Winter's Thaw

by babs

Summary

Daniel's been missing. Will SG1 be able to bring him home again?

His name was Winter because that was the time when they found him. He didn't remember being found--only the winter itself in a vague passage of fever and sickness. He knew there was a time Before. A time when he had lived somewhere else. A time when he had lived with other people. But that seemed long ago. He thought he remembered a time when he could walk in the front of the tribe and not be relegated to the back with the old, when he didn't need to walk bent over because of the cough.

He sat now with Perrla, who was showing him how to clean the shellfish the others brought back from the edge of the sea. He didn't have a knife as she did; they'd given him the blunt scoop the children used for the task. He looked at the healed cut on the back of his hand: the cut he'd received when he'd been using a knife and one of the visions came.

They told him he was blessed by the gods, but if it was a blessing, he didn't understand why it made his head hurt or caused him to lose control of his body. But they had no answers for him. They cared for him as if he was one of the elders, or a child who still needed play-time. They spoke to him quietly, teaching him, patient beyond understanding when his fingers were clumsy or when he stumbled.

His head came up at the shouts from the water's edge and he saw some of the young men dancing in delight at the bounty they'd pulled in with their nets. Summer was a good time--a time when they would all grow fat, Perrla told him. She would gather herbs for him. She'd promised. More herbs would make the cough go away and ease the pain in his head.
Sparks flickered before his eyes, and he blinked once, twice, before he knew they were not from the fire. His hand started to shake, and he dropped the scoop. He heard a murmur of distress from Perrla. Then his world was filled with flashes and voices he knew from the Before time, and then his body was no longer his.

"Shh, shh." Someone was stroking his forehead, and it took him time to recognize the voice.

"Sssammm?" He hated the slur that always came after the vision time.

"It is Myana. Here, drink." She lifted his head, and he felt a cup against his lips. He reached up to try to take it himself, but let his arm fall back because it took too much effort, his muscles stiff and sore.

He was naked, he realized, covered only with a soft animal skin. He kept his eyes closed, not wanting to see Myana's understanding gaze. They'd undressed him, taking his soiled clothes to be washed. As if Myana knew his shame, she patted his shoulder and whispered, "Sleep."

In the dreams, his name was Daaneel. He walked other places with his tribe--a man with silver hair and laughing brown eyes, a slender woman with hair the color of gold and a man with skin the color of the earth the young women here gathered to make the cooking pots. They had names, but he never could hear them. But he, Daaneel, walked tall and strong. There was no cough, no shaking where he lost control of things even a small child could handle.

He believed the dreams were real, but he had no idea what they meant. No idea how to make the people of his tribe come back, to live that life he glimpsed in the dreams. In the Before time. It made his head ache and he sighed. He was very tired. Maybe as Perrla said, he thought too much. But he longed for the dreams and wished he knew how to make them come true.

Myana brushed the hair back from his forehead again. "Sleep," she said once more. "Sleep." So like a child being ordered so by his mother, he did.

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Jack took a deep breath as Carter, Teal'c and SG-2 came through the Gate. He'd never wanted to come back to P1R-779, not since their last mission.

"Sir?" Carter spoke softly. She touched his forearm, and he looked down at her, seeing the grief etching lines in her face that hadn't been there four months ago.

He was aware of everyone watching him, looking to him for orders. He tried to forget the last time they'd been here, his orders had resulted in...Snap out of it, O'Neill. He gave the first order to himself, then looked at the personnel gathered around him.

"We all have the information from the briefing. The UAV showed the river emerges from the canyon approximately sixteen clicks to the northeast. Most likely Dan...the body..." He didn't think the words would hurt so much. He thought the grief had all been wrung out of him, "will be found somewhere along the banks there." He didn't want to think of finding the body, of seeing Daniel half decomposed or stripped to one of the skeletons the archaeologist used to study. But they owed it to Daniel--they owed it to him to bring his body home.

Sixteen clicks was going to give him a long time to remember all that had gone so very wrong.
"About ready to pack it up, Daniel?" Jack warned, sticking his head into the small cavern where Daniel was working.

"I'm done," Daniel called. He came out, ducking to avoid hitting his head on the low ceiling of the cavern.

"So, you get anything interesting on there?" Jack pointed to the camera as he and Daniel headed back towards the others. "You know, orgies, sacrifices, stuff like that?"

"Sorry to disappoint you." Daniel grinned at his friend. "Hunting scenes, some sort of celebration--my best guess at this point is a summer solstice one. No sign of recent human habitation, though."

"A bust, then?" Jack motioned for Carter and Teal'c to move out as they approached.

"No, not a bust. I'll have plenty to study when we get home and a nice long report for you to read," Daniel said, giving Jack a brief smile before taking his position in the center of the team as they headed back to the Stargate.

Jack looked up at the darkening sky. The analysis of the weather patterns of this planet had indicated winters were harsh and would prohibit travel back before spring. Jack just hoped they were back safe and sound on Earth before it began to snow. He shivered at the thought.

Teal'c led them on the path they'd taken from the Stargate, a twisting trail along a rushing river. It happened quickly. One moment Daniel was walking along the path in front of Jack, his backpack bobbing with each step, and the next, he was...gone. Too quickly to shout, the ground simply giving way beneath him.

Jack shouted out, seeing Daniel trying desperately to fight the current, while he ran along the bank hunting for a way to save him. He managed to run ahead, making his way down to the bank where some boulders jutted out into the water. Jack flattened himself on them, praying Daniel would drift close enough for him to grab. He became aware of Teal'c behind him, holding onto his legs, allowing him to stretch even further.

"Grab my hands, Daniel," Jack yelled as Daniel came closer. Daniel was still fighting, still trying to swim. He angled his body towards Jack and the boulder. Jack had him, for an instant he had hold of Daniel's shoulder, but debris caught up in the flood banged into them, and Daniel was swept away once more, his body limp.

Teal'c pulled Jack back, and they were off again, following the river. It just ended. The water swept into a narrow canyon and Jack moved to jump into the rapids when he saw Daniel being carried along. But Teal'c held him tightly, not allowing him to follow. It was only then Jack realized he couldn't move his hand, that his arm hung useless and hurt like blazes. He staggered away from Teal'c when his friend let go of him and threw up into the bushes. //

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There had been no rescue attempt...no, Jack corrected, no body retrieval. SG-1, the broken SG-1, had stumbled through the Gate, all of them in shock, Jack with a broken arm and dislocated elbow. Reopening the Gate showed them a fierce winter storm. And on a later attempt, the Gate wouldn't open. Carter theorized the DHD was somehow powered with sunlight and the weak winter light didn't provide enough charging each day. So they waited and tried to get on with their lives, such as they were. But Jack knew, as they all did, that until they were able to bring Daniel home, they were caught in a kind of limbo, not quite able to grieve fully.
He wondered if finding Daniel's body would allow them to finally let go. Somehow he doubted it. SG-1 was damaged now in a way they'd never been before. He was aware Carter was contemplating resigning from the team. Teal'c spoke of going off-world, helping lead the Jaffa rebellion. He'd believed at the beginning they were honoring Daniel's memory by continuing the fight against the Goa'uld, but Jack was beginning to believe maybe the fight should go to younger, stronger men than himself.

Ferretti was ahead, motioning for them to approach cautiously. Jack's mouth went dry, his heart pounding. Carter was silent as she dropped to her belly, but a quick glance showed him her milk-white complexion.

"There's a camp up ahead," Ferretti whispered as Jack came to his side.

"Jaffa?" Jack murmured.

"Looks like they may be native to the planet. Maybe fifty people. Family groups." Ferretti conveyed the information in a low voice.

"Sir." Davenport moved back from his place on the bluff. He motioned to his binoculars. "I think you should take a look. There by the fire at two o'clock."

Jack crawled forward, pulling up his binoculars. He focused on the fire Davenport had indicated, seeing an old woman cleaning some sort of shellfish. A younger woman sat next to her, and Jack could see her throw her head back in laughter. He moved his binoculars to the next figure and watched in shock.

"Carter. Teal'c. Tell me I'm seeing what I think I'm seeing." He whispered, not because he wanted to keep his voice down, but because he couldn't seem to find enough breath to speak. He turned his attention back to the familiar figure. The hair was longer than it had been when Jack had first met Daniel, but it still wasn't long enough to totally obscure his face when he ducked his head. His face was clean shaven, and Jack risked looking away for a moment to see a few of the other men in the camp. They either shaved or were descendents of some group that didn't grow facial hair. Jack wasn't the anthropologist--that would be Daniel's job.

"Sir, it can't...it's..." It was rare Carter was rendered speechless, but Jack knew exactly how she felt. He glanced at her, seeing her swallow hard, trying to keep her emotions under control.

"It is indeed Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said from Jack's other side.

Jack used the binoculars again, watching as the older woman said something. Daniel gave a nod and stood. He held his hand to his mouth, coughing, it appeared. As Jack watched, Daniel moved away from the fire, limping and walking as slow as if he'd aged thirty years.

"Well gang," Jack turned his head to look first at Carter and then to Teal'c, "let's go bring our lost lamb home."

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There was a commotion on the edges of the camp. One of the children came to him, pulling at his arm.

"Winter, you must come with me."

He looked down at her, not understanding. His chest hurt with a tightness he recognized, and he
turned his head and coughed.

"Come," she urged, pulling him back towards Perrla's fire. She skipped a few steps backwards and then turned and ran when she saw he was following.

Myana came to his side, offering her support as he made his slow, limping progress.

"What is happening?" he asked. "Is there trouble?"

"Strangers," Myana answered. She appeared excited, but unafraid. "When you came to us, do you remember the strange clothes you wore?"

He nodded his head and looked down at the summer kilt he wore now, dyed a bright red from mosses the children gathered from the sea stones. They'd shown him the clothes he'd been wearing when he was found. Perrla had carefully removed the designs out of the cloth, putting them in a small pouch he carried still. When he had been so sick, unable to do more than lie in the snug winter huts his rescuers built in the thick forest, he used to pull the pieces of fabric out, trying to understand what they meant, knowing they were more than simple designs.

But thinking had sapped his strength and he let go of whatever past he had. There were times, after the visions, after the dreams, when he fingered the patches; the mere action brought him a comfort he couldn't explain. There were other times, times when Perrla would insist he sit and rest, when he would pull them out and bring them close to try to decipher what they said, but his eyesight wasn't good at the best of times so he didn't persist, because Perrla or Myana would tsk tsk when he complained of his head aching. He still didn't understand why everything in his dreams was clear when in the morning light, he couldn't see across the camp and recognize any of the clan.

He looked up as he approached the gathered camp, heard speaking that was strange, yet familiar.

"Myana? What is going on?"

She shook her head and guided him through the crowd. Used to watching his feet, he didn't look up right away, but he heard a man's voice say, "Daniel."

He looked up to see the people from the dreams. A man with hair of silver, a woman with hair of gold and a man with skin the color of earth and no hair at all.

"We do not know what they want," Perrla said, keeping her voice low. "But they are dressed as you were when you came to us."

As if in a dream, he pulled the patches from the pouch hanging at his side. He held them close to his face and then squinted at the strangers. Daring to step closer, he held one towards them, towards the man with the silver hair.

"Here," he said, pushing it towards the stranger. The man looked at him as if he couldn't understand the word.

"Daniel," the man said again, and the woman's blue eyes filled with tears. They were the color of his own, he realized. No one in camp had eyes the color of his, or so he was told. Sky eyes, one of the boys had called him during the winter, and he hadn't understood why the other children laughed.

"Danneel?" He tried, the word feeling strange. He pointed to the man. "Danneel?"

The man shook his head. "No, no. Jack." He pointed to himself. "Daniel," and his hand touched
Winter's chest.

"Dan...Daniel," he said, speaking carefully and sounding out the word the way the silver haired man said it.

"Sam," the woman said, pointing to herself, and then she said more. He knew he should understand. She looked at him and waited.

He closed his eyes hearing the words she spoke in his mind. "Found you. Lost, alive." They danced in his head, familiar to him, and he couldn't understand why.

"Sssamm." He repeated it slowly, wanting it to sound right, but he was afraid to open his eyes. He knew them. His legs felt shaky and he didn't know if he could stand. There was a jumble of words, of rushing water, cold, hurt, pain, loss--he couldn't breathe. Arms wrapped around him, supporting him and keeping him on his feet.

"Ttt..." He knew this man, had called him friend, and the name flashed into his mind. "Teal'c?"

"It is I, Daniel Jackson."

"Jack, Sam, Teal'c." He pointed to each of them and then to himself. "Daniel." The names sounded strange on his tongue, but the words felt right.

The people smiled at him even though they looked sad.

"That's right," the man named Jack said, and started to say more, but there were flashes of light across his vision. He could feel his right hand starting to shake, and he couldn't stop it. Teal'c's arms loosened a bit, and he heard Jack calling his name and then yelling something. He wanted to answer, he really did, but there was nothing he could say with words and thought being snatched from his control.

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"That's right," Jack said as Daniel repeated their names. He smiled at him, hoping somewhere deep inside, Daniel knew who they were, remembered something of his own past. He saw Daniel's right hand shaking, and then the tremor moved up his arm. Teal'c loosened his grip around Daniel and helped support him towards the ground.

"Daniel!" Jack called, hoping he could still hear him. "Danny? Answer me." He turned to Carter and Ferretti as Daniel's whole body began to shake.

"Shit, he's having a seizure." Jack knelt by his friend's shaking body. "Watch his head, Carter." He rolled Daniel to his side, knowing all they could do was wait until the seizure ran its course. He glanced at his watch, timing it, knowing Fraiser would want to know as many details as possible.

"Ferretti, Teal'c, find out if this has happened before," Jack ordered. The shaking had finally stopped. He wiped the drool running down the side of Daniel's mouth with his fingers, giving a grimace as he wiped his fingers on his pants.

"Daniel?" He tapped Daniel's cheek. "Danny? You with us?"

"Unnngh." It wasn't much of a response, but Daniel attempted to open his eyes.

"Carter, we're gonna have to carry him out of here. Stretcher."
"Yes, sir."

"Hey, Daniel." Jack looked down and tried to give a reassuring smile at the man staring up at him in confusion. "We're gonna get you home. You just rest, and let us take care of everything."

"O'Neill," Teal'c said, and Jack looked up at him from Daniel's side. The gray haired woman Jack had seen sitting by the fire earlier was standing with Teal'c. "This is Perrla. She is the Healer for this village."

Jack motioned for Carter to remain with Daniel and let Ferretti take his place by Daniel's side.

"Perrla." Jack looked down at the woman. She didn't appear afraid of any of them. "Can you understand me?"

"She cannot, O'Neill, but we have found a common tongue." Teal'c said something to the woman in a language Jack didn't recognize, and she replied, using her hands to gesture along with her words.

"Winter was found cast on the shore of the river," Teal'c said, keeping his eyes on the woman. "His leg was injured, and he was bruised and bloody. When they found him, he was very cold, and they thought he was dead. But then he groaned."

"Winter?" Jack asked.

"It is their name for Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said. He said something to the woman and she nodded before replying and holding up her hands. "She reports Daniel Jackson was ill and the people cared for him as if he was one of the old, or a child. He has had a cough and fever throughout the winter. It still troubles him, and he has been sick since the last full moon." Teal'c paused again, listening to Perrla's continued tale. Jack noticed Teal'c's frown and felt his own heart sink as his teammate gave a grave nod. "She says the visions, the seizures, occur frequently. She does not know why the gods have blessed him in this way. Perhaps he is meant to be a shaman for our people. If our people do not wish to care for him, he is welcome to remain with her tribe."

Jack felt a lump grow in his throat. "No, tell her, he is meant to be with us. That we will care for him and help him."

Perrla's wrinkled face broke into a wide grin as Teal'c repeated Jack's words. She stepped forward, grasping Jack's hands in her own and said something before stepping back.

"She thanks you, O'Neill. And says that we are greatly blessed to have Winter among us."

"Yeah, yeah, I got that," Jack said. He looked away and saw Carter, Ferretti and the others rolling Daniel onto the stretcher. Daniel didn't appear conscious, and he wished there was a quicker way back to the Stargate. There was no way they were going to make it back before dark, and he really, really wanted to get Daniel in Fraiser's care ASAP.

He realized that but for the help these people had given Daniel, his friend would be lying dead by the river. His throat nearly closed up at the thought of Daniel dying alone on this planet. "Thank you," Jack said to Perrla. He hoped she could understand his words, or at least the emotion behind them. "Thank you for taking care of Daniel for us."

She raised a hand to his cheek and patted it gently before going to kneel by the stretcher, and Jack felt as if he'd just received a blessing. He vowed when they got back to the SGC, he was going to recommend a team be sent back here to provide these people with whatever they needed to help them survive through another winter. He knew whatever the SGC gave them, it would never be enough to repay them for saving Daniel.
A younger woman came to the older woman's side, wrapping her arm over the healer's shoulders. They spoke quietly to Daniel for a few minutes, despite the fact that he appeared beyond hearing, and then they both took a turn pressing a kiss to his forehead.

"Teal'c?" Jack murmured.

"A blessing, O'Neill. They told him he is back among those who love him most." Teal'c watched as the two women made their way back to the rest of the tribe, the younger supporting the older.

"Let's move out, people," Jack ordered, taking the right back corner of the stretcher. "Let's get him home."

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"Wherrr?"

Jack nearly dropped his canteen at the sound of Daniel's slurred, sleep-heavy voice. They'd stopped for the night about three hours out of the camp. Daniel had roused a few times while they were transporting him, but he'd never said more than a few words before falling back asleep.

"Hey, Daniel," Jack said. He placed a hand on Daniel's shoulder, keeping him from moving out of the stretcher.

Daniel made a jerky motion, pulling away from the touch. He frowned up at Jack. Pulling one arm out from under the covers, Daniel rubbed his eyes and then looked back at Jack for a moment. He said something in a language Jack didn't recognize--the only word Jack could understand was Perrla.

"We're taking you home," Jack said, hoping Daniel could understand. "How are you feeling?" He rubbed a circle over a shoulder far thinner than he remembered. He could see Daniel's breathing quicken. Daniel moved his body, tugging at the restraints they'd used to keep him safe in the stretcher. He muttered something, and Jack had to lean close to hear.

"Off, please, off."

Jack could see Carter and Teal'c watching from a short distance away, but he shook his head, wanting them to keep their distance for the time being. "I'm gonna loosen these up, buddy. You had a seizure. Do you remember?" He was quiet while he undid the straps, aware of Daniel watching him with curious eyes. "You remember, Danny?"

"Jack?" Daniel asked, his tone shaky and unsure. He ran his tongue over his lips, and Jack cursed himself for not offering Daniel water. "Jack? Dream?"

"No, not a dream. I'm real. We're all real." Jack pressed his hand to Daniel's shoulder once more while uncapping the canteen with the other. "Here."

Daniel swallowed. He turned his head and coughed, then closed his eyes. "Sleepy."

"I know." Jack patted Daniel's shoulder once more. Daniel gave a few more coughs before his breathing evened out. Jack touched his fingertips to Daniel's forehead, frowning at the heat there. He glanced at the sky and wished the night would pass.

"Colonel." Davenport called his name, and Jack woke up to see Carter by Daniel's side. She'd relieved his watch a few hours previously, and he'd reluctantly stretched out to rest. He hadn't thought he'd sleep but had fallen asleep within seconds.
He could hear Carter talking and then heard Daniel answer with a slow measured pace. He wondered how severe Daniel's head injury had been—if that was the cause of the seizures. He doubted Daniel had gone without oxygen for a length of time—had that been the case, most likely they would have found a body instead of a living, breathing, functioning Daniel.

"No. You need to stay on the stretcher." Carter's voice was rising, a sure sign she was getting in over her head.

"I want to walk."

Some things never changed.

"Children, children, children. Do I need to send you both to time out?" Jack walked over to them, giving Carter and Daniel a stern look. Carter smiled, but Daniel looked confused at Jack's banter.

"I want to walk," he insisted. He pushed back the blanket covering him and rolled to his side.

"You had a seizure." Jack put his hand on Daniel's shoulder. "Stay put."

"I *want* to *walk*. I *can* walk. No seizure," Daniel said again. He leaned away from Jack's touch and got to his knees.

Jack looked at Carter. She shrugged. Jack sighed and held out a hand, pulling Daniel to a standing position. If Fraiser ever found this out, she'd probably have his ass in a sling. He hoped Daniel would get tired after the first ten minutes and give in to Jack's request that he stay in the stretcher.

"Let's move out, people," Jack said, watching as the teams assembled to begin the rest of the hike back to the Stargate.

"I can do it," Daniel muttered as they started off at a slow pace, and Jack didn't know if he was making an announcement to prove himself to Jack or just psyching himself for the endeavor.

"You let us know if you need to rest." Jack let his hand drop to his side when it appeared that Daniel wouldn't accept help from any of them.

"Yeah," Daniel said. He squinted at the horizon and Jack realized Daniel had gone months without glasses, and some of his problems might have been caused by his inability to see clearly. It gave him a little hope at least, even if it wasn't really true.

Jack motioned for Teal'c to move to Daniel's other side. He knew Teal'c would monitor Daniel's condition and alert Jack and Carter to any problems.

Ten minutes stretched to an hour, and Daniel was showing signs of tiring. The limp Jack had noticed while watching Daniel in his binoculars had become even more pronounced as they continued, and he didn't like the small coughs Daniel was giving every so often.

"Take five," he called out. Ferretti left Davenport on point and came back towards Jack. Jack moved away from Teal'c, who was helping Daniel to sit on the ground.

"How's he doing?" Ferretti spoke softly.

"Hanging in there, but at this rate, we're not gonna make it for another five or six hours." Jack pushed back his cap, scratching his head.

"Stubborn," Lou said, giving a wry smile.
"That he is." Jack glanced back over his shoulder at Daniel. Carter was trying to get him to eat a power bar while Teal'c held out a canteen. He looked back at Lou. "I'd love to just tie him down to that stretcher, but I don't know what's triggering those seizures."

"We'll get him home safely, Jack," Lou said with a smile.

"Yeah," Jack agreed. He let Lou at his position and walked over to his reunited team. "Hey, campers."

Carter smiled up at him, obviously relieved Daniel had finally relented and was taking a few bites of the power bar.

"Jack?" Daniel looked up, rubbing at his forehead. "I know you?"

Jack's heart sank a little at the question. "Yeah, you know me. And Carter. And Teal'c."

"I dreamed," Daniel said, accepting the canteen from Teal'c. "It's all hazy."

"We'll get you back to Janet, and she'll sort things out," Carter said, but Jack could hear the fear in her voice.

"Where's Perrla? Myana?" Daniel looked around, as if surprised not to find the two women with the group. He sighed. "I need to remember."

"Plenty of time," Jack reassured him. "Don't sweat it."

"I am sweating," Daniel said, looking up at Jack once more in confusion.

"Don't worry about it," Jack explained.

"Okay," Daniel seemed to take the advice to heart and stood up. "Are you taking me home?"

"Yeah, yeah. We are," Jack said. He just hoped Daniel realized the home he was going to now wasn't the one he'd just spent months in.

"Good." Daniel nodded and began walking, his limp less noticeable since the short rest. Jack wondered how bad the injury had been. He hated that the Gate was still hours away. He was really going to have to talk to Hammond about the possibility of using some sort of transport off-world.

Daniel amazed him sometimes, Jack reflected a few hours later. To his surprise, they'd only needed two more breaks. Jack guessed sometimes that sheer determination and stubbornness of Daniel's could come in handy. That was probably one of the reasons SG-1 had found a living, breathing Daniel instead of a dead body.

Daniel stopped as the Stargate came into view. He stood, looking at it and breathing hard. "Jack?"

"Yeah?" Jack came to Daniel's side, noticing Carter and Teal'c also surrounding their team-mate.

"We use that?" Daniel pointed.

"We do, Daniel. It forms a wormhole through space that allows..." Carter began, but she trailed off as Daniel looked at her with a frown.

"It will allow us to return to the SGC, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said. "You belong there."

"It's a wild ride," Jack added. Daniel smiled at his comment and nodded.
"I remember."

"Let's go home." Jack patted Daniel's shoulder. His friend watched in seeming amazement as Ferretti pressed the glyphs on the DHD, stepping forward as the sixth glyph was entered.

"This one." Daniel pointed to the glyph for Earth.

"That one," Ferretti grinned. "You can do the honors." He motioned for Daniel to press the glyph.

Jack felt a lump in his throat as he watched Daniel enter the final symbol and press the center crystal in the DHD.

"Now?" Daniel waited while Ferretti's team went through the Gate first, followed by Carter.

"Now," Jack said. And he stepped to Daniel's side, taking his arm while Teal'c took the other. He knew something was wrong the second they entered the wormhole, a trembling in Daniel's muscles warning him.

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"Medic!" Jack yelled as he, Daniel and Teal'c came through the Stargate. "He's seizing!"

Teal'c lowered Daniel to the ramp, turning him to his side. Medical staff quickly surrounded Daniel and Jack looked away from his friend's jerking body to see General Hammond staring at the scene in what he could only guess was shock.

"Doctor Jackson is alive?"

"Yes, sir." Jack could feel a grin spread on his face despite the condition Daniel was in. He trusted Fraiser. The whole time they'd been bringing Daniel home, he believed she'd be able to restore the archaeologist to health. "He was found by some natives and nursed back to health."

"The seizure?"

Jack and Teal'c walked down the ramp to stand next to Carter and Hammond.

"The native healer informed us he's been experiencing seizures since he was found." Jack paused, watching the medical team whisk a now still and unconscious Daniel away on a gurney. "Sounded like he might have had a bout of pneumonia, too."

General Hammond looked at SG-1, and for a second, Jack would have sworn he saw tears in Hammond's eyes. "I'm sure Doctor Fraiser is going to want all the information you have. De-briefing in one hour."

"Yes, sir," Jack said. Carter and Teal'c followed him to the elevators. Now that they'd retrieved their missing team-mate, nothing, except the possible wrath of Doctor Fraiser, was going to keep them apart.

It wasn't Fraiser that got the information when they arrived at the infirmary. Jack could see her with Daniel, ordering various tests to be performed. Doctor Carmichael pulled the healthy members of SG-1 aside, bombarding them with questions about the Healer's report and their observations of Daniel's condition. Their own post-mission exams were then performed efficiently by a nurse.

SG-1 and Ferretti's team met Hammond for the de-briefing, but Jack was sure Hammond knew how distracted everyone was. The SGC had been given a miracle, and it was taking some time for it to
Jack didn't discuss his plans with Carter and Teal'c, but nevertheless, they were back in the hall waiting by the infirmary doors for some word of their friend's condition.

Carter rubbed her hands up and down her arms as if she had a chill. "They're doing a MRI and CAT scan."

"Yeah," Jack said, staring at the doors as if he'd be able to see into the infirmary. When he wasn't miraculously given the gift of X-ray vision, he paced a short distance away. The initial giddiness and adrenaline rush of finding Daniel alive was giving way to anxiety, not that Jack would be willing to admit it. He glanced at his watch. "It's taking long enough."

"We have been waiting forty-five minutes, O'Neill," Teal'c said from his position against the wall. "I am sure Doctor Fraiser and her staff are providing excellent care."

Three, Jack thought. Daniel had three seizures in the past two days. That couldn't be good. Maybe there *had* been brain damage. Maybe that was causing the limp. If he closed his eyes, he could see that swift running water again—feel Daniel's shoulder slip out of his grasp. Whatever Daniel's condition, Jack had no doubt it was his responsibility. He'd provide whatever Daniel needed to get well or, God forbid, whatever Daniel needed to function if complete recovery wasn't possible. Jack rubbed the back of his neck, the muscles tight under his hand.

"Sir." Carter's voice intruded on his thoughts.

"I know." Jack gave one last look at the infirmary doors and stepped away. Duty called, and sometimes it wasn't where he wanted to be. But Hammond needed their reports. Maybe by the time they finished, there would be news.

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The phone rang in Jack's office, rousing him from the past thirty minutes or so of staring at the computer monitor. Reviewing the mission report where Daniel had been lost had brought back far too many memories.

"O'Neill."

"Sir, General Hammond and Doctor Fraiser request your presence in the briefing room in ten minutes." Hammond's aide delivered the information in clipped tones.

"On my way," Jack said. He stood and pressed his hands to his desk. He hadn't eaten since returning to the SGC, and he doubted his stomach would tolerate any food at the moment, despite its grumbling.

Fraiser sat next to Hammond, a folder in front of her. Jack glanced at her face, trying to read her expression, hoping it would tell him something about Daniel's condition. But she only blinked back at him before looking down at the folder and reading a paper.

Teal'c and Carter came in, and Jack noticed Carter's nose was reddened, although she had schooled her face to her usual scholarly and soldierly expression.

"Doctor Fraiser," Hammond said, giving the floor to Janet.

"Doctor Jackson is resting comfortably for the moment. He was slightly confused in the aftermath of the seizure, but he was alert enough to recognize me and the SGC infirmary. His CAT scan was
negative for any traumatic brain injury."

"But the seizures?" Carter leaned forward in her chair.

"Appear not to be caused by any brain damage. I've called in Doctor Leyden for a neurological consultation, and we will be doing more extensive tests to find the cause."

"The rest?" Jack asked, glad he'd found a pen to twirl in his fingers.

"His right leg has some muscle damage and a torn ligament. He's lost quite a bit of weight and is slightly anemic. We've also discovered an encapsulated abscess in his right calf, which will be drained and treated with antibiotics."

"He was coughing, too," Jack added. He had the feeling the news wasn't going to get any better.

"He has pneumonia. From what Teal'c reported to Doctor Carmichael, it appears he's never gotten over his initial bout with it, although the herbs the natives used did help to keep it from getting worse. It's going to be a long recovery, but he will recover."

"And the seizures. What about them?" Jack pressed for answers. He knew, as well as all the others at the table, there was no way Daniel would ever be allowed off-world with a seizure disorder. The risks would just be too great—to Daniel and to anyone who was with him.

"I don't know, Colonel. At this point, I can't give you any answers about that. But if it is a permanent condition, many people with epilepsy live productive and fulfilling lives once the seizures are under control."

"I *know* that, Doc. It's..." Jack held up his hands in frustration.

"Let's not borrow trouble, Colonel," General Hammond said. "We've got him back. Let's take things one step at a time. Now that we have more information on Doctor Jackson's condition, perhaps you and your team can fill both the good doctor and me in on exactly what happened on that planet? The first de-briefing wasn't as informative as I would have liked."

"Yes, sir." Jack took a deep breath, knowing part of the report was going to dredge up the memories of his earlier failure. But Daniel was alive and back among them. He had to keep reminding himself of that, no matter how the ordeal had changed Daniel. "It was Major Ferretti who first noticed the tracks," Jack began, aware of Fraiser and Hammond listening to every word. Beside him, Carter smiled and even Teal'c looked as if he was pleased. Daniel was home. For the moment, that was all that mattered.

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"Good evening, Colonel." Fraiser spoke in a whisper, not wanting to disturb a sleeping Daniel. "He's probably not going to wake up for any length of time tonight."

Jack nodded. "I know. I just needed..." he glanced away from his friend to look at Fraiser. "How's he doing?" His gesture took in the oxygen mask covering Daniel's mouth and nose, the hanging IVs, the propped and bandaged leg, and the various leads plastered on Daniel's head and chest.

"His temperature has come down a few degrees, and there were no complications with the abscess Doctor Warner drained. Doctor Leyden is studying the results of the tests he ordered."

Daniel's hand twitched in sleep, and Jack noticed Fraiser go to full alert, studying one of the monitors.
Jack covered his friend's hand with his own. It was obvious Daniel still had a fever but as the doc had reported, it wasn't as high as when they'd first come through the Gate. Daniel turned his head, opening his eyes and staring at Jack.

"Hey, buddy."

A small frown line appeared on Daniel's forehead. "Jack?" The word was muffled by the mask, but the slurred speech from before was gone.

"Colonel, I need to do an assessment," the doc said softly by his side.

"Yeah, I know." He nodded to Fraiser before patting Daniel's hand once more. "Hang in there, Daniel. I'll be back in a little bit."

As he walked away from the bed, he heard Fraiser speaking quietly, asking Daniel some questions. He headed towards Fraiser's office, leaning against the wall to wait for her and closing his eyes to relieve the headache he was pretty sure came from fatigue and lack of sleep.

"Colonel O'Neill," Fraiser said, and Jack nearly fell over, realizing he must have drifted off for a few moments.

"Doc." Maybe if he pretended it hadn't happened, she wouldn't notice.

"You need to rest. If you want, I'll arrange for someone to drive you home."

"No." Jack ran a hand over his face, feeling the rasp of whiskers under his palm.

"No?" Fraiser frowned up at him. "Sir, with all due respect, you've had a great shock."

"No, as in no, I don't need someone to drive me home. I'm staying on base until..." Jack looked over her head towards the infirmary.

She smiled at him. "Doctor Leyden will have more information for us in the morning. I promise that I will have my staff notify you if there is any change in Doctor Jackson's condition. But until then, get some rest."

"Doc?" Jack asked as she opened the door to her office. "How...you know...if it's permanent..."

"If it's permanent, then Daniel and the rest of you will need to learn to live with it." She must have noticed Jack's frown because she continued. "I'm sorry if that sounds cruel, but Daniel is a survivor. Hold on to that."

"Yeah, I've got it." Jack waited until Fraiser went into her office. He debated about sneaking back to Daniel's bed for one last peek at his friend, but he was sure Fraiser had her nurses warned about any possible incursions by Jack O'Neill. Daniel was in good hands, he knew. Hell, Daniel was in the best possible hands, and if Jack stopped to admit it, he was rather hungry and could probably use a good nap.

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"Sir?" Carter stood by his table, holding a cup of coffee, questions in her eyes.

"Sit down." Jack nudged an adjacent chair out from the table.

"Thank you." She wrapped her hands around the cup, staring into it. "Teal'c is doing kel-no-reem."
"I figured."

"How is he? Did Janet let you in? Does Doctor Leyden have any more information? Do they know if the condition is permanent?"

"Stable. Yes. Not at the moment. No." Jack rattled off the answers, knowing Carter was going to be as unsatisfied with them as he was.

"Sir, if the seizures..." She turned the cup around in a circle. "He wouldn't be allowed off-world."

"Carter, we went to that planet to retrieve a corpse and came back with a living, breathing Daniel. Isn't that enough of a miracle for you?"

"Yes, sir." She gave him a big grin. "Yes, it is."

"Let's just focus on the fact Daniel is alive. The rest is just details."

He finished his own coffee and stood up. He couldn't quite hide a yawn that escaped.

"Good night, sir."

"You too, Carter." Jack nodded, noticing the circles under her eyes. "Get some rest." When she opened her mouth to protest, he held up a finger. "That's an order, Major."

"Yes, sir." She'd gone back to staring at her coffee cup, and Jack headed off to his quarters.

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Jack was beginning to wonder if he would have to ask for a translator to interpret Doctor Leyden's report into a semblance of English. The good doctor had been speaking for the past ten minutes about different brain waves and electrical activity, and Jack was as confused as he'd been when the man had started. A quick glance at Hammond showed him the general might be having some difficulty with the report himself. But a change in the doctor's posture alerted Jack that something else was going on.

"It's my conclusion, and my colleagues concur, that the seizures and uncontrolled electrical activity are being caused by a build up of a certain chemical found in the plants the natives used to treat Doctor Jackson's cough and illnesses. I don't suppose anyone brought back some of the plants with them?" Doctor Leyden looked around the table.

"I will return to the planet to ask Perrla the Healer for some of the herbs," Teal'c offered.

"It would definitely help us know how to treat Doctor Jackson," Fraiser said. "We can't be sure of any possible drug interactions until we are able to test what he's been given."

"You have a go, Teal'c. Assemble a team and be ready to go within one hour."

"I will, General Hammond."

"Permission to accompany Teal'c, sir?" Carter said, not surprising Jack in the least. Carter never had been good at waiting, and she wanted answers and reassurances that no one was able to give.

At Hammond's nod, Jack fully expected Carter to take off at a run. There was no one he trusted more with this mission than his two healthy team-mates.
"Thank you, sir," Jack said after the room emptied, and he was left alone with the general.

"Doctor Jackson is highly valued," Hammond said, sounding almost dispassionate, but Jack heard the slight break in the older man's voice.

"Sir, if I have your permission, I'd like to go to the infirmary."

"Go ahead." General Hammond stood. "And, Jack?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Let Doctor Jackson, Daniel, let him know we're all thinking of him."

"I will, sir." Jack watched as the general walked to his office, remembering Hammond's first reaction to Daniel newly arrived from Abydos. It hadn't taken long for the general to like the archaeologist, even if Daniel's non-military background sometimes had Hammond calling Jack into his office to ask just what the Sam Hill was Doctor Jackson thinking by standing up to introduce himself to possible hostiles. Maybe it was time Jack told Daniel those stories, even if they were years old.

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"Hey." Jack leaned forward in his chair as he saw Daniel open his eyes. For the first time since he'd begun his vigil in what seemed hours ago, Daniel actually turned his head to look at him.

A frown crossed Daniel's face, and the little line that appeared between his eyebrows whenever he was puzzled or trying to figure things out was fully in evidence.

"Jack?" Daniel squinted at him.

"The one and only," Jack said. He handed Daniel a pair of glasses he'd kept hidden in his desk drawer for the months Daniel had been missing--a reminder of his failure to save Daniel.

Daniel looked at the glasses a moment, turning them from side to side in his fingers, and Jack worried Daniel didn't know what to do with them. He made a small sound, ready to imitate putting the glasses on, when Daniel smiled and placed the frames over his ears with no prompting at all.

"How ya feeling?" Jack asked when Daniel continued to blink at him slowly from behind the lenses.

"Um, I'm in the infirmary?"

"Yeah," Jack said and then cleared his throat. "Back home again."

"I lived with The People," Daniel said. He turned his head, apparently looking for something. Jack handed him the controls and watched as Daniel pushed the button to raise the head of his bed. "They gave me a home."

"Daniel?" Jack was getting seriously worried. He wondered how much Daniel remembered of life before the accident. It seemed like there were gaps. "Do you, you know?" Jack made a twirling motion with his index finger near his forehead.

"Know what?" Daniel frowned at him. He reached his hand up towards the nasal canula. Jack put out his hand, intercepting the movement. Some things evidently never changed.

"Know who you are?" Jack asked. He watched Daniel's face carefully for any sign of distress.

"I'm Daniel Jackson."
Jack gave what he hoped was an encouraging smile.

"I work for the SGC, and I, uh, lived with The People." Daniel paused, and then rubbed his forehead again. "Was I doing some sort of study?" He moved his hand rubbing his chest. "My chest hurts."

"You've got a little case of pneumonia." Jack waited for some response but Daniel didn't appear about to give him one. He was relieved when he heard Fraiser approaching.

"Hello, Doctor Jackson." Fraiser smiled at Daniel.


"That's right. How are you feeling?" Fraiser glanced from the clipboard to Daniel.

"My chest hurts," Daniel said, looking at her. "Jack said I have pneumonia."

"You do, but we're giving you medicine for it, and that's why we have you hooked up to the oxygen. It should help."

Daniel shifted his position on the bed. "I don't think I remember everything."

"Remember?" Fraiser had moved closer to the bed and taken Daniel's wrist in hers. She was good, Jack thought. Her voice was calm and matter of fact while Daniel was struggling with his memory. He didn't know if this was a side-effect of the seizures or some harbinger of something very bad.

"I used to be here and then I was with The People and now I'm back here again." Daniel stopped talking when Fraiser put the stethoscope to his chest. He took a breath at her order, and Jack winced as it caused a paroxysm of coughing.

"Sorry," Daniel finally said when he'd regained his breath.

"Do you remember how you came to be with The People?" Jack questioned. He settled onto the chair beside Daniel's bed once again. Fraiser was watching them both, a pen in her hand.

"I remember studying the video SG-5 brought back from P8T-224. And then I was with The People." Daniel shrugged. He put out his hands and gripped the bed-rail, trying to shift to his side.

"No, Daniel. Your leg is injured. I'll get a nurse in here in a few minutes," Fraiser said, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"They called me Winter," Daniel said, ignoring Fraiser and looking at Jack. "And I think I must have hurt my head. Dreams, visions. They said it was a blessing."

"Seizures," Fraiser explained. "You've been having seizures."

Jack covered Daniel's hand with his when he saw Daniel go pale. "It's being caused by some plants they were giving you. You're gonna be okay."

"How long?" Daniel whispered, still looking at Jack.

"We don't..." When Daniel shook his head, Jack understood the question. "You were missing for four months." He decided Daniel didn't know they'd gone back to the planet fully prepared to bring back a body or remains, rather than a living, breathing, functioning archaeologist.

"Daniel." Fraiser spoke softly, waiting until Daniel looked at her before continuing. "We have every reason to believe the seizures are temporary. Sam and Teal'c went back to the planet to get some
samples. We're doing tests to see how we can best help you."

Daniel nodded and turned away from her, closing his eyes.

Jack looked at her across the bed. She motioned towards the door and held up five fingers. Jack nodded. He rubbed his thumb over the back of Daniel's hand, enjoying the feel of warm skin under his touch. He could only hope that Fraiser's optimism was well-founded. Within the allotted five minutes Daniel was asleep once again, exhaustion one thing he remembered Doctor Leyden mentioning when he explained the seizures to them.

"Doc?" Jack asked as he met Fraiser in her office. "Is something wrong?"

"Doctor Leyden is doing more tests, but he believes that, with time, the seizures will disappear."

"There's a but in there, I'm guessing," Jack commented, rubbing his head.

"All our preliminary results from the samples indicate giving Daniel anti-convulsants would be a bad idea."

"And that means?" Jack pressed for more information, although he had a sinking feeling he knew.

"That means that until the build-up in his system dissipates, his seizures won't be able to be controlled. We'll need to monitor him, of course, and Doctor Leyden expects Daniel will also have petit mal or absence seizures in addition to the grand mal ones. He's hopeful since Daniel has gone without a grand mal seizure in the past twenty-four hours, he may have fewer of those."

"So, what are you telling me, Doc? That Daniel has to stay in the infirmary for what could be a few weeks or months?" Jack asked.

"I'm saying Daniel certainly can't live on his own until this condition is resolved."

Jack looked at her desk instead of meeting her eyes because it was easier than seeing any compassion there. "He can stay at my place. It's the least I can..."

"Colonel, if you are doing this out of some misguided guilt because you were unable to rescue Daniel four months ago, you won't be doing him, or you, any favors."

"He's my friend. He needs my help," Jack said, even though she'd hit a nerve with the guilt comment. He wasn't sure if it was true or not, unable to analyze his motives for the gesture.

"We'll discuss all of this with Daniel tomorrow," Fraiser said. She placed some file folders in a neat pile and squared them off. "Doctor Warner is going to clean out the abscess later today. His release will be dependent on how he tolerates that procedure. I want you to understand, Colonel, that even without the seizures, Daniel is in for a long recovery." She looked at him as if in challenge.

"I do understand," Jack said. His gut was churning; he understood far more than she knew.

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"You about ready to blow this Popsicle stand?" Jack asked as he came to Daniel's bedside.

His friend was sitting on the side of the bed, head hanging down and staring at the untied sneaker on his left foot. Crutches rested by the side of the bed, along with a wheelchair.

"Daniel?" Jack asked after waiting a few seconds. He saw Daniel give a small shudder before
looking up at him. Daniel blinked a few times, and Jack knew he'd just come out of an absence seizure.

"Hey," Daniel finally said, his brain taking a little time to get back online. He ran a hand through his hair, making it stand up on end. Jack had to fight the urge to smooth it down as he'd done for Charlie. "Um, Janet said she'd be back in a few minutes." He touched the edge of the sheet, running his fingers up and down the hem.

"How's the leg feeling?" Jack asked, trying to make some small talk. He crouched down and tied Daniel's sneaker when it was apparent Daniel had forgotten it. He'd convinced himself over the past week and a half that he could do this. He could deal with the aftermath of Daniel's prolonged stay with The People. He'd spent the past weekend making his house as safe as he could for Daniel, moving some furniture out of the way and into the basement. He'd had Carter show him how to actually use a search engine to find information on seizures so he didn't need to go through one million pages to find information he could actually use. He'd spent time with Doctor Leyden, grilling him on what to expect, met with the captain assigned to be Daniel's physical therapist and worked out the details of scheduling. Daniel had been surprisingly accepting of the situation, and Jack suspected the depression it appeared Daniel was experiencing was simply the calm before the storm.

"Okay, it's okay," Daniel said. He took the crutches in one hand, ready to stand. Jack held out a steadying hand, only to be met with a glare. He let his hand drop to his side. He said nothing, just watched as Daniel gained his balance.

"Wheelchair, Doctor Jackson," Fraiser ordered as she came to the bed with a clipboard. "I want you to use that to go topside."

Daniel frowned at her, but he sat down, holding his crutches between his legs and squinting up at both of them.

"Here are all your instructions. I know we went over them earlier but this will serve as a reminder." Fraiser held out a packet of papers. "Do you have any questions?" When Daniel didn't respond, Jack held out his hand for the papers. Sighing, Fraiser stepped closer to the wheelchair, bending over slightly to look in Daniel's eyes. "Daniel, I know this is hard for you, but I need you to follow the instructions we've given you. You will get well, I promise you that."

"I know." The words were said so softly, Jack barely heard them. "I know I will."

"We'll see you and the colonel in two days," Fraiser said, smiling at both of them.

"Hang on, Dannyboy. It's gonna be a bumpy ride," Jack said, hoping his joking would bring a glimmer of smile to Daniel's face. But, for his part, Daniel gripped one of the armrests and nodded.

To Jack's great relief, the elevator was empty. He squatted down beside Daniel when the doors closed, looking into his friend's face. "You okay with all of this?" When Daniel shrugged, he continued. "I had Carter and Teal'c bring some of your books over to my place. I thought you might like to do some reading." Jack watched Daniel grip the crutches even tighter, his knuckles turning white. "It's okay to be scared," Jack said in a sudden flash of understanding.

"I'm not scared," Daniel said.

"I know, buddy." Jack patted him on the shoulder and stood. "But if you want to be, you can." He moved to stand behind the wheelchair and rested his hand on Daniel's bowed head, wishing he had some words of wisdom to make all the pain and fear go away.
He was going home--for the first time in nearly five months he would be seeing his native sun, sleeping under stars that were familiar--except...it wasn't his home. Daniel clenched his hand into a fist as Jack drove his truck away from the Mountain. A brief wish came to his mind, to be back with The People where he had no concerns other than to obey Perrla and listen to Odres, the story-teller, late into the night. He closed his eyes against the passing scenery, speed something he hadn't experienced in so long, it made him feel nauseous. And Jack was giving him sideways glances. Daniel didn't even need to open his eyes to know it.

"I'm fine," he said before Jack could say a word. He heard Jack's intake of breath, and then the sound of one of Puccini's operas filled the cab. He wasn't sure which one it was; it had always been Jack's great dismay that to Daniel, every aria sounded much like every other. The flash of memory brought a smile to Daniel's lips, and he opened his eyes, focusing on the view from the windshield.

"Carter and Teal'c wanted to come over tonight," Jack said as he stopped at a red light. "I told them I thought it might be better...

...if you want me to?" They were moving again and Daniel didn't remember the light turning green. He clasped his fingers together, noticing the small bruise on the back of his hand. Jack was waiting for him to answer, and Daniel had missed the question.

"Do you want them to come tonight or tomorrow?" Jack asked as they turned up a familiar street.

"Tomorrow is fine," Daniel said. "Sorry about...you know." He touched his index finger to his forehead. Reassuring himself that Doctor Leyden had said the seizures would lessen in frequency over the course of the next few weeks didn't take away the frustration of losing bits of conversation every few hours. He dreaded the thought of having a grand mal seizure in Jack's presence. It had been different in the infirmary, where nurses were there to clean him up as he lay half asleep and unable to move after one of those. Somehow, Daniel thought, cleaning your best friend's ass went above and beyond the whole friendship code. But Jack seemed supremely unconcerned about any of those issues.

"Well, we're home," Jack announced, and Daniel felt a lump in his throat. He wanted to be at his own house, not being babysat for the next month or so while his body healed and his brain went through the whole detoxification process. Jack was at his door, smiling at him and steadying him as he adjusted the crutches under his armpits. Jack walked beside him and it gave him a sense of security, knowing that if he was to fall, Jack would catch him, while at the same time he wanted to push Jack away and like a toddler, yell he could do it himself.

Walking, well actually hobbling, into Jack's house brought a familiar rush of home, even though he hadn't stayed at the house for any length of time after he first came back from Abydos. But Jack's house had always meant a place to relax, to regroup after a rough mission, and Daniel was surprised and pleased it still gave him such a feeling of warmth. He remembered sitting in Jack's kitchen a week or so before their last mission together and eating an apple pie that Jack had bought at a local bakery. What they had discussed was gone, along with all memory of the week leading up to the disastrous mission. He had no memory of the accident, no memory of walking through the Gate or falling in the water. Even his first memories of The People were hazy. It was as if he'd lost a part of himself. Daniel knew from Jack, Sam and Teal'c that nothing of import had happened during that week, but they were his memories, his mind that was messed up. He couldn't help feeling somehow cheated by the loss. And Janet hadn't been hopeful he'd ever remember.

"Do you want to go take, uh, lie down?" Jack asked as he closed the door behind them.
Daniel shook his head, heading for the living room. "You were going to say nap, weren't you?"

"You're not three," Jack said, taking the crutches Daniel handed him.

"No, I'm not." Daniel leaned back on the sofa, closing his eyes and letting the cushions support his aching body. He heard Jack moving around, felt the weight of a light blanket cover his legs and torso, and his right leg being lifted up and placed on a pillow.

"Just rest a little," Jack whispered, and Daniel managed to murmur an agreement. The trip to Jack's had tired him more than he wished to admit.

He woke up to a myriad of smells. Grabbing his crutches, Daniel made his slow way to Jack's kitchen, pleased that he remembered the layout of the house. Jack smiled at him as he entered the room.

"What are you making?" Daniel felt his leg muscles beginning to shake with exertion. He sniffed appreciatively. "Spaghetti?"

"Spaghetti with the famous O'Neill sauce," Jack said, turning from the stove with a ladle in his hand. Daniel could feel his mouth turn up in a grin. "Um, doesn't the famous O'Neill sauce come in a jar?"

Jack shrugged. "It's a secret family recipe."

Pointing to the jar sitting on the counter, Daniel grinned, enjoying the teasing. "Ragu? Some relation I don't know?"

"You hungry?" Jack asked as he held up a box of pasta.

To his surprise, Daniel heard himself say, "Yeah I am," and watched as Jack dumped the entire box into a pot of boiling water. He hadn't wanted to come to Jack's house, but he had to admit there was something reassuring about being back in a place where he felt at ease. He watched Jack at the stove, forgetting for the moment about the therapy he needed to take and the recovery no one could tell him how long would last, just enjoying being with his friend once more.

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Jack finished putting an extra ladle of sauce on Daniel's spaghetti and carried the plate over to the table. He placed it in front of Daniel with a flourish.

He bent down when there was no response. Daniel was staring ahead, unblinking, and Jack felt his heart contract. The grand mal seizures may have decreased but these absence seizures bothered Jack more. They were far more frequent and he knew they were frustrating for Daniel--losing little moments of time and only hearing parts of conversations.

He hooked one of the kitchen chairs with his foot and pulled it closer, sitting down beside Daniel. He never quite knew what to do in this situation. Hell, there wasn't anything he could do. All he could do was sit and wait and watch to make sure that Daniel was okay.

"You're at my house," Jack said in a low voice, knowing that Daniel came out of the seizures confused and sometimes not remembering what had happened in the few minutes preceding one of them. "We're just getting ready to eat supper." He repeated the words as he saw Daniel blink furiously and shake his head.

"Jack," Daniel said, before ducking his head and looking at the plate of spaghetti.
"It's okay," Jack said, getting up to dish up a plate for himself. Daniel was pushing the pasta around with a fork when he sat down at the table. He hoped Daniel would eat—he still had pounds to put on, and his appetite was nowhere near what it should be.

He nudged the bread basket closer to Daniel and was relieved when his friend took a slice.

"I'm sorry to cause so much trouble," Daniel said in a soft voice, and Jack looked up from his plate to see Daniel watching him with an anxious expression.

"This isn't trouble," Jack said, pushing his plate away and noticing Daniel hadn't eaten more than a few bites. When Daniel saw him glancing at his plate, he made a half-hearted attempt to take another bite.

"Don't worry about it." Jack shook his head and pointed to the plate.

Letting out a sigh, Daniel pushed the plate to the middle of the table. "After a..." Daniel pointed to his head, "sometimes the food doesn't taste right."

"Yeah," Jack said, even though he didn't know if it was true or not. When Daniel averted his eyes back to a study of the kitchen table, Jack decided it was time to set the record straight. "This wasn't a hard decision for me." Ah, that got a little reaction—a flick of eyes in his direction, so he continued. "God, Daniel, we thought you were dead. We spent the last four months thinking you were a skeleton on that damn planet. Believe me, this, you, are no trouble at all."

He watched as Daniel spread his hands flat on the table, stretching his fingers and then curling them into fists. "I don't like being dependent on people."

"It's not forever," Jack said. "And I want to do this."

Daniel looked at him finally, frowning. "You didn't have a choice." His tone was bitter and Jack realized how tired Daniel looked.

"Hold on a minute." Jack held up his hand. "I had plenty of choices. Hell, you had a choice. You didn't have to come here if you didn't want to."

"I wanted to come here," Daniel whispered, his gaze averted once more. "But I don't want to be any trouble."

Jack got up from his chair and moved over to crouch down by Daniel. "Look at me," he ordered. When Daniel's eyes locked with his, he gave a reassuring smile. "We're gonna get through this together, buddy. You are going to be well again; it's just going to take some time. There isn't any rush."

To Jack's dismay, he could see tears in Daniel's eyes. He knew his friend's emotions were very near the surface since they'd brought him back to Earth, and even more so when he was tired.

"Thanks," Daniel finally said, sticking his fingers up under his glasses and pinching the bridge of his nose.

Jack patted him on the shoulder and then squeezed it before getting up and beginning to clear the table. He watched as Daniel got to his feet, tucking one crutch under his arm and carrying his own plate to the sink. The days ahead weren't going to be easy, but he knew they'd get through them together.

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"Jack." Daniel took great delight in speaking into the small white box by his bed. "I can't sleep."

He smiled as he heard a grumbling on the other end. "Well, close your eyes and pretend you are."

Waiting a few minutes, Daniel whistled and then called again. "Jack, I need a drink of water."

This time there was no response from the monitor, but he could hear footsteps coming down the hall. The bedroom door opened, and Jack came in, clutching his own monitor.

"Damn it, Daniel. Some of us are trying to get some sleep."

Daniel moved on his bed, trying to find a way to relieve the ache in his leg. His PT session today had been especially tiring, and his attempt to work on a translation with some of his colleagues had given him a headache, not to mention that he'd had a number of petit mal seizures after going two days with none. He knew he was taking his pain and frustration out on Jack, but really, when he'd discovered the baby monitor in his bedroom the first night at Jack's, it had made him feel even more dismayed at his current state. He'd taken to bugging Jack on it every evening, but even he had to admit tonight there was no teasing or fun in irritating his best friend and host, simply a desire to make Jack feel as bad as he felt. Four weeks of living at Jack's, and it seemed he was no closer to regaining his independence than when he'd first come back through the Gate.

He looked up at Jack, noticing the lines of exhaustion around Jack's eyes, and the way his mouth was drawn into a straight line. He felt contrite and very small for his pettiness. "Sorry," he said, looking straight into Jack's eyes.

"I didn't know what else to do," Jack said, pointing at the baby monitor on Daniel's night table with the one in his hand. "If you had a seizure and I...it was the best I could think of, okay?" He ran a hand through his hair and rubbed his face.

"I know," Daniel said. "It was a good solution." He tried to rub his aching leg without Jack noticing and sighed when he saw Jack's demeanor change from tiredness to one of concern.

"Bad session?" Jack asked.

Daniel nodded. His leg muscles were taking far longer to heal than he wanted.

"I'll be back." Jack left the room and came back a few minutes later with a heated rice bag wrapped in a towel. He placed it over Daniel's thigh and Daniel relaxed onto his pillow as the heat began soaking into the pain. Jack stood by the bed, and Daniel opened one eye to look up at him.

"Thanks," he said, and managed a smile. He took off his glasses and fumbled to place them on the night table.

Jack took them from him and Daniel closed his eyes again. "If you need anything," he said, "well, you know..."

"Yeah, I do," Daniel said, smiling and letting himself drift away while the pain abated. He heard Jack leave, heard the door close. The pain lessened as the heat reached deep into his muscles. Janet and his therapists were pleased with his progress although Daniel was growing impatient with what was becoming a long recovery. He was due for another consult with Doctor Leyden in the morning. He'd have to remember to tell him about the latest seizures.

Daniel could hear the sound of water running now. Jack must be taking a shower. He knew that SG-1 was going off-world in a few days. He'd been doing his best to help analyze some of the data Sam had gleaned from the UAV. He'd have to remember to tell her to look for the...A high pitched
whining filled his ears and there was a strange metallic taste in his mouth. He could feel his right arm beginning to shake. He tried to call out to Jack, to form the word with his mouth, but all that came out was a grunt, and then the world was all sparks, and he didn't know anything anymore.

****

Jack walked into his bedroom toweling his hair. He grinned as he thought back to Daniel's plot to annoy him. He hadn't known what else to do when Fraiser and Leyden had explained to him how important it was that Daniel be watched carefully when at home. And despite Daniel's embarrassment and annoyance at having a baby monitor in his bedroom, Jack knew his friend also found it reassuring, considering he'd had a grand mal seizure the second night he'd been home from the infirmary.

He looked at the monitor sitting on his own night table, his urge to sleep quickly quelled when he heard the grunts coming from the small device.

"Shit." Jack grabbed the phone and took off for Daniel's room at a run. Daniel was at the edge of the bed, his body jerking in violent spasms. Jack glanced at the clock, automatically noting the time. Most times, the seizures had lasted less than two minutes. Jack pulled the covers back from Daniel's body. This was the most violent seizure he'd seen Daniel have. Realizing that if he didn't do something, Daniel was going to fall off the bed, Jack maneuvered his friend's still shaking body to the floor, wincing as Daniel's flailing hand hit him in the jaw.

He knelt beside him on the carpet, speaking softly and hoping that in some part of Daniel's brain, he was heard. "It's gonna be okay. Keep breathing. Keep breathing. I'm right here."

Daniel's body went limp and Jack noticed that three minutes had passed. He placed a hand on Daniel's forehead, wiping back the sweat soaked hair. "Hey, Daniel," he called, waiting for Daniel to look at him.

Daniel opened his eyes, looking around the room, his eyes not fixing on Jack, even when his name was called. He lay there gasping for breath a moment but not responding to Jack's touch or words. Jack saw the tremor begin in Daniel's legs and then his back and neck arched as another seizure began.

Something was very wrong. Jack didn't know what exactly, just that whatever was happening was not good. He hit speed dial, getting Fraiser on the first ring.

"Doc!" Jack wondered if his voice was as frantic as his heart's hammering. "It's Daniel. He's seizing, and it's not stopping."

"Transport will be there in ten minutes, Colonel," Fraiser said, her voice calm. "How long has it been going on?" she asked, cutting through Jack's growing fear.

Jack looked up at the clock. "First seizure was three minutes, but I was taking a shower. It might have been longer than that."

"So one ended and another started?"

"I... yes, Doc." Jack moved between Daniel and the night table to protect him from being hurt. "He didn't respond to me when it stopped, and then it started again. Maybe thirty seconds later. I called you right away."

"You've done the right thing, sir," Fraiser said. "I'm going to alert Doctor Leyden. Transport will bring him right to the Mountain, Colonel."
"Thanks, Doc," Jack said and turned his full attention back to Daniel.

By the time the medics had arrived with the ambulance, Daniel had four more seizures, still not responding to Jack between them, and his skin had taken on a dusky hue.

Jack recognized one of the men, a tall captain by the name of St. James.

"How long have the seizures been happening, sir?" St. James knelt by Daniel's side, gently moving Jack out of the way while his partner went to the other side.

Jack glanced at the clock. "Fifteen minutes."

"Has he come out of it at any time?" St. James asked.

Jack shook his head and then realized the medic's attention was on Daniel and not him. "No. They stop for a few seconds but then start right up again."

"Let's get him ready for transport," the medic told his partner.

"I'm going to give you some oxygen, Doctor Jackson," St. James said. He quickly affixed the oxygen mask over Daniel's face, and Jack was relieved to see some color return to his friend's cheeks.

"You can come with us, sir," the other medic said as they lifted the stretcher.

The ride back to the mountain was a nightmare. Jack knew Daniel was losing ground. He heard St. James mutter something under his breath at the same time one of the monitors Daniel was hooked up to gave an alarm.

He watched in horror as the medics began CPR, letting out a huge breath when the younger of the two announced he had a heart beat again. Jack put his head in his hands. He hated being this helpless, unable to do anything to alleviate his friend's suffering.

They arrived at the mountain, and Jack followed the medics and Daniel's gurney in a daze, listening as they spewed off all sorts of information to Fraiser and Leyden, and then he was left standing alone as Daniel was taken into an exam room.

Jack didn't know how Carter and Teal'c knew Daniel had been brought back to the base--all that mattered was that sometime in the past hour, the two of them had shown up, and were now waiting with him. None of them spoke but then again, they were a team. Words were rarely needed between any of them. Carter was studying a spot on her hand, picking at what appeared to be paint with one blunt fingernail, Teal'c stared at the infirmary doors, and Jack waited and saw Daniel in the throes of the non-ending convulsions, could still hear the medics counting as they worked to bring Daniel back from the edge.

The doors whooshed open and all of them took a step closer to Fraiser as she came through.

"Doc?"

"Janet?"

"Doctor Fraiser?"

She gave them all a brief smile. "We have him stabilized for now. Doctor Leyden administered an anti-convulsant and..."
"Wait, Doc. I thought he couldn't be on those," Jack interrupted.

"We had no choice," Fraiser explained. "Daniel was experiencing repeated seizures. It's a calculated risk, sir. What would cause more damage--the seizures or the drugs? We're running more tests, but it appears the substance that caused the seizures in the first place is gone from his system."

Beside Jack, Carter frowned. "Then why all the seizures?"

"It appears to be almost a form of withdrawal." Fraiser sighed and ran a hand through her hair. "Daniel's unconscious for now, and it's going to be a few hours at least before I feel comfortable allowing any visitors."

Jack looked over her head at the infirmary doors, wishing he could be with his friend, let Daniel know things were going to be okay. "And the risk?"

"Without the drugs, Daniel was in danger of experiencing brain damage," Fraiser said. Not liking the look in her eyes, Jack motioned for her to continue.

"And we don't know if any damage has been done," she finished. "I'm sorry, but right now we just need to wait and see how things develop."

"Doc," Jack said as she turned to go back into the infirmary. She looked up at him, and he knew whatever had happened behind those doors had shaken her. "I just wanted to say thank you."

"You're welcome, sir." She nodded and gave them all a smile. "Daniel is strong. If you come back in a few hours, I'll allow you to see him."

****

He wasn't at Jack's house. He knew it without opening his eyes. The familiar sounds of a medical equipment and of hushed voices told Daniel he was in the infirmary.

"...wake in there?"

Okay, that was Jack. Daniel rolled his head to the side, wondering why it felt as if it weighed a hundred pounds. He opened his eyes a slit and was rewarded by seeing Jack and Janet smile at him. "Hey."

"Can you open your eyes the rest of the way?" Janet asked him.

Daniel licked his lips and made a valiant effort, even though he felt as if all he wanted to do was close them again and go back to sleep.

"There we go," Jack commented.

Daniel tried to focus on what Janet was saying. Oh, okay he could do that--squeeze her hand--no problem. Well, he thought it wouldn't be a problem until he realized he felt like a wet dishrag. Every muscle, hell, even some muscles he didn't know he had, ached.

"Whuh hapn'd?" That didn't so sound so good. He couldn't remember anything past going to bed at Jack's house.

"You had some seizures," Janet said, patting his arm. "We've got everything under control now. The alien substance is out of your system."
There were too many words for him to process, his brain didn't seem to be online. But Jack was smiling at him, which meant he was going to be okay. "Good," Daniel said, closing his eyes again. He'd worry about all Janet had said later on. The blankets were warm, the lights were dim and no one seemed very worried. Daniel decided to let everything in their hands and sleep for a little longer.

Jack was there again. Daniel heard his off-key humming before he opened his eyes.

"O'Neill." Ah, Teal'c was hanging around, too.

"What?" Jack sounded annoyed at the interruption.

"Your attempts to reproduce La Bohème for Major Carter and me are unsuccessful."

"Huh?"

Daniel heard an explosive sigh from someone else. "In other words, Colonel, your humming is driving us nuts."

The humming stopped, and Daniel heard Jack grumble something. Seemed like Jack knew a couple of foreign languages, too. Daniel was so nice and warm and the aches he remembered from before seemed to be not quite as severe. And his friends were with him--that alone made him smile. It wasn't long until the humming started again. Jack was fidgety whenever one of them was in the infirmary. Memories of seeing Jack playing with an IV bag came to mind. Daniel opened his eyes, turning his head to the left so he could see Jack and Sam.

"You're humming again," Daniel said, his voice cracking from his dry throat.

"I am?" Jack seemed distracted, but then his expression changed. "Hey, you're awake again."

"Yeah." Daniel raised a hand to his head, not surprised to see an IV, although he had no memory of getting one. "Long?"

"A day, Daniel," Sam said. Sometimes it was scary how well they all understood each other's shorthand.

"Oh. What happ...?"

"Seizures," Jack said. Daniel looked at him. Jack sounded relaxed, but there were lines around his eyes, and Daniel thought it might have been a little more than one of his usual seizures. "But the gunk is out of your body."

"Over? No more seizures?" Daniel asked. He heard the click of heels and saw Janet standing in front of Teal'c.

"Doctor Leyden still has some tests to give you, but we think yes," Janet said.

"So am I back on SG-1?" He didn't know why it seemed so urgent, just that it did.

"Not so fast," Janet said, shaking her head and holding up a hand. "We're going to need to make sure you stay seizure-free for a period of time. Let's not rush things."

Daniel swallowed hard, fighting down the disappointment. "Yeah," he said, but he wished they'd all go away and leave him alone. Useless, that was what he'd become. A burden on his friends. Hell, not only on his friends, but on the SGC. He thought of the backlog of work in his office--translations of off-world writings, research to do so the teams who stepped through the Stargate would be safe.
"Colonel O'Neill," one of the nurses said. "General Hammond would like SG-1 to report to the briefing room immediately."

SG-1. Daniel forced a smile at Jack, Sam and Teal'c, listening to their hasty apologies and pretended he didn't care. SG-1, and he wasn't a part of it anymore, it seemed. Maybe it would have been better if he'd never been found. He rubbed at his chest, wishing it would relieve the ache that seemed to have taken up residence there along with the huge lump in his throat.

Janet was talking to him, and he focused on her, concentrating on keeping a pleasant expression on his face while she told him Doctor Leyden would be arriving in the next hour or so. Maybe it had all been a pipe dream—to assume he could take his place back on SG-1 as if he'd never been away.

"Daniel? Is something wrong? How do you feel?" Janet asked, her voice warm and deep and laced with concern.

"I'm fine," he said. He would be, he told himself. He had no choice.

****

Jack entered Daniel's office. Daniel was sitting hunched over an artifact, muttering something to himself about Aztecs and some Ketsi guy.

"Hey." Jack spoke quietly, not wanting startle him.

Daniel turned, blinking up at Jack. "Hey."

"You about ready to go?" Jack asked, making a point of looking at his watch.

Daniel sighed, pushing the small pot-bellied figurine away from himself. "Yeah. Maybe I'll be able to figure out these glyphs if I get away for awhile." He stood and stretched before grabbing his jacket.

They walked to the elevators in silence, the limp that had been the one remaining outward sign of Daniel's experience all those months ago now gone.

"How was the mission?" Daniel asked as they stepped inside the cabin.

Jack didn't miss the quick look of sorrow passing over Daniel's face. It was brief, but it cut Jack to the core. He knew how frustrated Daniel was with the continued wait to see if he would remain seizure-free, how much it hurt Daniel to see his team-mates go off-world while he remained behind. "Same old. Same old."

"Ah, that good, huh?" Daniel murmured.

"You?"

"Same old, same old," Daniel said as the elevator reached their destination.

"You had an appointment with Leyden," Jack said as they signed out and headed into the sunlight. He looked at Daniel from the corner of his eye, trying to guess what had happened from Daniel's posture and expression. Judging from the way Daniel pulled his jacket closer around his body, it wasn't good news.

"Another month," Daniel said as Jack hit the button to unlock the truck. "He said he wants to wait another month."
"Your scans?" Jack put the key in the ignition but didn't turn it. After the last horrible seizures as the alien substance left his body, Daniel hadn't had another seizure. Jack knew Doctor Leyden and Fraiser were erring on the side of caution, but Daniel didn't seem to see it that way.

"Clear," Daniel said, and turned slightly to look out the window, effectively shutting Jack out.

Jack concentrated on driving, letting Daniel have his space. He didn't know what he could say to make things somehow better. Fraiser still insisted Daniel stay on base when SG-1 went off-world and unfortunately, for the past four weeks, Jack and the others had been spending more time off-world than on, further alienating Daniel. Jack decided he'd call Carter and Teal'c later tonight and ask them to his house tomorrow. They'd put in a couple of movies, eat pizza and otherwise spend time with Daniel.

Jack pulled into a McDonald's parking lot, glad it was the middle of the afternoon and not full. "What do you want?" he asked as he stopped at the menu board in the drive-thru lane.

"I'm not hungry." Daniel said, his voice flat and tired.

"Two Number 3 meals," Jack said to the tinny voice asking for an order. He tapped his fingers on the steering wheel as they waited at the window before accepting the bag from the clerk and putting it on the seat between the two of them.

"Have some fries," Jack said, nudging the bag towards Daniel after he reached in and grabbed a handful of fries for himself. He grinned as he noticed Daniel retrieving a few fries a few minutes later.

By the time they reached Jack's house, the fries were gone. Daniel grabbed the bag and followed Jack into the kitchen, pulling out one of the chairs and sitting in it with a thump. Jack busied himself with getting some extra Cokes from the fridge, in deference to the ban on Daniel's drinking alcohol. He sat across from Daniel, eating his burger and wishing he knew something to say.

"You done?" Jack asked as he watched Daniel pull the hamburger bun into tiny pieces.

Daniel's head shot up and he frowned. "I told you I wasn't hungry."

"I know. That's why I asked if you were done," Jack said. He pushed his chair back and stood, grabbing his own trash and then reaching out for Daniel's.

"I can do it," Daniel said in a tight voice. "Don't patronize me."

"Patronize you?" Okay, Daniel was definitely veering into the weird zone, considering all Jack wanted to do was clear the table.

His breath coming out in a huff, Daniel leaned forward, holding his head in his interlaced fingers. "You, Sam, Teal'c, even Janet and Hammond. Do you have any idea what it feels like?"

The trash forgotten, Jack hooked a chair with his foot, pulling it over to sit by Daniel. "It?"

"I thought once the seizures were over, I could live my life again. But here I am." Daniel finally raised his head. "No one even trusts me to live on my own. Maybe you think that way you can keep me safe, but you can't. It's like I'm a child who can't be away from his parents."

Jack was silent, knowing he had to choose his words carefully and realizing he had no idea what was the right thing to say. Daniel stood, taking a few steps to lean against the counter. He held his arms wrapped tightly across his middle, his body language telling Jack 'don't approach' in the continued
"What do you want me to do?" Jack finally said, turning his hands palm up on his lap. "I can't change we weren't able to rescue you. I can't change we, hell, that I, left you behind on the planet. Just tell me what I can do."

****

The edge of the counter bit into the small of his back, solid and unyielding. Jack spoke, his voice sad and low and tired. He wanted an answer from Daniel--only problem was, Daniel didn't have one. Lost in feeling sorry from himself, he didn't quite tune into the words until Jack fell silent again. And then he realized what had been said.

"I'm not mad about that," Daniel said, but his mouth went dry, and his hands started to sweat. He wasn't, was he? He'd accepted Jack and the others thought he was dead--they had no reason to believe otherwise. He'd accepted the Stargate didn't work through the long cold winter he'd spent with The People. He could feel Jack still watching him, and Daniel moved a little, trying to turn sideways.

"I'm not," he said again, as if by saying it, he could make it so.

And then in the silence that stretched and filled the kitchen, he heard Jack speaking again. "I would be."

"You're not me," Daniel said. He pushed away from the counter, taking a few steps towards the doorway. He could hear Jack clearing the table behind him, a sound of normality. He hadn't remembered any of them except in dreams, but four months of his life on Earth were gone. They said they'd missed him. Had they eaten meals without him and ever mentioned his name? Had they ever looked at the empty chair in the briefing room and pictured him sitting there? Did they miss him now or had they grown used to their three man team?

"Daniel? Hey buddy, I'm right here. You're at my house." Jack was speaking softly and Daniel remembered the tone.

He turned to face his friend before Jack reached his side. "I'm not having a seizure. I was thinking." Daniel nearly spat out the words. "But I guess I won't be allowed to do that anymore. Not without you or Sam or Teal'c waiting for me to fall over."

"Daniel."

"No, no, no. You don't trust me. Janet and Leyden think I'm going to relapse. They don't even want me to live on my own," Daniel yelled. "I'm sick of being treated as if I'm a child, as if I don't know my body. I lived with The People for four months. Four months! Without medicine and without anyone who knew my name and I survived. That should tell you something."

"You're a survivor. No one ever denied that."

"I was alone, Jack. The People took care of me, said I was one of them, but I didn't fit in. But I was alone. No one could understand my dreams, and I didn't know what they were telling me. I could have..." Daniel felt his stomach clench again and he pushed away from Jack, needing to get out in the fresh air and away.

Daniel stood on the deck, gulping in breaths. He closed his eyes, telling himself he was being irrational. He was back home with his friends. He was healthy again. He had no reason to be angry, certainly none to complain. But still...
He walked over to the ladder that led up to Jack's rooftop observatory. He scrambled up the rungs and smiled as he saw the two folding lawn chairs placed there. Daniel settled into the chair he always used and tilted his head back, looking up at the stars and taking slow even breaths.

He was home again. That was all that mattered.

****

Okay. That went well.

Not.

Jack looked down at the wet paper towel he held in his hand and wondered how everything had gone to hell so quickly. He tossed the soggy pulp in the trash can and hesitated a moment at the door. He'd touched raw nerves in Daniel he hadn't even realized existed. Or maybe he had sensed what was going on. He knew the feelings of abandonment, after all, had been left behind on a mission himself. Jack took a deep breath, opened the door, and followed his friend.

Daniel was on the roof. Jack had heard the thump of Daniel's boots overhead. But he waited, standing on the deck, staring at his backyard and listening to the hoot of an owl in a nearby tree. Anyone who thought Daniel didn't have a temper had obviously never seen the man in action, and when Daniel thought or knew he was right, he wouldn't back down, even if it took days or months to convince someone of his views. But this was different—in those last moments before Daniel had fled to the roof, Jack sensed there was more fear than anger in the whole blow-up. And now, Jack knew, Daniel was up there sitting and trying to understand what was happening, and if he knew his friend as well as he thought, telling himself he was being irrational in feeling that way. But hey, Jack could be just as stubborn as Daniel. He might not have the staying power for the long haul, but for the short term, he could give as good as Daniel any day.

"Hey," Jack said, as he stepped onto the roof.

"Hey," Daniel said, not moving other than to shift his legs a little so Jack could get past without tripping.

"Nice night," Jack commented, sitting down in his chair. He adopted Daniel's position, tilting his head back slightly and looking at the stars. Later on, there'd be time to look through the telescope, but for now, it could wait.

"Yeah."

Jack grimaced. Daniel was going to be a tough nut to crack, making Jack do most of the talking to start. He'd come up to the roof more than once for the four months they thought Daniel dead on that far distant world. He'd spent one night drinking, trying to drown the pain, although it hadn't worked. He leaned forward and looked through the scope, adjusting it slightly.

"I knew where you were. That was the hell of it," he said, drawing away from the viewfinder and motioning for Daniel to take a look. Daniel gave him a strange look but obliged, pulling away after a few minutes.

"Is that...?"

"P1R-779. Well, not actually the P part, but the star you knew as the sun," Jack said. Daniel leaned back in his chair, watching Jack. "Four months, I'd come up here and look and tell you we were coming back for you."
Daniel said nothing at the comment, tilting his head once more and looking up at the stars. Jack wondered if his confession had caused more harm than good.

"If you hadn't come back...even though you did...our paths could have crossed, and you would have never known, and I'd still be having dreams of a place where I belonged," Daniel finally said. "I could have spent the rest of my life with The People and never come home."


Daniel rubbed at his forehead. "Sometimes I wonder if I am. I don't fit anymore, Jack. You, Sam, Teal'c---you are still a team and I'm..."

"Our missing piece," Jack finished for him. He held up a hand when Daniel opened his mouth. "We're waiting for you. Why do you think there hasn't been a fourth assigned to the team?"

Shrugging, Daniel looked over at him. "I thought maybe you just didn't get around to it yet."

"You know, sometimes all those brains in your head don't do you a lick of good," Jack said. "We need you, Danny. And you will come back to the team. It might take a little while, but you'll be back."

For the first time in the past few weeks, Daniel gave what Jack considered a genuine smile. "Yeah, I will."

Tonight, after Daniel went to bed, Jack figured he'd be making a few phone calls, especially one to Fraiser. Daniel had been seizure-free for a month, maybe he could persuade her and Leyden to allow Daniel to go on a simple mission to get his feet back under him. Daniel needed SG-1; SG-1 needed Daniel. The equation was that simple and that complex.

****

Jack looked at his team assembled at the base of the ramp. Carter was grinning like a fool, nearly bouncing in her excitement. Teal'c was looking particularly indulgent as he watched Daniel adjust the straps of his pack and Daniel...well, Daniel seemed supremely unaware of the attention he was being given. The chevrons lit and all the while, Daniel tried to find room for just one more book. The wormhole formed with its customary kawhoosh. Ah, Jack smiled, that got Daniel's attention. Carter exchanged a look with her CO. Jack nodded.

"SG-1, you have a go," Hammond said.

They started walking up the ramp and Jack couldn't help sneaking glances at Daniel, whose smile was growing bigger the closer they got to the wormhole.

Teal'c and Carter went through first, disappearing into the blue.

"Jack, I..." Daniel said, stopping two steps from the Gate. "For everything. You know."

"C'mon, Doctor Jackson, time's a-wastin'. Do you know how much money you're burning?" Jack said. He brought his hand up to briefly squeeze Daniel's shoulder. "And yeah, I know."

"Last one there is a rotten egg," Daniel said, and they stepped through the Gate, ready for whatever awaited them on the other side.
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