Yesterday's Pain

by kikkimax

Summary

In an abandoned stronghold on a gloomy planet Sam and Daniel aren't quite themselves.

A little something in the spirit of Halloween.

~Nominated 2004 Stargate Fan Awards: Best Gen Drama~
As the light slowly faded from the sky Jack O’Neill inwardly cursed his old knees and the even older stone under foot. The sun finally dipped below the horizon of the alien world, casting the weatherworn stairs into ever darkening shadows. With a flip of his thumb he turned on his flashlight and estimated the remaining steps curving up the steep incline to the gloomy castle above at around twenty. He glanced up to the tower high overhead and saw an indistinct figure watching him through binoculars.

“Sergeant Garrett?” he asked, keying his mic.

“Yes sir. Welcome back, Colonel,” came the quick reply.

O’Neill sketched a half-hearted salute as he continued up the stairs. The chilly, stiff breeze pulled at him as he finally reached the top and for a moment, he heard voices floating back to him in the air. Although he couldn’t make out most of the words, the tones were clear and sharp. One was deep and angry, the other higher pitched and almost frantic. An unexpected shiver went up his spine as he picked up his pace and entered the fortress through the tiny courtyard.

The owners of the voices had been known to engage in lively discussions, dictated perhaps by the very things that made them such distinct personalities. Daniel was more willing to take things on faith, which allowed him to make his legendary leaps of logic, but Carter usually clung tenaciously to scientific theory. On the rare occasions when they actually did disagree about something, it was always in the spirit of respect and friendship. Never had he heard them shout viciously at one another, as he and Daniel had been known to do.

Maybe two days encamped in the old Goa’uld stronghold had tested their limits for each other, but Jack seriously doubted that, especially since SG-7 had been present to buffer any real hostilities. Judging by the venom in Daniel’s voice, whatever had them up in arms had to be bad. He wished Teal’c had returned with him from the stargate. Even with his odd ways, Teal’c’s calm demeanor was, well, calming, and he often found the right words when Jack couldn’t.

O’Neill stopped to catch his breath as he entered the main corridor, listening to determine the location of his teammates and hopefully catch a clue as to just what the hell was going on. Rapid footsteps echoed further up the hall and a heavy door slammed hard, the resulting thunder bounced off the stone walls throughout the castle.

“How am I supposed to get any work done with that damn woman constantly under foot?” Daniel lamented loudly.

Jack followed the sound down the central hallway already lit by torchlight and stopped outside an open door to peek into a partially caved-in room. The sagging roof had been reinforced with thick fence posts and two by fours from the dismantled remains of an outbuilding just on the other side of the wall. Daniel had been enthusiastically leading the construction before Jack and Teal’c had even left.

A familiar form on hands and knees gingerly picked through a pile of rubble in the circle of a large portable halogen light.

“What’s goin’ on?” Jack asked without preamble as he switched off his flashlight and returned it to his vest.
“Jack? When did you get back?” Daniel asked in surprise, appearing unruffled and in control with his ‘archeologist’ bandana tied securely in place. He sat back on his haunches and wiped at his brow with a forearm. “Where’s Teal’c?”

Jack frowned as he answered. “Hammond said it might take a while to find the references you wanted. Apparently, nobody can find anything in your office but you, so Teal’c’s gonna stay on Earth ‘til morning. No use slogging back here in the dark. Give me a sit rep.”

“It’s amazing, Jack. I would have thought a ruin this accessible would have been picked clean a long time ago, but that’s not the case at all,” Daniel reported excitedly. “It’s like everything is exactly where it was the day it was abandoned, which has been at least a hundred years, although the structure itself is much older than that. I’m certain it was built by the native people and then taken over since it’s so crude by Goa’uld standards. In fact, I’m thinking it was just a Jaffa-staffed outpost with maybe one or two minor Goa’ulds to run things. I doubt seriously if any of the system lords ever spent time here.

“The local inhabitants were warned generations ago not to enter the castle, some vague nonsense about a curse. But about thirty years ago they decided to risk it and commissioned an archeological survey. Then something happened that scared them into abandoning it again. I’ve barely scratched the surface…”

“Daniel,” Jack interrupted with a long-suffering grimace.

“Jack, I’m not finished sit reping,” Daniel objected.

“What about Carter?”

“What about her?” Daniel asked, clearly baffled by the query.

“That damned woman?” Jack prodded acerbically.

“I beg your pardon?” Daniel raised both eyebrows in surprise.

“That’s what you said.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did.”

“When?”

“Just now, right after Carter stormed out of here,” Jack explained in exasperation, pointing toward the hall. “I heard you.”

The confused look on Daniel’s face almost imperceptibly changed to concern as he pushed himself to his feet and gave a hasty brush of the hand to his backside as he moved closer. “How much water did you drink today?” he asked as he narrowed his eyes and studied Jack intently. “You know you need more when you exert yourself, even when the weather is mild.”

“I had plenty of water, thank you very much. I’ve been doing this a long time, ya know,” Jack exclaimed defensively.

“Uh huh,” Daniel said, taking a second to moisten his lips as he completed his assessment. “Jack, Sam’s not here.”
“What? Where is she?”

“She went to the village this afternoon with Lieutenant Perez to replenish our water supply. The well here is dry and that llama-like creature they’re letting us use can only carry so much. We’ll have to haul it in at least every other day, assuming we can stay for a few more days?” he asked hopefully. At Jack’s nod he continued. “They’re going to stay in town tonight and find out more about the local history for me.”

“You think it’s safe?”

“Yeah, absolutely. Major Kantor agrees.”

Jack took in the information as he looked around. “Who were you talking to?”

“I wasn’t talking to anyone. Everyone’s asleep except for whoever’s on watch right now,” Daniel assured. “It’s only dark for about seven hours a night this time of year.”

“So why aren’t you asleep?”

“Come on, Jack, our time is limited and I’m the only trained archeologist on this trip. I’m just putting in a little overtime,” Daniel explained with a shrug. “Besides, I can’t seem to sleep here anyway so I might as well get something done.”

“Well, knock it off,” Jack ordered. “You’re starting to talk to yourself.”

“No, I wasn’t. But do you know why the locals won’t come near this place?”

“No,” Jack answered cautiously.

“Apparently there was a murder/suicide here during that first archeological survey, a man and a woman. Folklore claims their voices can still be heard here at night.”

“I thought you didn’t believe in ghosts,” Jack scoffed.

“I haven’t heard a thing,” Daniel replied complacently.

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Jack wandered down the hall, stopping near the end when he heard soft snoring coming from one of the rooms. “Kantor?” he called out as he tapped on the half open door knowing the occupant was either the Major or the final, unaccounted for member of SG-7, Senior Airman Bricks.

“Yes, sir,” a sleep muffled reply answered in the dark.

“Sorry,” Jack muttered. “Just checkin’ in. Everything okay while I was gone?”

“I suppose so, sir.”

“You suppose so?” Jack echoed, surprise coloring his tone.

There was movement in the room and an old-fashioned lantern finally sputtered to life, lighting a small circle next to the bed. “I don’t know how you work with them, sir,” Kantor offered sincerely. “They’re like two little kids.”

“Yeah, well… scientists,” Jack said with a shrug.
“It’s not that, sir,” Kantor quickly amended. “It’s the constant bickering. I have to say, I always heard what a tight-knit group SG-1 is, but I’m not finding that to be the case at all, Sir.”


It was Kantor’s turn to shrug. “I can’t really blame Doctor Jackson. I mean she drives him crazy with her constant nagging. I think that’s why he asked her to go to the village to talk to the locals. I think he just wanted some peace and quiet for a while.”

“Huh.”

Kantor yawned. “Um, there’s an empty room two doors down on the left,” he hinted, the flickering lantern light dancing eerily on his dark face.

“Right,” Jack said with a guilty grin. “Get some sleep, Major. You can wake me for the last watch.”

“Yes, sir. Good night, sir.”

“Um, Major?” Jack asked hesitantly, stopping in the doorway.

“Sir?”

“Do you ever hear anything around here at night? Voices? Footsteps?”

There was a long pause as Kantor turned out the lamp. “If I didn’t know better,” he began hesitantly. “I’d swear this place is haunted.”

“Good night, Major,” Jack said softly as he turned to go.
The empty room was empty for a reason Jack decided. There was a narrow, shuttered window, but the unwelcome draft came from a large crack near the ceiling. Intermittently, it developed into a slightly more than refreshing breeze and played havoc with his lantern. After fashioning a makeshift curtain over the hole with his rain gear, he bypassed the musty cot for a relatively clean spot on the floor to spread out his bedroll. As Daniel had pointed out, long days and short nights marked the time on the temperate planet and O’Neill knew he should probably try to get some sleep.

They had discovered definitive proof of Goa’uld activity almost immediately after arriving at the old stone fortress three nights prior. O’Neill hadn’t been around long enough to settle in because he and Teal’c had headed back to the gate early the next morning to report the find and request more time for the mission. That gave the rest of the team plenty of time to settle in, but now that he was back, Jack wanted to get a feel for the setup. Even though he knew Daniel was an old hand at the practical side of a dig and he was sure Kantor had handled the military aspects, ultimately it was his responsibility.

Things looked right on the surface, but Jack couldn’t shake the uneasy feeling that niggled at the back of his neck. Daniel and Carter had both been in hog heaven, chattering animatedly to each other about the importance of the find. It was hard to believe they weren’t getting along now.

As he returned from his nocturnal recon, he noticed a glow coming from the room where Daniel had been working. With a sigh he moved down the hall to once again try to put the archeologist to bed. “Daniel,” he called reprovingly as he reached the door.

“Jack,” Daniel answered in the same tone without looking up.

“I thought I told you to go to bed.”

“No, you told me to knock it off because you thought I was talking to myself. Since I wasn’t, apparently you’re the one who needs sleep.”

O’Neill snorted in mild amusement at his friend’s reasoning. “Look…”

“No, Jack, you look,” Daniel interrupted impatiently, jerking his head up. “This is the first time I’ve had to work uninterrupted since we got here and I’d like to take advantage of it. I won’t be able to sleep anyway so you might as well leave me alone and let me do my job.”

“Carter’s really giving you a hard time?” Jack asked shrewdly.

Daniel looked shocked, but tried to cover it. “Of course not,” he lied unconvincingly, wincing at the look of disbelief on Jack’s face.

“Come on,” Jack pressed, “tell me what’s been goin’ on.”

“I’m not sure,” Daniel offered after a minute, fidgeting with the brush in his hand. “All of a sudden she’s developed this mother-hen-from-hell act. The constant hovering is driving me nuts. She’s worse than you are.”

“No way,” Jack teased.

“Way,” Daniel assured unenthusiastically. “I’d just appreciate being treated like an adult. I know my limits. I’ll eat when I’m hungry and I swear I’ll try to sleep when I’m tired.”
Jack reluctantly nodded his understanding. As usual, time was limited. They were lucky to have someone as dedicated and hard working as Daniel, who had unwillingly become an expert at hit-and-run archeology. “I’ll talk to her,” he offered at last.

“Thank you,” Daniel breathed in relief. “Now go to bed. You look like hell.”

Jack chuckled in agreement, feeling like he’d run a marathon. “Have fun,” he called over his shoulder as he turned to leave.

“I am,” Daniel replied distractedly as he flicked the brush once to dislodge the residue on it and got back to work.

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“Damn it, Daniel! I can’t believe you,” an all too real voice shouted in the hallway, waking Jack from a restless sleep and chasing away the last vestige of a hazy, somehow disturbing dream. He couldn’t quite make out the muted reply as he opened his eyes. The room was almost fully lit and he realized he hadn’t been woken for the last watch. He unzipped his sleeping bag and rolled to his feet with a groan at the protesting muscles as he headed straight for the door to peek out into the slightly gloomier hallway.

“I’m talking to you,” Carter shouted at Daniel’s back as he threw a towel over his shoulder and walked away from her. Other heads poked out of various rooms as everyone came to see what all the excitement was about.

“Carter!” Jack barked in his best command voice, bringing her up short as she moved to follow Daniel.

“Sir, welcome back,” she greeted sheepishly as she stopped mid-step and turned to face him.

“You’re back awfully early yourself,” Jack commented as he glanced at his watch. “It must have still been dark when you left the village.”

“Oh, we didn’t want to be away too long,” Sam explained. “We left early.”

“Very early,” Perez agreed unhappily as he made his way past them and down the hall. “Glad you’re back, sir. Very, very glad,” he muttered under his breath.

“What are you harassing Daniel about?” Jack asked, sparing a glare for Perez as he slipped away.

“I wasn’t… I mean, I’m just concerned. He said he was on last watch, but I think he worked all night again,” Carter explained.

“You’re back awfully early yourself,” Jack commented as he glanced at his watch. “It must have still been dark when you left the village.”

“Oh, we didn’t want to be away too long,” Sam explained. “We left early.”

“Very early,” Perez agreed unhappily as he made his way past them and down the hall. “Glad you’re back, sir. Very, very glad,” he muttered under his breath.

“What are you harassing Daniel about?” Jack asked, sparing a glare for Perez as he slipped away.

“I wasn’t… I mean, I’m just concerned. He said he was on last watch, but I think he worked all night again,” Carter explained.

“He did take last watch,” Kantor confirmed as he stepped out of his own room. “He said not to wake you because he was up anyway, sir,” he added as the colonel turned a cold stare in his direction.

“Watch means watch,” Jack lectured sharply. “Not fiddling around with artifacts or reading or writing in some damn book.”

“Yes, sir, I understand that. Doctor Jackson took a P-90 and went up to the tower. He pulls his watch like everyone else. In fact, he insists on taking his share of all the extra duties, even though he does all of the archeological work by himself.”

Jack rubbed his eyes wearily, noting how long the short night had seemed until he’d finally fallen asleep. “Well, like he’s already pointed out to me, he’s the only one trained to do it. But from now on
that’s all he does. No watch and no housekeeping duties. And we let him set his own hours,” he added looking pointedly at Carter. “Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir,” Sam answered, echoed immediately by Major Kantor.
Chapter 3

After locating and using the latrine just outside the main structure, O’Neill followed the strong smell of coffee to an enormous, and thankfully warm, room. Airman Bricks was preparing breakfast over a grated section of the huge hearth situated along the short wall. A massive kettle of water sat at the other end of the fire, heated to just short of a boil. The far corner of the long room had been sectioned off and Jack could see two pair of booted feet below a couple of olive-drab woolen blankets.

“Real eggs?” Jack asked in amazement as he peeked over the airman’s shoulder.

“Yes, sir,” Bricks assured with a smile; looking distinctly boyish with his red hair and freckled face. “The town has a great market and we managed to trade a few little trinkets for lanterns and some fresh supplies. There’s a specially designed pantry behind that wall that keeps everything cold. Major Carter is still trying to work out the technology.”

“You a good cook?” the colonel asked as he sampled a sausage link.

“Yes sir, he is,” Kantor answered as he joined them at the fireside, covering his hand with a cloth to snag the coffeepot off the flame and carry it to the table. “That’s why he always gets KP,” he teased, his dark eyes flashing with amusement.

“Is that why, sir?” Bricks asked artlessly, hiding an impish grin.

Jack laughed at the easy banter and crossed the room to check out the rigged-up clothesline.

“How can you shave without a mirror?” Garrett asked from the other side.

“Well there weren’t a lot of mirrors on Abydos,” Daniel explained with a chuckle. “It takes practice.”

“Just don’t cut your nose off,” the freshly shaved sergeant laughed as he pulled back the curtain to exit the improvised washroom allowing Jack a quick, unimpeded look into the area.

Daniel paused long enough to take a sip of coffee before finishing his task without the aid of the tiny round mirror they had mounted on the wall. As the curtain fell back into place, he began splashing water onto his face to remove all traces of the shaving cream.

Jack moved forward and picked up the blanket again. “Why’d you put the wash area in the kitchen?” he asked.

“For comfort and convenience mostly,” Daniel explained as he lathered up a washcloth and cleaned his dusty neck, chest, and underarms. “There’s plenty of room, it’s warm, and we don’t have to carry the heated water very far.”

“Yeah, but the kitchen?”

Daniel laughed. “It’s not like we’re shaving over the eggs,” he teased as he rinsed off. “Besides, it has drains. Too bad the rest of the plumbing is out of commission. By the way the big kettle is wash water; runoff from the roof. Don’t try to make coffee with it,” he said as he pulled the plug in the basin he’d been using and poured some of the hot water in the bucket next to him down the drain to rinse out the sink. He tensed and reached for his towel as he glanced past Jack’s shoulder.

Jack turned at the sound of boots on the hard floor and let the blanket fall back down when he realized Carter was unashamedly checking out the bare chest of the man behind him.
“Breakfast is ready,” Sam announced cheerfully, still looking past Jack at the impromptu curtain.

“Great,” Jack replied, placing a hand on her shoulder to steer her back to the table. “Coming, Daniel?”

“Yeah, I’ll be right there,” came the reticent answer from behind the drape.

Jack sat next to Garrett on the end of one of the benches at the lengthy table, but Sam went to the hearth to help Bricks bring over the food. Daniel ducked past the edge of the blanket tucking in his tee-shirt with one hand and carrying his now empty coffee cup in the other. He sat across from Jack and immediately refilled his mug.

“No wonder you can’t sleep,” Sam commented as she nudged Daniel over, making him move further down the bench to the next place setting.

Jack watched Daniel’s jaw clench slightly as he brought the steaming liquid to his lips and took a sip. Carter took it upon herself to generously fill Daniel’s plate with sausage and eggs.

“Sam,” Daniel protested, his annoyance clear in the one word.

“What?” she asked innocently.

“Enough,” he growled.

Carter’s eyes grew wide and she looked hurt as she sat there still holding her spoon. Daniel closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “That’s enough food,” he amended with great effort. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Sam said with a smile and dished up some eggs onto her own plate before sliding the platter across the table to Jack.

No one commented on the little scene as everyone studiously minded their own business. Jack frowned as he sat the dish within easy reach of Garrett and they both took a share before passing it on. Daniel ate silently, keeping his eyes on his plate. Carter seemed oblivious to the tension as she related her adventures in town with Perez, mostly concerning the dinner they had been served at what passed for the local hotel.

“Did you learn anything about the castle?” Daniel questioned at last, looking disappointed with the meager information Sam provided.

“Not really,” Sam said, eliciting an odd look from Perez.

“What about you, Daniel?” Jack asked. “Have you found anything else?”

“Well, not pertaining to the Goa’uld necessarily, but I did find something interesting late last night,” Daniel supplied, a spark of interest in his tired eyes. He fumbled with one of the side pockets of his BDU’s and pulled out a small, leather bound book. “It’s Gellum’s journal. I haven’t had a chance to really read it yet, but I have glanced through it.”

“Gellum?” Jack asked.

“He was the man the local government let excavate the fortress three or four decades ago,” Sam supplied as she ate.

Daniel shot her a questioning gaze. “That’s right. I though you didn’t learn anything in town?”

“Well that,” Sam said offhandedly, “But nothing important.”
Daniel grunted with displeasure. “I’d still like to hear it,” he prodded.

Carter rolled her eyes and sighed. “Gellum wasn’t really an archeologist, more of an explorer, but I suppose he was the closest thing to an expert around here,” she began. “He brought a team up from the village and they camped here, too. Apparently, he had an ill-fated love affair with the daughter of one of the town elders. When both of the lovers ended up dead, the dig was abandoned. The villagers think we’re nuts for staying here.”

“Ah, the curse… they are a tad superstitious,” Daniel allowed.

“They say on moonless nights you can sometimes see the young woman in the tower,” Sam replied pensively.

A peculiar hush fell over the table as everyone finished up, lost in their own thoughts. Daniel managed to eat all the food on his plate and stood to help clear the table.

Sam took the plate from his hand. “Colonel’s orders,” she said quickly before he could protest.

Daniel crossed his arms over his chest and turned a subtle pout in Jack’s direction in silent query.

“Uh, yeah. I want you to focus on the dig and leave the chores to us,” Jack explained, irritated at having been put on the spot before he could speak to Daniel alone.

“What about watch?” Daniel asked with annoyance. “I can still do watch, right?”

“Night’s are short. I think we can manage without you.”

Daniel bit back a protest. “Fine,” he mumbled edgily, making his way to the door.

“Daniel?” Sam called after him.

He stopped but didn’t turn around. “Yes?” he asked, almost completely masking the lassitude in his voice.

“I’d really like to go over that journal with you.”

Holding out the book as he pivoted, he shrugged one shoulder. “You can read it now. I’m going to try to sleep for a while.”

“You’re going to sleep now?” Sam complained.

“You were just yelling at me for not resting,” Daniel ground out between clenched teeth.

“I know, but I was gone all night and now you’re just gonna run off to bed? What about me?”

Daniel’s mouth fell open and he struggled for something to say. “What?” he finally managed, glancing around at the startled and embarrassed faces staring at them.

“Nothing,” Sam spat out as she brushed by him and out the door without taking the journal from his outstretched hand.

“Sorry,” Daniel muttered to the room in general, apparently mortified as he followed much slower in her wake.

Jack turned in astonishment to Major Kantor. “This is what’s been going on since I left?”
Kantor nodded. “Yes sir. That was mild, by the way. At least he didn’t yell back at her this time. I think she’s wearing him down.”

“And you don’t see that there’s something wrong with this picture?” Jack asked, not even attempting to hide his frustration.

“We just thought it was a lover’s spat,” Kantor explained awkwardly.

“Uh, that would be no,” Jack quickly assured. “Why would you even think that?” he questioned, feeling his agitation growing by leaps and bounds.

The members of SG-7 glanced around at each other apprehensively. “Well, we were surprised,” Perez finally admitted. “I mean, we’d all heard about you and Major Carter, but…” he trailed off at the double glares from the colonel and his own commanding officer.

“Do you always listen to gossip?” O’Neill hissed dangerously.

“No sir.”

“Sir,” Kantor interrupted austerely, “We all saw Major Carter sneaking out of Doctor Jackson’s room the first morning we were here, right after you and Teal’c left. We assumed they had spent the night together. We just thought that maybe she read more into the experience than he did.”

“You assumed,” Jack repeated acidly.

“Yes sir. It certainly explained their behavior.”

“For the record, Daniel was still up in the tower on watch when we left,” Jack started angrily before biting back the rest of the scathing retort on the tip of his tongue. “Oh, for cryin’ out loud. Forget it,” he grunted instead, turning on his heel and marching out of the room.

“I can’t believe you brought that up,” Kantor said, taking a swat at Perez’s head with his cap as soon as the colonel was out of sight.

“Sorry sir. But everyone’s heard the rumor about Colonel O’Neill and Major Carter. They all but admitted it when the Tok’ra brought that machine to test everybody.”

“Can it,” Kantor ordered gruffly. “I don’t want to hear another word about it.”

“Yes sir,” the group responded as one.
Feeling a little better after a shave and a bird-bath, Jack went back to his quarters to deposit his kit before starting to explore the castle in earnest. He had found a myriad of things to keep SG-7 busy and they had scattered to do them, not wanting to further incur his wrath.

“Carter,” he groaned as he rounded the corner and found his 2IC leaning in the doorframe of Daniel’s room. “What are you doing?” he whispered.

Sam jumped and looked appropriately abashed before turning to meet his eyes. “I was just checking on him, sir,” she explained softly.

“And?”

“He’s asleep,” she admitted, turning back to stare into the room.

Jack sighed and looked over her shoulder. Daniel lay on his cot with one arm over his eyes and the other resting lightly across his belly. His boots were off and his socked feet were crossed at the ankle. A soft snore sounded in concert with the rise and fall of his chest.

“I’m worried about him,” Sam offered without a prompt.

“Why?” Jack asked quietly.

She shrugged, but kept her eyes on the sleeping man. “He hasn’t been himself since we’ve been here. He’s hardly slept at all and has to practically be fed.”

“Sounds like Daniel in ‘mad scientist’ mode to me,” Jack ventured. “You’re the same way when you really sink your teeth into something.”

“No, not like this,” Carter argued, shaking her head. “He’s been irritable… standoffish. Out right resentful.”

“Listen, I know they’re way off base, but if it affects the team, I’ve got to ask…” Jack started tentatively, prodding her farther down the hall so they wouldn’t disturb Daniel now that he’d finally decided to rest.

“What?” Sam asked, meeting his eyes with a wary expression.

“Kantor is under the impression that you and Daniel are a hot item.”

“Sir!” Sam exclaimed with a startled laugh.

“I told ‘em you weren’t,” Jack began. “But I have to say, all that fussing at breakfast didn’t do a lot for my case.”

“He hasn’t been eating,” Sam reiterated in exasperation. “Besides, you do it, too.”

“I know,” Jack said, holding his hands up in supplication. “I understand that part, but you acted like a nagging wife when he said he was gonna take a nap.”

Sam flushed and looked at her boots. “I’m sorry, it’s just…”

“Just what?”
“Well he promised he’d translate some of the technical stuff for me this morning if I’d go to the village and ask around about this place last night. He keeps putting me off. It’s like he doesn’t want to be in the same room with me. I guess I just got a little frustrated that he stayed up all night and now he wants to sleep instead of help me.”


“Sir?”

“Never mind. Look, do me a favor and turn down the intensity a little, okay?”

“Yes sir,” Carter replied with resignation.

Jack nodded, happy with the resolution. “I’m gonna take a good look around. Wanna come with?”

“Uh, no sir. I’ve got a few things I can do even without the translations.”

“Okay. Let Daniel sleep,” he warned.

“Sure,” Sam smiled and moved towards the opposite end of the hall.

Jack watched for a second, then nodded again and followed the hall back to the main entrance where he’d seen the narrow staircase that lead up to the tower. He fought the urge to look back as a wave of the now familiar uneasiness settled in his gut.

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Sam waited until the colonel was out of sight before returning to Daniel’s room, slipping in and closing the door. Daniel stirred and dropped the arm from his face but didn’t wake. Holding her breath, Carter tiptoed over to the cot and located the journal under his eyeglasses. She picked up the spectacles and delicately folded them before lying them back down on the table and taking the old leather-bound tome. Settling on the floor next to Daniel, she watched him sleep for a while before opening the book to read.

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“Sir,” Kantor announced himself as he climbed the last few steps to join O’Neill in the tower.

“Major,” Jack muttered noncommittally, looking through his binoculars for any sign of Teal’c, although he knew it was still a little early.

“It’s a great view.”

Jack quirked an eyebrow, but didn’t bother to answer as he scanned the lush countryside.

“I wanted to apologize for my team… for this morning,” Kantor pushed on bravely.

With a weary sigh Jack lowered the glasses and motioned for the major to join him at the high stone ledge. “That damned Zantac… Xanax… whatever,” he muttered under his breath before turning fully to the major. “Let me be clear. I care about my team… my whole team. Surely you can understand that.”

“I do, sir.”

“And this thing between Carter and Daniel… she’s just trying to look after him,” Jack tried to explain. “As a team, we’ve sort of drifted apart lately and I suppose Daniel’s gotten the short end of
the stick for the most part. He’s had a rough time recently and we haven’t really been there for him. I think Carter feels guilty about it and maybe she’s just overcompensating. And God knows Daniel doesn’t take smothering well.”

“You know them both pretty well, huh, sir?”

Jack snorted and finally allowed a tight grin. “Daniel’s easy. He usually wears his heart on his sleeve. I only worry about him when he’s quiet for too long. The real secret to commanding Daniel is to never let it get down to a battle of wills. He may tell you what you want to hear, but he’ll do it his own way and in his own time. He’s got something they don’t teach you at the Air Force Academy; pure, unadulterated pigheadedness.”

“Doctor Jackson’s stubborn?” Kantor said with a smirk. “I hadn’t noticed.”

“Right,” Jack drawled sarcastically, knowing Daniel’s doggedness was legendary within the SGC. “Carter’s a little harder to read, but she’s a damn fine officer. She follows orders to the letter, even when she thinks you’re wrong. You may get a ‘with all due respect, sir’, but you can count on her every time. And she’s got a big heart too; she just doesn’t want anyone to know about it ‘cause she thinks it makes her look soft. But yeah, I know my team. I won’t even get started on Teal’c…”

“Colonel O’Neill,” Bricks shouted from down below. Footsteps clattered up the steps until a red head appeared around the bend. “Sir! Come quick. They’re at it again.”

“I was sure Daniel would sleep for a while,” Jack grumbled as he pushed away from the wall.

“I think Major Carter woke him up,” Bricks explained hastily, leading the way back down the circular staircase. “He was really upset. I… I think he knocked her down.”

“What?” Jack asked in disbelief, increasing his speed and overtaking the airman when they reached the bottom of the stairs. He raced towards the sleeping quarters and rounded the corner to find the other two members of SG-7 huddled over Sam in the hall.

“Ow,” she cried as Perez slipped her boot off.

“Carter, what happened?” O’Neill snapped as he dropped down beside her, pushing Perez’s hand out of the way and examining the swollen ankle himself.

“It was an accident,” Sam explained as Jack probed the area and then gently bent the foot one way and then the other. “Ow! Sir!”

“I don’t think it’s broken,” Jack stated cautiously. “But we should probably tape it up. Do you need to head back to the infirmary?”

“No sir, it’s not that bad. Besides, it really would be sore after that long walk to the gate. I don’t want to leave.”

“So, I repeat, what happened? I thought I told you to leave Daniel alone?”

“Um… I… he must have been having a bad dream. He woke up yelling and when I touched him, he pushed me back, I fell over his pack and twisted my ankle. I’m sure he didn’t mean to hit me, sir.”

“Garrett, get that fixed up,” Jack ordered as the sergeant opened the first aid kit.

“Yes sir. Major?”
“Not too tight,” Sam warned as she stretched her leg out towards him.

Jack looked at Kantor before getting up and going to the door of Daniel’s room. “Hey,” he called out softly. Daniel glanced at him with troubled, red-rimmed eyes and then moved to stare out the window. Pulling the door closed behind him, Jack followed and stood at his shoulder. “What happened?” he asked.

Shaking his head, Daniel kept his gaze fixed on the valley below. “Why won’t she just leave me alone?” he asked in a rough voice.

“What?”

“I can’t even sleep without her bothering me now.”

“She said you were having a nightmare and she came to check up on you.”

“No,” Daniel argued. “She had a knife. She was trying to kill me.”

“Paranoid much?” Jack asked sardonically, eliciting a cold, hard stare that shocked him with its intensity. “Daniel, you were dreaming.”

Daniel narrowed his eyes in concentration and slowly shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

“But you’re not sure?” Jack questioned carefully.

“It felt real,” Daniel muttered, turning back to the window and rubbing a hand across his throat.

“You’re exhausted,” Jack offered worriedly. “I have it on good authority you haven’t slept more than an hour at a time since you got here.”

Daniel frowned as he moved to sit on his bunk, stooping to pick up the journal from the floor as he went. “Is Sam okay?”

“She turned her ankle when she fell, but she’ll be fine.”

“I think you should send her back to Earth,” Daniel said solicitously as he thumbed through the old book.

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” Jack replied. “She’s not hurt that bad. But if you want me to, I’ll talk to her again about giving you some space. Good enough?”

“No,” Daniel answered unexpectedly. “I really wish you would send her home. Or send me home; right now, I don’t care which. I’m losing it here.”

Jack sat next to him on the cot and pulled the journal out of Daniel’s grasp to still his hands. “Cut the crap, Daniel. I need you to tell me straight up what’s going on,” he ordered.

Finding his glasses and slipping them on, Daniel paused to moisten his lower lip. “Every time I go to sleep, I have these dreams… about Sam.”

“Oh?” Jack inquired, raising both eyebrows.


“How bad could they be?”
“I keep dreaming about putting my hands around her throat,” he paused for a minute as he involuntarily clenched his fists out in front of him in mute demonstration, “and squeezing the life out of her. Jack, I’m scared. I know I’d never intentionally hurt Sam, but now I apparently don’t know when I’m dreaming and when I’m awake. I really thought she was trying to kill me.”

“It was just a dream,” Jack reiterated.

“What if it wasn’t?” Daniel asked desperately. “What if… what if I snap or something? Jack, I don’t want to hurt anybody, especially not Sam.”

“I know that, Daniel. You’re just tired and stressed out and Carter’s been an enormous pain in the ass. But don’t worry, I’ll set her straight. Now please, try to go back to sleep,” Jack requested politely as he got up and handed over the journal. “That’s an order,” he added with the ghost of a smile.

Daniel nodded wordlessly but hesitated before lying back down. He put the book on the crate next to his cot and placed his glasses on top.

Jack stood and watched until he actually closed his eyes. “I’ll make sure no one bothers you,” he promised quietly as he left.
Chapter 5

The hall was empty so Jack meandered back to the room where they were storing all the unearthed goodies. As expected, Carter sat at a table full of alien gadgets with her ace wrapped foot propped up on another stool. Each piece of equipment had a corresponding index card with Daniel’s unique script scrawled across it.

“I thought you said he hadn’t translated these yet.”

“I guess he did it last night,” Carter muttered shamefacedly. “I didn’t check before I jumped on him about it this morning. There was actually very little text, but he offered possible uses and some pretty astute observations, considering he’s not an engineer.”

Jack nodded absently as he read one of the cards next to a silver, egg-shaped device. “What’s this do?”

“I’m not sure, but it’s emitting a low-level EM field I haven’t been able pin down just yet. Daniel found it the first night we were here.”

“Yeah… about Daniel.”

“Sir?”

“Where exactly were you when you heard him call out?” Jack queried judiciously.

Sam pursed her lips, but didn’t answer right away.

“The truth, Carter. You were already in the room, weren’t you? Because if he lashed out within the first few seconds of waking up; that’s understandable, in fact that’s about what you’d expect of someone in the throes of a nightmare. But if he was already awake when you got there and still thought you were trying to kill him, then I’d say he’s delusional and we probably need to get him back to Doc Fraiser ASAP.”

“I was there,” Sam admitted reluctantly. “I went to get the journal and I was right beside him when the nightmare started.”

Jack sighed. “Something’s not right here,” he finally stated. “Neither of you are acting like yourselves.”

“What are you saying, sir?” Sam asked uncertainly.

“I’m saying… and I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I’m saying there’s something spooky going on. I just want to finish up and get the hell out of here.”

“You’re buying into the theory the castle is haunted,” Carter accused with an amused smirk.

“I didn’t say haunted,” Jack argued adamantly, holding up a finger. “But don’t you hear anything at night?”

“No.”

“No shouting? Or doors banging shut? Footsteps?”

“I haven’t heard anything, but Perez told me that he has.”
“Kantor, too,” Jack agreed. “I’ll have to ask the other two.”

“What about Daniel?”

Jack shook his head. “No, he said he hasn’t, but he did tell me he’s having bad dreams. You?”

“I’ve slept like a baby except for…” Sam’s eyes got big and she paused.

“Except for what?” Jack urged.

“Um, the first night we were here I think I took a walk in my sleep.”

“Really?”

“I’m not sure, but I woke up in Daniel’s cot early the next morning and I don’t know how else I would have gotten there.”

“Ah,” Jack muttered cheekily. “Cozy.”

Sam’s cheeks went red with a combination of anger and embarrassment. “He wasn’t in it at the time. I assume he was at the dig or on watch.”

“Oh. Well SG-7 thinks you were in his room with him all night.”

“Of course, they do,” Sam groaned leaning her forehead into her hands. “It seems I’m getting quite a reputation.”

“You and me both,” Jack agreed. “Don’t worry about it. It’ll blow over.”

“With all due respect, Colonel, it’s different for women. You and Daniel will get an ‘atta boy’ or a nudge, nudge, wink, wink, but I’ll get labeled as a slut and it’ll stick with me for the rest of my career.”

“I’ll speak to Kantor.”

“Thank you, sir, but don’t waste your breath. It’ll just add fuel to the flame.”

Jack nodded resignedly. “In the meantime, why don’t you stay away from Daniel?”

“No!” Sam refused adamantly. “I mean, I’m not going to avoid Daniel because of what they think.”

“Carter,” Jack cut in. “Daniel needs some space right now and I’m ordering you to stay away from him.”

“But sir!”

“Except for meals and other communal events, I want you to keep your distance while we’re here.”

“I’ll try.”

“You’ll try?” Jack asked incredulously, “As in ‘you’ll try’ to obey a direct order?”

Sam wrung her hands. “I can’t help it, sir. It’s like a compulsion. Ever since we got here, I just have to be near him. I can’t explain it.”

“And you don’t find that in itself suspicious?”
“What? You think I’m under some kind of alien influence?”

“Or something.” Jack admitted reluctantly.

“Or something,” Sam repeated, staring off into space.

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Daniel watched the ceiling for a while, but every time he closed his eyes, he could see Sam’s lips began to turn a pale blue as he cut off her airway, his grip tightening by increments until her eyes rolled back into her head. He could almost feel the soft skin of her neck in his hands, and it terrified him. He’d never been as irritated or frustrated by anyone as he had been by his dear friend since they’d entered the old stone bastion. But he swore to himself, he didn’t want to harm her, not even when she was at her most annoying.

He gave up on sleep and rolled over to put on his glasses. Picking up the book, he propped his head on one hand and thumbed through the delicate pages with the other until he found the page where he had stopped earlier.

At last I have been granted permission to establish a party to investigate and explore the ancient palace to the North. It seems the Holy Elder’s daughter has become quite fond of me and insisted on accompanying us. I have told her of my beloved, but she listens not and becomes angry when I try to tell her of my approaching nuptials. Helena is fair of face and will make a fitting bride to a lucky man someday. I, however, love another.

Biting his lip as he read, Daniel scanned the next several pages looking for any other references to the woman. Skipping pages of incredibly detailed and fascinating references, he focused on Gellum’s personal passages for the time being, even though he wasn’t sure why. “Helena,” he whispered to himself, unaware he had done so.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to concentrate as that woman confounds my every turn. She has taken to entering my chamber as I sleep and finds no fault in her actions when confronted. Confessing her abiding love to me daily, she remains persistently underfoot. I am quickly reaching the limits of my patience with her. I have resorted to hurtful words, but she turns a deaf ear to me and speaks of her dowry until I become enraged. The battles grow worse each day.

Helena is a monster in disguise. I grow weary of her constant attentions and have spoken at length to her father about her behavior. He has promised to improve the situation and has summoned her to the village. I pray he won’t be too harsh with her, even though I myself have more than once dreamt of strangling her with my bare hands…

“Oh, God,” Daniel muttered, taking a moment to consider the implications of what he had just read. He licked absently at his lip as he turned the page to the very last entry of the diary.

Helena is angry with me. Her father banned her from the fortress and yet she still came. After a final plea to the Holy Elder, I have learned that he has beaten her terribly with a strap and those who have seen the wounds pronounce that she will be excessively scarred. I refuse to feel guilty and pray at last this matter is over. Tomorrow I have plans to move the excavation to the next room. I must rest now as the light grows dim.

Clutching the journal to his chest, Daniel rolled onto his back and once again contemplated the grayness of the ceiling. Initially, he’d felt foolish for confiding his dreams to Jack, but it had also lifted the burden of responsibility from him. Even if they stuck him back in a padded room as soon as his foot struck the ramp, he had done what he could to prevent a potential tragedy.
The revelation from Gellum’s journal that perhaps the dreams were not conjured up out of his own dark psyche inexplicably made him feel better. Suddenly, the villagers didn’t seem so irrational after all, he thought vaguely as he finally drifted off to sleep.
“Colonel O’Neill,” Garrett’s voice emanated from Jack’s radio.

“Go ahead.”

“I’ve spotted Teal’c across the valley.”

“Already?” Jack asked. “Damn, he’s making good time. It’s not even noon yet.”

“Twelve minutes ‘til,” Sam said with a smile as she checked her watch. “I wish we could bottle that Jaffa stamina. Are you going out to meet him?”

“Uh, no. Why?”

Sam shrugged. “I just thought you might like to get a little fresh air. I would if my ankle wasn’t so sore.”

“Uh huh,” Jack allowed, not buying it for a minute. “Let’s head on up to the chow hall. By the time we get there it’ll be time to eat. What do you guys usually do for lunch?”

“Don’t get your hopes up, sir. We just eat MREs for lunch.”

“Oh,” Jack muttered in disappointment. “I guess we should just let Daniel sleep then. Come on, you can lean on me.”

“I’ll come up in a little while. I just want to finish this…”

“We can peek in on Daniel on the way if that’s why you’re trying so hard to get rid of me.”

“I can’t help it,” Sam complained defensively as she lowered her foot and accepted the arm Jack offered for support.

“Yeah, yeah, I know, another victim of that Jackson charm.”

“Obviously you haven’t been around him lately, sir,” Sam rejoined as she limped along, letting the colonel take some of her weight.

“Not pleasant?”

“Remember that time Janet decaffeinated him?”

“That bad?”

“Worse,” Carter stated grimly.

“Okay, I find that hard to believe,” Jack argued softly as they shuffled slowly but steadily along the hall.

When they finally reached Daniel’s room they could hear the snore from the hall.

“Sweet.”

“Open the door,” Sam requested, just short of an order.
“Excuse me?”

“Please open the door, sir.”

“Why? He’s obviously asleep. And trust me, he’s breathing just fine.”

“Sir, I just need to see him,” Sam pleaded. “Just for a minute.”

“Carter, just tell me you do recognize this as aberrant behavior,” the colonel insisted.

“Please.”

“Oh, for crying out loud,” Jack swore as he cracked the door minutely.

Sam leaned into it eliciting a loud creak as it opened further. Her expression softened as she caught sight of the lanky archeologists asleep with his glasses askew, mouth open, and his arms crossed over the journal tucked tightly against his chest.

“Carter,” Jack warned as she tried to move forward, tightening his grip on her arm.

“We can’t let him sleep with his glasses on,” she stated reasonably.

“Yes, we can. He does it all the time.”

“What if he bends the frame?”

“Then he’ll just have to unbend it won’t he?”

“I won’t wake him up,” Sam swore as she tried to pull away.

“You already have,” Daniel grumbled gutturally, his voice deep with sleep.

“Dammit,” Jack spat out under his breath. “Sorry Daniel.”

“It’s okay,” Daniel said as he swung his feet out of the cot, pushing his glasses back into place. I wanted to talk to you… both or you, anyway.”

Sam’s face lit up at being included and she practically pulled the colonel along with her as she hobbled over to take a seat next to Daniel on the cot. “Sorry, I needed to get off my foot,” she lied deftly, playing on Daniel’s sense of guilt for the injury at the same time.

“The villagers may be right about this place,” Daniel began, ignoring Sam as she leaned into his personal space. “I think that somehow we’re re-creating whatever happened here that lead to the murder and subsequent suicide.”

“I don’t think so,” Sam argued, slipping her hand into Daniel’s.

“Really? So, have you suddenly fallen in love with me or just lost your mind?”


“Look at her, Jack,” Daniel implored, lifting their entwined hands. “Is this the Samantha Carter you know?”

Jack shrugged his eyebrows, but didn’t disagree.

“Sam? What are you feeling right now?” Daniel questioned seriously.
Carter rested her head against Daniel’s shoulder and didn’t pull back when he tensed. “I’m confused. I want to be with you even though I know you don’t want me here. And on top of that, I realize that what I’m wanting isn’t… genuine. It’s almost like it’s not even me wanting it. What about you?”

“I want to wring your neck,” Daniel blurted out. “It’s taking every ounce of my self control not to physically push you away right now. But like you, I don’t think I’m feeling my feelings at all. Maybe the natives aren’t wrong about this place.”


“Exactly how many times have you seen Ghost Busters, sir?”

“I’m thinking more along the lines of disembodied spirits,” Daniel corrected seriously. “I think they’re trying to possess our bodies. At least Sam’s and mine.”

“Daniel, you don’t believe in ghosts,” Jack reminded him.

“Yeah, Jack, and once upon a time, you didn’t believe in little green men either.”

“They’re gray,” Jack corrected automatically. “Oh. Right. I see your point.”

“I’ve been reading Gellum’s personal entries,” Daniel began. “He and Helena were not lovers. She was obsessed with him to the point of, I don’t know, medieval stalking I suppose, and he dreamed of strangling her. I guess that’s what finally happened. Of course, there’s no entry after the murder. Maybe he couldn’t live with himself after he killed her.”

“You don’t think it could be a coincidence?”

Daniel turned a baleful look Jack’s way and finally shook Sam’s hand free as he jumped from the cot and began to pace furiously. “Do you honestly think I want to visit the funny farm again? Why would I tempt fate if I wasn’t certain something is going on? I’m telling you, Jack, if you don’t take precautions, I could do something we will all regret.”

“Calm down,” Jack ordered with a wince. “Nobody’s goin’ to the funny farm.”

“Gellum, please,” Sam added dolefully.

Jack and Daniel both froze and stared at her in shocked surprise.

“What?” she asked.

“What did you call me?” Daniel questioned frostily.

“I called you… I said… Gellum,” Sam whispered, placing a hand over her mouth. “Oh my God.”

“See…” Daniel jabbed his finger toward Sam as he gave Jack a panic-stricken look.

“Yeah,” Jack said slowly. “I caught that. That’s a little… freaky.”

“What do we do?” Sam asked, eyes growing wide.

“What’s the absolute minimum time you need to finish up here?” Jack questioned Daniel.

“Uh, I think I can wrap things up in two days.”
“Two?”

“Yeah, Jack. Minimum. This isn’t the meaning of life stuff you hate so much. This may be the technology we’ve been looking for.”

Jack sighed and removed his cap to run a hand through his hair. “Carter’s not going anywhere on that bum ankle for a couple of days anyway. And Frankly, Major, it’s too far to carry you.”

“Yes sir. I agree.”

“O’Neill,” Teal’c intoned as he came to stand in the doorway.

“Teal’c! Good, you’re back. I’ve got a job for you,” Jack greeted, relieved to see the big Jaffa. “You must be tired.”

“I am not.”

“Oh. Well, I want you to watch Daniel while he sleeps anyway.”

“I don’t want to sleep now,” Daniel objected grumpily. “In fact, if we’re going to leave in two days, I’ve got a lot of work to do.”

“Daniel, you need to rest,” Sam replied solicitously.

“I was trying to rest and you kept waking me up,” Daniel snapped, moving once again to stare out the window moodily.

“What has transpired here?” Teal’c inquired as he narrowed his eyes at his squabbling teammates.

“Long story,” Jack stated wearily. “You take Sleeping Beauty and I’ll take Snow White. The object is to keep them as far apart as possible for the next two days. Daniel can explain it to you.”

Teal’c nodded as O’Neill helped Sam to her feet. Daniel stayed at the window until they were out the door.

“I’ll see you later, Daniel,” Sam called back to him despondently.

“Not if I see you first,” Daniel mumbled under his breath. “Hey, Teal’c, I’m glad you’re here,” he added as he crossed back to his cot to sit and put his boots on.

As he unhooked his pack, Teal’c assessed his friend. “You do not look well, Daniel Jackson.”

“No, I’m fine,” Daniel sighed unconvincingly as he struggled with the laces, “Just a lot on my mind.”

“You have had bitter words with Major Carter.”

“Well… not exactly. Sorta. I mean, we’ve been fighting, but I don’t really think it’s us,” Daniel explained badly, rising to his feet.

Teal’c raised an eyebrow as he located the large reference the archeologist had requested.

“Oh, thank you,” Daniel said as he took the book and started out the door. “If you don’t mind, there’s something I want you to take a look at, then you can rest while I dig.”

“Very well,” Teal’c agreed as he followed. “If you will tell me what has occurred.”
“It’s a long story.”

“It appears that we have time.”
“Bricks,” Jack called as he helped Carter into the makeshift commissary, “we have a standard toolbox, right?”

“Yes sir,” Bricks acknowledged as he split open a new box of MREs.

Carter settled on the bench and helped him pull back the flaps before digging through and reading the contents stamped on each dark brown plastic pouch. She selected two.

“How hungry?” Jack asked cheekily.

“Um… Daniel likes the spaghetti,” Sam explained timidly, then moved to put the package back in the box. “Of course, I should probably let him get his own.”

“Does the toolbox come with some kind of latch in it?” Jack queried Bricks with a defeated sigh.

“I’m sure there’s one in there.”

“Good. How about a padlock?”

“Standard issue, sir,” Bricks assured with a questioning gaze.

“Okay. After lunch I want you to put a lockable latch on the outside of Doctor Jackson’s door.”

“What?” Sam blurted out.

“If you don’t mind my asking, sir…” Bricks began.

“Just do it. Then give me the lock and key.”

***

Daniel scooted over under the half-buried column to make room for Teal’c who crawled in beside him and rolled over onto his back until they were lying side by side. Maneuvering his flashlight, Daniel spotlighted the area on the now horizontal column he wanted to show him.

“Ja’nok varin,” Teal’c said immediately as he pointed out the symbol Daniel had been unable to get a handle on.

“Varin, that’s… that’s hurt. No, no, it means… pain,” Daniel reasoned to himself out loud. “Ja is pre or prior, I think, and nok is… now?”

“Ja’nok is yesterday,” Teal’c provided smoothly.

“Yesterday’s pain?” Daniel questioned, his brow furrowing in concentration. “What does that mean, exactly?”

“It is a warning,” Teal’c explained. “In the old regiment of Sokar, it was customary to place a curse on a stronghold when it had to be abandoned, especially when it might fall into enemy hands.”

“Yes, see the villagers have spoken of a curse, but they’re not really clear about it. They do think the castle is haunted.”
“It is said when Ja’nok varin is invoked that what is past is remembered in the hearts of those who fall to its power.”

“So, you believe in this curse?” Daniel asked carefully.

“I believe as I believe in all Goa’uld magic. If it exists, there must be some form of technology behind it.”

“Right,” Daniel agreed happily. “Right! There must be something here that the Goa’uld left behind that’s affecting us. It’s probably the same thing that set off Gellum and Helena to start with.”

“Indeed. I do not believe you would otherwise disagree with Major Carter so vigorously.”

“Teal’c?” Daniel said quietly as an ominous creak preceded a tiny stone tumbling down the retaining wall directly over them. A miniature landslide of dust and small rocks followed. “Maybe we should get out of here.”

Wordlessly, Teal’c rolled to his knees and carefully began to back out of the shallow, makeshift cavern. Daniel held his breath while he waited his turn, swallowing when his flashlight abruptly shorted out. Another tiny trickle of rocks rained down on him from the formerly stable area above him.

“Daniel Jackson,” Teal’c called out softly once he was free.

“On my way,” Daniel muttered breathlessly, turning over onto his stomach to begin inching his way out. A loud crack sounded nearby and he managed to roll back into the relative safety offered by the fallen column just as the support beam gave way.

***

“What was that?” Jack asked urgently, jumping up from the table at the loud crash echoing throughout the ancient citadel.

“I don’t know, sir,” Kantor answered, already moving out the door. “We usually only hear stuff like that at night.”

“Daniel!” Sam shouted fearfully into her radio.

“Stay here, Carter,” Jack ordered, racing after Kantor and followed by the rest of SG-7. “Teal’c! Daniel!” he called as they rushed through the sleeping quarters and towards the main dig area.

“O’Neill!” Teal’c bellowed back.

Overtaking Kantor, Jack pushed open the heavy wooden door to the partially collapsed room to find it in much worse shape than before. “What happened?” he questioned, stopping to stare in dull horror at the single, half-buried boot protruding from the rubble where a dusty Teal’c knelt.

Carefully, one stone at a time, Teal’c began removing the remains of the toppled structure. “Stay back,” he warned. “The area is extremely unstable.”

“If we work from the outside,” Kantor panted, pointing towards the now clearly visible sky, “we can reinforce the ceiling beams with some rope and maybe prevent another slide.”

“Do it,” Jack said tersely, not bothering to look as SG-7 disappeared back out into the hallway. Distantly, he could hear Kantor giving orders. “Daniel!” Jack called, ignoring Teal’c’s advice and
moving closer.

“I was unable to elicit a response,” Teal’c informed him solemnly, moving over to allow O’Neill to join his efforts.

“I thought he had this thing shored up pretty good,” Jack swore guiltily, pushing a large rock away from the camouflage-covered leg beginning to take shape in the ruins.

“As did I.”

“Daniel!” Sam cried out from the door.

“Dammit, Carter,” Jack barked without slowing the steady excavation. “We don’t have time for any nonsense right now.”

“Yes sir,” she answered nonetheless moving further into the room.

“Just stay there,” Jack ordered, stopping to glare at her.

“I will,” Sam promised, using the wall next to the door for support as she moved over to sit at the crate that served as Daniel’s improvised desk.

A muffled cough sounded from under the rocks and Jack patted the now exposed knee. “Daniel,” he called anxiously.

“Colonel! We’re ready to throw some ropes through to you,” Airman Bricks shouted from the gaping hole up above.

“Just a minute,” Jack yelled back. “Daniel?”

Another cough and then the lower body began to squirm. “Daniel Jackson! Do not move,” Teal’c instructed loudly.


“Kay.”

“Sir?” Bricks called again from on top of the wall.

“He’s alive,” Jack reassured as he climbed to his feet. “Go ahead and toss down those ropes.”

“Heads up,” Bricks advised, letting fly with the first of several nylon cords.

Teal’c continued to dig while Jack rigged the roofing beams and threw the leftover lines back to Bricks who straddled the top of the exposed wall and passed them back to his own team on the outside to tie off. Not totally convinced it was worth the effort, Jack returned to Teal’c’s side just in time to encounter a trembling hand snaking its way out from under the rubble.

“Daniel,” Jack called, giving the hand a squeeze.

“Jack. I’m okay… just get me the hell out of here,” Daniel replied, squeezing back tightly.

“O’Neill,” Teal’c rumbled, uncovering a large, flat section of the ceiling that rested on Daniel’s shoulder and effectively pinned him to the column.
“Ouch,” Jack muttered.

“On the contrary, sir,” Sam corrected, suddenly at Jack’s side. “I think that piece probably saved Daniel’s life. It looks like it’s caught on something a little further back.”

“Are you sure?” Jack questioned doubtfully, “We need to move it, but it’s likely to bring down the roof whether we’ve got it roped off or not.”

“Guys?” came a disembodied complaint from deeper in the debris.

“We’re working on it, Daniel,” Sam assured with a shaky voice.

“If we were to build a fulcrum, could we not lever the stone away?” Teal’c asked.

“That’s a good idea,” Sam agreed quickly. “Yeah, yeah, that’ll work. Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Bricks,” Jack called. “Stay there, but send your team back inside. Tell them to bring another one of those fence posts. Hang on, Daniel,” he added.

“Don’t worry, I’m not goin’ anywhere,” Daniel promised with a slight cough followed by an ominous groan.

“Daniel?”

“Not… feelin’ so good.”
Sam gave the setup one last glance. “That should do it, sir,” she declared.

“Okay, wait in the hall.”

“Just be careful with his neck and back…”

“Carter!” Jack ordered, taking his place beside Teal’c in the most precarious position, ready to slide Daniel out from under the slab.

Biting back a frustrated comment Sam did as she was told, realizing she’d not only be in the way with her injury but also be another source of stress. But she didn’t go far.

“Daniel? You ready?” Jack questioned, not expecting an answer since the fallen man hadn’t uttered a peep during the whole set up of the hoist. He glanced grimly at Teal’c, who nodded that he was prepared as he wrapped his hands securely around Daniel’s upper thigh.

“Kantor?” Jack asked.

“All set,” the Major acknowledged for the three members of SG-7 who stood anxiously by the thick lever they had managed to wedge into a crack between the stone and the column.

“Bricks?”

“Yes sir,” the young man answered quickly from his post on the wall. With gloved hands, he held the other end of the rope that wrapped around the center beam of the still standing part of the roof then down and around the flat slab to form a crude pulley. “Let’s do it.”

“On three,” Jack instructed taking a second to flex his fingers before sinking them into the material of Daniel’s pants leg just above the knee. “One… two… three!”

SG-7 pushed down on the lever with all their might while Bricks winched the stone from up above. For several long, tense moments, nothing happened. The room filled with the sound of exhaled grunts and soft swear as the team gave it their all. Suddenly the stone budged slightly, sending a shower of minuscule to midsized debris raining down on Jack and Teal’c. Not wasting a second, they used the slight opening to slide Daniel free and as far out of danger as possible before covering his battered body with their own until the small landslide diminished.

“Get him out of here,” Kantor panted. “I think the whole thing might come down when we let this thing go.”

With the best seat in the house, Bricks tied off the rope and watched anxiously as Teal’c rapidly hefted his unconscious teammate into a fireman’s carry and vanished through the door with him, the colonel hot on his heels.

“Now!” Kantor ordered, jumping back with his men as they released the lever. Miraculously, the rest of the remains stayed put. “Clear the area,” he told Perez and Garrett, who, concerned for the injured archeologist obeyed immediately.

“Can you get down okay?” the Major looked up to ask Bricks.

“No problem, sir,” the airman replied, studying the scene below him intently. “But I think I might
have found something.

“What?”

“Major,” Bricks began solemnly as he dropped to a sitting position with his legs on the inside of the destroyed room. “That retaining wall should have held.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Doctor Jackson knew what he was doing and me and Perez helped him. Sir, that support was solid…” he trailed off uneasily.

“Just spit it out, airman,” Kantor ordered impatiently.

“I’m not trying to accuse anyone or anything. I’m just saying what if someone cut the support beams?” Bricks sighed and rubbed his chin with a dirty glove. “When we went to put on the latch on Doctor Jackson’s door like the Colonel ordered, I noticed the cordless saw was missing from the tool kit.”

“So?”

“I just found it, sir,” Bricks stated despondently, pointing toward an overturned table directly across from him. “There’s no reason for it to be in here.”

Kantor turned to stare at the piece of bright yellow plastic protruding from beneath the trash piled in the corner next to the broken furniture. “Wait there for a minute,” he ordered, cautiously making his way to the edge of the debris field. He knelt at the base of the first support beam, which had been knocked forward with the weight of the ceiling. “This one’s okay,” he muttered.

“Be careful, sir,” Bricks counseled. “That mess is unstable.”

“Well we’re gonna have to look at it sometime,” Kantor grumbled, rolling his eyes at the airman’s worried tone. Crawling forward warily, he edged closer to the next beam. “I’m gonna have to dig a little. Sit tight and watch my back.”

“Yes, sir,” Bricks answered nervously.
Chapter 9

Sam jumped back against the wall as Teal’c bolted out of the room with their injured friend. He headed straight for the first of the sleeping quarters, which happened to be Daniel’s own room. Jack shot her a grim glance as he passed, but didn’t slow down. She hobbled along after them as fast as she could, ignoring the pain in her throbbing ankle and using the wall to bear some of her weight. After a quick peek to make sure Daniel really was alive, she continued hurriedly to her own room to get a first aid kit.

Just as Teal’c prepared to lower him to the cot, Daniel gasped sharply and started to struggle. Jack caught him by the shoulders and supported his upper body, easing the transition. In a mild panic, Daniel fought their efforts to lay him flat.

“Can’t breathe,” Daniel protested, sounding frightened as he resisted the hands urging him down.

“Okay, okay,” Jack soothed, allowing him to stay upright but keeping one hand on him just in case. “Let’s have a look,” he added, awkwardly unzipping Daniel’s jacket with his other hand.

With a stifled cough Daniel calmed down and attempted to help, sliding one arm out of the sleeve, but stopping short on the other with a pain filled hiss. “Stop, stop!” he cried, grabbing his shoulder in agony with his free hand, overbalancing and threatening to topple into the floor. Strong arms steadied him from both sides.

“Where is the pain, Daniel Jackson?” Teal’c queried as he positioned himself behind him on the cot with one leg on each side, forming an improvised human headboard for Daniel to lean back against. Meanwhile Jack delicately extracted the remaining arm from the dusty jacket.

“Right shoulder mostly, head, ribs… ow, right hip but not too bad,” Daniel stated objectively, taking inventory of his aching body parts.

“Yeah,” Jack agreed with a sympathetic wince, dropping the jacket to the floor, happy to note no overt bleeding except for the small scratch under Daniel’s right eye. “That shoulder took the brunt of the slab that hit you. You were in and out so I’m guessing you’ve got a concussion, too.”

“Let me see,” Sam instructed breathlessly as she scrambled back into the room once again oblivious to her own injury. Without waiting for a response, she pressed herself between Jack and Daniel tearing the first aid kit open.

“Get away from me,” Daniel snarled, moving as far back on the cot as he could until Teal’c’s bulk halted his efforts.

“Daniel,” Sam scolded softly, “you’ve got a cut on your cheek. I need to clean it.”

“Easy,” Jack advised both of them, then turned to Carter. “Just back off a little and let us get a look at the rest of the damage first.”

“I will speak to your father at once,” Daniel warned, angrily pointing a finger of his good hand into her face.

“Jacob?” Jack asked in confusion, already pulling Daniel’s tee-shirt free of his waistband.

“No,” Sam muttered disbelievingly, stepping back a tiny bit. “I think he means Helena’s father.”
“Who?”

“It’s in the book,” Sam explained with an uneasy sigh. “Gellum’s lover.”

“No! We were never lovers,” Daniel argued, shaking his head dazedly.

“Oh. So definitely a head injury then,” Jack quipped. “Daniel, let’s get this off, too.”

“How is he?” Perez asked immediately as he and Garrett clambered into the room.

“A little confused,” Jack informed them as he helped Daniel pull his tee-shirt over his head and off his uninjured side. “Banged up some but all in all, I think we got lucky this time.”

“What happened?” Daniel asked suddenly aware again. He grimaced as Jack peeled the soft cotton material away from the abraded skin of his right shoulder and down his arm.

“Did I mention confused?” Jack replied glibly, frowning as he inspected the swollen, already bruising skin. “How’s your breathing now? Any easier?”

“What? No, it’s fine,” Daniel assured, cradling his ribs. “It just hurts a little when I try to… inhale or… exhale. Ow!”

“Sorry,” Jack mumbled contritely, easing off on his palpation of Daniel’s ribs. “You might have a crack here. Can you lift that arm?”

“Probably. But I don’t really want to.”

“Humor me,” Jack urged.

Daniel gritted his teeth and managed to raise his arm almost parallel to the floor. “Satisfied? You want me to try a few pushups, too?”

Sam winced, but stayed out of the way.

“What’s your name?” Jack asked, ignoring the sarcasm and continuing his primitive assessment.

“Daniel Jackson,” the patient responded, giving in to the examination with a long-suffering sigh. “Did anyone find my glasses?”

“Sorry, Daniel,” Perez informed him regretfully, “I think they’re still under the rubble.”

“How many fingers am I holding up?” Jack persisted, holding two fingers in front of Daniel’s face.

“Two?” Daniel responded, obviously guessing.

“Try three,” Jack lied.

“Really?” Daniel asked, giving himself away as he reached out to count the digits with his hand.

“Is your eyesight impaired, Daniel Jackson?” Teal’c inquired quietly.

Squinting hard Daniel glanced around the room. “Yeah,” he admitted. “About like usual when I get hit in the head with a roof.”

“Concussion,” Jack reiterated, gingerly tilting Daniel’s head back to peer into his eyes. “Pupils look okay though,” he added settling back to think out loud. “Not too bad considering, but I’ll feel a lot
better after Fraiser checks him out.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to move him to the gate, sir,” Sam interjected. “With a possible rib fracture, we would risk puncturing a lung if the trip gets too bumpy.”

“I’m okay,” Daniel muttered, closing his eyes and leaning back against Teal’c. “I don’t need to go back. By the time we’re finished here I’ll be able to make it back on my own.”

“Daniel, you need more medical attention than we can provide out here,” Jack objected strenuously.

“Really, Jack, I’m okay,” Daniel assured.

“Well that’s good to know, Daniel, ’cause not more than a couple of minutes ago you thought you were that guy,” Jack informed him bluntly.

“Who?”

“Jell-O.”

“Gellum,” Sam corrected.

“Yeah, him. Whatever, the dead guy,” Jack explained impatiently. “Look, Daniel, I don’t know what’s going on here, but I do think we need to stick to plan A and get the hell out of here like yesterday.”

“Ja’nok varin,” Daniel cut in, opening his eyes and leaning forward.

“What?”

“Teal’c knew the symbol I couldn’t translate. It’s Ja’nok varin. It’s a Goa’uld curse; it means ‘yesterday’s pain’.”

“Yesterday’s pain?” Jack asked dubiously as he pried the first aid kit out of Carter’s hand. “What kind of curse is that?”

“Ja’nok varin invokes the suffering of the past,” Teal’c explained.

“Yeah, that,” Daniel replied thumbing over his shoulder at Teal’c. “We think it must be a Goa’uld device of some kind. It has to be something Sam and I came into physical contact with, especially since we’re the ones who seem to be the most affected.”

“So, no ghosts then,” Jack replied, trying hard not to sound relieved.

“The effects are sporadic, so maybe the device is malfunctioning,” Sam decided showing more interest.

“All we have to do is figure out which doohickey it is and shut it off,” Jack surmised, pouring peroxide on a gauze pad. “Hold still.”

Daniel flinched slightly but allowed Jack to clean the wound, glancing uneasily at Sam as she hovered nearby. “Maybe Teal’c can identify some of the other stuff… a process of elimination of sorts.”

Teal’c nodded his agreement as Kantor and Bricks entered the room.

“Glad to see you made it, Doctor Jackson. I guess the Colonel was right, you do have a hard head,”
Kantor teased.

“The hardest,” Jack agreed, wiping the rest of the grime off Daniel’s face to keep it out of the newly cleaned cut.

“Can I speak to you a minute, Colonel?” Kantor asked, his casual tone belying the seriousness on his face.

“Sure,” Jack replied guardedly. “Someone put some antibacterial cream and a bandage on this and clean him up a little. Someone not you, Carter,” he added as Sam moved forward to take the tube from his hand.

Sam nodded tightly and moved away; clearly not happy with the order. Much to Daniel’s relief Perez took the cream and went to work.

Jack watched the scene for a second then followed Kantor out into the hall. “What’s up?”

Kantor looked uneasy as he crammed his hands into his pockets and looked around. “At least two of the support beams on the retaining wall have been cut,” he said bluntly. “I don’t know how many more, the rest are buried too deep and it was just too unstable to keep digging around in that mess.”

“Someone got in here?” Jack asked incredulously.

“No sir. Whoever it was used the skill saw out of our own tool box.”

“That doesn’t mean one of the natives couldn’t have…”

“Colonel, the locals won’t come near this place,” Kantor argued. “It couldn’t have been Teal’c because he wasn’t here and none of my people have any reason to want to hurt Doctor Jackson.”

“You think Daniel was the target?” Jack questioned.

With a deep sigh Kantor nodded his head. “He’s the one who was most likely to be under there so unless he did it to himself, that leaves you and Major Carter.”

Jack’s mouth fell open and he felt the heat of his anger crawl up his face. “Neither one of us has any reason to want to hurt Daniel either; despite what you and your team think,” he managed in an even tone.

“That’ll be for General Hammond to decide, sir. In the meantime, I’m assigning one of my men to watch over Doctor Jackson.”

“Fine,” Jack growled. “He’s in no shape to travel just yet so I’m gonna send for Fraiser. By the way, Daniel thinks there’s some kind of device here affecting our behavior.”

“Whatever you say, sir,” Kantor agreed unhappily. “I’ll send Garrett for the doc.”

With a nod, Jack turned and went back into the room, glad to see Daniel patched up and calmly laying on his back. “Feel better?” he asked.

“Mmm. Tired,” Daniel replied sleepily.

“Listen up, people,” Kantor replied. “Bricks, you stay here with Doctor Jackson. Remember to wake him up every couple of hours.”

“Yes sir.”
“I’ll stay,” Sam volunteered.

“No, Carter,” Jack argued. “You and Teal’c need to find that alien thingamabob and shut it off. Go now.”

Sam accepted Teal’c’s arm and trundled along with him as she muttered under her breath, the words ‘yes sir’ not easily picked out. She halted their forward momentum in the door and stopped to look back at Daniel.

“He’ll be fine,” Jack swore, noting the even rise and fall of Daniel’s chest.

“Nothing but Tylenol,” Sam lectured.

“I know the drill, ma’am,” Bricks assured with a grim smile.

“Garrett,” Kantor ordered, motioning the sergeant out into the hall. “I know it’s getting late, but I want you to head back to the SGC and bring back a medical team. Report in every half-hour until you get out of range.”

“No problem, sir,” Garrett agreed, heading off to his room to get his pack.

Jack leveled an assessing gaze at Kantor. “Show me those beams,” he requested, taking one last look at Daniel before heading back to the scene of the crime.
Chapter 10

Jack cursed inwardly as he fingered the splintered wood and traced it back to a small but well-placed cut in the beam. The angle and placement of the slice showed forethought and a solid understanding of the physics involved in bringing down the house with minimum effort. He glared at Kantor’s ‘I told you so’ expression.

“So exactly when do you suppose I managed to cut this?” Jack asked nonchalantly, but with an edge of irritation.

“I didn’t say you did, sir,” Kantor replied stiffly.

“You think it was Carter.”

Kantor shrugged. “Somebody cut it.”

“Yeah,” Jack had to agree. “Let’s get out of here before the rest of the roof comes down.”

***

Teal’c slowed as they approached the impromptu lab until he stopped dead, dropping his supporting arm away from his much smaller teammate.

“Teal’c?” Sam asked expectantly, still holding on to him for balance. “What’s wrong?”

Placing a hand over his symbiote pouch, the big man swayed for a moment. “Something is not right,” he managed cryptically.

“You feel something?”

“Indeed.”

“And you haven’t felt this before now?” Sam questioned, falling easily into scientist mode.

The Jaffa dazedly shook his head and returned his hand to cup Sam’s elbow to help her travel the rest of the way into the room. Glancing around, his gaze came to rest on the silver, egg shaped device.

Sam climbed onto the nearest stool, freeing Teal’c to rummage around the mechanisms scattered about the room. His attention returned almost immediately to the fist-sized, slightly dented egg.

“Well that thing is definitely doing something,” Sam supplied. “I’m just not sure what.”

Very carefully, Teal’c lifted the object. Immediately he blanched. With a groan, he dropped to his knees, let the egg fall to the floor and clutched at his pouch with both hands.

“Colonel,” Sam called into her radio. “Something’s happening to Teal’c!”

Jumping off the stool, Sam scrambled on hands and knees for the egg as it rolled under the table. When she caught it, she sat back on her haunches and turned it every which way as she frantically examined it. “There’s got to be a way to shut this thing off!”

A huge black hand wrenched the object from her and hurled it against the nearest wall, sending silver shrapnel in every direction. They both ducked under the table as the debris rained down around
“That’ll do it,” Sam muttered in disbelief as she lifted her head to have a look at the damage. “Teal’c? Are you okay?” she asked, placing a hand on his unsteady shoulder from where he still knelt on the floor.

“What’s goin’ on?” Jack blurted out the second he raced into the room. “Teal’c?”

Releasing a shuddering breath, Teal’c lumbered to his feet. “I am well again,” he pronounced as he reached down to help Sam off the floor.

“What happened?” Sam asked anxiously, aware of the group gathering just inside the room.

“Once again,” Teal’c began stoically, “I was given the image of my father’s death.”

“Yesterday’s pain,” Daniel’s voice observed from behind the crowd in the doorway.

“Daniel,” Jack and Sam admonished simultaneously as they turned to look for him. SG-7 parted to reveal the injured archeologist leaning heavily on Airman Bricks.

“Daniel Jackson, should you not be resting?” Teal’c finished the collective sentiment.

Bricks looked around sheepishly. “We heard a commotion.”

“That’s how it works,” Daniel continued, taking no notice of the disapproving looks. “The device prompts a Jaffa’s symbiote to conjure up painful memories. Don’t you see? Yesterday’s pain.”

“What about us?” Sam asked doubtfully.

“I don’t think it was ever meant to work on humans,” Daniel guessed with a shrug that he immediately regretted. “Ow.”

“That’s it,” Jack decided. “Back to bed.”

“Sam?” Daniel called out even as he was gently being escorted from the room. “How do you feel now?” He clamped onto the doorframe with his good arm preventing his physical removal.

“I feel fine,” Sam answered after a second’s thought.

“Yeah, me too,” Daniel murmured absently.

“You know,” Jack replied, stopping to think. “It is kinda like a dark cloud lifted… or something.”

“Yes sir,” Kantor agreed quickly. “I feel it, too. The gloom is gone.” A chorus of ‘me too’ went around the room.

“So, the device was meant for Jaffa but had an inadvertent side effect on humans?” Daniel queried.

“Could have been the frequency,” Sam surmised. “It might have been working on our nervous systems at a level we weren’t consciously aware of, creating some sort of emotional imbalance. We’ve seen it before.”

“But it’s over now,” Jack decided, nudging the remnants of the device with his boot. “Carter, off that ankle and Daniel, back to bed,” he ordered.

“Are we okay?” Sam asked, paying no attention to the colonel as she limped over to Daniel.
“We’re good,” Daniel smiled, opening his good arm to her. She slipped in gingerly for a hug, careful not to hurt him.

“Bed,” Jack growled leaving no room for discussion.

Daniel allowed Kantor and Bricks to help him back down the hall. “So now there’s no reason we have to leave in a big hurry,” his voice drifted back to them.

Jack blew out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “That’s what he thinks,” he replied. “Doc Fraiser will be here tomorrow and if she says Daniel can travel, we’re out of here.”

Sam knelt and began to gather the scattered bits of egg innards.

“Want a dustpan?” Jack teased.

“We still might be able to learn something from the broken pieces,” Sam retorted thoughtfully, selecting several of the larger pieces.

“She’s back,” Jack grinned at Teal’c as he stooped to help with the recovery process. They gathered as much as they could and placed the jagged scraps on top of the table to piece together.

Kantor frowned as he stepped back into the room a little later, adjusting his radio as he walked.

“What’s wrong?” Jack questioned seriously, looking up from the techno jigsaw spread out in front of him.

“Garrett’s overdue for his second check-in and I can’t raise him.”

“Perhaps Sergeant Garrett is out of range,” Teal’c offered.

“If it was you, maybe,” Jack pointed out. “None of the rest of us can move that fast. Garrett?” he said, switching on his own radio, “Report.”

Several more tense moments went by before the telltale static interrupted the silence.

“Here sir,” came the breathless reply after another couple of seconds. “I’ve got a situation.”

“Go ahead,” Jack requested, exchanging a worriedly glance with Kantor.

“There’s a group of about twelve Jaffa advancing on me,” Garrett reported. “They’ve got me trapped in a narrow valley about three miles north of the castle.”

“Hold tight, we’re on our way,” Jack ordered tersely. “Let’s go.”

“It has been some time since Jaffa last visited this planet,” Teal’c replied grimly, following as Kantor and Perez sprinted for their weapons.

“Maybe we set off some kind of alarm,” Sam surmised as she hobbled towards the door with the men.

Jack turned back and seated her firmly on a stool. “You’re gonna sit this one out, Major,” he instructed on his way out the door.

“But…”

“No buts, you’ll only slow us down,” Jack called out from the hall.
“Yes sir,” Sam answered unhappily to the empty room.

“Bricks, Garrett’s in trouble,” Jack warned, stopping quickly in Daniel’s room. “Get your gear.”

The young man dashed out of the room without question.

“Jack?”

“Daniel, you’re not going.”

“I realize that,” Daniel ground out painfully as he forced himself up from the cot where he had just settled. “Lock the door.”

“You really think that’s necessary?” Jack asked impatiently.

“I hope not, but I’d rather err on the side of caution.”

“Fine,” Jack muttered gruffly, backing out of the room. “We’ll be back as soon as we can.”

“Be careful,” Daniel offered as Jack pulled the door closed. He tensed for a second at the sound of the latch and then the click of the lock. As the booted feet thundering down the hall receded, he lowered himself gently back to the cot.
“Daniel?” Sam called some time later, tapping softly on the door. “I got here as fast as I could.”

“I’m okay, Sam. You should probably get off that ankle.”

“I can’t believe he locked the door.”

“I asked him to,” Daniel explained. “I just didn’t want to take any chances.”

There was a long moment of silence. “You would never hurt me,” Sam insisted at last.

“Not on purpose,” Daniel agreed quietly.

“I hate this,” Sam’s voice proclaimed as she thumped the door, whether with hand or foot Daniel wasn’t sure. “I’m really sorry about before. I know I got on your nerves,” she added with a slight laugh.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Daniel assured. “I’m sorry I pushed you. I think that might really have been me.”

“You were dreaming.”

Daniel didn’t voice his doubts as he tried in vain to find a comfortable position, stifling the tiny grunts of pain each time he moved.

“Have you taken anything?” Sam asked intuitively.

“Bricks gave me some Tylenol.”

“That didn’t help at all?”

With a sigh, Daniel decided to be honest. “About like putting out a forest fire with a squirt gun.”

“I wish I could give you some morphine, but we can’t risk a sedative with a head injury,” Sam sympathized.

“I understand,” Daniel replied with a fatigued edge to his tone. “I don’t want to go to sleep and not wake up. Don’t worry, I’m fine.”

“Sure you are,” Sam scoffed lightly. “Just try to rest. I’ll be right here.”

“There’s nothing you can do for me from out there. You might as well go wait someplace comfortable.”

“No,” Sam argued, “I think I should stay close just in case. I still need to wake you every couple of hours anyway.”

“Sam…”

“Daniel, I can get in if the need arises.”

“Yeah, I know,” Daniel snorted. “Promise me you won’t pick the lock.”

“Sam?” he prodded after an extended pause.
“I won’t unless I have to,” Sam agreed reluctantly.

“Good enough,” Daniel whispered, closing his eyes. “Gonna rest for a while,” he muttered hazily.

***

Once they reached the bottom of the three hundred some odd steps leading down to the valley from the castle, the group headed away from the village and towards the stargate. Half an hour later as the sun began to set, the sound of staff weapons being leisurely fired lead them straight to where Garrett was holed up in a rocky ravine.

The Jaffa seemed to be making a sport of knocking rocks down from the ledge above their victim with precision shots. Intermittently, Garrett could be heard taunting them from deep cover where they would probably never reach him without actually going in. Every now and then the sergeant punctuated his words with a round from his P-90. Essentially, until he ran out of ammo the situation was a standoff.

Splitting up, the rescue team silently took positions above and around the unsuspecting Jaffa at the lip of the small box canyon, marking them as easy targets. When Jack gave the signal, all hell broke loose. At the sound of the gunfire, the Jaffa spun around, firing their staff weapons wildly as they were cut down.

“Hold fire,” Jack called out after the brief skirmish was over. A deathly silence hung in the air along with the acrid smoke of the battle. “Garrett?”

“All clear, sir,” Garrett announced, clamoring into view down below as he began checking for survivors.

“Are you alright?” Kantor asked solicitously.

“I thought my goose was cooked there for a while, sir,” Garrett admitted with a grin as everyone but Bricks, who kept watch from the top, scrambled down the rocky incline to the bottom

Grimly, Jack looked over the scene. “We’ll head back to the castle tonight just in case there’s any more of ‘em. First light we’re out of here.”

“What about Doctor Jackson?” Garrett asked.

“Daniel’s as tough as they come,” Jack assured guiltily. “He’ll be okay tonight. Tomorrow we’ll send to the village to borrow a cart or a wagon for the trip to the gate for him and Carter.”

“Yes sir,” Kantor answered for the group.

“Sokar’s?” Jack asked, turning to Teal’c.

“Indeed,” Teal’c confirmed, looking up from his examination of one of the dead Jaffa.

“Sokar’s dead and Apophis is gone… so who did these guys work for?”

“I do not know,” Teal’c said thoughtfully. “It is possible they were stationed on a remote outpost and were unaware of Sokar’s demise.”

“But we tripped the alarm and they came running. Peachy.”

“Colonel,” Kantor prodded.
“Yeah, let’s get back,” Jack agreed. “Teal’c, take point.”

Teal’c nodded and headed off unerringly up the shadowy trail.

***

A shadowy form loomed over him as he fumbled for his glasses. When he slid them on, the indistinct figure morphed into Sam. She held a boot knife threateningly in her hand as she approached. With one swift move she lunged at his throat. Instinctively, he blocked the attack and shoved her away with all his might. The knife clattered to the floor and slid under the skirt of the ancient bed across the room as Sam fell over his pack...

“Daniel,” Sam called out fearfully, kicking the door loudly. “Please answer me. Come on Daniel, wake up!”

“What?” Daniel questioned groggily as he startled awake. “Sam? What’s wrong?”

“Thank God,” Sam sighed in obvious relief. “I’ve been trying to wake you up for the last ten minutes. You wouldn’t answer me.”

“Dreaming,” Daniel muttered blearily, “Just a dream.” As he rested his head back against the cot, he became aware of the almost completely noiseless squeak and clank of metal working against metal.

“Hang on, I’ve almost got it.”

“No!” Daniel objected, now more alert as he realized Sam was picking the lock. “Sam, please stop. I’m… I’m still having dreams.”

“What?”

“Don’t open the door,” Daniel reiterated, straining to sit up and light his lantern in the now dark room. “I’m fine. Please, Sam, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Daniel, it was just a dream.”

“I don’t… I wish I could believe that,” Daniel swore. “They should be back soon, right?”

“Yeah,” Sam admitted. “They’re on the way back now. I just talked to the Colonel.”

“Just… just wait ’til they get back. Promise!”

“Okay,” Sam agreed hesitantly. The lock thunked against the door as she released it.

“Oh,” Daniel echoed, lying back down wearily. “Just a dream,” he told himself softly. Slowly he turned his head to the side as a stray thought entered his mind. His eyes were drawn to the bed across from him and a chill went up his spine.

Forcing his battered body back up to a sitting position, he clutched his shoulder and slid off the cot. He hit the floor with a grunt.

“What? What are you doing?”

“Nothing,” Daniel lied as he painstakingly scooted along the floor, too stiff and sore to even try to cover the sound.

“I’m coming in,” Sam announced, once again working the lock.
Daniel disregarded the warning as he eased onto his back and attempted to lift the fragile bed skirt. The ancient material literally disintegrated between his fingers and the age’s old dust made him cough painfully. Growing increasingly impatient, he simply tore the fabric away enough to see into the nest of cobwebs and dust bunnies. Much to his dismay, the light from the lantern glittered on a steel blade. Remaining flat, he reached under the bed with his left arm.

“Got it,” Sam crowed in triumph. Suddenly the door swung open and Sam limped into the room. “Daniel,” she cried out as soon as she spotted him on the floor.

“Stay where you are,” Daniel threatened, brandishing the knife. “It wasn’t a dream. You did try to kill me.”
Chapter 12

Jack tried to tune out the hushed conversation behind him as he walked, carefully making his way along the moonlit path. He understood why SG-7 seemed a little proprietary towards Daniel, as this wasn’t the first field-trip they’d taken with him. He let the discussion slide until Perez’s voice rose a little too loud and their CO cut them off, negating any pretense he hadn’t heard them.

“Pipe down,” Kantor warned.

Jack stopped suddenly and whirled around on them. Almost immediately Teal’c was at his elbow. “You got something to say, Perez?”

“They’re just concerned about Doctor Jackson, Colonel,” Kantor tried to intervene.

“Maybe they should be,” Jack allowed. “What’s the problem?”

“I just don’t understand, sir,” Perez stammered, “About the lock.”

Realizing it probably had looked bad for him to order a lock placed on the door of the person SG-7 considered to be his romantic rival, Jack backed off his defensive stance. “Crap. You do know about the murder suicide, right?”

“Yes sir,” everyone agreed as they gathered around.

“Well Daniel thinks somehow that scenario is posed to repeat itself.”

“Yes sir, we know that,” Bricks acknowledged. “Doctor Jackson told me his theory while I was sitting with him. But why lock him up and not her?”

“So he doesn’t strangle her, that’s why,” Jack explained.

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Perez insisted. “Gellum didn’t kill Helena. She killed him.”

“What?” Jack asked, his blood running cold.

“That’s what we learned in town,” Perez noted. “She slit his throat and then jumped from the tower.”

“Why didn’t you say anything before?” Jack questioned irritably.

Perez shrugged. “I was gonna tell Doctor Jackson, but then everything started happening. Besides, Major Carter has known all along.”

Jack sighed as he snatched off his cap to run a hand through his hair. “But that damn egg has been destroyed. That’s where all the trouble started. Right?”

“As far as we know,” Kantor said quietly.

“Let’s go,” Jack decided. “T, pick up the pace.”

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“I’m not crazy,” Daniel insisted fretfully, seriously doubting his own words even with the proof firmly in his hand.
“Nobody thinks you’re crazy,” Sam soothed, holding up her hands in supplication. She slid down the wall to sit on the floor. “Why don’t you give me the knife?”

“Just stay there,” Daniel muttered wearily. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You’re not going to hurt me. You might hurt yourself if you keep waving that thing around though,” Sam teased gently. Raising up to her knees she slowly approached him. “Teal’c smashed the Goa’uld device, Daniel. It can’t influence us anymore.”

“What if that was incidental? What if we’re dealing with two separate issues?” Daniel questioned passionately, gesturing absently with the knife as he spoke. “I mean, it doesn’t make sense that an alien device would affect only the two of us that way. Does it? How could it? Bricks handled the egg and so did Perez but neither of them was affected the way we were.”

“What about Teal’c?”

“Well a symbiote carries the genetic memory of its race and Jaffa live for such a long time… there’s bound to be painful memories shared by the two. That part I can understand.”

“You really think this place is haunted?” Sam asked facetiously.

“Yes. No. I don’t know,” Daniel groaned, lessening his self-protective posture even more. “I can’t seem to think straight right now.”

“It’s okay,” Sam replied calmly. “Come on; let’s get you back to bed.”

Daniel chewed on his bottom lip as he stared at the ceiling. “Yeah, okay,” he agreed at last, lowering the knife completely.

“I’ll throw this out the window,” Sam suggested with a smile as she relieved him of the knife.

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” Daniel started, feeling a little silly about his earlier outburst.

“The physical pain was nothing compared to the wound you made in my heart,” Sam murmured, suddenly straddling Daniel as he lay on the floor.

Daniel gasped as her knees squeezed his tender ribs. Grappling for the knife, he held her off with his left hand. “Sam!” he called frantically. “Fight it! Sam!”

Using both hands, Sam forced the blade closer to his throat. With a growl of pain, Daniel added his injured right arm to the fray pushing her back in increments. “Sam!” he yelled again, trying desperately to get through to her.

“Why couldn’t you love me?” she shrieked, tears flowing down her cheeks. “I would have made you so happy.” With an extra burst of strength, she forced the blade low enough to puncture the skin just under his chin.

“Helena!” Daniel shouted, changing tactics as his energy waned. “Helena, please,” he beseeched, softening his voice unintentionally as he found it harder to draw breath with her weight on his injured chest. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I never meant to hurt you.”

Taken aback, Sam began to let up on her assault. “Liar,” she cried.

“I love you. I swear, I never loved anyone but you,” Daniel managed as his vision began to gray around the edges. “Please forgive me,” he whispered, dropping his hands as he lost consciousness.
At the abrupt loss of resistance, Sam fell forward, the knife skittering away from her sweaty hands. “Gellum,” she sobbed, stroking Daniel’s blood-soaked throat. “What have I done?”

Rising to her feet, she staggered through the door.

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“I hate those damn stairs,” Jack muttered darkly after they finally reached the top. He took a second to flex each knee before following where Teal’c had already disappeared into the castle.

“O’Neill!”

The sense of urgency in the Jaffa’s cry bolstered Jack’s fading energy and he bolted down the hall. Seeing Daniel’s supposedly locked door wide open was nothing compared to the shock of finding Teal’c kneeling beside a blood covered body on the floor. Daniel’s blood covered body.

A low moan stifled Jack’s question and he dropped down next to Daniel’s head just as blue eyes squinted open.


“Stay with him,” Jack ordered as he ran for the door passing the confused members of SG-7 in the hallway.

“Sir?” Kantor asked urgently.

“He’s alive,” Jack explained, not stopping as he raced toward yet another set of stairs. Kantor, Perez, and Garrett followed while Bricks stayed to help Teal’c with Daniel.

“Carter!” Jack shouted as he neared the top of the winding steps. As he feared, she was standing precariously on the high stone ledge. “Carter,” he repeated much softer, slowly inching closer.

The wind buffeted her, whipping her hair and clothing. She didn’t bother to look down at him until he reached tentatively towards her leg.

With a feral snarl, Sam dodged his hand, tottering dangerously on the edge as she glared down at him.

“Carter… Sam,” Jack barely breathed. “Get down from there. That’s an order,” he said softly.

She answered by turning her body back toward the empty space in front of her and flinging her arms open to the stiff breeze. In the distance the large moon slowly sank below the hills leaving her silhouetted against its fading light.

“Don’t!” Jack couldn’t stop himself from shouting, helplessly reaching out to grab her if she fell. Or jumped. Kantor and his men crowded the top of the stairwell but froze there in horror at the scene.

“Helena,” Daniel called firmly from down below them around the curve of the steps. “Return to me at once,” he instructed.

Sam hesitated before turning hastily back, staring hard as if she could see through the thick walls.

“Come to me now,” Daniel’s voice insisted.

The wind picked up suddenly and rushed the men at the top of the stairs before dissipating as quickly as it had come. Sam went limp, dropping off the wall and into her CO’s arms as he shot forward to
catch her.

“Is she okay?” Perez questioned urgently.

Jack’s hands shook as he lowered her to the floor. Patting her pale, clammy face he called to her worriedly. “Carter?”

Sam frowned as she squinted her eyes open. “Sir?” she answered uneasily, beginning to shiver.

Kantor was already out of his jacket and placing it around her as Jack ran his hands up and down her shoulders to warm her up.

“You know you really need a parachute for base jumping,” Jack admonished quietly.

“Daniel?” Sam asked with dread as she tried to sit up.

“He sounded fine to me,” Kantor supplied.

“Yeah, he did,” Jack agreed, assisting her into a more upright position. “Let’s get back down there.”

“Perez, head into town for a wagon,” Kantor ordered as he helped Jack pull Sam to her feet.

“Be careful,” Jack added. “Watch out for any more Jaffa. Garrett, get Bricks and start packing us up. We are so out of here.”

“Yes sir,” the two airmen replied, trotting down the steps as Jack and Kantor supported Sam between them and followed much slower.

Jack stopped Bricks as he passed them in the hall. “How’s Daniel?”

“He’s been in and out,” Bricks reported, “But I don’t think the stab on his neck is very bad. It’s just been bleeding a lot.”

Jack glanced at Kantor who only shrugged in reply. Easing Sam through the door, they lowered her to Daniel’s campstool. Jack left Kantor to steady her while he moved closer to the cot.

“Teal’c?”

“Daniel Jackson is unwell at this time,” Teal’c proclaimed as he held pressure to the saturated dressing on the wound under Daniel’s chin. “However, I believe he will improve with proper rest.”

“Yeah, well that was great timing,” Jack stated. “He did good.”

Teal’c frowned as he looked up at the colonel.

“What happened this time?” Daniel asked, obviously not as out of it as they thought.

“You got Carter off the wall before she jumped,” Jack explained. “It looks like the device had some residual effects after all.”

Daniel exchanged a puzzled glance with Teal’c. “What are you talking about?” he asked in a hoarse whisper.

“You came to the bottom of the tower and called her Helena,” Jack insisted. “Then she sorta passed out.”
“Daniel Jackson has not left this room,” Teal’c advised. “In fact, he has barely spoken at all.”

Jack glanced at Sam who sat with her head buried in her hands. Kantor stared back at him with an incredulous, bewildered expression on his face.

“We’re getting’ the hell out of here. Tonight,” Jack stated in a tone not to be argued with. No one did.

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Losing count of the number of times he’d been up and down the cursed steps, Jack sighed as he and Teal’c finally eased Daniel into the borrowed cart next to Carter. They huddled together in the back ostensibly for warmth, and Jack cocooned them in a wealth of sleeping bags. Luckily the wagon was also large enough to hold most of their equipment and all of the archaeological treasures they were taking back, promising to make the trip a little easier on the exhausted group.

Jack and Kantor discussed who would ride and when they would switch out as the final preparations were completed. The horse-like creatures had been skittish ever since they had come close to the bottom of the stone stairway with the castle looming ominously above. Knowing the sun would be rising soon was little comfort at the moment as the setting of the moon had left them in an eerie darkness barely touched by beams of the flashlights all around.

Daniel glanced up at the castle longingly. His pale, bruised face looked very young without his glasses. “I always liked the tower,” he said quietly.

“Why?” Jack questioned, climbing into the front seat of their ride with Bricks.

“I don’t know. I was drawn there,” Daniel tried to explain, “Especially at this time of the night.”

Sam followed his gaze and bit her lip as she too stared silently up at the dark outline of the fortress for a moment before closing her eyes and resting her head resignedly on Daniel’s good shoulder.

“Let’s go home,” Jack ordered.

Bricks jiggled the reins and urged the spooked creatures forward, lurching into what promised to be a slow, rough trip. Teal’c led the way and the others fell in beside and behind the wagon.

Without his glasses it was hard to tell so Daniel didn’t call attention to the luminous figure who bid him farewell from the tower high above.

The End

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