not Daniel.

“Oh god yes, Ian. God yes.”

“Call me My Lord from now on.”

“Yes, My Lord.”

“Good boy. We’re going for a ride, Daniel. Would you like that?”

“Yes, My Lord.”

“I’m sorry?”

“If it pleases you, My Lord.”

Camulus picked up the camera and aimed it at Daniel. “Good answer. Now, tell Jack you’re leaving him for me.”

“Where is he?” Daniel asked, barely able to stand.

“Here, Daniel. In the camera.”

“Tell him to fuck off and die.”

“Fuck off and die, Jack.”

“You love me, not him.”

“I love Ian, not you.”

With one hand, he held the camera, and with the other, he pulled Daniel into a torrid, heated kiss. “Time to leave. Zip yourself up.”

“Yes, My Lord.”

Camulus looked into the camera and whispered, “Do you get the message, O’Neill? He’s mine now.” He prepared the video for sending, but others had to see it first.

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“Where is he?” Jack asked, pointlessly.

“An hour?” Kowalsky asked.

“He’s been held up,” Ferretti said.

“C’mon,” Jack said, and hurried out of his truck. The three men quickly entered the hotel and got to room 413 as fast as they could. Jack started to kick the door in, but Ferretti held up a hand and turned the knob. The door opened.

“Always check,” he told Jack.

“Yeah, alright,” Jack said testily, and they entered the room. In front of the TV, they found a note with large writing on it. “Play Me.”

“Shit,” Kowalsky said and he found the vial with the thread still inside.

Jack pressed play. The video of Daniel’s seduction and blow job played, and Jack’s face burned and reddened. Not just because of the content of the video, but because Ferretti and Kowalsky were watching it, too.

“That sonofabitch,” Ferretti said.

“Son of a fucking bitch!” Jack howled, spinning around, and looking for the video. “Where is it?”

Ferretti tapped the side of the TV. The video was on a flash drive. He pulled it and the TV went dark. He handed it to Jack. “Calm down,” Ferretti said. “Let’s go.” They left the hotel in a hurry and got back into Jack’s truck. “Is his DNA on file?”

Jack blinked at him. “Well, duh, Ferretti. His and the other Daniel’s DNA are exactly the same.”

Ferretti made a face. “We can track him that way. Head for your hotel.”
“How?” Jack asked, surprised.

“Asgard technology,” Kowalsky said.

“Come again?” Jack asked.

“We have fifteen ships, Jack. The Prometheus, Daedalus, Athena, Heracles, Agamemnon, and Andromeda are six of them. They all have Asgard technology, from weapons to shields to sensors. They can locate him.”

“Providing one of them is in orbit,” Ferretti reminded him. “Remember, they were going on maneuvers?”

Jack’s tried Daniel’s cell. It rang seven times before going to voice mail. Jack hung up and tried again. On the fourth ring, someone answered, and it wasn’t Daniel.

“Hello, Jack O’Neill,” said a resonant voice.

Jack clenched his jaw. “Camulus.” Kowalsky’s and Ferretti’s heads snapped around to stare at him. “Where’s Daniel?”

“Ah. Your little pet and I are on our way to a special retreat.”

“I’m going to—”

“Now, now. Don’t be like that. I assure you, he’s in no immediate danger. He’s going to star in a few films, then he can go. Unless he wants to stay with me. You heard how much he does. Plus, he’s so charming and pliable and can suck cock like a pro. Can’t you my sweet?”

Jack heard a faint, “Yes, my lord.”

Jack’s blood went cold. “What have you done to him?”

“Modified his mood. Come here. There’s a good boy. I’ve done nothing harmful. Think about Set and Hathor. I’m sure it’ll come to you.”

Jack squeezed his eyes shut. “You sonofabitch,” he said quietly.

“Ah, yes. I am. Should I have him suck me off, O’Neill, and make you watch?”

“No.”

“Are you going to back off and wait for my call?”

“Yes.”

“Did you enjoy that little video?”

“No.”

“Yes you did,” Camulus chuckled. “You remember those pain sticks, yes?”

“Yes,” Jack said, hissing the s.

“Interfere and I’ll kill him with one. Understand? He’s mine, now,” Camulus said, and hung up.

Jack screamed with something more than rage and threw the phone so hard the back came off and
the battery popped loose.

“Jack, fuck!” Ferretti cursed, scowling. “You wanna destroy your means to Camulus?”

“You said you can find him with DNA,” Jack said, and spittle flew out of his mouth. “We need to do that, right the fuck now. You heard him.” He relayed what Camulus had said.

“Get to your hotel,” Ferretti repeated.

“Why?”

“DNA, O’Neill, remember?” Kowalsky said.

Jack closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Right.”

When they got there, Jack ran up and grabbed Daniel’s toothbrush, hairbrush, and dirty tee, and balled the first two items in the tee as he made his way back down to the truck. “You drive,” Jack said. Kowalsky moved over and then stepped on the gas.

They arrived at the mountain as fast as they could, and luck was with them: they hadn’t been pulled over by any cops for speeding far above the legal limit.

In the first elevator, Jack’s phone rang. Kowalsky had it, just to keep Jack from throwing it again, and gave it back to him.

“Here’s something else, O’Neill.”

The call went to live video. Daniel was in the center of a large room. A harsh overhead light poured overhead and beyond it, was blackness. Within the light sat a king-sized mattress and a long table with many sex toys and torture implements.

“Oh fuck,” Jack said under his breath. Camulus didn’t hear him, but Kowalsky and Ferretti did. They moved to see what Jack was looking at and made the same growling noise Jack was now making.

Daniel appeared from the dark, still dressed, and was led to the bed where a collar was put on him. It was attached to a chain that descended from the ceiling. From the darkness, someone fired a zat at him and he seized and jerked, falling into a daze. Nothing happened for a minute or so, but eventually, Daniel came to his senses. And he was no longer under the influence.

He whirled, and his hands went to his throat. “You sonofabitch. Come near me and I’ll kill you in the most painful way I can think of.”

“Damn,” Kowalsky said.

The camera panned around and Camulus appeared in extreme close-up, where you saw his eyes and nose only. There was a whip crack and Daniel cried out and cursed. Camulus scowled and looked away and the camera no longer showed what was going on. There were sounds of obvious fighting and an unfamiliar voice howled in pain.

“Dose him!” Camulus spat.

“No!” Daniel protested.

There was silence now and Camulus turned to face his camera. “Well, wasn’t that exciting? He’s going to put on a show soon. A little nish’ta and we’ll get our money’s worth. I do hope Daniel
won’t be too hard on himself afterward.” Camulus scowled at the camera. “Good luck finding him. He’s mine. And there’s not a fucking damn thing you can do about it.”

The video call ended. Jack shut off the phone and stuck it in his pocket. “I’m going to tear him limb from limb.”

“I’ll hold him,” Kowalsky said. He chewed at his lip. “Has Daniel always been like that? Your Daniel, I mean.”

“Like what?” Jack asked.

“Strong. Kick-ass,” Ferretti said. “That’s not the one we knew.”

Jack stared at them, expecting them to wither under his gaze, but they didn’t. Failing to scare them off the subject, Jack said, “You mean, soft-spoken, peace-loving, pain in the ass to the Pentagon? That Daniel?”

“Yeah,” Ferretti said. “Pretty much.”

“My Daniel used to be like that. But … do you remember that mission where we got our minds ‘brain stamped’?” They nodded. “He changed after that. Neither of us know why or how. But he stopped being mild-mannered. And then the NID made it worse. Made him mad.”

When they arrived in the Control Room, Hammond met them there. The situation was quickly explained, and Hammond nodded to Captain Graham Simmons to open up a channel to the Athena. A video popped up on a single, large screen over their heads, but Hammond spoke into a tiny version on the console.

“Colonel Madison,” Hammond greeted.

“General. What can I do for you?”

“Beam up these gentlemen. A search needs to be run for one of our personnel who’s been kidnapped.”

“Holy crap! Right away, sir.”

After Jack, Dave, and Mike disappeared, Hammond told Madison, “Get them geared up for a rescue op. Extreme force is authorized, do you copy?”

“Loud and clear, General.”

“Contact me when the mission is concluded or if there are any problems.”

“Let’s hope it’s the former, sir.”

“Agreed. Hammond out.”


Jack found himself aboard a familiar ship, but with a slightly upgraded design layout. Antsy, and in no mood for delays, he gave Ferretti and Kowalsky an expectant look. They explained
everything to Madison, who got up and went to the back of the bridge where an Asgard stood behind a large console and holographic display.

“Hermod,” Madison greeted. “We need to locate a human named Daniel Jackson.”

“I will need his DNA,” Hermod said.

“These are all I could grab that might have his DNA,” Jack said, handing Hermod the bundle.

The little Asgardian picked through the items and couldn’t find anything on the hair brush or toothbrush, but there were skin cells on the shirt. He ran an opaline stone over the cloth and a result appeared on the holographic screen. An examination began at once as cells were located and set in a data table. When the data examination stopped moving on the screen, the test was apparently finished.

Hermod said, “Where was Daniel Jackson last seen?”

Jack told him, and gave him the address. “He isn’t there, though.”

“I expected as much, or you would not be here,” Hermod said. His console table lit up with a map of Colorado Springs and surrounding area. The search began. Jack stood there, impatient, expectant.

“How long with this take?”

Hermod blinked at him. “There are over two-hundred-thousand in this area, O’Neill. But rest assured that we will locate him.”

Jack walked away and covered his eyes while his free hand formed a white-knuckled fist.

“We’ll find him, Jack,” Ferretti said. To Kowalsky, he said, “I’m so glad we’re not onboard the Prometheus.”

“No kidding,” Kowalsky said.

“I can hear you, gentlemen,” Madison said, smirking. To Jack, he added, “Hermod’s the best Asgard for this sort of thing. While it feels like it takes a long time, it really doesn’t.”

Jack swallowed. “If it takes longer than ten minutes, some particularly nasty things are going to happen to him.” He closed his eyes and tried to gain control of himself, but a rage was building. He knew that if anything bad happened to Daniel—other than what already had—he would lose control. “I can only hope that the Goa’uld takes time to gloat and preen, like the rest of them always do.”

Kowalsky and Ferretti looked at each other and they wanted to comfort Jack but didn’t know how. He wasn’t their Jack, and yet, he was.

“We’ll find him in time,” Kowalsky said in a low voice.

“Along with whoever’s got him,” Ferretti said. He walked over to the Captain and with a pointed expression, and a lowered voice, he said, “Maddy, this is it.”

The Colonel snapped his head up, then got up. “You’re certain?”

Ferretti pointed at Jack. “It’s all down to O’Neill and Jackson. They were in a position to go after him.”
Madison looked at Jack. “How’d that happen?”

Jack chewed at the inside of his mouth. “Daniel and I didn’t do shit. People came to us. The only reason we were able to get to this guy was thanks to his attraction to Daniel.”

Madison winced. “I’m sorry.”

Jack nodded, silently.

“Colonel,” Ferretti said formally. “When he’s found—”

“I know the deal, Mike,” Madison said. “Whoever is in the vicinity will get beamed up to the holding cells.”

Jack let out a calming breath. “Good.” His rage was on simmer, waiting for release. In the meantime, he had to console himself with the fact that Daniel would be alive. Hopefully, when he was beamed aboard, he wouldn’t be in a seriously compromised position. Other than the embarrassing one and …

Jack’s eyes went round and he swallowed a bit of panic. “Um … are you going to beam him to the bridge?”

“Sure,” Madison said. He frowned, puzzled. “Is there a reason we shouldn’t?”

“No, but could we get some blankets up here. Maybe a set of fatigues. I’m fairly certain he’s going to be in a compromised position.”

Madison grumbled under his breath. “Should’ve thought of that. Those nasty bastards.” He pressed a button on his chair’s console. “Hey, could someone bring up three blankets please? And a pair of fatigues, size …” He looked at Jack.

“Medium Long.”

“Medium Long.”

“Right away, sir.”

“Thanks.” He gave Jack a worried look. “You’re sure?”

Jack nodded. “Yeah. That guy … They have some sort of racket going. If it involves one Goa’uld, I’ll be my paycheck it’ll involve more. You know who’s masquerading as Camulus, don’t you?”

Madison frowned and glanced at Kowalsky and Ferretti. “Who?”

“The former member of SG-2, and he’s on the Advisory Board.”

Madison went pale. “Coburn?”

“You know him?”

Madison shook his head. “Not to speak to. I knew someone on the Board had a hand in some shady shit, but I didn’t realize …”

“If a certain video I was shown earlier today is any indication, there’ll be a lot of unsuspecting victims. Daniel’s going to be making some sort of film and I don’t think he’ll be starring in it
alone.”

“Sonofabitch,” Madison swore.

“That about sums it up,” Kowalsky said.

Madison stared at Jack. “Hammond authorized this little op? With you?”

Jack sighed. “Yes, with the guy who’s taking over the twin’s life.”

“Both of you?”

“Is that an issue?” Jack asked. “Because I think you’ll be the litmus test for everyone else.” Jack thumbed at Kowalsky and Ferretti. “Except for these two. They seem to fine, but then, I only just met them.”

Kowalsky and Ferretti started asking Jack about past missions they’d been on with SG-1, including the one that started it all. Jack kept nodding, kept telling them things they were stupidly surprised to hear, given that the other O’Neill and Jackson had been through those things with them.

“We’re … them,” Jack said. “With a few differences.”

“Like Jackson being willing to kick some ass,” Kowalsky said, grinning a little. “I know it’s bad, Jack, and I get that he’s in some deep shit, but I gotta tell ya. Hearing him threaten those guys like that? I like that change from the old Jackson.”

Ferretti nodded. “He sounds like he can handle himself.”

Jack jogged his brows. “He can. We’ve gone through a lot of stuff. But even before the SGC went to shit, he was training with Teal’c on an almost daily basis.”

“Doing what?” Kowalsky asked.

“Learning the Jaffa version of martial arts,” Jack said, and was gratified, a little, to see the pleased surprised on their faces. In fact, everyone’s faces, when he glanced around. “Damn, people. Was your Jackson that bad?”

“No, certainly not,” Ferretti said. “But he was constantly trying to defuse a situation, preferring to talk rather than fight.”

Jack nodded. “Daniel used to be like that. But he changed after a mission.”


Jack chewed at his lip. “Let’s just say that a few of the other workers were a bit … hard on him. And I wasn’t of any use. I was always there to watch his back but down there, I wasn’t. He decided that he wasn’t going to depend on me anymore for saving his ass. That he’d do it himself from then on.”

Jack was glad they didn’t ask any more questions about that FUBAR mission. The things that went on down there among the workers hadn’t just been about work and sleep. It was just as well that Madison and the others thought that Daniel had been picked on. He had, but that hadn’t been the issue.

Down there, under the ice and snow, the workers had developed their own methods for relieving
stress and Carlin had jumped right in. Daniel still carried guilt about it, despite Jack telling him that he hadn’t been cheating. It doesn’t count if you can’t remember, he’d told him ad nauseam. Sort of like now. Jack closed his eyes. He knew another round of guilt trips was in Daniel’s future. “Shit,” he said, under his breath, and so quiet that no one heard.

“Has Hammond accepted you two back into the fold?” Madison asked, and Jack was glad of the diversion.

“I think so,” he said simply.

Kowalsky stepped around and Ferretti joined him until they flanked Jack. “For what it’s worth, sir,” Kowalsky said. “He’s the same guy. He may not have memories of us, but it’s him. I can only imagine the same for Jackson.”

Madison shrugged. “Okay by me. It’s just unusual. Hammond was adamant.”

“Until they showed up, yes, sir,” Ferretti said.

“What secured it?” Madison asked Jack.

“I don’t have the foggiest,” Jack answered. “I think he just …”

“Missed them,” Ferretti said.

Jack gave him a look of surprise. “Seriously?”

“Seriously,” Ferretti said. “Scuttlebutt about the base was that you were identical. It’s true enough, apart from your memories of us.”

Jack chewed at his lip. “It was a relief, since the other SGC was downright hostile. Except they weren’t really the SGC.” All three men looked at him blankly. “You do know that we came from a second universe, right?” Blank looks. “Okay. We left our universe and entered another one. But that one had been taken over by human-form replicators, so we left that one and came here.”

More blank looks, but Ferretti asked, “What are replicators?”

An Airman appeared with the blankets and uniform and at Madison’s gesture, handed them to Jack. “Man, you really don’t wanna know,” Jack answered as he took them. “I can only say thank god, they don’t exist here. They wiped out the Asgard. And the Goa’uld. And us.”

“But what were they?” Madison asked.

“Machines. Shaped like spiders and bugs and eventually, people.”


“Yeah, with eight legs. And twelve. Or however many was needed.”

Everyone shuddered.

“I have located Daniel Jackson,” Hermod said loudly, but in a voice that was free of emotion. He might as well have said he’d found the TV remote. “He is attached to a chain. Shall I beam him aboard with the thing attached?”

“Yes!” Jack said excitedly.
A white light activated, and Daniel appeared three feet away, landing on the floor in a sprawl. He was writhing on the floor, clutching at the collar, and screaming in rage. “Fucking cocksucking sonofabitch!” Whatever had been causing him pain disappeared and he suddenly realized where he was. “Oh, thank god. Damn effective timing.”

Jack was alarmed at the shakiness of his voice as he knelt. He was dressed, so there was no need for the blankets and the uniform. “What happened?”

“Collar has the ability to immobilize.” He looked around while his body twitched uncontrollably.

“Electrical?” Jack asked.

“Like that pain stick they use,” he said, and he was panting now, since he no longer had to hold his breath. “Where am I?” Daniel said, shaking even more uncontrollably. He found Kowalsky and Ferretti kneeling beside him, and he nodded at them.

“You’re aboard the Athena,” Madison said.

Daniel saw him over Jack’s shoulders. “Camulus, Baal.”

“What?” Jack asked, puzzled.

“Baal’s down there with about eight other Goa’uld.”

“Whoever was in your immediate area was beamed to our cells,” Madison said, standing up, equally alarmed.

“Oh thank god,” Daniel said, falling onto his back. He kept twitching. “Someone help me get this fucking thing off my neck! And in the meantime, there are Goa’uld ships in orbit, cloaked.” He cleared his throat, but it wouldn’t smooth out. “Six, I think.”

“Hermod,” Madison said, looking over his own shoulder.

Daniel heard an Asgard’s unmistakable nasal tone. “I have found six Goa’uld ships,” Hermod said. “The fleet is two minutes away, on their way back from the exercise platform.”

Jack suddenly reached out to steady his husband. “Can you stand?”

“Yes, but I’m not going to,” Daniel said. “I need water.”

“Security to the Captain,” came a voice from the bridge intercom.

Madison pressed another button on the console. “Captain here.”

“Sir, we have quite a few Goa’uld down here and they’re fighting.”

“Fighting who?”

“Each other, sir.”

Madison’s brows went up. Slightly. “And?”

“Do you want us to stop it, sir?”

“Stand by.” He tongued his cheek, thinking, then sighed. “Hit them with a stunning beam. We need them to talk first before they kill each other.”
“Copy that, sir.”

Jack thought the man sounded pleased. “Stunning beam?” he asked. “Nice.”

“A gift from the Asgard,” Madison said. “Hermod, situation?”

“The Goa’uld have been surrounded and their ships disabled. However, a few al’kesh escaped under cloak and entered hyperspace.”

“Baal will love that,” Daniel commented as he finished. “Especially if he’s one of them. And he’s going to be really mad. He’ll lose a lot of money.”

“Doing what?” Jack asked.

“He’s been using Coburn … Camulus … and other Goa’uld to … basically treat the SGC, and the humans around the planet, as their own personal … well. Whorehouse.”

“Say that again?” Madison asked, narrowing his eyes. Kowalsky and everyone else on the bridge, minus Daniel and Jack, just stood there with their mouths hanging open.

Daniel sighed. “I’d rather just let you read it in a report. If you don’t mind.”

Madison nodded. “Understood.”

Jack desperately, desperately, wanted to ask what happened, but more than that, he wanted to soothe his husband. Both would have to wait. “We’re gonna need to give Hammond that report ASAP, Colonel,” Jack said.

“I figured.” Madison pushed another button. “Stargate Command, come in.”

Ravaged

Jack kept an eye on Daniel, without trying to look like he was keeping an eye on Daniel. His husband wasn’t talking, and that was worrying. History was repeating itself. Daniel hadn’t talked to him about what went on under Simmons’ sadistic hand, and he wasn’t talking about what happened with Camulus. And Baal. He’d given Hammond the ‘facts’, but that was all. He’d been cursory. Even his report had been cursory.

For the first twenty-four hours after the rescue, Daniel had twitched involuntarily every few minutes, thanks to the effects of that goddamn collar. He had also refused to be examined and had instead, gone to his base quarters and cleaned up. He hadn’t let Jack in, either.

Something was very wrong, and Jack could only guess. There was one word that kept pinging in
Jack was finished with his report. He was about to leave his base quarters when he opened the door and found Daniel standing there, hand raised to knock.

“Hey,” he said.

“Hey. I’m going to see Janet. Come with.”

“Okay. Let me drop this off fir—”

“No,” Daniel said, and there was turmoil behind his eyes. “Now. I was supposed to do it this morning, and I’ve only just worked up the nerve. If I wait, I’ll chicken out. Then Hammond will be forced to order me and …” He lowered his voice. “I’m in no mood to be ordered to do shit by anyone, Jack. I need to do this now.”

“Okay,” Jack said, closing his door. “Let’s go.”

He was silent all the way to the infirmary, but instead of going to one of the gurneys and waiting on her, Daniel went straight to her office. He knocked.

“Come,” she said.

He and Jack entered, and Daniel pointedly locked the door, then went to the window and shut the blinds. She watched him with cautious interest and Jack gave her a pained smile.

“You mind if we, uh …”

Janet raised a brow. “Guess I don’t,” she said, getting up. There was a reason she had a shortened version of a hospital exam bed in her office. For patients such as this. She walked over and patted the narrow linen-covered mattress. “Have a seat.”

Daniel sat down, and Jack watched him carefully. There wasn’t any wincing or any other physical sign that he might have been raped. But Jack was still afraid that that was what had happened. And there’d been the use of nish’ta, so perhaps there hadn’t been force. It would still qualify as rape.

In fact, that’s what Daniel had called it after that business beneath the ice on that planet. It didn’t matter that he’d been willing. He hadn’t been himself, so as far as he was concerned, it had been rape. It had taken him a while to get over that. How long would it take this time? Worse yet, Jack couldn’t do a fucking thing for him. The only thing he could do was go torture a few snakeheads.

“Colonel?” Janet asked.

Jack blinked. “Sorry. What, Doc?”

“I need you to step outside.”

Jack expected Daniel to object. But he didn’t. He started to say something, but … no. “I’ll just go drop this off to Hammond,” he said, and irrationally, he was angry. He’d been about to do that in the first damn place.
“I’m sorry,” Daniel said. “I’ll find you after, okay?”

Jack nodded. His anger cooled as he put himself in Daniel’s shoes. “I’ll meet you in the cafeteria. I’m starving.”

“Okay.”

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The moment the door was closed, Janet gave him a thoughtful, sympathetic look.

“Don’t do that,” he said, cringing.

“Do what?”

“Look understanding.”

Her brows went up. “Okay,” she said. “Your heart rate is up. I’ll assume that’s leftover stress?”

He nodded. “And I think it’s residual side effects from …” He described the collar he’d been forced to wear.

She frowned, concerned that someone would do such a thing. “Given what you’ve described, you’ll need to rest for a few days. No exercise, no sudden emotional episodes.” When he frowned, she clarified, “Don’t get into arguments or fights.”

“Oh,” he said. “That might be a problem, Janet. I can’t predict how I’ll react in dealing with the aftermath.”

She bit at her bottom lip. “I haven’t read your report.”

“It isn’t in my report,” he said, wincing. “I can’t put that in a report. I was cursory. I gave enough info to give Hammond a rough idea what the Goa’uld and their business partners were into. And that’s all I gave him. He knows I had a collar on. He doesn’t know why, nor does he know what happened when …”

His mouth hung open, his throat stuck mid-sentence. Heat filled his cheeks, his eyes. Janet’s eyes widened in alarm and she took his hands in hers and set her jaw. She waited. He swallowed, and swallowed again, and then again. She grabbed a blue bag and gave it to him just in time. He retched for a few, very long minutes and he suddenly grew cold.

“I’m afraid,” he said quietly.

“Of what?” she asked.

“Of not getting over this.” He forced himself not to cry. “It’s bad. What I did. What I went through.” He took a deep breath. “Did you guys … I mean, SG-1. Did they go to P3R-118?” Janet looked at him blankly. “Sorry. A planet with an ice age, with the inhabitants occupying a dome, protecting them from it. But underground, they had a slave labor force. SG-1 was taken hostage and—”

“Oh, the brain stamp.”
Daniel grimaced. “Yeah. That. So they went through that?”

She nodded.

“Did your Daniel Jackson give you any indication that he was having a hard time dealing with what happened down there?”

Janet shook her head. “No outward sign. If he was having trouble, he didn’t come to me about it.”

“No,” Daniel said slowly. “He wouldn’t have.” He grimaced again. “We’re practically the same, Janet. Except I changed a lot after that mission. From what I’ve learned, he didn’t.”

“Why?” Janet asked.

He shrugged. “Maybe he didn’t go though the same things I did.” He closed up the bag and grimaced for a different reason. She took it from him and opened the door to her office and dropped it into the bio container in the hall. Returning, she locked the door and walked back to him.

“So can you tell me what happened? About you, yesterday?” She looked at the clock. “Day before yesterday.”

Daniel stared at nothing, seeing only the harsh memory, and feeling the harsh sense memory. He shivered.

“Are you cold?” she asked.

He nodded.

She checked his temperature with an ear monitor. “It’s got nothing to do with internal temperature, so that’s good news.”

“It is?” he asked, sarcasm in his tone. “It means it’s in my head.”

She sighed. “I’m sorry. I can’t help there. I can recommend—”

“No,” he said, holding up a hand. “All I really needed to know was how long can I expect to keep twitching.”

“You haven’t twitched once since coming in here,” she noted.

He blinked at her. “I haven’t?” He thought that over.

“Nope. I expect it’ll happen off and on until your system readjusts itself. If it doesn’t get better, then we’ll know there’s nerve damage.”

He ground his teeth. “Bastards.”

“As for the other reason you’re here?”

He looked up, puzzled. Then he remembered. “I need you to draw some blood.”

“I was going to do that anyway.”

“But I need tests run. After Hathor put that whammy on me, what did my blood test say?” He made a face. “Shit. Sorry. What did his blood test say?”
She grinned at the use of a cuss word. “Two of your neurotransmitter levels were out of whack. One, the dopamine was sky high. Two, the norepinephrine levels were extremely low.”

He nodded. “Explain?”

“Your pleasure center was dangerously high, even though you weren’t being stimulated anymore. And the transmitter that regulates your ability to protect yourself, the fight or flight response, was nearly depleted. Nish’ta robs the body of the transmitters needed for self-determination and protection. To put it simply, your will was taken away and you were given a false sense of euphoria for an extended period of time. The Goa’uld are pretty good at doing that and to hell with the side effects. For example, that chemical found on that … Goa’uld vacation planet. The one with the light?”

Daniel nodded.

“That light gave a false sense of euphoria, but unlike nish’ta, it shut your system down when you weren’t receiving it. An instant addiction.”

“There was something different about this nish’ta, Janet. I could be reinfected after the effects were drained by a zat blast. That didn’t happen with Set or Hathor. I couldn’t be controlled twice. But Camulus used his on me a number of times.”

“How many?” Janet asked as she assembled the blood draw materials. Daniel didn’t answer, and she didn’t press, but while she took his blood, she said, “I ask because it might be important should there be a problem with the test results.”

He nodded. “I’ll tell you then, if it’s necessary. I hope that’s okay.”

“Sure.” She was finished and after releasing the rubber tubing, she laid a hand on his arm. “Daniel. You may be from another universe, but you’re still him. So let me give you a piece of advice from a friend?”

He frowned, puzzled. “Sure.”

“If rape is one of the things you’re struggling with, I know someone who can help you talk about it. If you want to talk about it.” She noticed the wince at the word rape. “Were you?” she asked.

He chewed at his lip and shook his head. “Not in the traditional sense of the word. The dictionary sense. The survivor sense.”

“What other sense is there?”

“The confused sense,” he said, looking down at the floor. He forced himself to meet her gaze. “It’s the guilt version. I was forced to perform. But I wasn’t forced. Nish’ta makes you think you want sex. If you were in your right mind, you wouldn’t. Not with … well, you wouldn’t. So was there, technically, rape? And …” He swallowed. “Was I the rapist?” He cringed and left her office.

She had no idea what to say.

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Three Days Later

The twitches were completely gone. Daniel was keeping himself busy in his lab-slash-office—no one knew what to call it, not even Daniel. Jack kept himself busy with mission reports and getting up to speed with the history of this reality. Much of their past had been the same, but it diverged after the fourth year, thanks to the NID takeover. This SGC had eleven more years under its belt, compared their original reality. There was a *lot* to catch up on.

One really nice change in this reality? Jack had an office. A big office. The same as Hammond’s. When he’d opened the door, he’d expected a closet. Nope. Aside from a modest desk, he had room for two file cabinets, a snack and coffee table, and three chairs. Couldn’t ask for more than that.

2IC. Second in Command. Jack still shook his head at the position Hammond had given him. It said a lot about trust and acceptance. Even better, he and Daniel were officially the remanned SG-1. That wouldn’t happen right away, however. He would eventually go out as leader of SG-1, but his primary gig would be as 2IC. Daniel had celebrated his position by bringing him flowers and pillows. “You’re back will hate that chair. Until you get a decent one brought in, the pillows will help.” And he’d been right. Jack had ordered a new one and it couldn’t get here fast enough.

He closed the file on Mission #P2X-490—they all went according to gate coordinate designations—and clicked on the next one. Another nice change? No more folders. Nearly everything was digitally backed up. Jack had a lovely laptop, and the bloody thing was heavy and huge. He was so used to the little ones that a twenty-one-inch felt enormous. Walter had said the things had been designed for ultimate gaming. And they cost a lot. Of course they did. The only thing not kept digitally was the science lab work. And Daniel’s office. Lab. Whatever.

He opened the next file and began to read when Daniel came in, knocking twice, and then shut the door. And locked it. Jack’s brows went up. Daniel had been avoiding him, intimately, for the last four and a half days. Jack tried not to mind but it was breaking his heart. Daniel wouldn’t even let him hold him.

“What’s on your mind?” he asked, trying to sound non-committal. Non-judgmental. Non-expectant. It was really, really hard. Difficult. Then he noticed Daniel’s bottom lip tremble just a tiny bit and he got up and went to him, pulling him in his arms. “You stubborn shit. I love you. No matter what.”

Daniel cried, quietly, in his arms.

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It was difficult over the next few weeks. Daniel’s PTSS was triggered at the oddest times and Hammond allowed Jack to take him home every time. Most of the time, Daniel thought he was suffocating. He needed outside air and there was nothing else to do but take him home.

Before either of them knew it, Moving In day had arrived.

Daniel felt invigorated after they moved their things from the hotel into the house. It hadn’t been much, but it was like a ritual to him. Soon, a few trucks arrived from the furniture store and they
were busy getting it moved in. Daniel grinned at the old tan leather and oak, and their matching overstuffed recliners. It was as if they had bought them for the retirement years.

Hammond had graciously given them a weekend to get things settled, then that following Monday, they would really be … home.

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Two weeks later

Daniel was dreaming. He saw Ian in the distance, walking away. He called out to him, but he faded, like a mirage. He snapped awake and sat up, and to his surprise, he had an erection. And more surprisingly, it scared him. What if he reached out to Jack, but then choked up when touched?

While they had settled down and felt finally at home, the one thing that had not gotten better was their sex life. Their non-existent sex life. Daniel didn’t know how to get it back. He didn’t know how to make his body respond without feeling guilt. And he didn’t know how to give himself permission to feel good. Having that much nish ’tea in his system hadn’t just messed up his neurotransmitters. It had messed with his head. Just allowing himself pleasure made him freeze up. He kept seeing the pleasure he’d experienced with Camulus and Baal. And just the thought of that would make his stomach lurch. If he’d been about to get an erection, it would die.

But now, here he was. He was hard. He liked it. And there was no accompanying fear or guilt. Had it been because of Ian? He suddenly thought of Joshua. He was in a psych ward, on suicide watch, ever since the Tok’ra had removed Camulus. Daniel’s erection slowly deflated, but it wasn’t a bad thing. He’d made a decision. He’d go see him.

The next morning, he told Jack.

Jack cleared his throat. “Ferretti told me that he’s been asking to see you.”

Daniel stared at him, mouth open. “You didn’t think I needed to know that?”

“I didn’t think you wanted to know that. You haven’t been talking to me about him or what happened.”

“It wasn’t him,” Daniel said, clenching his jaw.

“No, it wasn’t,” Jack said, and though Daniel resisted, he pulled him into a hug. “We’ll go.”

All the way to the hospital, Daniel kept thinking about what had happened between them when he’d been Camulus. He remembered how his lips tasted. How his hands felt. It was odd and suspicious. How could he think of that and not freak out in any way like he had been doing? Was he finally getting past it? Daniel suspected he was sheltering himself somehow. But regardless of how he felt, he really had to see him. To forgive him.

“You sure?” Jack asked one more time as they stood outside Coburn’s room. Daniel nodded silently, and the doctor unlocked the door.
“He’s calmed down quite a bit. And if you don’t mind my saying, I think your visit will do a lot for him. We’ll be right outside.”

“Thanks,” Daniel said. He entered and experienced a very vivid déjà vu. Once upon a time, when Machello’s bug had driven him insane, he’d been in a padded room just like this, only the lighting had been a lot harsher. This subdued light was much better. Easier on the mind. Swallowing, he looked over his shoulder and nodded. The door closed.

Coburn sat on the floor with a deck of cards and he wouldn’t look up. He took a deep breath and said, “Hi. Daniel. I’d offer you a chair but …” He gestured at the floor and Daniel walked over and sat down across the game of solitaire.

“Joshua,” he said softly. “Are you getting better?”

The man cringed. “A little. Suicide watch is still in place but I’m not in a straight-jacket anymore.” He cleared his throat. “How are you doing?”

“Better. But …”

“Yeah.”

“It’s the nish’ta. I have issues about … pleasure. I don’t know what’s real.”

Joshua nodded. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t, Joshua. I don’t blame you. It wasn’t your fault.”

“So everyone keeps telling me,” Joshua said, and he set the cards down. He drew his knees up and wrapped his arms around them. Tears flowed. “But they don’t have the memories. They never experienced the things that fucking monster made me do.”

“But that’s the thing,” Daniel told him softly. “He didn’t make you do anything. He had complete control. You couldn’t fight. You didn’t have a choice. When someone says you were made to do something, it implies coercion.” Daniel paused, because it looked like he was getting through to him. “As if you had a choice. You didn’t.” He paused again, then swallowed and said, “Unlike me.”

Joshua shook his head. “Don’t do that to yourself. That drug made you do things and he gave it to you.”

“Yes, the nish’ta. It takes away your will, replaces it with false happiness. But before that. I showed up in that hotel room. Willingly. Yes, he threatened Jack. Other people. But I made the choice. You weren’t able to. I’ll carry a lot of guilt for a while, and maybe it’ll never go away, but you have no reason to feel guilty. I know you’ll feel it anyway, but … I had to see you. To tell you that there’s nothing to forgive. You don’t need to apologize.”

“I can’t help it. I feel tremendous guilt. I don’t know how to deal with it. And it’s worse, now that I see you.”

“How?” Daniel asked, alarmed. “Do you want me to leave?”

“No.” Joshua swallowed audibly. “When it came to you … I was fighting inside, but I was also jealous. Of Ian.”

“Oh,” Daniel said, blushing, and hating that he was blushing. “Were you and the other Daniel …
friends?"

“In a way. We were … fuck buddies. For about eight months. It was hot and exciting. Then he just called it quits. Said he couldn’t do it anymore because he was in love with Jack.”

Daniel blinked, reeling from this news. “Did he know? Jack, I mean.”

Joshua nodded. “O’Neill looked at me oddly for a while. Like he wanted to knock my head off and ask questions at the same time. When they got together, I could tell. The arguing during joint missions changed somewhat. O’Neill stopped being judgmental and arrogant. He was still demanding, still annoying. But anyone with a brain could see they were together. They would have been happy, if they’d been out, like you and your O’Neill.” He kept his gaze away. “I guess I’m jealous of that, too.”

“Why won’t you look at me?”

“Because,” Joshua said tightly. “All I want to do is …” He swallowed. “Touch you. And that’s putting it mildly.”

“Joshua,” Daniel began.

“Don’t.”

“I have dreams. About you. About Ian.”

Joshua looked up, startled. “What kind of dreams? Re-enactments?”

Daniel shook his head. “They’re … healing dreams. I see you. I hug you. I tell you things will be okay.”

“I wish I could believe that,” Joshua said.

“One day, I hope it’s true.”

Joshua looked down and started crying. “He … killed …”

Despite the fact that the doctor would hate it, Daniel rushed to him and held Joshua in his arms. “I know.” He rocked him for a long, long time.

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Daniel knocked on the door and he was let out. The doctor stared at him as if he had three heads. “What?”

“That’s the first time he’s truly cried. Or held a conversation with anyone. Ever. Before you, he’d just hurl sentences, ramblings, then scream and yell to be left alone.”

“Sarah was like that,” Daniel said absently as he looked through the window of the door.

“Sarah?” the doctor asked.

“Another person freed from the Goa’uld,” Jack told him.
“And my ex,” Daniel said, also absently.

Jack could see the anguish and compassion in Daniel’s eyes, in his expression. It was encouraging because he wasn’t panicking as he looked at the man who’d been his tormenter. Yes, it was while he’d been under the control of someone else, but the same face, the same voice? That should have been hard to confront. And it wasn’t. Jack, however, was holding that thought in reserve. It might hit Daniel later.

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“You okay?” he asked him when they got home.

“Yeah, fine,” Daniel said. Absently. Again. He was preoccupied. He kept mixing images in his head. He went to the kitchen and opened the fridge to get a beer. He stood there, staring at the new appliance while not really seeing it.

“Ahhuh,” Jack said, not believing him. “What’s going on in that head of yours?” he asked gently. “Out with it.”

Daniel shut the door and leaned against it. “I keep seeing … dreaming about … both of them. Ian and Joshua. And I can’t seem to separate them. I can separate Camulus, but at the same time, I keep … feeling him.”

Jack sat on the edge of the dining table, taking the beer Daniel handed him. He twisted off the top. “Are you finally going to talk to me about that?”

Daniel winced a bit. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. It’s just I want to help so goddamn bad and I can’t until you let me.”

“What happened,” Daniel said slowly, folding his arms tightly. “What Camulus did.” Daniel swallowed and looked at the floor. “It was something that Ian and I did once. It was almost exactly the same.”

Jack stared at him, stunned. “You mean, that blow job?”

Daniel shook his head. “Ian and I played a few rough games now and then. It was hot. When I was in that … arena. Or whatever it was. He did it again. And I wasn’t allowed to … get off. He wanted me to fuck him. And so I did.” Daniel swallowed hard. “Then Baal came in and told me to do it hard. Rough. To make him beg. So I did. And after I … Baal took over. I was told to get on the bed in front of him … I was in his mouth and Baal was …”

Daniel closed his eyes and shuddered. “We went out once. Ian and me. We went to a gay bar. We ended up in a threesome with this guy we didn’t know. And the arrangement was exactly the same.” Daniel went to the sink and poured out the beer. Staring into it, he said, “That used to be a fond memory. Hot. Kinky. But now my memories of him are corrupted.”

He felt the tears sting his eyes, but he refused to give into them. He sniffed and turned around to finally look at Jack. “I don’t know when we’re gonna have sex again. And for fuck’s sake, Jack! I miss it! I miss you! And every goddamn moment of every goddamn day, I hate myself! I have to get over … I have to.”
Jack took him into his arms and just listened to Daniel breath against his neck. “You know I’m not going anywhere, right?”

Daniel sighed. “Yes. But it’s just so fucking frustrating.” He pulled back to give Jack a light kiss. And something happened. He was aroused. He blinked, his eyes widening a little, then he opened, inviting Jack inside, and it was like quenching your thirst after finding your way out of a desert. It was like finally having a good meal after being forced to eat energy bars for a month. Even better, he was getting hard. Breaking the kiss, the shocked look on his face told Jack all he needed to know.

“Does that mean what I think it means?”

Daniel couldn’t talk for a moment. He then whispered, “Touch me there.”

Jack didn’t. Not right off. He stroked Daniel’s chest and belly with the back of his hand before he slid down, keeping in contact with the warmth of his body. He was cautious, but he continued, turning his hand over as his fingertips brushed over the rise of Daniel’s jeans. He knew right where his cock lay, where it always did. He looked into Daniel’s eyes, watching for the refusal. The freeze-up. It didn’t show up.

“So far, so good. Now what?” Jack asked.

Daniel’s mouth went dry. “I want you.”

“Let’s go break in the new bed and find out where this goes.”

Daniel kept waiting for his mind to reject what his body was demanding. But it didn’t. When he was finally naked, he moved slowly onto the bed and Jack joined him. He was slow, careful, touching his skin as if he’d never done it before. Well, it had been awhile. He kissed him, sensually, deeply, and when he wrapped his fingers around Daniel’s cock, it was bliss. When he kissed his cock and surround the head with his lips, it was bliss. And when Jack slicked up his fingers and gently slid inside him, it was more than bliss. His prostate was given the lightest of touches and Daniel nearly dislodged him with a sudden jerk.

“I want you in me,” Daniel said softly.

“You’re sure?” Jack asked.

“Jack,” Daniel said, and his tone was reassuringly familiar.

“Okay,” Jack said, but he made this bit go just as slowly.

Instead of their usual position, they lay on their sides, facing each other, and Daniel lifted his leg over the crook of Jack’s arm. When he entered him, it was just as slow as everything else.

“How’re you feeling?” Jack asked with a soft but heated voice.


He stroked slowly, deeply, and Daniel’s eyes half-lidded. It was amazingly good. His breathing quickened finally, and the sweat began to bead on his upper lip. “Fuck me,” he said softly. “Fuck me harder.”

Jack grinned, and it had a wolfishness to it. “Nope. Just like this.” Slow. Deep.
Eventually, however, the need took over. Jack picked up the pace and placed Daniel’s leg over his shoulder.

“Yes,” Daniel gasped, leaning back to give Jack a better angle. It was fast now, torturous. “Yes,” he cried, and he was coming, coming hard. Jack kept pounding, driving him insane, and his orgasm kept going. It was almost painful. Keen. Gasping, he was about to demand that Jack stop when his husband came with a loud groan and a gravelly, “I love you.”

They pressed their foreheads together, breathing fast, hearts hammering. “I love you too,” Daniel said with a satisfied sigh. “Thanks for waiting.”

“My pleasure,” Jack said. “Let’s not do that again.”

Daniel started laughing.

SG-1

Two Months Later

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Their new home, the cottage across the lake, was fully furnished now, making it look like a true home, even though open boxes littered said home with debris. They’d already ‘broken in’ the bed. Next came the living room couch, the dining room table, the kitchen floor, and the washer, and the dryer. Everything but the exterior shed. The patio? No. Al fresco sex wasn’t, unfortunately, going to be on the menu. Not here.

Daniel grinned after he and Jack had the tool shed all fixed up. “Want to break it in now or later?”

Jack groaned as he kneaded the small of his back. “You’re going to kill me. Let’s wait until this old body’s had a rest.”

Daniel snorted as he pushed Jack up against a wall. Jack wrapped his arms around his waist. “You’re not old.”

“Fifty-two is old.”

Daniel scowled. “No it isn’t. Seventy-two is old.”

“Whereas you only just turned forty-three.”

Daniel gave him acryptic smile. “Making you my older man, not old man.”
Jack opened his mouth and tilted his head to kiss him, but the phone rang.

Daniel dropped his head back and groaned. “Can we ignore it?”

“You know the answer,” Jack said, and they ran back inside. Jack grabbed it on the sixth ring. “O’Neill’s bed and break—”

“Colonel O’Neill,” Hammond said, curtly. “You and Doctor Jackson get up here fast. We have a situation. I hope you have a go bag prepared. You have fifteen minutes.”

“Yes, sir,” Jack said, and Hammond hung up. Jack stared at the handset, then set it on the charger. “That was weird.” He repeated Hammond’s words.

“That is weird.”

Jack and Daniel did indeed have go bags prepared. But they also had several. Not long after Daniel’s recovery was officially over, they had gone shopping and returned home with five backpacks.

Daniel set them on the dining table and asked, “Now are you going to tell me what these are for?”

Jack sighed. “Every goddamn time we turn around, we get hit with something we’re unprepared for. So, if we’re forced to go on another investigation where we have to go into hiding or some similar shit, we need bolt holes with supplies stashed.” He went to the hall closet and pulled out four large duffle bags.

“Where’d those come from?” Daniel asked, frowning.

In the bags were first aid kits, maps, burner phones, fire starting gear, a few camping items, compasses, and boxes of high energy bars.

“Holy shit, Jack.”

“Yep. I’ve also gone to the best gun shop and bought several sidearms. Glocks and Berettas. They’ll come through once the background check clears. And then there’s …” He pulled out a couple of Winchester rifles. “We break these down, and strap the tools to them to put them back together. Plus there’s a lot of ammo, too.” He looked at his husband, who stood there with his mouth hanging open. “I’m not fucking around this time, Daniel. We may not ever have to use them, but we need them. Just in case. With all the shit we know about, and all the shit we’ve seen, do you think this is overkill?”

Daniel chewed at his lip. “No. We’ll add changes of clothing and cash. Where were you thinking of going with it?”

“A few storage lock-ups, some train station lockers, bus station lockers. A couple of safe deposits, too.”

Daniel nodded. “Okay. Let’s get this shit sorted.”

Along with those were their SGC go bags, two each. They simply held additional pairs of
uniforms, boots, underwear, cash, and a few weapons and tools. The former included fixed-blade Tanto boot knives, which were superior to the ones they’d been issued, and the latter were the standard all-purpose Swiss Army, also non-issue. Daniel added books they each preferred, plus a couple of Kindles, in case they were stuck at the mountain for some time. The wi-fi was excellent.

They arrived at the base with their Go Bags, and after getting to Level 11, they had planned on stopping off at the locker room to stash them, but the desk sergeant said, “General Hammond wants you both to report straight to Briefing Room.”

“Okay,” Jack said slowly as he and Daniel traded worried frowns as they got into the secondary elevator.

“What the hell, Jack,” Daniel said, leaning against the back wall of the car. “In civilian clothes?”

“I know. I don’t like it.”

“It means something bad, doesn’t it?”

“Probably.” He sighed heavily. “I’m really sick of this shit.”

Pushing away from the wall, Daniel unzipped the bag, took out the Tanto knife, and slid it into his civilian work boot. “Just in case.”

Jack chewed at his lip. “You have a point.” He did the same.

The elevator didn’t stop until they got to Level 27, which was even more alarming. It was two p.m. in the afternoon. The elevator was never *not* busy. In fact, they needed new ones installed but for security reasons, the brass had refused. When they left the elevator, the hallway had the normal amount of traffic, and no one was in a hurry or looked at them funny. It made them both think they were overreacting.

When they arrived in the Briefing Room, they found Dave Kowalsky and Mike Ferretti standing by the observation window. As one, Jack and Daniel set their bags on the conference table. It was like a statement. *We’re ready to disappear.*

“What’s up?” Jack asked them.

They both shrugged.

“Hell if I know, Jack,” Kowalsky said, arms folded. “He’s been in there on the red phone. Colonel Davis from the Pentagon is in there with him.”

“Paul?” Jack asked, and he turned to Daniel. “Did he get in touch with Svetlana about Alexei?”

Daniel nodded. “Not long after we busted up the … party.”

“The Pentagon’s liaison to the SGC was involved?” Ferretti asked.

“Yeah,” Jack drawled. “We kept you out of that loop. Sorry.”

Kowalsky gave him a smirk and shrugged. “No big deal. One less thing to worry about, right?”

Daniel frowned in thought. “Where’s the Advisory Board? Aren’t they supposed to be hovering over this gathering? It smells like something they’d have something to do with.”

Behind them, an Air Force General walked in wearing his Class As and carrying a satchel. He
looked no-nonsense. His tag said “Vidrine.” Out of respect for his rank and service, Daniel stood up, but he slid his fingers into his pockets as a reminder to this man that he was in civilian clothes.

“Gentlemen,” Vidrine said, receiving salutes and greetings from everyone except Daniel, who just nodded. Once. “The Advisory Board is currently being re-evaluated by the President.”

Daniel knew this wasn’t the same man from his home reality, but he couldn’t help but feel a little irrational bias. The dark-skinned General had been put in charge of the SGC before Simmons had taken over. He’d been an interim, taking over for Hammond, and he’d wielded an iron fist. He hadn’t liked Daniel one damn bit, and from the look Daniel received from this version of the man, there didn’t seem to be a change in attitude.

“Something wrong, Doctor Jackson?” Vidrine asked.

Daniel affected a bland look. “Not yet, sir.”

“Are you expecting something to be?”

“I’m prepared to deal with anything, General,” Daniel said, keeping his words as neutral as he could without either lying or being aggressive.

Jack cast him a long look, knowing exactly why Daniel was doing it, but he was giving him a warning to chill out. “Daniel?” he asked, out loud, when Daniel’s body language didn’t change. At least, the body language only Jack could read. Tense. Ready to fight. “He’s not the guy from our reality.” He said it out loud, on purpose, for Vidrine’s benefit, and it had the desired effect. The General relaxed slightly.

“I see. I take it my counterpart wasn’t friendly.”

Daniel was deeply tempted to say, “He was a dick.” Instead, he simply shook his head. Jack gave him a tiny smile of approval. It said, Nice response. Now let’s see how the wind blows.

“It’s good to have a healthy skepticism, Doctor Jackson. Especially toward those you’ve just met. But be careful that you don’t alienate people based on irrelevant data.”

The rebuke was taken in stride, but Daniel wasn’t going to let it go unanswered. “Agreed. But that advice works both ways, General.”

“Meaning what?” Vidrine asked. He had a harsh look about him, so the merest hint of a frown made him look like he was scowling.

“Meaning nothing,” Daniel said, sincerely. “Just as I shouldn’t judge you on your counterpart’s actions, you shouldn’t judge us by our counterparts.”

Vidrine lifted his chin. “I see the scuttlebutt about you two is partially correct.”

“In what way, sir?” Daniel asked. He was not backing down from this asshole. No damn way.

“It’s been said that you two are carbon copies, aside from an intimate relationship, and one that isn’t allowed.”

“We’re married,” Daniel said casually and held up his ring. Jack held his hand up, too. “Just because this world is more backward doesn’t negate that. We understand that this is a workplace environment and we understand that we can be thrown out. But make no mistake. We are married. I’m not about to ignore my husband just because some rule says I have to. Husbands and
wives visit each other’s quarters on this base. So will we.”

“Understood. And the scuttlebutt was correct. You are not the Daniel Jackson who died five years ago.”

“How’s that, sir?” Jack asked.

“That Daniel Jackson would not have stood up to me.” He headed for Hammond’s office without indicating that he was or was not in favor of Daniel’s behavior.

Daniel sat back down on the edge of the table. He had expected nothing less from this man. He was a Pentagon General. They did not like civilians—except for the ones who gave them something of high value in return for payment, like military contractors. Daniel’s contributions to the Program weren’t seen as ‘high value’ unless they resulted in things that boosted defensive—and more importantly, offensive—capabilities.

They probably still considered him the cause of everything that had gone wrong because he was the one who’d cracked the cartouche. That was Kinsey’s major complaint. Apart from the fact that he objected only because he didn’t personally benefit from it. If it hadn’t been for Daniel, the Stargate Program would have been delayed. He was sure that other people would have figured it out—and in fact, they had, but Catherine hadn’t known that, and that was a whole other issue. Most of the animus they held toward him didn’t bother him. Their opinions meant nothing because he was used to them from academia.

The only common opinion that did bother him was the fallacy that he’d believed that the pyramids were landing pads for alien spaceships. For fuck’s sake, even Sam had bought that bullshit until he’d corrected her. Someone at the Pentagon had heard a certain Doctor Steven Raynor joke about that, and it had spread like wildfire in order to discredit him. It pissed him off, in point of fact. All he’d written about was that they were a lot older than everyone had believed. Six-thousand years older. He’d made his case, and for some reason, the academic world had refused to test his theory. Fuck ’em. He’d been right.

He remembered where it had culminated. In that lecture hall. Steven had sat in the back of that room and heckled him, shouting out ‘landing pad’, making people laugh. Daniel hadn’t objected and disproved the notion right away because it had been absurd. Who the hell would believe such a dumbass thing? Apparently, every goddamn academic in that room. Even Catherine, until Daniel had set her straight. He’d had reason to doubt her knowledge about him, anyway. She hadn’t known that the people in the photograph were his foster parents. Someone in the research department had dropped the ball. Or they wanted to make her look bad. That was a distinct possibility.

It was also possible that everything he was just thinking about didn’t apply to this world, apart from the Pentagon’s attitude. Had there been a Steven Raynor here? Sarah? Doctor Jordan? It didn’t really—

“You’re woolgathering,” Jack said under his breath as he moved over to sit next to him, their shoulders touching.

“Just reliving the beginning of all of this, back when Catherine dangled a carrot in front of me.” He looked to his right at Hammond’s office.


“No, money,” Daniel answered. “I was broke. And I had just become homeless.”
“I remember. I wasn’t much better than the General, you know.”

“You weren’t remotely the same, Jack. You’d just lost your son. You had a reason to be grim.”

Jack sighed. “You saved my life. Did I ever tell you that?”

Daniel blinked at him, stunned. “No, you never did. What makes you say that?”

“I didn’t die,” Jack said simply.

“I think Skaara had a lot to do with that,” Daniel said, refusing to take any credit.

Jack shook his head slightly, keeping his voice low. “Maybe, but you need to accept what I’m telling you. You saved my life.”

Daniel leaned into him a little. It was his answer of acceptance. “And now, we’ve come to this moment. I wish I knew if it was going to lead to something bad. I have this horrible feeling we’re about to be fired.”

Jack frowned. “What makes you say that?”

“We took matters into our own hands and put people’s lives at risk.”

“There was no risk, except your own life, and Hammond gave us the go-ahead.”

“Yeah, but who says that’s gonna be on the record.”

Jack’s frown deepened. “Where’s this morose attitude coming from?” Daniel didn’t answer, so he nudged him and whispered, “What’s going on in that head?”

“Pessimism.”

“It’s not rational, Daniel. I think this is leftover PTSS from our home universe. Take a deep breath and let’s just see what happens, okay?”

Daniel closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Still, he crossed arms, tightly, hating the fact that they’d been called here only to sit and wait. But … wait. If they were going to be fired, why the Go Bags? He nodded to Jack. “I think you’re right. I’ll try to keep the paranoia to a minimum.”

Jack grinned and crossed his arms and leaned into Daniel once more. “Good man. We’ll have a bit of alone time later. It’ll cheer you up.”


“Always.”

“I think if anyone deserves credit, it should be Svetla—”

Svetlana Markova entered the room at that moment.

“—na,” he finished. “Hi,” he said, not moving.

“Hey yourself,” she said, stopping in front of them.
“I thought the Board was under review,” Jack said.

“It is,” she said. “But for the members, not the Board itself.”

“So you’re cleared?” Daniel asked.

“I assume so,” she said. “I was called to come in. I’m to be a witness or something. Do you know why?” They shook their heads and she frowned in obvious annoyance. “I do not appreciate having my dinner interrupted.”

Hammond excited his office with Colonel Davis and General Vidrine. He was wearing his Class A jacket. Was he going somewhere? Then Walter Davis came in with a padded portfolio clipboard and five black boxes. He handed the portfolio to Vidrine, then stepped beside him and waited. The General, Davis, and Vidrine lined up side by side and Hammond said, “May I have your attention. Airmen, stand to and present yourselves. You, too, Doctors Jackson and Markova.”

Okay, this was odd, but when Daniel looked at Jack, he found surprise, not suspicion. Dave and Mike were flat-out floored. The five of them gathered in a line and stood at attention. Daniel took his spot next to Jack, but he wasn’t bound to standing at attention, so he stood there, hands clasped behind his back. Svetlana did the same as she stood next to him.

“Attention to orders,” Vidrine began, reading from something on the clipboard. “By order of the Secretary of the United States Air Force, in recognition of meritorious service and valor…”

Daniel stood there confused as Jack, Dave, and Mike were given Air Force Commendation medals, and even more confused when he and Svetlana were given Department of the Air Force Decoration for Exceptional Civilian Service medals.

Vidrine handed him an open black box. It held an actual gold-colored medal that hung from a blue ribbon. He shook the General’s hand and despite himself, he gave him a closed-mouth smile. Daniel said the proper things he knew were expected and remained standing there while Svetlana received hers. Vidrine had to add something with hers, however.

“This is a real service medal, Doctor,” he said. “I realize that your government may not accept this as valid, but your service to this command requires recognition.”

“Thank you, sir,” she said, shaking his offered hand.

Vidrine and Walter left the room and Daniel congratulated her as well as Dave and Mike. He felt undeserving, even though he knew Jack would disagree. He’d walked deliberately into a trap and been brutalized. Why the fuck give him a medal for that? It made zero sense.

Before they were dismissed, Hammond had one more piece of business. He handed Dave and Mike ‘SG-1’ patches.

“You are now members of SG-1. Sergeant Fowler has been reassigned to SG-4. Congratulations. And to reward you, you’re all going on a nice, boring set of missions, starting at 0400. Colonel Davis will fill you in.” He grinned at them, then grabbed his cap. “If you’ll excuse me, I have a plane to catch. Doctor Markova, you’re with me.” The two left the room.

“Huh,” Jack said, grinning at them. “Welcome to the machine.”

Kowalsky snapped his fingers and pointed. “Emerson, Lake, and Palmer.”
“No, dumbass,” Feretti said. “Pink Floyd. Honestly, Jack. He needs some training.”

“I’ll leave it to you.”

Kowalsky gave Davis an expectant, questioning look. “Okay, Colonel. Where’re we off to?”

Davis handed Jack a mission folder. “You’re to visit all of our offworld sites and conduct investigations on who’s dirty and doesn’t belong there. Someone offworld has been feeding those snakeheads information and we need to find out who.”

“I’d start with the Tok’ra,” Jack grumped.

Davis shook his head. “Colonel Carter already cleared them.”


“What’s the reason?” Daniel asked. “For the visits, I mean. Are there suspicions?”

“We’ve heard rumors for months, but there was never any hard evidence. Hammond’s not going to wait for it to drop in our laps, so you’re heading out to find it. He wants the rumors either confirmed or put to bed.”

“The specs are in the folder,” he said, nodded sharply, and started to leave.

“Paul,” Daniel called after him and the man paused in the doorway. He lowered his voice. “How’s Alexei?”

Davis cringed a bit. “He’s … alive and physically, he’s okay. No damage. But …”

The pain on his face made Daniel take one of his hands in both of his. “If you need anything. Advice. An ear. Call me, okay? Tell Alexei to do the same.” He let him go. Davis only nodded and adopted a subdued but grateful expression. He then hightailed it out of the room, and Daniel and Jack assumed he was leaving with Hammond and Svetlana.

Daniel turned around and stared at his open medal box sitting on the table. He grabbed it and shut it, loudly, and shoved it unceremoniously in his Go Bag.

“How’d you do?” Jack asked. Daniel shook his head. He nodded acceptance, then held up the folder, and included Dave and Mike in his next words. “We have time to catch breakfast.” As the four of them left the Briefing Room, with their Go Bags, he could tell that Daniel was disturbed by something. He stepped aside and pulled Daniel with him. “Go ahead, guys. We’ll meet you there.” They nodded and kept going. Jack looked behind him and found the door to a supply office. He opened it, found it empty, and pulled Daniel inside.

“Okay,” Jack said, closing the door. “Out with it.”

“It’s noth …” He saw the look on Jack’s face. “I don’t … I feel disconnected.”

“Why?”

“First, I don’t deserve that medal. Second—”

“Hang on! Hold that right there.” Jack took hold of Daniel’s face. “You listen to me. You do deserve it. You put yourself on the line. You didn’t have to. You did it to find out what was going on. You did. The only reason you came out of it in relatively once piece was thanks to our Asgard
friends and their ability to find you. Hammond recognized that great risk, at severe personal cost. That’s why you were given the award. Not just because we nailed those bastards.”

Daniel pushed past him and whirled around to look at him. He was angry. “I got an award for being violated? That’s how you’re spinning this?”

Jack scowled. “There’s no spinning. What the fuck is the matter with you? You earned it for exposing the Goa’uld. It wasn’t because you were brutalized. It still would have been awarded even if all he’d done was tie you up and take you with him. Why don’t you get that?”

Daniel was silent.

Jack sighed deeply. “I did next to nothing and I got a medal for it. If anyone should feel unworthy, Daniel, it should be me. And Dave and Mike. But we accept the recognition anyway because it’s basically an amalgamation of all the previous work put together. Consider it a given for all the unrecognized stuff.”

Daniel sighed. “It’s not. It just doesn’t feel right somehow. I know it’s not rational.”

“What will it take to convince you that you’re worth the recognition?”

“Time,” Daniel said, shrugging. “It’s just not that simple.”

“It never is,” Jack said. “C’mon. Let’s go eat. Then we’ll head out. When we come back, I’ll make you feel better.”

Daniel gave him a dubious look. “You can try. I have my doubts.”

“Ooh, a challenge.”

During dinner, Daniel’s spirits were somehow lifted by the genuine looks of respect he got from Airmen and Marines. It was odd but welcome. And something interesting happened when Jack wasn’t looking. Daniel had gotten up to get a refill of iced water and he found he had to get in line. While waiting, a deep voice from behind said, “Hi, Doctor Jackson.” He turned around to see a man he vaguely recognized. “Uh,” he began. The man was a Major and his name was Lorne. “Major Lorne.”

“Kevin,” he said.

“Kevin,” Daniel smiled.

“Listen, I was wondering if you’d let me give you some martial art lessons. I’m starting up a training group.”

Daniel’s brows rose. “Really? I could definitely brush up on my skills.”

Lorne stared at him. “You already know how?”

“Yes,” Daniel drawled. “I know it’s unbelievable but pass this around: I’m not him.”

“Oh,” Lorne said, confused. “Right. Well, then, you’re welcome to spar.”

“Who’s in the class?” Daniel asked.

“I just got approval, so you’re the first person I’ve asked.”
“Oh?”

“I’ll be posting invitation notices later.”

“Oh, right. We, uh, heard.”

“I didn’t get the mission specs from Jack yet,” he lied. “I’ve been rather preoccupied of late.”

“Where to?”

“Tortured by the Goa’uld?” Lorne said, leaving it a question.

“Yeah. If, you know, you’re interested. The other … Doctor Jackson … did that a lot with Teal’c.”

“I can imagine. I can help you through some guided meditation. If you’re, uh, interested.”

Daniel felt a curiously intense warmth in his thighs. The man was flirting. “When I get back?”

“Right. So … um … rain check?”

“Absolutely.”

Daniel got his iced water and headed back to the table. The curious heat that built up within him was exciting. He’d been hit on. That had never happened before—at least by a civilized, normal person. Assuming Lorne was, that is. He’d have to turn him down, but it was still flattering. How would Jack feel about it? A bit of mischief colored his cheeks.

“I was just hit on,” he said in a low voice.

“What?” asked Jack, Mike, and Dave.

Oops. Daniel forgot to exclude them. Too late now. He quickly explained.

“Huh,” Ferretti said. “I could not have called that one.”

Kowalsky gave Daniel a curious look. “Were you tempted at all?” Jack transferred his heated look to him and the man held up a hand—with a fork in it. “I’m just sayin’.”

“You’re not,” Jack warned.

Kowalsky shut up but he and Ferretti exchanged grins.
Daniel found himself the focus of Jack’s particularly possessive gaze. Under other circumstances, he’d never receive such a look. But they were in unfamiliar territory. No marriage recognition. Openly gay anyway. Who was on their side and who wasn’t?

“Get that look off your face,” he warned Jack.


Daniel sighed through his nose. “I’m intrigued and flattered. If you have to ask me if I was tempted, like Kowalsky just did, I’m getting up from this table.” When Jack paused, Daniel dropped his knife and fork and walked out, leaving his tray behind.

Jack chewed at his lip. “Take care of our trays, guys,” he said to his new teammates. “We’ll leave in an hour. Just have some … apologizing to do.” He had a feeling that Daniel might have gone to his quarters and he was right. He walked in, thankful that the door was unlocked. “Okay, let’s have it.”

“Excuse me?” Daniel asked. He crossed his arms and leaned against the room’s desk. “Try again.”

“No, I don’t think you were tempted. Happy?”

“No.”

Jack threw up his arms. “Daniel, for fuck’s sake. We have to leave in under an hour. Accept my apology.”

“What apology?”

Jack stared at him. “This one.” He moved over and took control of his mouth while his right hand reached between them to undo Daniel’s jeans. “We have to change,” he said.

“Where’re our uniforms?” Daniel asked.

“Kowalsky and Ferretti are getting into theirs right now. We’ll go in five minutes.”


Jack answered by dropping down and pulling his cock from his briefs. Daniel wasn’t even hard. Not even a little. Jack didn’t care. He sucked him into his mouth and immediately began working him. Daniel dropped his mouth open and took Jack’s head in his hands.

“Jack,” he hissed. “We don’t have time for—” He suddenly gasped, sharp, and loud, and it was quickly followed by a groan. Jack cupped his ass cheeks and encouraged him to thrust. Happily, he did. “Jack, that’s … oh, my god.”

Jack had him hard as hell in under thirty seconds and Daniel threw his head back, mouth wide open, panting. “Jesus, Jack,” he whispered, and then his husband stole his breath away and in one minute, Daniel was coming down his throat. He used the afterglow as foreplay and he turned them around and knelt. Jack was already hard but that was okay. Daniel worked him slowly, eagerly, and as he bobbed up and down, he thrust two fingers into Jack’s ass and found his prostate. Jack hissed and cussed and gripped his husband’s head. Just like he’d done to Daniel, the excitement of doing this sent him shooting come down Daniel’s throat.

After cleaning up, Daniel turned around, his back to Jack’s chest, and they hugged that way while
the afterglow faded.

“I love you,” Jack murmured against his ear. “And you know what?”

“I love you back.”

Jack blew over his ear, tickling him, and Daniel curled his shoulder up as he swatted at him. He chuckled and kissed his husband’s temple.

“Okay. What?” he asked.

“I believe we’re finally home.”

Daniel rested his head on Jack’s shoulder. “I think you’re right. But let’s leave the heroics to someone else for a while, okay?”

Jack squeezed his arms around him. “Do you even think that’s at all possible?”

Daniel groaned and closed his eyes. “No. But let’s give it a try. The only thing I want to do for the next few years is grow bored while having amazing sex everywhere on this base. Think that’s doable?”

Jack slid his hands down Daniel’s abdomen and bent forward slightly to cup his crotch with both palms. “With you, everything is.”

~

End

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