A Step To The Right

by ToxicAngel13

Summary

Instead of Nathan Stark stepping into the Chamber, Jack did so knowing he was making the right decision. Zoe was almost an adult, and this was his job after all- why let one of the people he swore to protect sacrifice themselves when he could do what was needed? Only that was just the beginning, Nathan isn't going to let a loss of cohesion take the life of Eureka's Sheriff, and it turns out Jack Carter was more then he appeared to be before coming to their secret community. He had secrets in his past, and those secrets aren't about to let him die like that either. Join us as Eureka gets just a little more crazy as another secret project comes to town, secrets are told, a man is brought back from the dead, and maybe a new love is found.

Notes

AN: I know I have so many other stories to work on- That is not in dispute. But I got bit by a new plunnie (Plot bunny) and my husband had the weekend off and let me have some time writing while he took care of our baby. I have written on my other stories- Don't worry there, though none of them are ready to be updated yet since this plunnie took over. It is my hope that my ADHD riddled mind gives me a break and lets me get back to my other tales once I've gotten this down and posted. I have a horrible habit of working on a story in my head when I can't actually write or type them down.... (Like when I'm laying down to sleep-which leads me to dream my story out-or during the day during various moments that I can multitask and daydream though) and that lucky story takes my focus front and center until I've written
what I've thought out down... Hence why I have so many in progress works. This plunnie took control when I was writing on one of my other Eureka fics in fact. (Le Sigh)
A Change in Sacrifice

There is a moment where the world suddenly comes into sharp focus, when you can see someone’s next move before they make it- see their mistake and correct it. For Jack Carter- Mayberry incarnate- that moment came while he was holding his broken ribs, trying to breathe as Fargo and Nathan freaking Stark tried to work out what was needed to end the time loops and save the world from being torn apart. He had been through at least a hundred of these loops himself now, and he knew that since they couldn’t fix this remotely someone would have to be in the chamber and do it manually- he’d puzzled that out a dozen loops ago, but each time he had mentioned it to Stark, to Nathan, the other man had denied the truth of it. Doing it manually would kill the person in the chamber. But this time. This time he hadn’t mentioned it and he could see it in the lines of Nathan’s body when he realized it. And the damned stupidly smart scientist planned on being the one to go into the chamber- to be the one who died saving Eureka and that wasn’t going to happen.

Jack snorted internally- he knew he was at the end of his rope- he had injuries on top of his injuries and he was pretty sure there was some internal bleeding going on in there too. There was a chance he wouldn’t even make it if this was all fixed so he would be the one in that Chamber. Zoe was almost 17 and Lexie was in town- and she would be staying if she had her way at the moment. And if she left and Zoe wanted to stay, well Jack had gotten his legal shit together when this loop started. If Lexie didn’t want to stay in Eureka then Stark and Allison would have custody of her until she turned 18 since Jack had sole legal custody of his daughter. With that in mind Jack Carter slipped into the chamber and sealed it before Stark had the chance to make his move. The hiss of the chamber sealing drew the two arguing men’s attention.

“Carter, get out of there now, you have no idea of what you’ll have to do. Of what it will do to you.” Stark barked out- his green eyes almost black and his face holding a hint of panic. Jack grimaced, grabbing the tablet he had snagged and connecting it to the machine in a pointed movement- ignoring his bodies protest as he did. He looked back up at the countdown then Stark.

“I've been through at least a hundred loops Stark, and in every loop I’ve gotten a new injury alongside my learning. I’m not as dumb as the IQ score planted in my file suggests so I can do this. And even if you were in here sacrificing yourself on your damned wedding day… There’s no guarantee I would live with the internal bleeding I have going on that’s been unchecked since I woke up this loop. SARAH had my legal affairs, Zoe stays here if she wants to- either in Lexie’s custody or yours and Allison’s. Keep her safe and make sure Jo get’s to be Sheriff- she’ll do a damn fine job of it.” He gasped out- before looking at the timer. He was running out of time- but the vid he had recorded this morning would cover much of what he had to explain. He had known that one way or another this was his last loop, so he had been prepared for this. Stark’s face went tight.

“Carter… Jack. Your daughter needs you to get the hell out of that machine. Hell Eureka needs you.” He tried protesting. Jack managed a smile as his eyes connected with Nathan’s through the glass. He knew- from a daring kiss a dozen loops ago- that the man didn’t dislike him as much as he acted like he did. Hell in that loop Nathan has vowed to call of his wedding if they managed to stop it- since he knew he could have Jack like he had wanted from that first day, but had assumed he couldn't have based on his perception of Jack's sexuality. But that wasn’t in their cards it seemed.
“Take care of yourself, and them all Nathan.” He replied, before starting to input the sequence. He didn’t flinch as Nathan started banging on the tempered glass of the chamber—deftly typing the things he needed to. Once that timer hit 6 it wouldn’t matter if he had finished his duty or not. He would be dead, and well… If he was going to die he was going to save the world first.

“Don’t do this Jack!” Nathan barked out, almost desperately as Jack’s finger paused, waiting for the right moment. When Jack pressed the final command in he looked into Stark’s eyes once more—and then smiled even more brightly as he knew nothing. Stark froze and the world went black and Jack knew he’d gotten it right.

Nathan watched as the Sheriff finished the sequence with dread weighing heavily on his chest. Then the clock passed Six o’clock and Nathan sighed… Only to see the first fleck of Carter break off. It was only when Carter’s face was half gone that he heard Fargo’s happy dance. This wasn’t supposed to be happening. He wasn’t supposed to be watching the Sheriff dissolve—the irrational man had beaten the odds so many times before…but here it was.

“Stop it.” Nathan barked—and he wasn’t sure who he was talking to—Fargo and his stupid cheering when he was watching Jack dissolve into trillions of particles, or Jack himself. Fargo’s eyes snapped to the chamber and he fell silent for a second—before yelping and typing something into the door panel. A shield briefly sprang into existence before fading from sight. Nathan turned and shot a suspicious glare at the pale and shaking man who was watching the Sheriff fade from sight.

“What the hell did you just do?” He snapped, feeling the weight of Jack’s death slam into him. Fargo’s eyes snapped to him and he stuttered for a few moments before visibly pulling himself together. His eyes wandered back to the chamber before meeting Nathan’s though.

Once a month Sheriff Carter reviews the experiments on sight that he has clearance through GD to see. Personally I think he should use the clearance I saw in his heavily redacted government file instead so he could review all the experiments in GD period—but he gets a little testy when I point out that I did some…. recreational hacking and know some things that I really shouldn’t. During his reviews he examines the safety contingencies more then anything. When he finds something that should be implemented he fills out a work order from with the proper safeties, and then somehow he gets your signature on them. Once that’s done the safeties are normally implemented and we tend to have less problems if the experiments get out of hand.” Fargo explained. Nathan blinked, feeling confusion well up as he processed what he had been told.

“So once a month Carter evaluates on sight experiments looking for safety needs…and then gets my signature to approve them. Damn it— I really should read whatever he shoves under my nose and talks at me until I sign them. So I’m to understand he saw the need for an additional safety on this lab? How long ago and what it the nature of the safety? And why the hell did he need my signature— Allison’s would have gotten the same results and she probably would have signed the papers without poking and prodding” He muttered, wondering what Carter had been thinking. He wouldn’t have had to push Allison if the Safeties were valid. Fargo blinked, before grinning.

“The Sheriff knew that if he had your signature then any disgruntled scientist was less likely to
come to you and complain about the addition to their labs. Or at least that’s what he told me- and it worked. Weinberger wasn’t happy about the shield- but once he saw your name on the order he shut up. It was about 3 months ago, and the shield is designed to contain photons- in case of accidental cohesion loss or something like that. It wouldn’t have been strong enough to stop the loops but it can contain the Sheriff right now until we can fix this.” Fargo responded, frowning at the room around then. Nathan’s breath hitched at the statement and the well hidden ‘if we can fix this’. Containing the trillion plus pieces of Carter while they worked on a solution would be helpful- they wouldn’t have to concentrate on gathering him back together at least. And just like that the Scientist knew he had to look over the other safeties the other man had snuck approval from him on.

“We’ll need to install a photon magnet at the door to gather and push any pieces that decide to come with us back into the room so there is complete containment.” He murmured under his breath—the mind Carter always mocked rapidly coming to a conclusion and planning his next move. He needed to get to the wedding and tell Allie it wouldn’t be happening today- if ever, because once he called it off he doubted she would still want to remarry him with the looming responsibility of getting Carter back into this time stream in one piece and her own hang up about losing him to work again. That had been one of her reasons for walking away from him in the first place after all. And then he needed to get Jack’s will before that sister of his did so he knew his rights in all of this.

Jack wanted Zoe to stay in Eureka and Nathan would make sure that she did- if that was what she wanted but Lexie Carter didn’t have his confidence when it came to caring for Carter’s brilliant daughter. So he wanted proof that if she didn’t follow Jack’s will he would be the one making the decisions. Allie might try and sway him into following Zoe’s blood relative’s will, but Nathan had looked into Jack’s eyes as he had spoken that wish, and he would be damned if he let the man down by letting his sister run off to gods know where with the daughter Jack had fought for.

“Right, let me make the call and then I believe you have somewhere to be.” Fargo murmured, pulling out his phone and dialing. Nathan looked back to the chamber and bit the inside of his cheek. He should have been the one in there, but he understood Carter’s reasoning. Carter took his job of protecting the citizen’s of Eureka seriously, and Nathan Stark was one of those citizens. It didn’t mean that he had to like his reasonings though. Nathan was pissed that the injured man had taken the ultimate leap and found himself dead to the world without even blinking an eye. His mind wandered back to Carter’s last words, and then Fargo’s and he spun to look at the other man as he hung up his call. His eyes narrowed on the smaller man and Fargo twitched.

“Carter’s redacted files that you mentioned, what exactly was in them that you were not supposed to know? GD does extensive background checks on all employees and they keep records to match that. Your comments on Carter analyzing what safeties are needed for the entire in house experiments that he had access to and his own statement about a planted IQ score leads me to believe much of what we thought we knew about our town Sheriff are false.” the joint head of GD asked seriously- a hard look glinting in his green eyes. Fargo gulped.

“Understand I only hacked his other files- ones that were not stored anywhere on GD servers mind you- because I was putting him in S.A.R.A.H. to live and I didn’t want to chance him hurting her, or you know making her explode, because he didn’t understand the complexities of her inner workings. When I confronted him on the fact that he could easily be employed as a Department Head with his IQ and work history before he was a Marshal he shut me down. Apparently he needed the distance from that life from some reason, and since I knew he wouldn’t be endangering my A.I. I
left it at that. When he came to me about looking over the safety protocol I told him to have at it since I knew it was well within his capabilities I didn’t see any harm. I know for a fact he only went to other people about creating the safeties installed part of the time. It’s my theory that even though he was distancing himself from his background that he needed an outlet for those good ole creative energies us scientists are known for.” Fargo replied earnestly. Nathan just stared at him for a moment- remembering all the times he had insulted Carter’s intelligence and wondering just how the blue eyed man had resisted decking him.

“We’ll be talking about withholding information later Fargo. Carter’s transition to Eureka would have gone a lot smoother had we known his full history- legally obtained or not.” He finally bit out- refusing to feel guilty for tormenting the blonde based on the information he had known. This almost wedding probably wouldn’t be happening had Allison known, that much was for sure. He knew his ex-wife and fiance well enough to know that bringing home average to her family wouldn’t be acceptable. (A small part of him winced, knowing that he himself was taking another look at the currently presumed dead man, and even though he had been attracted to Carter in an abstract way knowing the other man could match him in an intellectual debate made that attraction more than just a physical appreciation. Not that it had stopped Nathan from fantasizing about Carter before he had proposed to Allison.) The intercom buzzed suddenly- breaking him from his introspection.

“Dr’s. Stark and Fargo- the device has been installed. You are free to exit the room.” A voice informed them. Nathan sighed, rubbing a hand over his face before heading towards the door. On a normal day informing loved ones of their family member’s demise or disappearance was one of his least favorite things to do. Allison took the brunt of it because she worked with people better. But today wasn’t a normal day. Today Eureka had lost Sheriff Jack Carter, and Nathan had a feeling it would never be the same until they had him back among them.

As he exited the room that Jack Carter’s particles were trapped in he paused for a moment- mentally promising the other man that this wasn’t the end. That he would do everything in his power to see him returned to this time stream and to his daughter. And then maybe. Just maybe Nathan would take a chance and see if the other man was interested in him. He knew that Allison was off the table, knowing his promise to Carter would leave her in the wayside, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t try and see if the snarking that he and Carter engaged in at every turn wouldn’t lead somewhere. Fargo bumped into his back- breaking him from his thoughts and he continued out, already resisting the urge to bury himself in his lab and start working on the newest problem he faced. That was just how his mind worked, and hopefully Carter wouldn’t mind it as much as Allison did.
A Canceled Wedding and Talks

Chapter Notes

AN: Alright ladies and gents, I ment this chapter to be short- but the characters wouldn't let it. There's OOCness abound. No one- except maybe Zoe wanted to play nice with me. Allison had thoughts and feels she wanted to get out, Nathan did too and we get a look at the crossover aspect of this story and get introduced to some terms i've playfully made into things. I don't want complaints that so and so wouldn't have said or done something.... I tried to make them behave, but apperently they want to be OOC in this tale and it's better then them going on strike to be honest. Now this chapter is a monster-over 7K in words in total and considering I've been writing it out during my son's naps... It's insane that I have this much to offer, I can't really believe it myself considering how long it takes to get a short chapter out for my other stories- but the plunnie is strong in this one.

Allison was waiting in her wedding tent for some sign of what was happening at Global- her mind coming up with dozen's of horrifying scenarios as to why Jack or Nathan hadn’t called to tell her everything was okay after the clock passed 6 and it became apparent that the loops had stopped. It all came back to one thing. One of the two men in her life had been hurt or worse in fixing this newest mess, and that wasn’t something they would tell her over the phone while she was waiting to get married. They would tell her in person, once the other was stable or arrangements made. So she was waiting to see who showed up- knowing that the other wasn’t going to be coming. Not today and maybe not ever depending on what had happened while they fixed Eureka’s latest issue.

A car pulled into the parking lot and she looked out the tent door- seeing Nathan’s lean form climb out of the vehicle made Allison’s throat close shut as tears filled her eyes. Nathan was alright, but as Fargo climbed out the other door Allison had a feeling that Jack wasn’t. From the look on both men’s faces she knew her fears were confirmed, Jack was gone. He had looked horrible when he had been here earlier today- and honestly she had expected him to be strong armed into the infirmary when they got to Global- after he had given Nathan whatever information that was needed.

If anything Allison had half feared Nathan would be the one not coming back alive, but this seemed much worse of an outcome. In the privacy of her own mind Allison could admit that she had made a mistake in accepting Nathan’s proposal, that she had come to care for the blonde Sheriff too much although obviously not enough to endure the jokes from her family about dating an average when she had the choice of the best minds in the world in Eureka. Within a year of being married to Nathan she would have been comparing him to Jack though and she would have found him lacking, which would have been the beginning of the end of her second marriage to Nathan.

Her core problem with her ex husband was that Nathan lived and breathed his work as a scientist. She knew the feeling, because she was guilty of it herself at times, but she had ended their last marriage because he couldn’t give her or Kevin enough time, enough of himself, to keep her satisfied. Nothing had changed there, so Jack Carter and his easy friendship, and understanding of when she just couldn’t make it due to some problem or her own work would have been all the
justification she would need to end her marriage once more. After all if Jack could take time out of his near constant work policing the town to make her feel special then why couldn’t her husband? Biting back the bitter realization Allison was surprised to see Nathan was almost at the wedding tent. If he wanted to continue on with this marriage he would be disappointed because with her admission to herself she couldn’t condone putting either of them through a disaster of a marriage. Not when she knew it wouldn’t end well for either of them. And she didn’t want to turn this friendship she had with Nathan now into a bitter ball of resentment because of their core traits.

“Allison.” Nathan greeted her- bringing her into a gentle hug. She felt tears pricking at her eyes, and wondered just what had happened. Nathan looked devastated in his own way, so she knew it wasn’t just as simple as Jack having been hurt even more while fixing the loops. Nathan pulled away from her, looking her in the eyes as he did.

“The clock had to be manually reset from the inside of the chamber. He must have realized this in the last loop, because the second I knew what had to be done he was sealing himself in the chamber. I tried to get him to come out, to let me do it, but… Damn it Allison when we saw him earlier today we should have gotten him to medical as soon as possible. He told me that there was internal bleeding that he hadn’t gotten treated from the last loop and he didn’t think he’d make it through the repairs and you know him. He wasn’t going to stand down while one of the citizens he was supposed to protect by oath took his place. Once he reset the clock his body lost cohesion on a cellular level.” Nathan murmured, explaining what had happened at GD with sorrow in his voice. Allison’s heart clenched as she listened to her fiance speak, not wanting to hear about Jack’s end- but having to listen all the same.

Jack Carter had been right in front of her- gravely injured and she hadn’t noticed the extent of his wounds beyond the obvious physical ones. She had been too caught up in her wedding day being interrupted to do fulfill her duty as a doctor. She would have to look at Zoe and tell her that her father had not only been hurt- that he was dead soon. Allison didn’t know of a way to regain cellular cohesion, let alone do that and retain a living being at the end of it- not one that had lost cohesion in the state Nathan was describing. Eureka had lost a hero today- Jack Carter had lost his life to save them. At that the co-head of GD and would be wife drew herself out of her own sadness when she heard a note of something in Nathan’s voice that made her pause and think for a minute.

For a man who took pleasure in degrading his rival, Nathan’s voice held the same sorrow, same regret she was feeling now that she had made her admission to herself. How in the world had she missed this? It wasn’t like Nathan’s bisexuality was a secret to her or anything. And he did love a challenge- and unlike her he wasn’t afraid of what other people said when he was serious about someone. Damn, it looks like her marriage would have failed sooner than her estimate- because she had a feeling the moment Jack stopped his flirting with her because she was married, Nathan would have thought on just why he liked riling the other man up so much. And he probably would have found a way to end the marriage himself once he had realized what he seemed to have almost done now. Once Nathan was done with experiencing this initial grief the full force of what he felt for the now dead man would hit him, she was sure of it. And he would feel the regret she did.

“The fact he lost his life isn’t right Nathan. We’ll need to tell Zoe that her father is gone, and Jack’s sister.” Allison stated, and watched as Nathan frowned, and his fist clenched slightly at her statement that Jack was dead. She raised an eyebrow at his reaction and he took a break before exhaling. He was obviously in denial, but as someone who hadn’t seen Jack die she could look at
this from an outside point of view. Something Nathan couldn’t see yet.

“I am not having Carter declared dead yet Allison. It’s possible to reverse the loss of cohesion that he suffered, we may not have the ability to do it yet but that’s what we do here in GD. We invent the impossible. There were safeties installed around the lab that allowed up to contain his particles as he… Dissolved. Or hopefully they did, since we’re not one hundred percent sure what data we managed to get I can’t be sure. I’m going to get him back, or at least try my hardest so I don’t wonder if he’s still there but just beyond our reach- knowing we never gave him a second thought.” He replied, his voice tight. Allison blinked, feeling confused by his reaction. Nathan was angry with her for following the logical train of thought when told someone lost cohesion and dissolved? The chances of him getting Carter back in one piece were worse than impossible and he should know that himself. It was the denial speaking.

“We may not have a choice. Thorne isn’t going to like keeping a man who is as good as dead on GD payroll, and she’s not going to keep a minor in Eureka without a reason.” She hissed back, feeling angry that he was getting upset with her for being practical, while his idea of somehow bringing Carter back from the dead seemed to make perfect sense to him. She could accept Jack Carter was dead- that there was no coming back from dissolving into trillions of particles. Nathan’s scowl should have shocked her, but somehow it didn’t. What did shock her was the gasp from the tent door and she felt nausea rise in her throat as she realized that Jack’s daughter had heard that last sentence.

“Zoe…” She breathed, while regretting every word she had uttered. This conversation could have waited until they were somewhere where she wouldn’t have heard it. Zoe’s eyes were wide and her face pale as she looked in between her and Nathan, before settling on her.

“My dad is as good as dead to you?! You’re just giving up on him Allison, after everything he’s done for Eureka- for you? I am so fucking glad he doesn’t like women like that now, because I have a feeling if it was Dr. Stark there that just saved Eureka and the world by dissolving your reaction would be the same. He should have never called you a friend- let alone let himself be drawn into that stupid flirting triangle the three of you had going on if this is how you react to him being in trouble.” The teenager spat in her direction. Nathan set a hand on her shoulder and her eyes shot to him. Her lips trembled and he didn’t hesitate in pulling her in for a hug- holding her tightly to his chest as the tears started falling. He glared at Allison, making her recoil as she prepared to defend herself from Zoe’s accusations and the implications she had made. She shut her mouth, knowing now was not the time.

“I am going to be trying to find a way to get him back Zoe- no matter what Thorn or anyone else says. He’s not gone until every available avenue has been explored. And your dad thought of you when he was making the choice to do this- he mentioned having gotten together legal papers this morning, when the loop started yet again for him. Either you go to your aunt if she stays in Eureka, or to Allison or myself. You are not alone in this, I promise.” Nathan murmured into the teen’s hair. As Allison watched the normally hostile man she loved comfort Jack’s daughter she was struck by how… parental he was. It was one thing to watch him interact with her autistic son, but he slipped from commanding scientist to comforting parent like it was his second skin.

Guilt hit the co-head of GD harder as she realized that when she had walked away she had cut
Nathan out of Kevin’s life without a second thought. In her mind she was her son’s only parent—Nathan had never taken her deceased husband’s place there no matter how much he had cared for Kevin. So when she felt that their marriage was over she never considered how he felt being sliced out of the role that he had in fact taken on. She didn’t understand why Nathan had gone after her again, as she was just realizing how much she had hurt him in her unilateral decision making. Allison watched as Zoe buried her head into Nathan’s shoulder with a shudder—before she visibly pulled herself together and pulled away. She wiped at her eyes—smearing her make-up that had left a mark on Nathan’s suit, before nodding to herself and stepping away from the scientist.

“Damn right he’s not gone, he’s just a little lost at the moment. Dad’s too damn stubborn to let something as simple as this kill him.” She murmured to herself in a convincing manner, before smirking at the scientist slightly. “As for Thorne, Mansfield or whoever the hell else thinks they can have a say in you working on getting him back, after I make a call they will be in one hell of a surprise. Let’s just say dad has friends in high places.” She announced, almost bouncing as she got excited for some reason, before pausing mid bounce and looking at Nathan— who was about to speak. He raised an eyebrow at her and she sighed, sounding tired as she gathered her thoughts before speaking.

“Before I start making calls, and stirring up some trouble for the higher ups, I think I should make my choice in guardian clear. I won’t be high maintainence since I’m looking into schools currently, and once I make these calls you’ll be responsible more in name only because the people who come running are family, but I prefer if you held that responsibility over the others you listed Dr. Stark. My Aunt will probably be getting back with the father of her children here soon- she was never really planning on staying here in Eureka no matter what she said. She’s a bit of a flake and she and my dad butt heads in the worst ways more times then not. He was treating her with kid gloves because of the babies. As for Dr. Blake there, well I’m more likely to smother her in her sleep if she keeps the attitude of Dad being impossible to get back then to be civil and none of us want that.” She announced. Allison felt a little insulted—she had thought that she had a good relationship with Zoe- but then again she had just said Jack was as good as dead. Before she could try apologizing Nathan nodded, smiling gently at the teen who had lost her world so everyone else could live.

“I understand. We’ll have to see just how your father worded it in the legal document before I can say that’s how it will go though. Who are you going to be calling?” He asked curiously. Zoe’s lips turned to a sharp smirk as she looked at Nathan, before pulling out her phone.

“I’m only calling my grandparents. After all they deserve to know that their son is ‘as good as dead’.” She replied sweetly, shooting Allison a bitter look as she repeated her words. The woman in question clenched her fists into the material of her dress as the teen walked to the far corner of her tent dialing her phone. She turned to look at Nathan— who looked torn between being confused and amused. She resisted the urge to roll her eyes at the easy interaction between the two.

Honestly it had taken him far longer to warm up to Kevin, but that could have been her fault since she was determined not to introduce someone as his father so he probably didn’t know where he stood. Jack had all but thrown custody of Zoe at Nathan, placing him firmly into a parental or guardian roll. Allison took a breath, trying to clear her mind and think about what came next.
“What does she think her grandparents can do about this? Most likely they are not even cleared to know how Jack died, let alone do anything about Thorne or Mansfield telling you to drop getting him back.” She muttered under her breath, feeling angry at herself for not watching her mouth when she knew Jack’s daughter would come to see what happened to her father, and at Zoe for her attitude. Zoe was smarter than to think some stranger could come into Eureka and change the collective governmental minds that ran the town. Nathan snorted, looking faintly amused oddly enough.

“After today I think I would err of the side that Carter does have some sort of connections. Fargo told me about a set of heavily redacted files he hacked into just to make sure Carter wasn’t going to hurt his A.I., files that contradict the one GD has on him. That alone says that someone high up redacted those files.” Her soon to be ex-fiance said plainly. Allison stared at him.

“What was in those files, or do I want to know?” She asked, wondering just who Jack Carter had been. Nathan smirked at her, his eyes showing delight as he made her wait.

“Apparently an IQ and work history good enough to qualify him as a head scientist at GD in the very least. Fargo didn’t go into details when he told me, but he’s going to be giving me the files in question as soon as we’re done sending people home here. It makes sense that Carter would fit into Eureka intellectually- far more sense than a norm stumbling into town and being able to handle the Chaos that is the number of genius’ working on their projects with government sanction ever did. He always suggested the simplest solutions, and that wasn’t just a norm with street smarts.” he replied, and Allison didn’t miss that he wasn’t intending to go through with this wedding either, and she definitely didn’t miss the notes of appreciation in his voice when he talked about Jack.

She didn’t know whether to feel relieved that she wouldn’t be hurting Nathan by calling off the wedding, or offended that he was going to give up on going through with the wedding when he had come here. To put it simply Allison was used to being the one who walked away from Nathan, not the other way around, but it looked like he really had come to some serious realizations of his own while he watched Jack die. And it was going to lead to an obsession in getting the other man back- no matter what anyone else would think. The would be bride resisted the urge to rub her face as she thought over the irony of this situation. Both she and her would be groom had come to the conclusion they they cared for the same person too much. And that left a bitter taste in her mouth when she thought of the information Nathan had revealed. Her biggest hold up in getting involved with Jack had been his supposed IQ, and now that she knew it wasn’t correct basing her decision to say yes to trying again with Nathan on that falsity made her feel shallow.

Jack Carter may have snuck under her shields and became someone she cared too much about- but if she couldn’t ignore his supposed IQ and go after happiness with him before this, then if Nathan succeeded in his impossible mission she shouldn’t try just because she knew he’d be accepted now. Her worry hadn’t been that he would be shunned by her family per say- but that she would never hear the end of the jokes that marrying down in intelligence would bring. Especially after having walked out of a marriage with Nathan Stark. She was selfish. Nathan… from what she had seen he hadn’t realized what was behind his snarking with Jack- hell she hadn’t suspected that he was really attracted to the other man before today. But if he had wanted Jack she knew he would have gone after him- regardless of what people thought about the blonde’s I.Q.
“Oh. I held off canceling the wedding when you didn’t contact me because I wanted it to be done with a united front. So people knew we were both in agreement, and there were no hard feelings to be had on either side.” She murmured absentmindedly- her thoughts stuck in a loop involving Jack, their attractions to him and guilt. Nathan gave her a hard look, but she didn’t notice it.

“And when did you start having second thoughts?” He asked icily. She paused, before looking him in the eyes. She could lie and let him think that she had decided when he pulled up without Jack- knowing that he would be focused on getting to the bottom of the time loops and what had happened to the other man. Or she could be truthful, and let him know that she hadn’t even been certain that this second go at their marriage would have worked out this morning. Or she could be honest with him and end this once and for all. Nathan wouldn’t even try to marry her again.

“It’s been in the back of my mind since I said yes. I left our marriage for a reason, and that reason hasn’t really changed. There will always be another challenge that draws you into your lab for months on end, and if I’m honest with myself it wouldn’t be fair to either of us. I would resent not being your priority, and it wouldn’t be your fault because I knew how you were before we got married again. I didn’t decide to cancel the wedding until it passed 6 and the world didn’t reset or tear itself apart though. I wasn’t honest with myself until then- I let myself believe that you had really changed enough that it would work out. Having you chase after me, treat me like I was your ultimate goal during your confrontations with Jack… It felt good. But you weren’t the only one that had to change in our relationship, and you shouldn’t have to change that much to make me happy.” She replied, baring her inner demons as she was brutally honest with both herself and him. His face softened and he drew her into another gentle hug, before sighing and nodding to himself- his chin resting on her shoulder.

“And if we’re being brutally honest with ourselves. I was desperate enough to have my family back when I came back to Eureka, that I would have done anything to get you and our son back. I hadn’t spoken to Kevin- my son, since you walked out, and you would barely take my calls. And then I got back into town only to see a handsome blonde man flirting with you and the divorce wasn’t even final. So I tried to change, tried to be the man that you wanted. And I would have kept trying after the wedding, but we both know I would have failed. I’m not the type of man, of scientist, that can put their work on the back burner at the end of a work day to come home and give you all of my focus. My work consumes me until I reach that break through, and that leads me to blocking out the rest of the world at times.” He said regretfully as he pulled away from the embrace, a resolute look on his face as he continued telling his side of thier story for the first time that she would listen to.

“If I was truly that man you wouldn’t have looked twice at me the first time because I wouldn’t be where I was in life. You know that as well as I do. You were looking for an intellectual equal that would impress your family after your first husband died. I was handsome and made you feel like a woman when I wasn’t tied up with one experiment or another. I know it wasn’t important for me to be a father in our marriage, because in your mind Kevin will only have your first husband in that position, but I consider myself one of Kevin’s even now.” It felt like he was stabbing Allison and twisting the knife in her back though- as he pointed out his points of contention in their previous marriage, and his reason for trying again. And she knew he was right in every one of them.

Allison didn’t like her mistakes, her vices and her errors pointed out. Before this talk, before today she could excuse herself from any guilt in their marriage’s destruction. Nathan had been
absent, he had left her feeling as if he wasn’t there for her. But she had known what kind of work ethic he had. She had known that he cared for her and Kevin because when he wasn’t on a project he was all about them. But those times hadn’t been enough for her and she had taken Kevin and walked away without a second thought. When her family had called her foolish she had stuck to her reasoning.

“This is the kind of talk we should have had before even talking about having another wedding Nathan.” She bit out- not meaning to snap at him but not able to help herself in light of what was being said. He didn’t take offense though. Instead he nodded and smiled sadly.

“It is, but we were both pretending that this time would magically work so we avoided having this conversation because if we said things we couldn’t take back it would ruin the illusion. I was pretending to be the man you wanted. And you were pretending that also.” He replied sagely. She wiped her eyes furiously, not wanting to cry but feeling like the world’s biggest fool. This was supposed to be her second chance with Nathan, but she had taken it for all the wrong reasons.

“I’m so sorry Nathan.” She verbalized her regret, before her attention was drawn to a snorting Zoe. The teen looked annoyed, and Allison didn’t know if it was about the conversation she and Nathan had just finished, or whoever was on the other end of the phone. They probably shouldn’t have let her make the call with the amount of classified information involved in this, but she had just lost her father, and they obviously had some things of their own to work out.

“Finally.” The teen hissed, not looking at either of the so called adults. She pulled the phone away from her ear and hit the speaker function. A dull voice was broadcast into the room.

“Sorry for the wait, but it’s been a busy day. What can I do for you?” Zoe rolled her eyes, even though the voice couldn’t see her do it, before glaring at the phone.

“This is a personal line for a reason Corporal Jenkins. I need to speak to General O’Neill. Tell him it’s his granddaughter, in relation to his son who just pulled a Danny.” She said formally. The dull voice groaned, losing it’s lack of interest and making the two Co-Leader’s of GD perk up. Obviously Zoe had wanted them to listen to whatever conversation she was having- hence the Speaker Phone function being turned on and she was speaking to someone in the military when she was supposed to be calling her Grandparents. Carter’s file hadn’t listen military connections. O’Neill’s name spark a feeling of familiarity though and Nathan made a note to look him up. But having a General on Carter’s side would keep him from becoming a forgotten friendly fire case like so many others.

“I didn’t recognize the number Ms. Zoe. And you and your father are going to get me killed. General O’Neill hates it when Jackson pulls a Danny. I would have lived a compete life without seeing him when his son pulled one. I’m putting you through because there is no way in hell I’m telling him this.” Jenkins groused. Nathan shared a look with Allison. Carter was O’Neill’s son. Nathan felt a smirk forming on his lips. He had a feeling that the man that would be coming onto the phone would keep Thorne and everyone else off his back while he worked on getting Carter back. The line rang then another voice cheerfully answered, sounding delighted as he called out the teen’s name.
“Zoe! My number one girl, how are you doing? You’re calling early this week, is everything happy in the land of the various clans of Space Monkeys?” Zoe’s lip trembled at the greeting, and a large tear fell, making Nathan start her way. He was responsible for her wellness now after all.

“Hey Gramps… Dad. Dad pulled a Poppa Danny on me. An Experiment in the lead monkey hut went wrong and was looping time- and he was the only one who remembered the reset every time. I don’t know all the detail’s yet- since I found out about it by eavesdropping on the head space monkeys but apparently he solved the problem and promptly loss cohesion. He dissolved. And the male head Monkey wants to work on fixing what happened since they had a containment field that should hold all his pieces, but the female one said he’s as good as… the D word gramps. I need you, Poppa and Carter along with whatever monkeys on your end that are down with the science in the land of the Clans ASAP to run interference and help get him home.” She babbled, and they were obviously talking code about Eureka. How they had come to associate Scientist’s with Space Monkey’s Nathan would never know, but suddenly a hell of a lot was explained about Jack Carter and his Thingys and whatchamacallits. Carter had used their exasperation at his non-technical terms to help hide himself in plain sight as a norm in Eureka. O’Neill swore, sounding pissed and exasperated.

“God-damn it. I liked it a hell of a lot better when Jr took after me rather than his father. We’ll be heading your way as soon as possible twerp, so keep your cool. We’ll get him back from wherever he got off too just like we do when Poppa Danny pulls his stunts- this is your dad’s first go at it so hopefully it’s an easy one. Who do you have looking after you in the meantime? Just so I know you won’t be moping in your talking house until we come waltzing in to save the day and keep the higher ups at bay” The general grumbled. Nathan stopped in his tracks as Zoe smirked at him.

“The male head Space Monkey. Apparently Dad left me to him, the female head or dear aunt Lexie.” She hummed, sounding pleased. O’Neill snorted, sounding as amused as the teen looked.

“So does that mean tall dark and grumps a lot has finally realized the source of his frustration with your dad was something else- or are they both being idiots still? And good on him for not letting Sam’s girl run off with you. How Carter had a daughter like Lexie I will never know” O’Neill hummed. Nathan raised an eyebrow as Zoe’s eyes twinkled at him. He had never met this man, but he was assuming that Nathan was attracted to Carter based on whatever Zoe had passed on, funny how blind he has been since coming back to Eureka. If a child could deduce things that he could not. On the plus side Carter’s father didn’t seem to not approve of them getting together, but considering it sounded like the General was with another man himself that would make sense. Zoe snorted in amusement, looking mischievous as watched his reactions. She shook her head after a moment.

“I don’t think either of them have come to that conclusion yet, but the Head Monkeys just called off their wedding so who knows what happens after we get dad back. I know I’m rooting for them and who knows what dad got up to while he was looping after all.” She replied with a wink towards Nathan. That last statement made him pause though, remembering those last few moments in the time room. Jack had known what needed to be done, had called him Nathan, and made sure to look at him in his eyes as he reset the clock. And Nathan remembered the feeling of loss crushing him.
The chances were that Jack had known what was needed to be done because he had brought it up in a previous loop. One where Nathan hadn’t been willing to sacrifice either of them because… because Jack had shown he was interested and Nathan’s mind would have put their snarking and show off behavior together and seen what it was in reality. He wouldn’t have wanted to lose that. So they tried something that had failed and this loop Jack hadn’t repeated his show of interest. In all probability it was partially to prevent a similar reaction because he knew they were running out of time before the loops tore apart reality and partially to hide the extent of his injuries. If Nathan had gotten close enough to kiss him he would have notice how injured the other man was right off the bat. Damn him. Of course Nathan couldn’t know anything for sure until Carter confirmed it.

“Your dad is stubborn kiddo, he gets that from me. I won’t tell you how long your Poppa had to whittle down my defenses, and he’d pulled two Danny’s by the time I admitted it. And then your dad happened. He was the best interference by outside forces in our lives, and he damn well knows it. When we get him back I’m going to ream him out, then congratulate him on joining the club.” The general reassured his grand daughter, and Nathan was curious as to how Carter had come along after the general had gotten together with another man. But he wasn’t going to ask that now. Zoe snorted loudly at that.

“The O’Neill stubbornness certainly breeds true Granddad. Now I’m going to get off the phone- which I’ve let the Head Monkey’s listen in on by the way, and I’m going to let Aunt Lexie know dad won’t be around for a while and her mom is dropping in. With any luck she’ll run back to her babies father.” The teen chirped. As the phone disconnected they could hear the general’s amused laugh. Zoe looked away from Nathan and at Allison. She smirked cockily after a moment of silence.

“That was my Granddad- General Johnathan J. O’Neill himself- though he likes to go by Jack just like my dad- who’s a Jr. by the way. He’s in charge a secret project out of Cheyenne Mountain, and I’m pretty sure they send some of their finds to GD to be reversed engineered. Dad worked with them for a bit before he did his time with the U.S. Marshall’s- meaning he probably has higher security clearance than you if he managed to keep them up since coming to play Mayberry here. Once they come into town. Well Thorne really won’t have a choice but to allow the research into getting dad back, and Mansfield is actually one of Granddad’s fishing buddies.” She informed the other woman sweetly. Nathan could feel her unhappiness with Allison like it was a physical thing in the room- obviously she had heard Allie mutter about her grandparent’s not being able to do a thing.

“I see. There was nothing in Jack’s file about having a General as a father, I apologize for assuming you were trying to contact a civilian who would have no power in the politics of Eureka.” Allison apologized, although it wasn’t without a spike of ill ease of it’s own. Jack and Zoe Carter had become strangers over the last hour- they couldn’t assume they knew anything about them- and to someone who had counted Jack as a friend this wasn’t a welcome development. Nathan, however, had remembered why O’Neill’s name had been familiar. Aliens. The Tech the got from Cheyenne was extraterrestrial in origin. Carter had worked with his parents before the Marshall’s, therefore he had interactions with the origins of that tech. Damn it, no wonder he took Eureka in stride.

“I’ve seen some of the tech they send. It’s always a challenge to reverse engineer because of it’s origins.” He offered the teen. She grinned at him, her demeanor easing into something more trusting.
"Yeah. I would think so, though I’ve never been further than the base. Dad’s been to some pretty out there places. He needed a change of pace though, hence the Marshall’s. Then he got sucked into Eureka because I was feeling trapped at my Step-Mom’s and ran away to make him chase me. Things were just weird with Abby after the divorce- she was trying so hard to be my mom and I didn’t need that. Eureka was good for us though- Dad got to slow down even more and play Mayberry, but he still got to tinker even if he said he was just keeping the safeties up to speck.” She replied easily. Nathan felt the stare his ex-wife and Fiance was giving him even if he couldn’t see it, but he didn’t respond as he listened to the information Zoe was slipping into her replies to them without really telling them a thing officially. She was surprisingly good at doing that. Just like Carter and his rambling in fact.

Carter had worked with the Cheyenne program for an undetermined amount of time, then the Marshall’s for some reason. He’d been off world to the places the devices section 6 reversed engineered. Eureka provided the man with both the break he was looking for in the Marshall’s and a chance to tinker with his trade. And Abby- Carter’s ex-wife, wasn’t Zoe’s mother. Nathan reconsidered reading Carter’s redacted files for a moment- enjoying puzzling out the man who he would be working on getting back. It might be interesting to see Carter’s reaction when he confirmed the facts that he put together. Carter himself had started the trail by mentioning a planted I.Q. after all. He might actually enjoy the fact Nathan had put together his life instead of just reading it.

Looking over to Allison he knew that she didn’t have the patience to wait for more clues to put together Carter’s life before Eureka though. His Allie liked Cold hard facts, and she hated having things hid from her. If he had been concerned about her going after Carter once he got him back before he wasn’t now. Allie was going to be pissed with Carter for not looping her into his history after all of his flirting, plain and simple. He could see, that with what they had discovered, that she felt betrayed by Carter because she hadn’t known any of this, plain and simple. But even in their line of work people hid things on a daily base, so he didn’t understand that line of reasoning. Carter sure as hell hadn’t known she was married when he came back into town after all and if Nathan hadn’t come back he didn’t think she would have readily shared that gem with the Sheriff.

“I think we should wait to talk more in a secure area, like S.A.R.A.H.” Nathan suddenly spoke up. If Allie was going to demand information it should be in a place where there wouldn’t be a chance of any random citizen of Eureka over hearing. They had already interacted too much with that chance. Allison snorted, looking put out as Zoe just shrugged, looking like she didn’t care one way or another.

“Once Grandpa and Poppa get here with their team secrecy won’t matter much. Dad and I trust Eureka and it’s been kind of fun watching people watch how Jack Carter ‘111’ handles the big bad genius’ but nothing lasts forever. Dad’s still going to be the same person, because believe me no one can fake that sense of humor and he gets it mainly from Grandpa, he’s just smarter and has a more…traveled and diversified life than he let on.” She replied. Allie shook her head shortly, nodding to the door, and the people who were waiting outside for a wedding that wasn’t going to happen.

“I agree with Nathan about continuing this conversation elsewhere Zoe. Besides I’m surprised someone hasn’t come in looking for an expectation yet.” She added in herself, and even though Nathan knew that Allie had questions, he also knew that she knew discretion when she wasn’t on a emotional overload. The teen paused, looking at the door, before grimacing as she looked back at the
woman she wasn’t too happy with. She looked like she saw Allison as something distasteful.

“I suppose your right. But just so you know, if you start in on the as good as dead with them when you explain the accident at GD I might just have to retaliate. He’s not dead- he just pulled his first Danny on us, and while that’s always a pain in the toosh we always get Poppa D back.” She shot back, sounding every bit as sarcastic as her father on a bad day would. Allison didn’t look impressed by her threat, and Nathan could tell that she really didn’t think they could get Carter back.

“What is pulling a Danny exactly?” He suddenly asked, curious as to why the teen wasn’t panicking over her father losing cohesion. It seemed like the incident being wrote off as pulling a Danny almost calmed her down in fact. Both Zoe and he Grandfather had mentioned it in relation to Carter’s current condition and they sounded like the one phrase explained everything. Zoe giggled.

“It’s simple pulling a Danny means dying. My Poppa D is the origin of the phrase, because he’s kinda famous for catching a mean case of the death and then recovering from it. I mean by now he must have been legally considered dead about a dozen times. There was the one time radiation poisoning that got him- it took a neat trick to come back from that. He’s also been blown up among other things, but we pretty much knew he was coming back after the first neat trick. After everything Poppa D has done a little loss of cohesion seems like an easy fix given the right space monkey’s working on the problem.” She replied calmly. Allison made a noise of disbelief because in Eureka Radiation poisoning was still something that people died from if the exposure was great enough. And people didn’t just recover from death by radiation poisoning so Zoe must be confused. Nathan just raised an eyebrow, understanding why Zoe wasn’t worried about Carter being dead for good. One of the devices section six was working on supposedly brought back the dead. They hadn’t gotten it to work on any of the animal trials, but O’Neill must have first hand experience with it.

“And the talk of clans and Space Monkeys?” He teased, trying to distract her from the announcement he and Allie were going to have to make very soon and referencing the code she and her grandfather had used in their conversation when talking about the Scientists of Eureka to do it. No matter what he thought he might be able to do to help Carter there would be a great number of Eureka’s citizen’s who fell in line with Allie’s train of thought. So there would be well wishers and condolences testing the teen’s resolve that her father would come out of this alright. If he kept her grandfather’s playfulness around them like a clock they might just make it through getting the wedding canceled and back to S.A.R.A.H before any doubt set in. Zoe snorted, her lips twitching.

“That term originates with my Poppa D too. Granddad has called him Space Monkey since virtually the day they were thrown together by their project and once dad and later I, came into the picture it grew to include any scientist we were fond of or exasperated by. The clans are the different professions and disciplines of course. Coming to Eureka really gave dad and I the chance have fun putting our various terms to practical use though, and expand them to have a concrete meaning that we could use when talking to granddad without actually saying a thing in case of someone overhearing our end or theirs. Of course beyond the amusement factor it meant we never broke confidentiality when explaining our day or frustration about a particularly stubborn or unthinking scientist. And there’s been a couple of those since we got into town- dad’s little flirting feud with you aside Dr. Stark” She explained, sounding proud as she explained the code her family had worked out to talk about scientists long before they ever landed in Eureka. Jack Carter was definitely more than he appeared to be, and the more Nathan learned the more intrigued he was.
Carter the Sheriff was an admittedly annoying person to know. He was handsome, but when handsome was flirting with your wife it didn’t lend to any kind feelings. Even when your wife finally got around to sending divorce papers your way while flirting back with both the other man and yourself. No that situation fostered hard feelings, and lead to a man to ignore other possibilities while he fights to get his family back. Allison sighed, drawing Nathan out of his thoughts. HE could wait until he got Carter back to speculate on if there was a chance of a different kind of relationship and interaction with him. She looked a little annoyed, and very tired as she exited the tent- putting an end to their procrastination. Nathan shared a look with Zoe before following her out. It was time to face Eureka’s citizens and tell them something had happened to their favorite Sheriff.
The Aftermath of Death

Chapter Notes

AN: So I’ve experimented with another way to continue writing- I’ve downloaded an app on my phone lol. I haven’t been able to get on my computer much so much of this was written on that app. *Gasp* As it is, it’s November- and in years previous i’ve sworn off Fanfiction while writing 50K on my original novel. This year…. This year I’m going to challenge myself even more than writing 50K in a month with a one year old child would- I’ve proven I can do it with a newborn that required constant care last year. So I’m going to keep sporadically updating random fics while writing 50K… Wish me luck ladies and gents. As of right now I don’t think i’ll count my fic words in my 50K count… but if I get desperate I might because I’m still writing them in November Aye? Stay patient with me loves.

Nathan found that the news of Allison’s and his wedding being canceled was all but forgotten in the light of what had happened to the sheriff in the end. The Scientist had narrowly gotten Zoe to his car before the well wishers had overwhelmed them, only slightly deterred by Lexie. Carter's sister had tried to block their way from following the pair after an odd visual exchange with her niece, and for that Nathan was thankful. Zoe didn't need dozens of people telling her how sorry they were for her loss, not when he intended to get her father back to her in one piece as soon as he could.

Pulling up to the bunker that the Carter family lived in was done in silence. Zoe was staring off into the woods surrounding S.A.R.A.H. with a slightly bitter and rueful look, letting the Scientist know that no matter what she portrayed she wasn't quite as alright with what had happened to her father today. Nathan was relieved to see that reaction to tell the truth. No matter how much history she had with one of her grandparents 'pulling a Danny', her father wasn't with them. And that had to be distressing for the teen, no matter how badly she wanted to believe that he and her grandparents could get Carter back.

“You know Scientist, Marshall, Sheriff… it doesn't matter what hat dad has on, other people always come first. If it's dangerous he's right there in the thick of things, putting himself on the line so other people can go home safe and sound as fucking house's and I already know he assumed I would be okay without him, but damnit. I don't want to be. I ran halfway across the U.S. to get his attention again after his working as a Scientist went FUBAR because of things out of his control. That should freaking mean something right?” The teen whispered suddenly, her voice thick and cutting as she raged against what had happened. Against her father choosing to leave her alone here and dying on her.

Nathan shifted, feeling uncomfortable with the raw grief in her voice, even though he had assumed responsibility for her well being. He didn't deal well with emotions, and was told his attempts at comforting someone were even worse than his coping skills. But if he was taking custody of the teen over her aunt or Allie, then he sure as hell better try his best to calm her down. He looked over her, feeling even more ill at ease with the tears that were starting to fall. If he didn't do something sobbing was the next step- and that was one state that he had never been able to navigate back from.

“Carter knew that you needed him, but like you said- if he could prevent someone else not
making it home he would choose to not make it back himself. It wasn't because he didn't want to come home, but the other choices for the person who went into the chamber was myself or Fargo. I was going to do it, I was in the middle of distracting Fargo and I thought he was too injured to move the way he did, let alone understand what needed to be done and what would happen to the person in the chamber. He sealed himself in before I even realized he has moved from where he was slumped. But he made me promise to take care of you and Eureka. Maybe there's more of an explanation of his actions with S.A.R.A.H. inside.” Nathan explained, going with logic as his weapon of choice against her emotional response. Zoe snorted, wiping her eyes as she liked over the man who had driven her home.

“He wouldn't have let you be the one if he could still move, and Fargo is like a little puppy so I can get that he didn't have much of a choice beyond letting the universe be ripped apart. It doesn't mean I have to like it though.” She shot back before looking at her home. “He probably recorded a video of some sort. He'd been looping nonstop for god knows how long though. That means that he probably hadn't gotten any real sleep so he was running on fuzzy logic.” She added, sounding resigned. Nathan raised an eyebrow at the term and her lips twitched upward in amusement.

“Fuzzy logic is just like it sounds. It's the way your mind kinda gets thick and numb when you've been up way too long. No amount of caffeine can set you right again either. Dad used to get that way all the time before he became a Marshall, less so after and then when he took on being Sheriff in this fine town it started getting more frequent in between policing the locals and pulling odd jobs increasing the safeties on GD labs. I think he liked the relaxation fuzzy logic gave him, because it meant he was actually working on something worthwhile that took him putting in more hours than normal.” She explained and for once Nathan found himself agreeing with Carter. He tended to call that state punch drunk, and even though he would be a little out of it by the time he made it to that point he always felt the most alive then and there. The teen shot him a knowing look before opening the car door and stepping out of the car.

“Come on, let's go see what S.A.R.A.H. has for us. My aunt shouldn't be too far behind us and I want to be in the complete righteous path when I tell her that I'm not her problem.” Zoe all but ordered him impatiently, when he didn't make a move to join her right away. The Scientist raised another eyebrow at that, but he could see a lot of Carter in her, and after watching the other man dissolve that was comforting. Until he got the other man back a part of him was alive and with them. He would do his best to protect that part-time so if Zoe wanted to make sure her aunt had no claim, then inside they would go. He nodded to her, before climbing out of the car himself and following her inside.

“Greetings Dr. Stark and Zoe. Has the documents and video Sheriff Carter left with me this morning become necessary to view and enact? Or was another way found to end the time loops Sheriff Carter claimed we were experiencing?” The smart house greeted immediately, not beating around the bush. Zoe looked down at the floor while Nathan nodded, unable to confirm that Carter wasn't with them at the moment in light of the blunt question for some reason.

“Very well. Shall we convene in the living room? Until the files have been viewed I will not allow anyone else into the house, as per Sheriff Carter's last instructions. I believe he wished to give Zoe a chance to assimilate what happened before she had to face anyone else.” S.A.R.A.H. suggested. Zoe bit her lip, before nodding. She was obviously a not as ready to go through this as she had implied outside. But it had to be done. Jack Carter's words needed to be heard, and Nathan needed to know what he had to do to have legal custody of Zoe, plain and simple.
“Thank you S.A.R.A.H., that sound like the most efficient way to do this.” Nathan offered, when Zoe didn't offer any sort of verbal acknowledgement to the houses suggestion. He guided the teen to the mentioned room and sat her down. He took a seat next to her and the T.V. screen flickered on, Carter's form materializing on it. He looked rough, just as he had in the time maintenance chamber.

“So I guess I was able to either convince or trick Stark into letting me manually reset the clock. I'm so sorry Zoe, but it was either this, Stark or the universe who went. I wasn't about to let Stark or the Universe go kaboom so there you have it. Now I'm leaving you with some options kiddo, you can stay with Lexie, Stark, or Stark and Allison depending on which way the wind blows. I know a couple loops ago he was ready to cancel the wedding…. But I'm rambling here. Of course you have other choices, my parents, or your other parent… but those are the ones that will let you stay here in Eureka. I know you like it here… and I know Stark. He's not going to write me off as gone, and if Fargo activated the safeties in the room then he above anyone can get me back given enough time. But Zoe, you have to keep living. Me getting myself dissolved doesn't give you the right to slack off on anything. When I come back I want it to be to a wildly successful daughter, who has thrived. I made this decision, and while I regret leaving you I won't regret saving Stark’s bossy behind or the universe. I love you Zoe Addison Carter. Never forget that.” Carter spoke to his child. Nathan felt awkward listening to the man's goodbyes, but he didn't want to leave Zoe to hear it on her own. The teen sniffed, and that was all it took for Nathan to bring her closer to him as the message ended. She burrowed into his side, her tears wetting his expensive shirt, but he just let her cry, not bothering to care about it for the moment. She has just listened to her father telling her goodbye, and he was pretty sure that even though she had declared that her father was ‘pulling a Danny’ that the events of the day were hitting her hard now. After about so minutes the crying stopped, but Nathan was faced with a new challenge. The distraught teen had somehow fallen asleep on him. He was contemplating what to do next when S.A.R.A.H. spoke up again, catching his attention.

“Sheriff Carter also recorded a message for you Dr. Stark. He suggested that you view it alone, or when Zoe was unaware of what would be said. You should know that all physical copies of his legal affairs are located in the lock box in his room, I have the code when you need it.” The smart house informed him. Nathan paused in his planning, contemplating what kind of message Carter had left for him. Would he explain what went through his mind when he had left Zoe the choice to choose him as her guardian? Or would the man explain what had happened in previous loops? He looked at the teen laying against his side and sighed.

There was no way to get her to another room, let alone up the stairs to her room while she was asleep and he knew it. He wouldn't be able to carry her that far alone, no matter how much time he put in at the gym a week. But he wanted to hear the message that had been left for him. The papers could wait until later, but his curiosity demanded that he see the message ASAP.

“S.A.R.A.H. lower the volume by one-third and play the Sheriff’s message. Cease playing if Zoe's vitals give any indication of her waking.” The Scientist orders, coming to a decision to listen to the message while the teen rested against his side. The house would be able to tell if Zoe was starting to wake and stop it before she heard anything theoretically.

“As you wish Dr. Stark.” The house replied, before another image of Carter appeared, this time the other man looked sheepishly towards the couch Nathan was on with his daughter.

“Looks like I got passed you this time around Scientist. I'm sorry that you had to watch what going into the chamber to manually fix it did to me, I really am. And I'm sure Zoe is going to call my parents the first chance she gets, so you won't be alone in this, in working on getting me back and in watching Zoe. She's a handful, but I have a feeling she's going to choose you to be her guardian while I'm… not around. You see she likes the thought of us finally realizing that we have been flirting since we met, and up until a dozen loops ago I thought she was crazy for thinking that you
would be interested in me. Hell in that loop I started out in a bad mood, you see I temporarily lost my mind in the one before it and I kissed Allison even though my flirting with her has always been playfully on my side instead of serious. She let me down easy, explained that while she felt something for me that I wouldn't ever fit into her plans, or her family's expectations and she wouldn't put me through that. It pissed me off more than anything, considering I'm not really an 'average' as Eureka calls me.” Carter greeted looking even bedraggled than the previous message. Nathan grimaced as he spoke about kissing Allie and her response. So the kind Sheriff was fully aware that the planted IQ had limited whatever relationship he might have had with Allie, and he had heard it from her mouth at that. It had to have stung, even if he didn't seem to have had any plans on actually pursuing Stark's ex-wife. This was a message Allie wouldn't be seeing if Nathan had a choice though- with Allie knowing Carter's IQ was not what she had thought the fact that another her had used it against him when he 'made a move on her' would make her uncomfortable. Carter snorted. 

“So since I had already lost my mind by kissing a woman, who is very attractive and fun to flirt with but ultimately more interested in status and just not my type, I thought 'What the hell, I've been looping for god knows how long, so let's listen to Zoe and try someone more my speed and taste.' I cornered you and repeated my folly, but with more interesting results. You were more then happy to get me pressed against the wall, and promise that the wedding would be called off just as soon as you got to see Allison face to face. Then I had to tell you about the loops, and in that one you just looked over me, and nodded- taking me at my word. I think you said something about it would take me looping so many times to get the hint that there were other options in Eureka beside Allison. But at least you didn't insult my intelligence, whatever you may currently think it is. I mean I love acting the part of Mayberry, but to have my supposed intelligence used against me like Alison did was insulting. If I was a ‘111’ IQ hearing something like that would have crushed me. A beautiful woman has feelings for me, but because I could never match her on an intellectual level she would never go there. But you… it didn't seem to matter what my IQ was, just as long as we made it through the loop and you got a chance to explore what we could be. If the loops had ended that time… I would have told you everything. I have some doozy secrets after all, most of them I'm sure will come out once my parents get here to help you on this. I only wish I got to see your reaction. Don't be too hard on Fargo once he fesses up to having hacked my more… secret files. He did it in defense of S.A.R.A.H. and I get that. And the kid stayed quiet because if I wasn't hurting his A.I. then the file wasn't his problem. Besides, I think he felt special being the only native Eureka to know.’” Carter… Jack continued to speak. Nathan's unoccupied hand clenched in surprise and with the slightest amount of frustration as his thoughts of Jack having made a move in a previous loop was confirmed. The reaction the other man described him as having made complete sense, but the Scientist sorely wished that Jack had done that in this loop. The other man would have been in the infirmary and no where near the damned time maintenance lab ad Nathan wouldn’t be faced with getting him home. As the other man continued to speak Nathan felt a smile tug on his lips. He had already puzzled out that Jack had some interesting secrets to be put together, but hearing it from him like that, seemed just like the other man. Carter would continue to give hints to tease Nathan with when he wasn't around to give answers at the moment. Jack wasn't done speaking though, and the fact that Nathan's message was longer than the one he had left his daughter didn't miss him. Nathan knew the message Jack had left to Zoe had been complete when it came to what he had wanted to say to her though. This was different, Jack apparently had more to say to him- things that were left unsaid in between them until now.

“Obviously we didn't fix the loops that time around. We had found out the most likely fix just before the end of the loop- because us working together is something brilliant, but you refused to take that step when we had other options still. I didn’t like letting the world loop again, but you convinced me to give it one more try… and we failed. I tried not to show interest the next one to avoid that repercussion. But I failed somehow, it must have been the fact that I was used to
interacting with you in different way that time. You ended up kissing me yourself, after canceling your wedding in the next four loops because of some hint or change in behaviour I must have made. This time… I will be as disinterested in you as possible, I'll be dense, annoying and sarcastic; because I didn't think I'll make another loop even if the universe does survive it. I'll apologize now, since you know I kinda can't until you figure out just how to get me back from wherever I end up after I fix this mess. I'm sorry for acting like the epitome of Mayberry today, and I'm sorry I'm only telling you about us in the other loops now.” He finished, the video ending. It wasn enough for Nathan, who wanted to rail at the other man about how he had no right to make those kinds of decisions. It would have to wait until Nathan got Jack back though- because the other man wasn’t here for the scientist to yell at. Zoe slept on, unaware of what her father had left for her pillow to listen to, and the thoughts that her pillow had looping in his head.
Chapter Summary

In which parents are shown, secrets are thought of and interactions are had.

(Will mention MPreg via genetic manipulation done on a clone by aliens.... silly things and gender don't mix apparently.... you have been warned)

Chapter Notes

AN" an update for my lovelies.

Chapter 4

Jack O'Neill looked out the window of the SUV he was riding in and resisted the urge to bang his head against it as the forests outside zipped past them. Jon had really done it this time. His son had 'pulled a Danny', he was technologically dead until they could get his stubborn ass back from wherever he was off floating. At that thought the General shot a look at his partner. Danny wasn't looking to happy with this situation himself, but then again over the years they had gone through so much with Jon. He closed his eyes, thinking about just how he had gotten his child.

Jonathan J. O'Neill Jr. came into SG1’s lives as a teenage clone. An exact genetic copy of Jack. And they had set him up to grow up and grow old as his own person after some drama. And then it happened. Jon’s DNA wasn't stable, and he was dying- that bastard Loki hadn't been worried about the longevity of the clone that he was working with it turned out, and getting ahold of Thor before Jon died was a pain in the ass because of the fact he was a freaking Alien that went god knows where on a daily basis, but they had managed it.

The Asgardian alien didn't have any good answers for the team after he had looked over the ailing teen though. Without a secondary genetic source weaved into the teens genetic structure he would die within the next 24 hours plain and simple. He would die just like Charlie had, and that was the very first time Jack had seen the teen as something other than a teenage copy of himself. He realized with a start that Jon was like his son, they chatted daily- he enjoyed hearing about his life and achievements. He had been a parent again and hadn't even realized it. Jack lost his ability to think- unable to process what he was being told when it felt like his world was ending, and his new partner had stepped up while he was off in lala land remembering his son, and mourning the one he had only just realized he had. This was Charlie all over again and this time he wouldn’t make it through the aftermath alive. Losing Jon would kill him and he knew it.

The next thing Jack knew, he was being told that his son was going to be alright by the grey alien. There were a whole bunch of technical jargon in the explanation that Jack blocked out as they were told to him. All he cared about was that his son, with the introduction of a secondary genetic source Jon was no longer just a clone of Jack but his actual blood son, was going to be alright. Jon was really his child now- a child Jack now shared with Danny. Which was kind of fitting given how much he loved his damn space monkey and how it would be impossible any other way.
Everything wasn't peaches and cream yet in their world though. Jon wasn't the same as before they meddled with his genetics…. He was smaller-younger to be more specific and NID was more interested in him than ever which was especially dangerous considering the lengths that they were willing to go to get the things that interested them. So Sam, who was pregnant with her daughter at the time, volunteered to leave SG1 with Jon and raise both him and her child as siblings to get the shrunken boy away from NID hands before they caught up to him and got him into a lab. For the original SG1 team this seemed like the perfect solution to their problem.

The official cover story was in the early days of the SG project she and Jack had a fling and their son had been raised by relatives until now. Sam had taken some leave around the 'time' they had decided Jon would have been born, so all it took was some professional grade forgeries, and Jon had a brand new life to step into. He had a mother and a father, and would soon have a half sister on paper. Jack and Daniel would come to visit them like a proper family and that should have been the end of things, until Jon turned 18 again that is. Then the plan came to a standstill, because no one knew what he would do after growing up again.

The plan would have been golden if Jon was younger then 11 and had the mind to go with his age. The brat didn't want to leave his life behind him like that though, because his mind hadn't changed just his physical age. That showed in him running back to the mountain every chance he got. Even with keeping Jack’s memories, and the memories he had formed when he was just a clone shouldn't have made an 11 year old doing that an easy thing, but for Jon it seemed to be and that golden tidbit clued everyone involved into the fact that he was smarter than Jack portrayed himself to be. Which was another insight that was a whole other bag of cats and dogs though-there was speculation that Danny’s genetics had added the extra smarts but that was shut down after Sam had a friend hack into Jack's files as a joke and found out he had some serious smarts to his name. Combine that with Daniel's DNA and it was a killer combination.

They had managed to keep Johnny Carter with his 'mother' Sam until he turned 15. 4 years, and then Jack had reluctantly pulled some strings and Jon Carter was 'aged' in the governmental records to 17 and restarted his training to join them in the mountain. Watching Jon go out with teams once he was recruited a year after that was bittersweet. Jack himself was in no shape to continue going off world, his knees couldn't do the running for his life thing anymore and he didn't like to think of his son doing it either. But Jon was good at what he did-playing protector and Scientist all at once and he got results, which made everyone happy. Until he wanted to stop altogether that is. Then some of the higher ups were not so happy with the younger O'Neill.

By then Jon had met someone, had been seeing them when he was on world and it was then that they had found out a little quirk about his biology that hadn't been apparent before. Jack's son was pregnant, and a pregnant male would draw eyes, let alone the danger that state would be in off world. He had to leave the Stargate program before he started showing or hiding him when he was 11 would have been for nothing because he would be in a lab being dissected along side the baby that was growing in his body in before they could do a thing about it. And that scared the family that SG1 had become.

So for 7 and 1/2 months after he left Colorado all together and settled into a loft in New York Jon became Jackie Jackson, a newly single pregnant mother to be. And then he became Jack Carter, U.S. Marshall once he had his child, a baby girl that he named Zoe. He changed professions because he wouldn't keep going off world with an infant daughter and Jack didn't blame his son one bit. He wished that he would have retired when Charlie was young sometimes, because then he wouldn't have had a reason to keep a loaded gun in the house around a child. Jon was doing his best to be the parent Zoe deserved, and Jack was enjoying being a grandfather.

Zoe’s father was read into the situation after he had gotten cleared for the security clearances, but
he hadn't reacted well to having a child with another guy, and had flat out refused to believe the DNA testing that he had watched be performed. In fact the asshole, who Jack never thought of by name, had used Zoe as proof Jon had cheated on him with a woman and bolted. He hadn't come around to believing the truth until Zoe was almost 10, and by then Jack had been married to his now ex wife for 4 years.

Zoe's other parent being a male hadn't bothered Abby the psychologist as much as the fact that her husband had secrets and she didn't have clearance to know them. Of course the fact that her husband's ex had the classification to know some of it didn't seem to help her cope with the revelation much. Instead it was the beginning of the end for their already strained relationship. They wouldn't last outside of 2 more years, not that they had known that then.

Jack Sr. hadn't liked his son's wife too much to tell the truth- she reminded him a lot of Sarah and Jr. wasn't his copy any more so he shouldn't be repeating his mistakes like this. He should be happy and in love with a person who he would share the rest of his life with, not just a portion of it like he was sure that Abby would. And an even an idiot could see that Jr. wasn't really into woman, even though he was trying to be. He seemed to think that Zoe needed a woman in her life, a mother to teach her how to grow into a woman herself. It made absolutely no sense since the little girl had both Sam and Lexie, but Jon was stubborn.

Not that Zoe's dad was much better than Abby in Jack's books. Jr and Zoe deserved the world, not some jackass who denied them for 10 years even faced with the damned proof that yes he had a child with another man. But Jr. wanted Zoe to know the man who helped make her, so an uneasy set of visitations were arranged between father and daughter. The following year was enough to make Abby who had been Zoe's only other parent for the duration of her marriage to Jr. admit that she felt jealous over the fact that she was now sharing their daughter- which didn't help their marriage at all as that jealousy turned to resentment. Then again not many things help their marriage even though Jr. tried. It really was Sarah all over again, just without a dead child spurring it on- though a child was involved. It wasn't a good place for Zoe, even though Jon tried to keep the peace between the two by throwing them together again and again by taking longer assignments and making them see each other more. That had backfired on him, and then led to Eureka and to this wonderful situation that they were heading to deal with.

A hand on Jack's thigh brought him out if his thoughts, and back to the present, the present where his second son was currently dead and they were going to save his ass- something he could never hope to do for Charlie. Danny raised an eyebrow at him and he managed a weak smile. When they took the red eye last night he had hoped to god that he would wake up and find that Zoe's call had been some nightmare, but he hadn't been that lucky.

“This better be the first and last time he pulls something like this on us Daniel.” He finally spoke out loud, voicing something other than a hopeful optimism that this would be resolved quickly. Danny snorted at his statement, shaking his head in response.

“No matter what Johnny started out as he has both of our genetics Jack. I'm surprised this is the first time we've had to deal with him 'pulling a Danny'. Hell, I've lost count on how many times you have almost died, and we all know my track record. He has all of your memories and mannerisms and we've raised him with Sam since he was 11 so there is that addition to consider. We're going to get him back, so try to go easy on him when we do? He did what he had to do to save the universe- all of us were at risk when he made that decision.” The linguistic professional murmured. Jack resisted the urge to glare at him, knowing that everything he said was right. It didn't mean that he had to like it though. His remaining son wasn't supposed to die before he did, losing one too soon was more than enough for Jack to handle in a lifetime.
“I won’t treat him any different than what you get after you pull something like this.” He finally offered as a concession. Danny looked unimpressed by his offering, but then again since they got together Jack gave him hell every time he died and he knew it.

“Jack…” the trouble prone man warned, but the general just shrugged, perking up as they saw the sign marking how far Eureka was. He would give Jon, Jack, whatever his stubborn son went as, all the hell he wanted to. It was a parent's prerogative to do so when their child did something monumentally stupid like getting killed. Hell the older man knew that his Granddaughter would be right there next to him, egging him on even if his husband would try to keep them from giving the punk the talking to he deserved for putting them through this. Jon had Danny's complete parental adoration going for him, and Danny's understanding of dying to save someone else, so of course he would defend him from criticism over dying.

“He's not just going to die on us without me saying something about it Danny. I know why he did what he did, but until we get him back he's dead. Not just off 'pulling a Danny' on us with a return date to look forward to.” The General said firmly, signalling the end of this conversation. His husband sighed, before looking out the window. The rest of the drive was finished in a heavy silence, both parent contemplating what had happened to their child, and what would come next.

Nathan looked over at the teen who was bantering with her house as she fixed dinner. S.A.R.A.H. was being oddly cooperative with Jack's daughter. He had heard the Sheriff griping about his house not letting him even cook enough to know this. Lexie had come and gone the day before, shortly after Nathan had managed to get out from under the sleeping teen and gather the legal papers that Jack had left behind so he would be ready for such an eventuality. He knew that she would be around sooner or later and counted himself lucky that he had managed to get them before her arrival.

Jack's sister had insisted on hearing that Zoe chose him as her guardian from the teens own mouth when he had informed her of the current situation, so that had lead to them woken her up. Lexie hadn't stayed at the house that night, picking up a room at the inn instead as a show of displeasure at the teen’s choice. And she had picked up her belongings this morning. Zoe didn't seem to care about her aunt's show of displeasure much, but then again she had said that her father and aunt had a rocky relationship between them at the best of times so this probably wasn't a new sight to see. Lexie seemed so young next to Jack that it wasn't funny.

Nathan had taken the day off from going into GD and diving into the problem of getting Jack back in one piece. Zoe needed one day of normalcy, before everything became a mess of working on his normally projects, plus his newest. He owed that much to her, given that he had accepted custody of her, even though she planned to stay living in S.A.R.A.H. and not in his home. He would patch the A.I. into his personal devices to make sure the teen didn't get up to anything she shouldn't, but she was independent enough to not need him hovering over her.

One day he and Jack might be something that would give Nathan the right to be a hovering parent, but for now he was her guardian, and until she proved his trust in her to be in error he would give her the space she needed- letting her come to him when she needed anything. The teen in question sighed, looking down at the pan of simmering soup that she had been working on for dinner. She was either in the mood to cook and stock up on leftovers, or she was expecting guests for dinner. He wasn't sure which one was the fact at the mentioned time, but he was sure she would tell him soon. She looked up and in his direction with a small smile.

“Granddad and Poppa should be calling soon, to let us know that they are in town and to ask for
directions. If I know Granddad, he spent most of last night pulling strings and calling in favors before catching a flight to the nearest airport. They'll be driving the rest of the way, so if I have my timing right they should be having dinner with us if you don't mind. Grandad may poke some fun at you, or he may decide to see if he like you more than Abby or my other parent. And you'll probably find out some more interesting information about dad.” She announced, explaining her actions. Nathan raised an eyebrow, not showing the thrill of shock he felt at Jack's parents possibly being mere minutes away. He had expected them to take longer to get here, knowing how slow the governmental machine could be, and knowing they would have to make arrangements with their own program.

“They are your family, I wouldn't have a problem with them being here no matter what. I would have gotten them here if you asked, even if they were civilians instead of military guns that will keep Mansfield and Thorne off my back while I work on getting your father home.” He promised in response to her question. She smiled tiredly at him, before nodding to herself as she stirred the soup.

“I know you would have. You're that kind of guy, family means a lot to you- I see that in how you act with Kevin in the café.” The teen responded, showing a great deal of maturity in her observations. “It's part of the reason why I knew I was going to choose you to be my guardian in Eureka once you mentioned that dad had made arrangements for me. You honor your commitments, and taking charge of me means that I'm kinda family to you, even if you didn't get the fun lovey part with my dad yet. And for what it's worth, I do think that the two of you to would be good for each other. Dad's good at breaking up your broody moments and you give him a challenge.” She added with a sassy grin. Nathan snorted, a smile tugging at his lips as he thought over her words. No one could ever say that Zoe Carter wasn't smart or observant. Every action she took had a meaning behind it- from choosing him as a guardian to encouraging him to see what she didn't know he had already realized. But he would keep that to himself and let her figure it out. She seemed to like puzzles after all.

“Smart girl.” The Scientist complemented, and watched her grin widen. Their moment was cut short by the phone ringing and Zoe's short laugh as she grabbed it to answer it.

“Did you guys get passed the bridge?” The teen greeted whoever was calling, presumably her grandparents. There was a booming laugh from the other side of the phone, one that reminded Nathan of Jack sharply before the other party said something he couldn't quite catch. Zoe snorted.

“Granddad this is me you're talking to. I calculated the quickest you could get here and planned for a half an hour before that. Once you guys get here I have dinner for 10 prepared, then we can get your lab monkeys settled at the inn. Aunt Lexie cleared out of the guestroom when I let her know that I wasn't choosing her for my guardian, so it's open for you and Poppa to use. I'm going to be taking Dad's room for the sake of making another guest room and he'd hate having anyone in it, and Grandma Sam can have mine for now.” She replied. There was another laugh, and then Nathan turned away as the teen started giving directions to the bunker to her grandfather. As she hung up she looked over at Nathan and grinned, looking more relaxed than she had since Allison had opened her mouth and declared her father as god as dead with her just outside the wedding tent door. Nathan felt a ball of worry ease in his chest, and felt more relaxed himself. If anything besides providing interference with the higher ups, Jack's parents would keep Zoe even tempered when he got lost in his work. And he would get lost in finding a way to get Jack back, there was no doubt about that because reassembling him wasn't going to be easy. He nodded to her, before going to set out the dishes that were needed for dinner. Her grandparents would be here soon enough, and she had enough to do in making the night's meal.
AN: Yet another story that hasn’t been updated in way to long- but I haven't forgotten or abandoned it, and I haven't died so here is an update!

“I’m sorry for your loss, but I don’t think you understand the scope of things here gentleman. Your… Son lost cohesion at a molecular level. Even if by some Miracle we were able to get those molecules to convalesce in a humanoid shape he’d be dead. Wasting D.O.D funds on bringing back a body just isn’t going to happen. I’m sorry for you’re loss, but storming into town and making demand’s won’t change what happened and the results of the incident.” Thorne said, smiling sharply at O’Neill and Jackson, looking as if she was sure they would step down in their demands for recovery efforts after her ruling. Mansfield was looking uncomfortable behind her, as if he wished he was anywhere but here. Nathan resisted a retort that rose to him lips as Jack’s father just chuckled, and shook his head before leaning forward and looking the fixer in her eyes.

“Lady… I don’t think you understand the scope of things. Our family has a history of shaking death off like a bad cold so I’m not even particularly worried about that part of his recovery. And if you’re worried about using this town’s funding to try to recover one of it’s missing employees I think you need to get your priorities straight. Or I’ll be glad to have someone higher then your pay grade set them straight. Like the president maybe? Because I’m willing to bet he’s just a phone call away and he’ll be willing to have a talk with you about this. Aside from the potential law suit ignoring efforts to bring my son back would bring down on you, I’m sure the citizen’s of this fair town won’t just leave Jack out there floating around without having their say. This place run’s on their idea’s and their productivity, and let me tell you. Unhappy scientists don’t produce shit. And you can only try to redact so many before your prized ship sinks because there’s no one to keep it going. Not that your bosses would approve of the reductions made based on recovering my son, since really? That’s just petty.” O’Neill drawled, looking bored as he responded to her quasi dismissal of bringing his son home. And he did it in a calmer manner then Nathan would have been able to had he been the one arguing to work on bringing Jack back. A look of anger passed over Thorne’s face as he spoke, and Allison shifted from where she had delivered her medical opinion that Jack was dead. Her words had reinforced Thorne’s idea that she could try and turn down the newcomers request.

“You have no authority here. If you think for one second the employees of this town would risk losing their jobs over a simple sheriff you’re sadly mistaken. I understand losing your son isn’t an easy thing to accept, but he did his job, and the person who replaces him will continue on in that legacy. Eureka is a business that I’ve been brought into help. Not a charity that throws money at hopeless cases because their daddy demanded us to and I’m sure that even the ‘President’ would agree.” She rebutted, sounding confident in her stance and more then just a little mean as she made light of his casual mention that the President would be on their side. O’Neill rolled his eyes, before looking at Carter and nodding before she hit something on her phone then activated the speaker with a grin. The sound of it ringing filled the air as a call was made.

“General O’Neill. How can I help you today?” A friendly voice filled the air. O’Neill grinned at Mansfield, who had stiffened, and was looking at the phone with a mix of shock and dread. Obviously the other General hadn’t expected O’Neill to call whomever he had. And it looked like this person may hold they key to keeping Thorne off Nathan’s back as he worked on getting Jack
back. The scientist resisted snorting, obviously it helped having friend’s in high places.

“Mr. President, I’m calling in relation to the situation we spoke of this morning. It seems Ms. Thorne has decided that it isn’t worth pursuing a recovery effort at all. Not profitable enough or some bull. I was hoping you would be able to change her mind, seeing as she’s stated I have no authority here, so I doubt that anything I say will change her mind.” O’Neill hummed, calmer and more diplomatic about the situation then anyone in his shoes could be. Even Thorne looked taken aback as she realized O’Neill had a direct line to the president, a little bit of fear coming into her eyes for some reason. There was shifting heard over the phone- paperwork being moved around as the man on the other end looked for something.

“Yes. About that. I’ve been doing some looking into the town in question since you let me know what happened Jack. From what I see it seems the person who needs recovering has been a key asset in preventing numerous disasters over his tenure there. Even if I didn’t know him, and the circumstances around the accident, I would be suggesting that efforts be made to bring him home. He’s earned at least that much from everyone considering the gravity of the incident he resolved.” Came the response, firmly disproving the assertion that the President would see Thorne’s point of view when it came to recovery efforts. Mansfield nodded, putting his hand on Thorne’s shoulder to stop her from speaking. The woman was glaring at the phone in indignation, and shook off the hand as she made a noise of unhappiness. This obviously wasn’t going how she had planned it to.

“Sir! You can’t be suggesting that we waste resources on a dead man. Dr. Blake herself presented information that implies that even if they managed to get him back, it would just be a body. I can’t in good conscious condone what amounts to a massive waste of this towns funds, no matter what the man’s connections were when he was living. He knew what he was getting into when he took the job in Eureka.” She protested, making Allison look down in shame, and for a vicious moment Nathan hoped that she regretted presenting her findings. He knew Allison was just trying to be logical, to let everyone know of the most probably outcome of recovery efforts in her eyes, but he knew. He knew that if they got Jack back, it wouldn’t be just a body to bury. He had to believe that because the alternative was too painful to consider, given all the revelation’s that had happened since time had been reset.

“Bringing a hero home, even if just to bury, is never wasting resources Ms. Thorne. You should know that, and if you don’t then perhaps we should be reconsidering your posting in Eureka.” The President responded evenly, a note of scolding in his voice, her expression did not change, but this was the president, and she couldn’t go against him if he was saying to try to recover Carter. Glaring at the man’s father- and she could see where Carter got his attitude towards authority and rules from when he smirked and winked at her, she nodded once. The man had won this battle, but she was sure there would be more to come. The task of getting Carter back seemed impossible so once the scientists had thier fill of frustration she could cease the recovery efforts saying that they had tried, and no one could say otherwise. But until she was removed, or done with what she had come here to do… she was still in control here and it wouldn’t hurt to remind them of that.

“Very well Sir. But If I see reduced productivity in any of the resident’s working with the General and his team I will be forced to have them withdraw from this project or redact them from the community.” She said stiffly, trying to hold onto the bit of power that she held here.

“I think not. From what I understand the resident’s that will be needed to help bring Carter home do not have any pressing matters this endeavor will delay currently. I think they can afford to concentrate on getting our missing man home. With the resources that came in from Cheyanne I’m sure this will be resolved quickly.” The President responded, a bit of bite in his words. Thorne’s face hardened, but for once she didn’t retort. Instead she nodded, though the only ones to see it were the men in the room with her. Nathan couldn’t resist the smirk that came at that. This conversation had
turned out to be kind of fun, and a part of him wished more than anything that Jack was here to see it. He would be snickering just like his father, and pissing Thorne off even more.

“Understood, Sir.” She finally acknowledged verbally, before getting up and walking stiffly from the room. It was only then the calm demeanor of the Team that Zoe had called in- her family, broke. Dr. Jackson-O’Neill started grumbling under his breath and making gestures with his hands at the door that had closed, while Carter sighed, taking the phone off speaker and bringing it to her ear.

“Thank you for your help sir. I’ll be sure to tell JJ you had his back when we get him home. Yes Sir, we should be getting to work now. Alright, if Thorne tries anything you’ll be the first to know.” she said rapidly into the phone, the conversation implying that both expected Jack to be alive, and Thorne to be a continuing problem, from her smile the President wasn’t disagreeing. As the Conversation ended determination set in, and Sam looked at her pseudo son’s ‘friend’.

“Alright then, we’ll need to see the data gathered from the room Jack decided to pull his Danny in, and the background information on the project itself, and the incident. Once we’ve gone over that with the team- and you Dr. Stark, we’ll have some sort of idea on how to get him home. I hope. Jack always liked to be difficult- he get’s that from both his fathers, so I wouldn’t put it passed him to make us jump through some hoops.” She spoke directly towards Nathan. For a moment he could see Jack, and his unwavering conviction that this was how something would go and no one would sway him. Jack had Incorporated many of his ‘families’ quirks into his own personality as he grew, and with him being gone right now, it kind of hurt to see him in so many other people.

“I can agree that Carter specializes in being difficult most of the time, god knows we’ve seen him at his finest a time or two while he’s been here. One would hope that given the circumstances he won’t give us a hard time though. Dr. Fargo should have all the data you need ready if you would follow me. Zoe’s working after school, but I’d like to be done with what we are doing today before she gets off, or at least be at the Bunker. Jack wouldn’t like us leaving her to her own devices while we’re working to get him back.” He replied firmly, knowing himself and his tendency to ignore the world while working on a problem. He had taken on Zoe’s care, and he wasn’t going to let Jack down by not doing right by her. The looks of approval his statement gained felt odd, he was used to defending his actions in relation to a child belonging to someone he cared for (Kevin being a prime example.) but it looked like everyone was agreeing with him. Dr. Jackson-O’Neill grinned at him in fact.

“I think you’re going to fit in with us just fine. If it starts getting late we’ll break for the night, I promise” He assured Nathan with a small laugh, Jacks other father just rolled his eyes and smirked at him, as the scientist wondered at the easy acceptance he was getting. And it wasn’t because of his intelligence or anything like that, which was mind boggling. No one in their right mind would call him a people person most days, but that didn’t seem to matter here and now.

“Fargo should be this way.” Nathan murmured, wondering just how much his life was going to change as he lead the group out of the room they had met with Mansfield and Thorne in. He had to admit he was looking forward to the changes, if he got to keep Jack and Zoe in the end.

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