How I Spent My Summer Vacation

by facetofcathy

Summary

After a meeting of the minds in a bar in Colorado Springs, John and Rodney embark on some family visits. Driving, drinking and other fun activities ensue. Takes place immediately after Trio.

Notes

This story was posted on June 30, 2008. If you are really interested, you can see the original version here at Dreamwidth. I am both pleased and a bit chagrined that it gives enough to readers that there is still demand for it. I could not bring myself to post it here in its original state, but I didn't have the commitment to the story to properly re-write it either. I split the difference and tidied it up a little, but did not substantially change anything. I put that Juvenilia tag on there to let you know that I don't think this is technically or objectively a very good story. But I do not think its totally valueless either. This story is in its final state, I will not edit it ever again, and so, reader beware, there will be imperfections.

See the end of the work for more notes.

"This is all your fault you know."

Rodney was busy contemplating the ceiling of the SGC infirmary and coming around to the idea that three weeks leave on Earth might not be so horrible after all, so it took him a minute to recognize John Sheppard's reedy whine and another to realize that the words were directed at him.
Rodney sat up on the bed and yanked the privacy curtain back. John was sitting in the next bunk, dangling his legs like a sullen teenager and glaring at Rodney.

"How is it my fault? And leave is not supposed to be a punishment you know."

"It is your fault, McKay, because you were the one who hacked Carter's computer and left editorial comments in all her files." John was wagging his finger for God's sake.

"I'm not the one who corrected her math on the ammunition requisitions and in red type, no less," Rodney shot back.

"I was helping. Anyone could make a mistake, and ammunition is kind of important to me. You left notes on every file on her hard drive—in bold italics in little pop-up boxes with giant yellow exclamation points. It's no wonder she exiled us." John crossed his arms and was so close to pouting it was, okay it was sexy, but Rodney wasn't going there.

"It's not my fault she broke her leg and needed us to do her dumb job for a week while she was doped up on Keller's happy pills. And it's not exile you moron, you're just mad because you don't want to visit your weird brother, but you'll feel guilty if you don't and won't be able to enjoy your extreme sports vacation due to your crushing load of repressed emotions." Rodney crossed his arms back at John. He was pretty sure he couldn't actually pout, he didn't have a little puffy lower lip like John did, not that he'd ever noticed John's lips. He could look smug though, and crossing his arms made his biceps look bigger than they were.

"He's not weird, and you don't even know what extreme sports are. You're still barely speaking to Jeannie; how long are you going to stay mad at her for getting married anyway. You should be glad to get a chance to spend time with her, see this leave as an opportunity." John was glaring again.

"Hey, did you just change sides in the argument here. I never said I wasn't going to visit Jeannie; I just have no intention of spending three whole weeks eating tofu and picking gum out of my hair. Quit being such a baby. Besides, has it ever occurred to you that there's more to the story between Jeannie and me than just my incredulity that she would give up on her own genius for a one-way ticket to planet soccer mom?" Rodney was wincing, inwardly he hoped. He hadn't really been intending to take this conversational turn; he'd just got caught up in the fun of the argument. Nobody bickered like John.

John had stopped bickering and was looking puzzled. "No, can't say I ever did. What's the rest of the story then? She steal your last pudding cup too?"

"Ha, very, very ha." Oh what the hell, John was a little bit more evolved than the average career officer and smarter than he pretended to be. What's the worst that could happen? "I'll tell you, just not here. If we ever get sprung, I'll buy you a beer and tell you the whole sordid tale. I've got a good travel agent I can hook you up with too, if you decide what you're going to do."

"Cool."

Once the SGC finished checking them for alien parasites or bizarre new STDs, or whatever the hell they needed three vials of blood for, they shared a car-pool Ford to the most convenient bar. It just happened to be in the lobby of the hotel they were both going to book into for the night. Rodney had gotten rid of his apartment and had set up a deal with an agency to store his mail and messages along with a few belongings. He wasn't sure if John even had any belongings left on Earth.

The waitress brought them two Sam Adams and tried to flirt with John. He smiled at her with his
dealing with the more annoying natives face that Rodney had always found smarmy and creepy, but women seemed to like. When she finally left, John took a sip of beer and made a hurry up gesture. "Whole sordid story," He quoted.

Rodney took a much bigger sip, something most people would call an inelegant gulp, and pinched the bridge of his nose. "All right, just remember you asked. Okay, so yes, I am a genius—not news, and I was very young when it became obvious that I was learning at a completely different speed than the other kids. My father was thrilled; he was a teacher—chemistry—at a small private college. He bought books on math and science, chemistry of course, but also astronomy, biology, anything he could find that I could read. My reading level advanced really quickly too. He bought me educational toys, telescope, chemistry set, more books than you can imagine, and he got tutors, other teachers from his school, until I was too far ahead of them. I was twelve, and I was ready for university, but of course they wouldn't take me; he hired a physics grad student to teach me. Anything I wanted he would give it to me—as long as it was educational. I was a happy little mini-intellectual.

"Jeannie, on the other hand—she's four years younger than me—and by the time I was twelve or thirteen, it was obvious to everyone that she was really smart too, maybe as smart as me. It wasn't like Dad didn't encourage her exactly; it was just always sort of understood that I was the genius, and she was just awfully smart for a girl, so she was encouraged to do other things, ballet, skating, social things with other girls. When I was just sixteen, she was starting high school two years early and was getting a bit bored with how easy it was. She resented the time Dad spent with me and why wouldn't she? I spent some time with her and loaned her my books, but no teenage boy, no matter how geeky, wants to spend all his time with his little sister. I was lobbying hard to go away to America to go to school, but Dad was not having it; he had some deal worked out with UBC to take me on full scholarship when I was seventeen."

John had signalled the waitress for another round sometime in the middle of his walk through McKay history, and she had switched their empty glasses for full ones and hadn't hung around.

"School was out, it was summer, and Jeannie and I were allowed to be home alone. Jeannie was supposed to be out somewhere, and she came back early and caught me making out on the couch with Jason Daliwahl." Rodney paused finally to see how John was receiving that news. His eyebrows had crawled up a bit, but John could do bland like nobody's business. Rodney couldn't tell if he was shocked or not.

"So, being a kid, frustrated and bored and wanting to stick it to me, she told Dad. His reaction was—well—interesting, if you find car wrecks interesting I guess. First, he refused to speak to me for three days and practically locked me in my room. Second, he forced me to go to a psychiatrist. Now that could have gone much worse, truthfully, but well, long story—I ended up learning everything I could about head shrinking in self-defence, and well, a few years later I realized that I had been actively trying to drive the doctor crazy. Third, when the psychiatrist gave up, after only six weeks the coward, Dad took all my physics books and gave them to Jeannie. He got her the same tutors I had, and he turned all that bright sun-like attention on to her."

"Jesus," John said. His hands were shaking, Rodney noticed. Well really, that was a bit much; it wasn't that much of a horror story. It wasn't like he had been abused or anything.

"So, I got—enraged is the right word—which is also when I discovered the motivating benefits of anger. I pretended to be Dad; I wrote to the universities in America I was considering and forged his signature on so many documents I actually lost count. I got accepted on a big enough scholarship to live on, barely, and off I went. I didn't speak to Dad; I just left. Jeannie figured out where I was and called me sometimes. She was just a kid; she didn't even see what she had done as being the catalyst for what happened really. She had all the attention she could want, and I had
what I wanted too. So you know, why not just get on with it, was what I thought.

"So ok, flash forward a few years. I was working for the US military, some moron was slow in getting messages to me, and I find out a week before her wedding that she's dropped out of school to marry an English Major. I just—it was like a kick in the gut.

"She thinks that I wanted to control her life, but it wasn't just that I thought she was making a huge mistake; I did, and I still do; it's that she took all that encouragement, all that attention, what she was always entitled to, maybe what she deserved, needed, more than I ever did. She took that and tossed it aside for a nice little heterosexual success story of marriage and children. Tossed it aside like it was nothing. Tossed it aside like it wasn't the thing I couldn't quite sell my soul for, and don't think I'm so fucking self absorbed that I didn't see that blaming her, taking it out on her, not going to her god damn wedding wasn't petty, but well, I did the best I could. I didn't show up with an M-16."

Rodney gulped down the rest of his beer and zoned out; he didn't really want to look at John's face, and he sure as hell didn't want to know what his own looked like. He'd never told that story to anyone, not even Heightmeyer, not even to the voices in his own head. He came to in time to witness the end of a consultation between John and the waitress over something called Glenmorangie and heard the word doubles.

"You ever tell her any of this?" John asked when the waitress left again.

"Not her shit to shovel."

"No, suppose not."

"I'll visit her. For a while—not three whole fucking weeks, and I'll try not to be a dick, and I'll do the best I can, and I won't take my P-90."

The waitress brought two expensive looking squat glasses with a very impressive quantity of amber liquid in them. John raised his in a silent toast and took a long drink and set the glass down. Rodney was tasting his and trying to decide if he liked it, or if it tasted like an old mouldy boot, and maybe it did, and he liked it anyway, when John said, "My turn."

"What, what, are you—you don't have to really." Rodney knew he looked all panicky when he waved his hands like that, but really, he didn't want John to think he was obligated to trade horror stories

John performed one of his calm down waves. He had several that ran along a scale of increasing urgency and irritation. "I do Rodney. I really do."

John took another long drink. "Okay, so you know I was married."

Rodney nodded. John nodded back and took another drink. "I, well my father really liked Nancy. A lot. He said, as often as I could bear to listen to him, that she was the only smart thing I had ever done. She was the best thing that ever happened to me. So, we got divorced, and well there were a lot of reasons and it was mostly me, but infidelity was not one of them—one of the reasons."

Rodney made a noise and John scowled at him. "What?"

"What, what?" I didn't say anything, and Rodney had promised himself he wouldn't interrupt.

"You made a noise, a rude noise," John accused.

"Fine, fine, I don't mean to speak out of turn, well I am but—fuck it. Going out a limb here John,
but I have been reliably informed that total emotional disconnection is it's own form of infidelity."

"Who the fuck told you that?" John was done his double and was waving over to the bar for another.

"Some woman, in some other decade; it doesn't matter." Rodney answered and nodded to the bartender for another scotch too.

"Got her number? We can call her up and tell her to fuck off." The bartender glided away on a sea of selective deafness leaving more smoky amber liquid in two fresh glasses.

"And yeah, the point has some validity, but I was doing the best I could." John wasn't above a smirk even mid-confession.

"So the rest of my sordid story—mine's shorter. Nancy and I got divorced, and Dave, my brother Dave, I think he was tired of hearing my father go on and on about it. Dave was married, and he was going to stay married and have lots of perfect little heirs, but I had failed at the whole—what was your thing? Heterosexual success story, and the world was ending according to my father. So, I think he was just trying to shut him up, or god help him, trying to help when he told my…" John sucked in a breath. "He told our father that he had walked in on me fucking Andy VanDorn back when I was twenty-two and home from the academy. I decided Afghanistan was just the right distance away from Dave, Nancy and my sainted father."

Rodney was staring over the top of his glass. This was not where he had thought this story was going at all.

John just stared back and lifted his chin in a jerky little movement. He raised his glass and said, "Here's to us Rodney. Two guys who grew up to live in a place where you can lock the fucking doors with your mind."

Rodney signalled the bartender for another round this time. When the man appeared with the scotch that Rodney was really growing quite fond of, Rodney signalled him to wait. "My friend and I have a bit of a problem," he said, paying some attention to the more slippery consonants. "We were planning to stay in this hotel, but we came in here first and seem to have accidentally gotten, well, really quite drunk isn't overstating it. So, in order to er, in order to avoid having to slosh up to the front desk, we were wondering if you could get them to just book us a couple of rooms, you know, remotely so to speak."

The bartender looked bland; he was almost as good as John at that. "I'm sure that can be arranged, sir. Two rooms sir?"

"Yes, yes that's what I said." Rodney sent the man off with his credit card and a glare.

John was smirking again. "Bit of advice Rodney. Never attempt the word slosh when you are, you know, in that state."

The bartender returned with two key cards in little navy and green folders, Rodney's Amex, and the bar bill in a leatherette folder. John snatched the last out of the man's hand before Rodney could even make a move for it. John wrote in some numbers and pulled out his own Amex, not his USAF issue card Rodney noted, and tossed the folder to one side out of Rodney's reach. Rodney tried to calculate the probability that the scotch was even more expensive than it tasted and that John had left an overly generous, yet mathematically precise tip. "Hey," Rodney said, and he realized he was at that state of inebriation where he said exactly what he was thinking even more often than usual. "I've got an idea."
John waved at him. John apparently talked even less when drunk.

"We both have to visit our families, but we don't really want to, so why don't we share? Like the misery, I mean. It will be just like a mission to some horrible swamp planet, tolerable only because you're not by yourself. We can fly to wherever it is your weird brother lives, stay there until I catch you going for your gun, and then we can go visit Jeannie, and you can watch me. We'd have lots of time left over for fun things too. Waddaya think? Good idea or drunk idea?"

John looked at him for a minute, like he was trying to place where they had met or something. "Can't decide. Think it's both. And Dave's not weird."

Rodney felt as mystified as he did when the anthropologists gave reports. "Is that a yes or a no?"

"Don't know. Sounds like too much commercial aviation to me."

"Okay, you so sound like Ronon when you're drunk, and just suck it up vis-à-vis the commercial aviation thing, I'm not buying you a helicopter. Where does weird Dave live anyway?"

"Still not weird. Outside of Frederick Maryland. He moved into our father's house."

Rodney was a little hazy on exactly where Maryland was in relation to well, anything actually. He must have looked confused because John offered up another sentence fragment. "Near Washington DC."

Rodney felt a new idea forming. It was definitely a drunk idea, but still, drunk ideas could work out really well sometimes. "East coast, so we go visit Dave, we run away screaming in the night after what, two—three days tops, but we don't fly to Vancouver, we drive there."

John looked confused, or maybe just surprised Rodney had left off the weird this time. He looked at his glass again, frowning at how empty it still was. "Drive to Vancouver?"

"Yeah, it'll be great we rent a car and stop at a 7-11 and, boom, instant road trip."

John was starting to look a little vacant. He was either picturing sports cars on long straight country roads, or he was about to pass out. "I get to pick the car," he said, pointing at Rodney.

"I get to pick the music then."

"No Celine Dion." John was pointing again.

"Please, as if. No DeLoreans."

"Deal."

Rodney found John in the hotel breakfast bar the next morning clutching a large coffee; a larger glass of orange juice and a glass of water waited in reserve. He barked the word coffee at the waitress, as he slumped across from John and gave the orange juice a dirty glare. The waitress brought his coffee, but refused to leave the pot.

"Uhng," John said, which could have been a greeting or a curse. Rodney transferred his dirty glare to John.

Halfway through his second cup of coffee, the phone Rodney forgot he had shrilled unreasonably loudly. "McKay," he squawked into it.
"Doctor, always a pleasure," a smooth voice said in his ear.

"Who the hell are you?" Rodney demanded and then had a vague recollection of calling his travel agent the day before and leaving a message. "Er, that is to say, good morning Sylvia, it's good of you to return my call so ah, early."

"You said something about travel plans, possibly to two totally different destinations. Really Doctor, you know the separate vacations thing never really works." Sylvia was laughing at him.

"Um yes, wait." Rodney peered at the phone until he found the mute button, and then he eyed John nervously.

"You've moved beyond single words, that's good, Rodney." John looked good hung over, the bastard.

"Travel agent," Rodney said, waving the phone significantly.

John just waved back at Rodney, which wasn't really all that helpful.

"Fredrick, Maryland?" Rodney said.

John waved again and sucked up the last drops of orange juice noisily through a straw. Now he looked like a hung over four-year old.

"Um, Sylvia?" Rodney said, "I need two tickets to someplace called Fredrick, Maryland."

John was waving for attention now. Rodney wasn't surprised; he had expected John to change his mind about their drunken plans. "Dulles," He said.

"Dulles," Rodney repeated, mystified.

"Dulles," Sylvia said in his ear. "It's an airport in Washington. Closest hub to Fredrick."

"Right, yes." John hadn't changed his mind. Rodney didn't usually enjoy being wrong this much. "First class, something with enough leg room for the unnaturally lanky, and we need a car, long term rental, about three weeks. Wait, um please, again. Car?"


Rodney turned the phone back on. "BMW Z4, whatever that is. Oh and we need to be able to take the car into Canada and leave it in Vancouver, um is that even—wait please." John was waving again.

"I'll just buy the car," he said. "You can get Jeannie to store it in Vancouver. Drive it when, ah, you come visit. Gimmee the phone."

Rodney handed it over.

"Sylvia, John Sheppard… Yes nice to hear your voice too, slight change of plans. Can you arrange to have a new, oh, silver Z4 at the airport. I'll get my finance guy to call you, and he can handle the money… Yeah, that's great. Sylvia, you sound like a sophisticated women. I just got into town, and um, my luggage is kind of lost. I need to get some new clothes before we hit the airport… Yeah? No, that sounds perfect. Ask for Carlo huh… No, no, we have a car here… Really, that's amazing, Sylvia… No, the red eye is doable… Okay, yeah, I'll call my guy about the car… No, bill the rest of it to McKay, and don't forget to include a nice commission for all your help… Thanks, no maybe next time. Yeah I'll—sure, you can. I'll call you next time I'm in town,
let me write that number down."

John commandeered Rodney's phone to call someone named Wilson, give him Sylvia's phone number, and explain the car plans.

"You should have warned the guy; Sylvia will probably hit on him too," Rodney said sourly.

"Wilson is a grandfather several times over. He should be okay."

"No one is safe from Sylvia," Rodney said darkly.

"She turned you down huh?"

"Fuck off, John."

"Food, Rodney," John said waving over the waitress. "Sylvia is sending our tickets to the hotel. We have to be at the Colorado Spring's airport by 7pm. So eat now while you can; I'm going to call Dave, and then we go buy some clothes."

Rodney shuddered.

Carlo turned out to be efficient and helpful, when he wasn't busy hitting on John. They managed to get a new wardrobe purchased and packed into new suitcases and still have time for a steak before they had to be at the airport.

A fresh-scrubbed intern type, who Rodney couldn't stop glaring at, met them at the Dulles airport. The eager little fellow helped them collect their bags and led them through the pre-dawn gloom to the car. John did a slow walk around the thing while Rodney made rude snorting noises, and then they wedged their luggage into the ludicrously small trunk. Rodney climbed in and started fiddling with the passenger seat controls. After a while, he rolled his window down and yelled, "Let me know when you're done humping the fender, Sheppard."

The intern scuttled away, and John slid into the driver's seat. He revved the engine, and Rodney snorted again. John drove the car around the airport parking lots for a while, claiming he needed to get a feel for the car. He found a straight stretch of access road behind some old cargo buildings and tested the acceleration.

"Fuuuuuck!" Rodney was shrieking. He was grinning too.

John found the exit out of the airport and found the right highway and turned vaguely north. Rodney was watching the passing scenery avidly. "There, there," he shouted, pointing at the aptly named Sunrise Café, illuminated by the golden glow of the rising sun. "Slow the fuck down, Sheppard. Must have greasy diner breakfast, now."

They each ate a very large, very greasy breakfast, drank too much coffee, and Rodney growled at the waitress when she called John, honey.

"What day is it?" Rodney asked when they were back on the road.

"Friday."

"Oh, good."

In less than an hour, John was off the highway and winding along a perfectly paved country road.
He turned off, crunching over immaculate gravel, and then drove on to a large paved circle in front of a tasteful grey house set in immaculate green lawns.

Rodney climbed out of the car, popping and stretching, and stared around. He had gotten a glimpse of paddocks and barns and fields edged in neat rows of fencing as they'd pulled in. "Sheppard, you didn't say this was a farm. You grew up on a farm?"

"Ha, farm. Yeah, if this is a farm, Rodney, then I'm the King of Atlantis. Horses are a business; it's all about money and networking and silly hats."

The house seemed modestly sized, but it sported a massive wooden door that was now swinging open. Rodney watched the man that appeared. He was tall, as tall as John, but his dark hair was fully under control, and his body more solid. He walked towards them, gaze flicking between John, the car and Rodney. He had quite a way with bland too. He clapped his hand to John's shoulder—the briefest touch—and said, "John," in a neutral tone.

John made some quick introductions while he pulled the luggage out and shoved Rodney's suitcase into his arms. They followed Dave inside, and Rodney eyed the grey stone interior and high ceiling dubiously. They dumped their suitcases as directed and followed Dave deeper into the house until they wound up in a huge room, furnished conservatively and expensively and sporting a wall of French windows that opened onto a landscaped terraced lawn that led down to one of the white-fenced fields. A dark haired woman appeared and smiled charmingly at Rodney. Dave introduced her as his wife Karen, and she shook Rodney's hand with a firm grip and a slightly puzzled frown.

"You are a doctor—you work with John?" she asked him.

"Not medical, astrophysics and mechanical engineering and yes, I work with Shep—er, John. Civilian of course."

"Another civilian contractor," Dave said blandly.

Rodney glanced at John, who seemed to be trying to blend into the wallpaper.

"Yes, John," Karen said brightly, if a little stiffly, "when you said you were bringing a friend—we thought that other young man—but no matter. It is good to see you again, John; we hadn't thought to have the pleasure so soon."

"Wait, wait," Rodney interrupted before John could join in the stilted conversation. "You mean Ronon." He turned on John. "You told them Ronon was a civilian contractor. That's all you told them?" Rodney's voice was rising to his usual lab volume.

"Well, yeah Rodney-"

"You asshole," Rodney exploded. "You fucking bastard, I don't believe you. You came to a funeral, your father's funeral, with Ronon in tow and that's all you said? Christ, John, what do you think they all thought? Fuck. Oh hi, here's this guy I just picked up at the beach, nice to see you. Asshole, even I wouldn't do something that—fuck, that's just—"

"Hey, it's not like I had any choice. It's not like I could just pop out with the whole fucking story, could I. Jesus. What the hell was I supposed to say?" John was yelling back, bouncing up on the balls of his feet and doing that thing where he didn't know where to put his hands.

"Oh, I don't know. How about something like, 'this is my friend, and he's come with me to keep me from going off the deep end, and yeah I know, not your typical army buddy, and I wish I could tell you, but it's classified, so you'll just have to take my word for it.' How about that?"
Rodney had stormed right up to John during his tirade. He had pushed right through punching range and ended up in kissing range.

"Well, okay then," John said, "clearly I need to get you to write me up some cue cards for these situations."

"Fine then," Rodney said.

He turned at the same time John did to see Dave and Karen standing close together and staring at them.

John ducked his head and addressed Dave, "Um, so apparently I owe you an apology for kind of being a jerk and possibly insensitive about Ronon. Sorry."

Dave just waved the words off.

"Christ, McKay, I can't believe you called me insensitive," John turned and hissed at Rodney.

"I didn't, asshole. You called yourself insensitive," Rodney yelled back.

"I kinda did the same thing to Nancy you know. Want me to call her up and apologize too?" John was smirking at him now.

"Don't be ridiculous. It's not the same thing at all. I'd like to take Ronon around to meet all my exes too, hell who am I kidding, like you wouldn't do just as well." Rodney was happy to see John's ears pinking up.

Dave cleared his throat and made noises about needing to get into the office.

Rodney waved at John, and said, "Don't mind him, he's just suffering from the horrors of commercial aviation," as if it had been John doing all the yelling. "A nice five hour nap and we'll both be fine."

Karen led them upstairs, apologizing to John that his old room was being used by one of their sons. John didn't seem too upset when she showed them two tasteful beige guest rooms and the gleaming bathroom they shared. Rodney found his bed and did a face plant.

Rodney woke up to afternoon sun streaming in the window and John bouncing on the bed beside him. "Go away," he mumbled into the beige duvet.

"You know, most Earth people don't actually sleep in their clothes," John said conversationally.

"Fuck off," Rodney replied in the same tone.

"Nope."

Rodney groaned and rolled over on to his back. "Fine. What time is it? What day is it for that matter, and why are you here?"

"Almost seventeen hundred hours, still Friday and waking you up."

"Five o'clock for normal humans, glad I didn't miss a day and why?"

"Karen tells me they made dinner reservations at some place in Frederick," John told him. "At seven o'clock," he added, enunciating o'clock extravagantly.

"Do you think this place has scotch?" Rodney asked.
"They just might, you know."

"Might be worth it."

Rodney staggered into the shower and tried to remember he wasn't in a hotel with unlimited hot water. He had pulled the dark navy suit Carlo had picked out for him out of the garment bag and let the shower steam it out. It wasn't too bad looking, although Rodney had never thought of himself as a suit and tie sort of guy. He had seen the sleek black number that John had bought and knew no one would be looking at him anyway.

Rodney gave up trying to get the tie straight and wandered downstairs. John was already there, sitting with Dave and Karen, white shirt flashing against the black suit and white teeth flashing when he saw Rodney. John had apparently misplaced his tie entirely.

Dave ushered them out to his car, a large dark grey something, and Rodney caught him casting envious glances at John's Z4 as they passed. They glided silently on perfect roads towards the city of Frederick. Rodney tried to pass some polite words with Karen; he had waved John into the roomier front seat without a thought, and was relieved when they pulled up next to a tastefully renovated eighteenth century house that glowed with golden light.

They were put up in the bar while they waited for their table. John surveyed the bottles and had a low voiced conversation with the bartender, while Rodney smiled at Dave and Karen and tried not to die of stultification. The bartender came back with six glasses of varying shades of amber-gold liquid. He lined three up in front of John and a matched set in front of Rodney. Rodney felt his will to live flare right up again.

"We're having a tasting," John said.

Dave sipped his vodka martini, and Karen clutched something pink. They watched John and Rodney work through their drinks from left to right and then back again with some trepidation.

They were happily bickering about the relative merits of drink number three versus the water of a certain stagnant lake they had once been forced to consume, when Rodney was gripped with the desire to sneeze up his right lung. He turned around to see the nasal irritant was the cloud of perfume that announced the arrival of a blonde in a tight green dress. She smiled at John, right past Rodney, and said, "You boys seem to be having fun."

John turned and smiled his almost shy-looking polite smile and leaned slightly away from her. "We try," he said quietly.

Rodney, suddenly in the grip of two realizations, missed the woman's name when she introduced herself while thrusting her hand at John. His first epiphany was the sudden and total understanding that John's affably polite, friendly and charming persona, that he used to such good effect on everyone from the mess hall servers to heads of alien worlds, was a pitch perfect impression of his brother Dave. This realization had a sub-part where Rodney played back every interaction with John he could remember and was reasonably certain John had never used that persona with him. The other realization was the casual observation that the woman's shoes were a size too small, with heels too high and at such an improper angle that she would likely have debilitating back problems within five years, say when she turned fifty? Rodney was trying hard to be sorry that he had said the last part out loud, but the woman and her perfume had stormed off, and John was snickering into drink number two in an undignified but delightful fashion, so he decided to stop trying.

"You know Rodney," John said, "You could have just done what you usually do when some
woman starts hitting on me—you could have tried to be charming and flirted with her until she goes away."

"Yeah, you know, lately I've been worrying we'll suddenly find ourselves in a threesome that way."

John snickered into the dregs of drink number one. Karen looked like she had just popped in from a botox appointment. Dave was using what had to be his board-meeting face, and Rodney was trying to calculate the exact number of hours since he had last eaten. He kept getting stuck trying to remember how many hours there were in an Earth day.

The waiter came to lead them to their table, and the contents of two breadbaskets restored the semblance of sobriety. They ordered their meal. John interrogated the waiter about citrus, and Rodney changed his salad choice twice when he didn't get definitive enough assurances and looked up to find Karen and Dave watching them again. When it came to wine choices, Rodney chose a bottle of Merlot for himself. John cast him a look and said, "Ever hear of sharing McKay?"

"Wine Review called it obnoxious and overbearing and not to everyone's taste. Thought you may want something tamer."

"Make it two bottles," John told the waiter.

Dave and Karen ordered single glasses of something with the word yellow in the name.

Rodney was pretty sure he had just been formally propositioned.

Karen had a real talent for making polite conversation. She knew just how to ask leading questions and to feign genuine interest, or maybe she really was interested occasionally. She certainly seemed warm and caring. Rodney liked her, and no one could be more surprised by that than he was. She had a hint of a southern accent that peeked out at odd moments, and he wondered what it would be like to get her drunk. Would she get all drawly and indiscreet? Would she start calling them sugar and make rude comments with devastating politeness? One pink thing and one glass of bland wine weren't going to provide any answers. He resolved to run the experiment some other time.

As the soup gave way to the salad, Karen smoothly lobbed a comment at Rodney. "You said earlier Doctor that you had two PhDs. That must have meant many hard years of study."

"Not as many as you might think," Rodney answered trying not to sound too smug. "I acquired both degrees the same year—I was twenty-three."

"Sixteen," Karen said quietly.

"Not exactly, I ah, needed to wait before I did my dissertation defence in astrophysics, so I finished up my engineering courses and got that dissertation nearly done before I got the ball rolling on the first one. I started University at sixteen anyway, so really I could have finished sooner, uh perhaps."

"Sixteen," Karen said quietly.

"What do you mean you had to, ah, wait?" John eyed him over his wine glass. "You've never mentioned this before."

"Oh, well. Yes okay, um, I was done, completely done, with the physics dissertation, ready to
send it to the printers, but I was, hmm, concerned that there may be problems with my defense.”

Rodney stalled with a gulp of wine. Really, how did he keep ending up playing true confession? "It may not come as any sort of a shock to you at all that my advisor, the whole department really, ah, hated me. This was compounded by—look you've never seen pictures of me from that time. I think I destroyed them all."

This odd turn in the story had John's full attention.

"Ah, you see, I was well, thinner obviously, and had a lot of hair. It was lighter, a sort of light—ah, it was blond actually. And curly. Curly when it was long."

John was grinning at him, no doubt planning bribes for Jeannie in exchange for access to the family albums. "Cherubic," John said. Drawing out the word. He clapped his hands over his mouth and shook silently when Rodney threw him a look of doom.

"Yes, yes fine, so hardly likely to be taken too seriously obviously. So, hatred and condescension is not a good combination in a bunch of middle-aged hacks that have the power to control your future. I decided to wait—uh—that is put things off, until I started losing my hair."

"You waited until you were losing your hair?" John nearly squeaked at him. "Wait, wait, how'd you know---"

"I theorized based on the available evidence of course. I compiled a pictorial history of my maternal grandfather and uncle and read all the available research on the subject. I made a statistical model of the probable um, hair-line time-line so to speak."

"You made graphs." John pointed at him.

"Well yes, of course. I ah, it has proved startlingly accurate actually."

"And this brilliant strategy worked. You got your PhD because of sympathy over male pattern baldness?"

"I wouldn't call it sympathy, more like a gleeful sense of schadenfreude on their parts—possibly a desire to never have to see me ever again as well."

Karen prodded Dave into some anecdotes about their two boys during the main course. Rodney was communing with a very large steak and had sort of forgotten they even had kids. He hadn't seen any evidence of them. He'd spent most of his time in their house sleeping. Really though, you didn't even have to get inside Jeannie's house to be aware of Madison, and you certainly couldn't spend more than five minutes inside without seeing her.

Rodney was enjoying a really disgustingly gooey chocolate thing with the last of his wine when he realized Karen was throwing the conversational ball his way again. "McKay is a Scottish name isn't it? My family's Scottish on my mother's side, and I've always thought a trip to Scotland would be fun. See the old family seat or however it works. Have you ever been?"

Rodney could feel the wine in his stomach sour. He knew he must suddenly look horrified, because Karen was certainly getting there quickly as she watched his face. Dave was absolutely still, but John was twitching his hands clenching for something that wasn't there. Rodney turned away from Karen's confused face; he saw John's eyes harden. His jaw worked, and he was swimming up past near drunkenness to anger right in front of Rodney's eyes. John's hands were clenched, he was gesturing with one fist towards Karen, and no, no—Rodney had to stop this.

"John," Rodney said, just as John opened his mouth.
John turned to him, eyes blazing with wholly inappropriate rage. "Rodney, fuck, she can't just-"

"John!" Clearly an order this time. Rodney grabbed John's flailing wrist and gripped it hard. "It's fine, John—fine. Just—be still. It's fine." Convinced that John could pull himself together, Rodney turned to Karen. He flashed a smile, sickly and fleeting, and he kept his tight grip on John. "You could not know. Seriously, I don't want you to—not for a moment… I ah, I was in Scotland last year. For a funeral. A—my colleague, my friend, my close friend. Carson, Doctor Carson Beckett. He died. And you couldn't have known that and really don't feel, don't be upset. John, is just… John is just being—"

"Protective," she said softly. "They do that. They both do that. I think they used to do it for each other when they were children, not that they would ever talk about that or anything."

Dave put his hand on Karen's gently. He glanced at John, fist still held in Rodney's grip. "I think we should call it a night."

Dave flagged down the waiter and dealt with the bill. When Karen tried to apologize to Rodney, he pinned her with his best glare. She smiled at him, and later she held his hand in the backseat of the car on the drive home. Rodney thought about the fact that she had never once lobbed one of her clever conversational volleys John's way.

Rodney watched John disappear silently into his room and took ruthless advantage of the chance to use the bathroom first. He kicked his shoes through to his room and tossed the suit after them. He found some Ibuprofen and chased it with about a quart of water. He scrubbed at his face with cold water, leaving his hair in wild wisps. Dressed in boxers, dress shirt and black socks, he collected the Ibuprofen and pushed into John's room without knocking. John was splayed back across the bed fully dressed. Rodney tossed the pill bottle at him. "Drink some water," he said as he sat on the bed.

John didn't answer him.

"Was Karen friends with Nancy?"

The question startled a response from John. He opened his eyes and said cautiously, "Yeah I guess, I mean they got along, talked about stuff."

"They'd have to wouldn't they?" Rodney said. "Drink some water," he repeated and headed back to his own bed.

The next morning, Rodney found Karen and Dave sharing breakfast with their two boys. There were some quick introductions, but Rodney's mind was on the buffet of eggs, bacon, biscuits, sausage and a fruit salad that was totally citrus free. The place obviously had invisible servants. The boys quickly ran off, babbling about riding, and Rodney sat down in one of their vacated chairs, his plate piled high.

"No sign of John yet," Karen said.

"Oh he'll be out running some alarming number of miles. He'll turn up," Rodney said before applying himself to his biscuits. "No gravy huh?" Rodney said sadly.

"You like biscuits and gravy Dr. McKay?" Karen was surprised.
"Please, it's Rodney. I only insist that underlings and stupid people call me Doctor. To answer your question, I’ve worked on military bases for years. It's not uncommon for the cooks to be southern, a heavy proportion of the men too. Biscuits and gravy, grits, fried buttermilk chicken—best food ever."

"Oh, if I'd known, I'd have had the cook make some grits. No one else will eat them. We don't have gravy too often, though, Dave's doctor always makes dire sounds about cholesterol."

Rodney crunched through his third piece of bacon and waved off the idea of worrying about cholesterol.

John showed up, fresh from his shower, and sat down with a large glass of orange juice. Rodney chose to ignore this provocation in favour of more bacon.

Dave asked how far John had run, and John grimaced and said, "I'm embarrassed to say, not up to my usual distance. I guess I need Ronon running ahead, taunting me to push myself." The two of them launched into some incomprehensible, to Rodney, conversation about workouts and running that led to some more babble about football. Rodney rolled his eyes and Karen giggled at him quietly.

Dave was suggesting John show Rodney the stables, and John was making agreeing noises, so Rodney had to kill that horrible idea before it could become a plan. "Just what I need, a trip to hay fever hell. Maybe I'll only cough up one lung, but I'm still not willing to risk it."

"Well, Rodney," John said, kicking him under the table, "if you think your delicate constitution is up to a walk on the big scary lawn, it is a nice day out."

"Might be survivable."

John dragged him through the French doors and across a patio and down onto the first tier of grass.

"It seems weird to be outside without a TAC vest and a sidearm," Rodney commented.

"Not likely to see anything you need to shoot," John said, and pointed him to a stone wall that overlooked the lower tier of lawn. They leaned on it in silence.

"This has been much less horrible than I thought it would be," John said after a while.

"Last night was fun actually. Right up to when it wasn't, but that wasn't an actual disaster either so…"

"You actually like Karen. I don't think I've ever seen you meet a woman and just like her in that low-key kind of way before."

"Teyla," Rodney said.

"What would you think about taking off today?" John asked him.

"Leave on a high note, nice dinner, nice breakfast, friendly little chat and then hit the gas? Sounds good to me. Not my call though."

"You got a plan for this trip? Charts graphs, itineraries?"

"Nope, figured we could point the car west, turn north at some convenient point, whatever." Rodney shrugged, not caring if they ever made it to Vancouver, if he was being honest.
"You want to drive through Canada at all, or just head for the coast?"

"The drive from Calgary through the mountains is nice, but to do that we would have to pass alarmingly close to Colorado, and I'm not too much in the mood for either that or all the boring fields of wheat."

"West it is then. Pacific coast is a fun drive. Hey, we could go to Vegas."

"Did that a couple of times when I worked at Area 51," Rodney said, and then he grinned. "Got kicked out of a couple of places for counting cards."

"Ha, figures. Grand Canyon maybe."

"Could do that."

"Um," John stopped. Rodney turned to look at him.

"This trip, how many rooms are we going to be needing?" John asked the top of the wall.

"Two of course," Rodney answered

"Oh, yeah, of course." John flashed his charming smile at Rodney and made to walk away.

Rodney grabbed his wrist and reeled him back in and pressed him up against the low wall. "First of all, you fucker, you don't ever show me that plastic little fake smile ever again. You can use that mask on your family, random bimbos in bars and planetary potentates, but not me, or this thing is never going anywhere, clear?"

John blinked at him, clearly shocked by the vehemence. "Um, yeah okay. Fair enough. Thing?"

"Second," Rodney ploughed on, ignoring the question he didn't want to answer, "it may have escaped your notice, but the SGC does monitor the activities of SGA personnel on leave. They don't put tails on anyone or monitor our transmitters, well not after I ripped Landry a new one over that, but they do check expense reports for signs of security breaches, so yes, two rooms; one on your government card and one on mine. I just happen to have a pile of cash I pulled out of one of my more obscure bank accounts, and I plan on upgrading my room to a very nice private suite with a Jacuzzi all off the record, but no one else needs to know that."

"Okay, putting aside the whole Jacuzzi thing for a minute, they monitor expense reports? You know this for a fact?" John was relaxed again now that he had a tactical objective to focus on.

"Yes," Rodney sighed; he might as well go with the conversational flow. John was not going to let this go, and yes, maybe he should have filled John in on this before now, but it wasn't really a military matter. "It's not really a military matter," he said. "You know Dr. Stewart? Big blond guy? Turns out the big and blond is down to his mother being Dutch. and last leave Stew—don't what the hell his first name is—anyway, he took off to visit the family—or so he told the SGC. According to the review of his expense reports, unless his family are all Amsterdam potheads and hookers, he never even called them on the phone. Landry and the IOA both wanted him fired, and I spent precious hours of my life that I will never get back arguing with them over that crap. I tried logic—big mistake. I tried explaining that their quaint American Puritanism wasn't really relevant in Pegasus—no good. Finally I mocked up a very convincing deposition that contained my testimony in absentia for Stewart's wrongful dismissal suit. When their lawyers told them that Stew had a case and that his taking it to court would likely out the Stargate program, they wised the fuck up. That was all Zelenka's idea by the way; he got out of some contract with the Russians by using a similar trick. Upshot of this is that expenses are reviewed for genuine security purposes,
not for evidence of a taste for legalized prostitution."

"Wow, I think I'm glad you don't tell me everything actually," John said. "I think I would have tried to get in the middle of that one and ended up fucking it up."

"They're always surprised, military brass and empty suits like Woolsey, when you fight them dirty. They have no idea how much muck you have to fucking shovel to get a PhD. Assholes, all of them." Rodney took a deep breath, and said in an earnest tone, "John I have to tell you something, in the interests of full and honest disclosure."

John waved a wary hand for him to continue.

"I really want to kiss you right now."

"Um," John said, "I think we're being watched." He waved to the French Doors—mirrors in the sun.

"Please, I don't think they'd be shocked, we did dinner with the in-laws last night for fuck's sake."

"Not shocked no, just terribly disappointed in my lack of discretion," John said.

Rodney made a rude noise to indicate his feelings on discretion. "Not what's stopping me. What's stopping me is the fucking gallon of orange juice you poured down your throat, asshole." He turned on the last word and ambled back into the house, knowing just how good his ass looked in his oldest pair of jeans.

Rodney was still sauntering just inside the guest room when he heard the thunder of running feet—six hollow cracks, as long legs ate up the stairs. He had thought enough to make his body relax, not tense against the impact, when John ploughed into him and brought him down, bouncing, onto the bed. John was laughing, grabbing at his arms and rolling him over on to his back. Rodney let him. John hooked his leg over Rodney's legs and bent his head low to Rodney's ear. "I could brush my teeth, if I thought it might be worth my while," He said, and his breath tickled against Rodney's skin.

Rodney went limp, and John brought one hand up and let it fall softly to Rodney's cheek. He ran his thumb in circles over Rodney's lips. Rodney smiled, fluttered his eyes shut—sighed. John was tensing just slightly. Rodney, realizing he'd nearly blown it by waiting too long, heaved up, pushing with his strength and his mass; he flipped John over and snatched his hands to pin over their heads. Rodney ground his hips against John in the lewdest way he knew how, and John was all black-eyed and interested now.

"I am not fucking you for the first time in the house where you spent your angsty teen-aged years," Rodney said before he bounced to his feet.

John made a little whiny noise and tried a few seductive sprawls.

"Hotels exist for a reason," Rodney told him in his best stubborn voice.

"Fine, how soon can you be packed?"

"Already am," Rodney told him smugly and jerked his chin at the suitcase sitting neatly by the door.

"Smug bastard." John rolled off the bed and headed for the bathroom. "I'll just go have a cold shower and then pack up. Shouldn't take more than half an hour, unless I die of frustration first."
"I'll be sure to hang a commemorative set of blue balls on the Stargate when I get back."

"Asshole," floated out through the open bathroom doors.

Rodney avoided the awkward-looking goodbye-scene in the driveway by firmly shutting the car door and fiddling productively with the radio. Soon, they were winding through some secondary highways, classic rock blasting out the windows. John turned onto a highway that seemed to be pointing not quite in the direction they were headed. Rodney decided to go with it. If they hit the Gulf of Mexico, he'd worry, or maybe just order some jambalaya.

After a few hours the signs on the highway were pointing out this and that in Roanoke Virginia. "I could eat," Rodney said. "Find a drive-through, or a diner maybe."

"Room service?" John started changing lanes.

"Mmmm, even better."

They made a pit stop at a strip mall off the highway. John refused to go in the drugstore with Rodney, wandering off towards a liquor store instead. Purchases made and stowed in the car, only two blocks down the road found them at a decent chain hotel. They booked into two basic rooms, and then John stepped back and watched as Rodney pulled out his wallet. The clerk seemed confused by what he wanted, so Rodney rolled his eyes at her and beckoned the manager over. A few bills crossed the counter, and Rodney's key card was exchanged for one to a corner suite with a king-sized bed, wifi and a Jacuzzi.

They rode up in the elevator together, and Rodney watched John walk off down the hall on his floor before the door closed and the elevator took Rodney up a few more floors. Rodney checked the bed in his own room, found it gratifyingly hard and got to work with the room service menu. A knock on the door brought him John Sheppard carrying a shaving kit and the liquor store bag.

"Even better than room service." Rodney said with a smirk.

"Just one hooker joke, and I'm out of here," John said, and pushed past him, plunked a bottle of scotch on the desk and disappeared into the bathroom.

Some more of his cash dealt with room service when it arrived, and John slunk back out of the bathroom carrying two glasses. He paused to blow a draft of toothpaste scented air Rodney's way and said, "See, minty fresh."

They split up the plate of sandwiches, and Rodney threw in one of the bags of chips he had been hoarding. Two generous fingers each of Glen-something chased it all down nicely.

John watched pensively as Rodney finished off the last sandwich. "Do you want another drink?" Rodney asked him.

"No," John said abruptly and stood up.

Rodney thought for one horrible second that he was going to leave. Instead, he pulled his tee shirt off with one smooth movement and tossed it across the room. "Okay, so I am extremely nervous here," John said, "so could we skip straight to the part where you um…” John made some sort of vague motion towards the bed.

Remembering a certain black-eyed look, Rodney wasted no time. He jumped up, got a towing
grip on John's belt, and shoved hard when they got close enough to the bed. John landed with a bounce, arms above his head and his legs trailing to the floor. Rodney climbed aboard and braced his hands on each side of John's head. Slowly, he lowered his head, turning at the last second to brush his nose down the length of John's cheek. He delicately nipped at the point of John's chin and then pulled back enough to run his tongue quickly over John's bottom lip. When John opened his mouth, Rodney sat back up and smiled lazily.

John made a frustrated noise and writhed a bit. Rodney repeated the nose trick on the other side of John's face, ending with a nibble down his neck. He brought his lips down in the lightest barest kiss and pulled back easily. John tried to chase him and made another frustrated noise when Rodney pulled farther out of reach. Rodney pulled up so far he wasn't touching John at all—just looming over him on his hands and knees. He flicked a glance at the rapid rise and fall of John’s chest and then focused on his eyes; he had all the time in the world here.

John's pupils pulsed wider, just like a cat about to pounce, and this time it was John surging up, flipping Rodney over with his whole body and bearing him down deep into the mattress. Hands turned his head and John was kissing him—tongue shoving into his mouth. The body holding him down was writhing wildly, sending sparks shooting deep in his belly. Rodney slid his hands up the bare, fever-hot skin of John's back and raked back down with his nails. John freed his mouth and let out a groan; he was writhing around so much that he was effectively humping Rodney's leg. Rodney got as tight a grip as he could get on John's ass and stilled him.

John collapsed, panting against Rodney's neck. "Got a little crazy there," he said

"Naked and crazy works better," Rodney said softly, hands moving to caress the bare skin again.

John pulled himself up and got to work loosening Rodney's belt and jeans. He pulled on Rodney's shirt and got it over his head. He slid back off the bed tugging Rodney's pants off as he went. John yanked the socks off his feet and then stood back to whisk off his own pants. He gave Rodney a strange look and pulled his underwear off and stood with hands twitching, looking the way he always did when he didn't have pockets to shove them into. Rodney tugged meaningfully at the waistband of his own boxers and looked at John.

"Lazy bastard," John said, but smiled, and pulled while Rodney obligingly lifted his ass. John eyed him up, taking his measure so to speak, looking more horny and less tense by the minute. He stuck out one long foot and tested the spring of the carpet experimentally—ostentatiously. He quirked a smile at whatever he was seeing on Rodney's face, and then Rodney was sliding down the bed, ass nearly hanging over the edge, before John dropped Rodney's legs and then dropped between them. He kept dropping, letting his mouth fall right over Rodney's cock, and Rodney was groaning, and John was sucking him hard.

Rodney was either going to die of a heart attack or come in an embarrassingly short time. John took that choice right away by going down a little farther, bobbing back up, and bringing one hand up to tickle Rodney's balls. Rodney was immediately coming and, quite possibly, screaming in a distressingly high register.

John crawled up beside him, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and then slapped his hard cock against Rodney's thigh with an impudent smirk. Rodney couldn't summon up too much interest in investigating the feel of the carpet under his knees, so he shoved John flat and got his hand on John's cock. He rolled over, propping himself on one elbow for a better view and jacked him slowly, pausing to tease at all the sensitive spots. This got him a string of nonsense obscenities and some nice moaning, so Rodney sped up, and John started to writhe again. He kept up the pace and then backed off, teasing some more.

"You fucker," John moaned at him, "harder, faster—fuck."
Rodney sped up, and John bucked his hips into the rhythm until he was coming in hard spurts. Rodney let him cool down for a minute, and then he leaned in and whispered, "Next time, I'll keep changing it up until you're begging me to let you come."

"Asshole," John said, but he sounded pretty interested.

Rodney got himself walking and went to clean up. He brought John back a towel and threw it at him; John jerked when it landed on his face. Rodney snagged the scotch and the glasses off the desk and sat, back to the headboard, and poured himself a very well deserved post-coital drink. John crawled up beside him and wound one arm around Rodney's legs and went to sleep with his face pressed against Rodney's hip.

Rodney was installed on the sofa, laptop warm against bare legs, drink handy, table covered in the remains of some more room service food. He could hear John's small movements that meant he was admitting being awake. Rodny saw an impression of white flashing in the light of the one feeble lamp; John was swinging his legs up and off the bed, and then he wandered into the bathroom. He returned in a few minutes damp in places, still naked. He settled onto the sofa next to Rodney.

"I slept through supper?" John said.

"Just some more sandwiches. Didn't want to wake you." Rodney waved a hand. "There's a couple left in the world's smallest fridge over there."

John glanced at the door behind them with a tiny frown.

"Don't worry, you can't see the bed from the door. No one got a look at your bony ass."

"Is not."

"No, it isn't, surprisingly enough. Nice handful."

John was possibly blushing a little bit, and Rodney believed he kept his smugness internalized, but John narrowed his eyes a little and then said, "Did you at least put some clothes on, or did you give the guy a good look at all your nice handfuls?"

"I swear I was properly attired and modestly covered at all times." Rodney rolled his head along the back of the sofa and rolled his shoulders.

"That's not work is it?" John pointed at the laptop.

"No. Really no," Rodney said to John's sceptical face. "I'm just goofing around, trying to give my brain a rest this trip. I think I'm more tired than I realized."

"Me too," John agreed. "Well obviously." He pointed at the bed he'd just slept the evening away in.

"Eat," Rodney told him, getting up to head for the bathroom. "I'm going to try out the Jacuzzi."

"Seriously?"

"Yeah, It feels good on my back."

Rodney came back into the room, pink everywhere and nicely relaxed. John was on the bed watching TV. "What's on?"
"House."

"Oh?" Rodney said, hoping John would find something else.

"Yeah."

"Don't see the appeal of that show."

"No explosions," John nodded.

Rodney found his glass and climbed on the bed. He waved the empty glass significantly, and John poured him the last of the scotch. They watched the rest of the show. John idly flipped through the channels for a while. "You buy anything at that drugstore other than chips?" he asked while watching something explode on the screen.

"Sunscreen," Rodney answered casually.

"Asshole." John changed the channel; the explosion had given way to exposition.

Rodney clambered over John to set his empty glass on the nightstand. He snatched the drugstore bag out of the drawer and dropped in on John's lap. John fished around it. Rodney stole the remote and started trolling for more explosions.

"Who needs three kinds of sunscreen?"

"One word for you—convertible." Rodney paused on a car chase.

"Yeah, I'm gonna put the top down tomorrow." John sighed happily.

Rodney turned to John and saw he had pulled out the box of condoms and was raising a dubious brow.

"Do we, uh…" John waved the box at him.

"Need to? No, not as far as I'm concerned, no one on Earth has blood tests as often as we do, but I didn't want to presume and some people prefer for—you know."

"Ummm." John stuffed the box back in the bag, came up with the two bottles of lube and began reading the labels.

"I was planning on writing up a brand comparison study. Maybe do up a quick grant proposal for it tomorrow." Rodney watched John's face, looking for any clue as to what he was thinking.

John turned to him and grinned. "What do you pay your lab assistants?"

"Corn chips and scotch, you interested?"

John lazily ran his hand down and caressed his own cock, which started to perk right up at the attention. "I could be. Pretty quickly, I think."

Rodney stared at him for a second then he rolled over and shimmied down the bed until he could lie flat, head on his arms. He spread his legs invitingly. He was expecting John to get right down to business. He was not expecting John to run a hand softly down his back, sliding over the crest of his ass and then bend to softly kiss the small of his back. Rodney made a small surprised murmur that John took as encouragement.

John spent forever running his hands lightly over Rodney's back, his ass, his legs. He followed
He soon had Rodney twitching at every touch, gasping as teeth and tongue and nails rasped against his skin. When John kneaded his ass with a firm hand, Rodney groaned and spread his legs wider. John teased him with a dry finger, and Rodney groaned a little louder.

"I wonder if I could make you beg?" John said quietly.

Rodney responded by bucking up his hips. He could talk too, if John needed him to. "You want to hear it John? I want you. I want you to fuck me. I want you inside me. Please, fuck me."

"Fuck," John said, and Rodney heard the cap of the lube pop open.

Rodney stayed splayed out flat while John got him opened up and slick. When he was more than ready, aching for it in fact, he pulled his legs up and got his ass in the air. John was slicked up and pushing inside, and this, this was all he had been thinking about all evening, everything he'd wanted and said nothing about.

He let John set the pace, do whatever he wanted. John wanted it nice and easy, not frantic, not out of control, not too slow either. Rodney let him. He spared a thought for the miles of America they had ahead of them and all the time he had to get John to lose control and go crazy again. He let himself get lost in the sensation of here and now with John sliding firmly in and out and starting to pant lightly.

Rodney shifted himself slightly, and John was rubbing over his prostate with every thrust, and Rodney was moaning low in his throat. John transferred his weight onto one hand and reached around and grasped Rodney's cock with a sure grip. "Want to feel you. Come for me," John whispered in his ear.

Rodney obliged him by shooting come over John's hand; his legs started to wobble, and John grabbed his hips to keep him steady. A few short hard thrusts, and John was pulsing inside him, groaning softly, fingers clenched tightly around his hips. John managed to fall sideways and pull Rodney with him as he slid free. He wrapped his arm tight around Rodney and pressed his mouth to the back of Rodney's neck. Rodney relaxed back against John, and John let his hard grip on Rodney settle to something almost easy.

A day of driving found them in Nashville by the afternoon, and Rodney's wallet got them a room that was so eerily similar to the one in Roanoke that it seemed like they hadn't really driven for almost seven hours. Lunch had been a sinful pile of barbeque at a seedy looking place just off the highway; Rodney had chased it with a sampling of fine southern baking that John had christened the world's first public piegasm.

Rodney felt bloated and stiff while John paced around, picking up the TV remote, setting it down and generally doing the caged cat thing he usually reserved for times when the team hadn't been off-world in too long.

"I need a run," he said suddenly.

"Okay."

"I'll just go then, change in my room."

"Take the other key card, I'm going to go, ha, try out the gym actually. I feel like I'm going to succumb to entropy if I don't move."
Rodney enjoyed the gym; being surrounded by slightly flabby middle-aged business travelers was a world away from trying to exercise in front of the cream of the American Marines and Air Force, not to mention his own team. He enjoyed the sauna even more. He headed back to his room, back stretched and loose, everything warm and happy.

The room was golden with the early evening sun slanting in the window and pleasantly cool from the air conditioning whirring away. Rodney tossed his key card and wallet on the table handily placed by the door and stepped fully into the room.

John was stretched out on the bed, face down, head pillowed on his arms, naked.

"Oh," Rodney said, "oh my."

"Mmmm," John smiled drowsily. "You were gone a long time."

"Sauna. Felt fantastic, didn't want to leave." Rodney wandered over to the bed. There was just enough room to sit down beside John. His hand drifted out, no will required and settled softly on the curve of John's ass. Rodney refused to use words like graceful or beautiful to describe that bit of John's geometry, even in his own head, but that was the nature of the shape under his palm all the same.

"Mmmm," John said, arching up into the touch. "Warm hand."

Rodney stroked gently, teasing his fingers down the cleft, relishing the change in texture as his palm slid lower to legs covered in black wiry hair. Rodney teased higher again and John spread his legs wide; his face bore a look of serious permission and shy request both. Rodney trailed his fingers deeper, more insistently against the hot skin, making plans all the while. "I need a shower first," he said.

"Mmumm," John disagreed.

"No really, I do," Rodney assured him. "But I think I can find something to keep you—occupied—while you wait."

John watched him as he rummaged in his suitcase and pulled out a small zippered bag that looked innocently like a small shaving kit. Rodney tossed it casually on the bed and resumed his seat. He returned his hand to its wanderings over John's skin, smiling when he got John hissing in pleasure and twitching from the occasional scrape of nails. Rodney pulled open the small black bag and pulled out a bottle of lube. He popped the top, grinning when the sound made John twitch. He teased John with the tip of one slick finger, really, really enjoying the squirming John was reduced to. He gently let his finger slide in deeper, twisting and pulling back, then deeper yet. He slid in his second finger, slowly going deeper.

John was quiet and motionless, eyes closed and breathing ragged. Rodney stilled the fingers inside John and slid his left hand slowly along John's bare thigh. He could feel the tense muscle beneath the skin as he gently moved his hand, slowly, slowly up and down. He watched John's face, focus clearly inward, eyes jumping behind closed lids. He kept up the motion of his soft caress. John sucked in a breath, let it out and relaxed. The thigh under Rodney's hand softened, John's face lost its tight concentration, and his skin bloomed in goose bumps. Rodney resumed the slow slid of his fingers, deeper and back out, in and twisting, and John softened beneath him, spread out and ready.

Rodney pulled out of John again and pulled a smallish plug out of his black bag. The silicone was angled with a knob at the end and flared wide at the base. It was also a really silly looking shade of purple with gold swirls. Rodney slicked it up with more lube and gently pressed the knob
against John's opening. Rodney gently eased the plug in, slowing down to allow John to feel the wide base pressing against his resistant muscle. When Rodney could see him relax again, he pressed it all the way in.

Rodney cleaned up his hands and wiped the shiny-slick traces of lube from John's skin and resumed his gentle caress. The skin beneath his hand was hot and flushed pink, John's face was flush as well and sweat had bloomed on his lip, his neck and in the small of his back. Rodney bent forward and blew softly against the damp skin.

John moaned and writhed beneath him. The movement must have made the plug slide over just the right spot because John's eyes snapped open and he repeated the move, a dirty smile growing on his lips.

Rodney laughed at him and placed a soft kiss to one tight round cheek. "You just amuse yourself for a while. I'm going to take my time in the shower."

"Yeah take your time," John said, shimmying his hips and gasping at the sensation.

Rodney tried to take his time, he really did, but the image of John lying naked and waiting on his bed had a very firm grip on his mind. He scuffed the towel over his hair, his underarms and balls and called himself dry enough to return to the bed.

John was quiescent as Rodney approached, but he shifted his hips up to meet Rodney's touch, moaning slightly. Rodney forced himself to stop the slow touches; he could lose himself in these caresses, awed a little by the body spread out for him. Rodney pulled one of the pillows down, positioning it beside John, and a tug on John's hip encouraged him to roll over putting the pillow under his ass. John pulled his legs apart and curled his knees towards his chest. Rodney couldn't resist a slow drag of hands up and down John's thighs as he positioned himself.

John watched him through hooded eyes as Rodney thoroughly slicked his very hard cock. Failing to resist again, Rodney reached out with one slick hand and pulled a few strokes up and down John's own stiff cock.

John hissed out a Rodney at that, and Rodney grinned at him, probably quite smugly.

Rodney gently tugged at the base of the plug and it slid free easily. Tossing it to one side, he immediately pressed the head of his cock against John. Rodney had to not think about what he was doing, not think about John, lust drunk and offering himself up. He had to forget he was, sweet waltzing Jesus, fucking John Sheppard and just get on with it. He pressed himself forward, holding tight to his own reins, letting the tight, tight, slick heat envelope him, pull him in. John hooked his hands behind his own knees and pulled his legs up. Rodney rose up on his knees and drove forward as slowly as he could. John was groaning and he was panting trying not to lose control of his breathing and thereby lose control of everything else. He closed his eyes, he could not, could not look at John. He pressed forward and then he could feel his balls nesting against John's ass.

Rodney took three deep breaths. He counted them, really counting, not usually so difficult. On the third exhale he withdrew, the only way he could bear to leave that hot, tight place was the certainty that he was soon going to be ploughing deep back inside. He was leaning forward, pushing in with more of his mass. John was groaning louder and there were words in there, affirmations and goads and nonsense and Rodney pulled out on a hissed yes and thrust back in on a more, oh more. Rodney fucked John, fucked him as hard as he dared to, finally able to open his eyes. They were both moaning and babbling and when John grabbed his own cock and pulled himself to a wild screaming orgasm with three hard strokes, Rodney followed him letting the clench and release of John's body tight around him milk him dry.
John was limp beneath him, legs still in the air. Rodney let his softening cock slip free and tried to make his legs work enough to find a landing spot. He collapsed diagonally across the bed and tugged the pillow out from under John so he could uncurl his body and let his legs crash on top of Rodney's own limbs. Rodney lay still, letting the chill breeze from the air conditioning over his skin contrast with the burn of John's hot skin against his own.

Suddenly, John was moving, twisting his legs and writhing around to align himself to Rodney. Hands were clutching at him, fingers pressing into his arms and his face, and John's mouth was on him, kissing and biting at his bicep, his shoulder, his neck. Rodney turned his head, and John's mouth was on his, tongue pressing in. John was making gasping, desperate noises and it was as if he was trying to climb inside Rodney. He climbed half on top of Rodney, his hands darting everywhere, mouth and teeth and tongue demanding—something.

Rodney brought his rubbery arms to gently caress John's fever-hot back. He patted and stroked, tried to soothe, let John into his mouth, let him in as far as he could. Finally the frantic fingers and mouth stilled and the tight arch of back under Rodney's hands stilled against him. John huffed a breath into Rodney's shoulder and his ragged breathing quieted again. "Sorry," John mumbled into Rodney's skin. "I got a little crazy again there.

Rodney made soothing noises into John's hair.

"I think I might be more, well, sexually fucked up than I realized," John said quietly, apologetically.

"I don't see things that way," Rodney said. He really didn't like the contrite tone John was using; he wanted to chase it away. "I don't separate my fucked up self in bed from my fucked up self the rest of the time. It's all one continuum of fucked upedness as far as I'm concerned."

John snorted at him. "You should really go for your third PhD Rodney. You shouldn't deprive the world of that level of psychological insight."

"Yes, well. You'd do well to listen to me. I know from fucked up and your unnatural apologetic attitude is weirding me out. It's interfering with my natural tendency to mock."

"Oh, can't have that, can't get between Rodney McKay and a good mocking. Or a pie."

Rodney aimed a hard slap to John's ass and prodded him up and to the bathroom. "We need to shower, again. I'm getting hungry too, you can buy me dinner to make up for taking the name of pie in vain." Rodney watched John waddle into the shower and tried not to think about the chances of John agreeing to a little recreational spanking.

They hit the road early the next morning, opting out of a greasy breakfast and instead going straight to mainlining coffee and ibuprofen. Their dinner the night before had included a visit to the hotel bar. A very nice tip to the bartender got them a bottle of scotch to smuggle up to their room at slightly less than room service prices. Some naked, drunken making out had ensued. Rodney counted it a plus that they had actually slept in the bed this time instead of just on it.

Rodney huddled under the brim of his dark blue Nashville Predators hat while John hid behind his sunglasses. They got on highway 40 and headed west with the top down. The third time someone pulled up beside them in a silly tricked out Honda and made aggressive revving noises through their coffee-can pipes, John swung the car sharply onto the next off-ramp. He wandered around on some back roads, looking happier than he had all morning, reversing sharply and changing
directions when the pavement ran out, and generally enjoying himself.

Rodney was getting tense and his third serving of coffee and painkillers was souring in his stomach. The real cause of the ache in his neck was the pod person driving the car. John was tapping away to the radio, right hand loose on the stick, smiling in the sunshine. He was also intermittently reaching out and squeezing Rodney's left knee. He had a system; he would tap the shifter ball lightly, reach out land his hand on Rodney's leg and slide his hand down, squeeze once and return his hand to the stick. Rodney was trying not to flinch every time the hand descended, but he was not maintaining a very high success rate. John Sheppard did not touch people at random. He didn't touch Rodney at random. Hell, they had spent hours together, naked hours in hotel rooms, and not once had Rodney been the recipient of any sort of casual touch outside of bed.

John finished another one of his tap, reach, squeeze and retreat routines, except he wasn't retreating. He turned his head to Rodney, an enigma behind his shades and goofy grin. He reached up and ran a finger along Rodney's neck, flicked an ear. "Might want to lather on some more sunscreen. Getting a little pink."

"All right, that's it, just what is wrong with you?" Rodney exploded at him.

John flicked a glance back to Rodney, back at the road, back to Rodney again, and then the car was slowing down and pulling over. John got out, ambled around to Rodney's door, and pulled it open. "Out, out, out," he carolled at Rodney in a suspiciously happy singsong.

Rodney yanked his way out of the seat belt and erupted out of the car intent on explaining just how much John's cheery, smiling, knee-squeezing carrying on was freaking him the fuck out. He got his mouth open, changed the opening salvo of his diatribe to a startled, "Hey," when John snatched his cap off his head, and lost the whole will to rant when John got a good grip on him and kissed him hard. John had him pressed up against the door of the car and was not letting him up for air.

A car whooshed by, horn honking, female sounding catcall drifting back, and Rodney could feel John raise his hand to wave. When John decided they were allowed to breath again, Rodney started up with and nice coherent, "What…"

John pushed away and grinned at him. "Thought you seemed a little tense. Wanna drive for a while?"

"What, what, you're joking. You'd let me? Let me drive?"

"Sure, you can drive stick can't you?"

It was a testimony to how fucked up fucking John Sheppard could make him that Rodney couldn't even make a bad joke out of that straight line. Instead he scampered around the car before John could change his mind.

Rodney took a couple of miles of empty road to relearn the rhythm of driving a stick and then they were off and really, he did feel much less tense. "We going anywhere in particular?" Rodney asked after a while.

"Thought we could take it easy today, head to Memphis, drive around, maybe drive by Graceland, gotta do that once I guess."

"And Memphis would be where exactly?"

John waved vaguely to the south of west. "Over there somewhere."
Rodney started turning down roads in a random zigzag and soon enough they found signs pointing back to the highway and the way to Graceland. They toured Memphis, found some more sinfully delicious food, drove by Graceland and pushed on to Little Rock, since Rodney was having fun driving and didn't want to stop.

The next morning John wanted to run again, and then he drove them to Amarillo, Texas, complaining about the detrimental effects of exhaust fumes on runners until they stopped for lunch. They got a late start leaving Amarillo when Rodney insisted he fulfill a life-long dream of committing sodomy in the state of Texas. John hadn't needed much convincing and subsequently smiled all the way to Albuquerque. Rodney smiled right along with him until he saw the signs for the turnoff for I-25 and Colorado Springs. The thought of driving into the mountain and stepping through the gate to home was leaving him with decidedly mixed feelings. He took the wheel for the drive through the desert to Flagstaff and hoped John would take his silence for concentration on his driving.

Flagstaff meant decision time, keep going west or turn north to tour the Grand Canyon and follow up with a visit to Las Vegas. Rodney was feeling rubbed raw by too much desert and too many uncomfortable thoughts and suddenly found himself screaming at John about his total lack of fucking interest in the Grand Fucking Canyon, Las Fucking Vegas or anything else in the entire fucking continental U.S. of A. He punctuated all this by storming out of the room, his own fucking room, and applying himself to getting drunk in the hotel bar.

John let him be for a few hours and then came and sat silently beside him nursing a beer. When Rodney got up to leave, John silently followed him. Back in the room, their room, John silently pushed a plate of sandwiches at him and set a bottle of water down beside it. Rodney ate himself sober and stripped down to his underwear and sat on the bed, back against the headboard, taking occasional pulls at the water bottle. John stripped down and sat beside him, looked at the TV remote and then set it down again.

"Elizabeth," Rodney said into a silence that had gotten comfortable again sometime between the food and the undressing. John looked startled by the name. "I know you were friends, and I was her friend too in my fashion, but sometimes, well sometimes she was the wrong person to—not lead exactly—but the wrong person to shape Atlantis. I don't know if you knew about it when we came to Earth, that first time. She was engaged, I suppose, in effect—to Simon."

John nodded recognition of the name.

"She wanted him to come back with us," Rodney continued. "She pushed Carson to accept him on his staff when really he could have, should have, been senior to Carson. It was all set—all the paperwork done. Problem was, he had moved on. He had a new girlfriend, younger of course, someone he was not likely to leave to move to a different galaxy and he waited over a week to admit that to Elizabeth."

John looked up at that, shocked. Rodney had thought maybe Elizabeth had kept that part of the story amongst the three of them, herself, Rodney and Carson. "Yeah, a week to plan the rest of her life in the brave new world of Atlantis, her and Simon. She probably had herself married to him and moved into new quarters in her mind. Rug pulled out doesn't quite convey the level of shock she must have felt." Rodney mused into his water bottle, wishing it were scotch, wishing he were drunk still. "I've thought, more than once, that she took that, what—betrayal I guess, she took it in and made it part of herself, and then she made it part of Atlantis as well."

"How do you mean?" John turned fully to him, set his hand on Rodney's leg. The shock of skin on skin tore a gasp from Rodney. Maybe not so sober after all.
"I sat in the mess hall one day, feeling like I was back in high school again, and it hit me. It's not high school; it's a nunnery, some weird co-ed nunnery. Chastity enforced by overwork and fraternization rules."

John snorted at him, "If you think Atlantis is chaste, you haven't been paying attention."

"No, no, I'm not blind, I know what goes on, but is anybody married? Has anybody even joined hands with someone else and happily gated back to Earth to get a picket fence and a dog? Anybody actually a couple in any openly defined way? Anybody sleeping in a fucking bed that's big enough for more than one small adult? Christ no one's even gotten pregnant before Teyla. That's unprecedented for a base with that many civilians on it."

"It is a war zone, Rodney."

"Yeah and how many service personnel became or got someone pregnant in Iraq last year, hell, last month?"

"Point." John frowned down at his hand, dark against Rodney's pale leg. "I was shocked by Teyla's pregnancy. Still am. I don't think I'm handling it well. Maybe I fit right in with Elizabeth's nunnery. Maybe you're right about it all and maybe it's as much my doing, my influence, as hers."

"I didn't say that. John I'm not blaming you, I'm not blaming Elizabeth…"

"I've been looking, Rodney. Looking at you and not touching for years. There's more to that than just some uncharacteristic rule following on my part."

"Yeah well that's a two way street and don't ever think differently, maybe we all need a bit of a rethink on our assumptions."

John tapped Rodney on the shin, scooted a little closer. "What does all that have to do exactly with flipping out at me about the Grand Fucking Canyon?"

Rodney laughed, at himself as much as John. "I'm not sure even I have that much insight into the workings of my own mind. I don't know, just feeling antsy." Rodney paused, thinking that wasn't quite true. "And well, too, I did fall right in with the culture Elizabeth promoted. Fuck, I sound like a fucking anthropologist. I let myself get lost, I guess. Let myself sink into the work and the pace and the sheer unmitigated terror and wonder of living there, and I changed. Not all for the worse necessarily, but not consciously either. Believe it or not I used to have a life, even in Russia it wasn't all work."

"Seeing Teyla pregnant, and Jeannie, of course, and some other things lately, I thought maybe I might like a life again. But you, I didn't expect you and this is, okay, I follow you. I follow you in the field and sometimes other places, other ways, and okay maybe not quietly, but I do defer to you and I was feeling like that, like I could lose myself again, lose myself in you. This isn't even making sense to me now, sorry."

"Trust me, I fully realize the desire to drive your own life," John said quietly.

"Also, maybe I was counting on the fact that you seem to be mostly immune to the more negative aspects of my personality."

"Safe to yell at." John grinned at him. "I used to, not yell, no yelling in my house, but start arguments with my father. Make him go away. Make him leave me alone."

"If you want me to go away, you'll have to come right out and tell me. Just being an asshole won't do it." Rodney smiled at him.
"This is not news," John said, scooted a little closer and kissed Rodney chastely on the cheek. Rodney kissed him back, much less chastely.

Much later, twined together in the bed John said, "Let's just head straight for the ocean. I'm sick of deserts and I don't really want to drive by Nelles and watch planes I'll never fly again scream by overhead."

"A sound plan," Rodney murmured into his shoulder.

The next day, they traded off the driving and pushed through to Bakersfield and then on to Highway 101 and north finally. When they started seeing signs for Salinas, John sang a few verses of Me and Bobby Magee and Rodney didn't even roll his eyes.

They rolled out of bed in a crappy roadside motel the next morning grabbed some coffee, piled into the car and headed to Monterey. They spent the whole day playing at the beach, eating California food, and watching the sun sink into the sea. That night, as John sank deep into Rodney, he resolved to quell the voice in his head that kept whispering, all be over too soon.

They dawdled up the coast, sticking to the Cabrillo Highway, eyes hungry for the sea. They stopped to swim, or just walk on the beech. They ate bright fresh food and switched to drinking green and gold California wine. Rodney bitched about the California lime conspiracy and redoubled his efforts at questioning waiters. John happily munched on tacos of dubious provenance and gobbled seafood smothered in lemon butter.

In San Francisco, Rodney made John come into the Good Vibrations Store with him, where they laughed like loons, blushed scarlet, and spent a lot of money. They both whooped like kids, or well, tourists really, as they crossed the Golden Gate Bridge with the top down.

At the Oregon border, tired of the requests to put the top up, John herded Rodney into a clothing store, made him buy a hoodie and a bright blue long-sleeved tee shirt that was so tight his nipples looked ready to poke through in the cold ocean breeze. John made him wear the shirt all day and happily stripped it off him in the hotel that night.

They reluctantly left the ocean behind and turned inland to Portland and then I-5 north to Seattle, where Rodney bought a ton of coffee. Then just like that they were at the border. Rodney glared at the border guard, handed over cash for the duty on the bag of sex toys and the coffee, and John tried very hard not to laugh. John took his turn glaring when the guard raised a dubious brow at John's American Military ID. A few dollars poorer, and they were in the land of colourful money, round vowels and gay marriage.

Rodney pulled out his phone, called Jeannie to warn her they were on their way and got another set of directions to the right address. Beaming down was so much easier than fighting Vancouver traffic.

John pulled into the Miller's driveway and slid in beside the Prius just as Jeannie bounded down the front steps. She stopped, hands on hips, and shook her head at the car. "The jokes just write themselves don't they?" She grabbed Rodney and landed a quick kiss to his cheek and waved at John while unlocking the Prius and stuffing a duffle bag in the passenger seat. "Door's unlocked, gotta go. Maddie—well, never mind, back in a bit. Go make coffee or something useful." She slammed the door on her last word and peeled out down the driveway.

Rodney and John watched her disappear down the street. "We still have time to escape before she
comes back," Rodney suggested.

"Suck it up, won't be so bad. Coffee sounds good, fish out a bag of that stuff you tried to smuggle into the country."

"I did not try to smuggle anything, asshole. Coffee I'll make, but I am also phoning around to find a hotel. I am so not staying in my sister's thin-walled suburban nightmare of a house." Rodney found the smallest bag of premium coffee in his suitcase and followed John into the house.

The place hadn't changed, bright and sunny, cluttered with the belongings of two adults and one child. They wandered into the kitchen. The window looked on to a big yard also cluttered with bright plastic toys. Rodney fussed around with the coffee. John leaned against the counter and looked around at the place he'd last seen in much less happy times.

"Dave said something when we were leaving. You know, when you were hiding in the car," John said quietly.

"Was not hiding. I can occasionally be sensitive. I was—not intruding on a family moment."

"Hiding. He said that we should get together sometime. His family and Jeannie, Kaleb, Maddie. Us obviously. Thought it would be good to meet everyone, he said." John rubbed his face ruefully at this confession.

"Is the man certifiable?" Rodney sputtered at him. "Can you picture that? I mean really, can you picture that? Clan Jeannie are all nuts and hyper, Christ that kid never sleeps you know. And Dave, Dave and his little robot children. I think he keeps them in a closet somewhere in that grey edifice. Crazy McKays meet the repressed Sheppards. I think that was a horror movie I saw once."

"Yeah, that combo would never work." John whacked him on the head. "You're so fucking obnoxious sometimes, how the hell do you ever get laid anyway?"

Rodney flicked the coffee pot on and turned to John, laughing. He slid his hands along John's waist and leaned in for a quick kiss. "Well you see, there's this guy I know, and you wouldn't think it to look at him, but he's really kind of slutty so…"

John was grinning at him, so Rodney kissed him again. He heard a sharp hiss that for one blissful fraction of time he believed was the coffee pot. John stiffened and pulled his mouth away. "My sister is standing right behind me isn't she?" Rodney said, certain of his doom. John didn't answer he just spun Rodney around.

Jeannie was indeed standing in the kitchen doorway, mouth open. Rodney decided to pre-empt whatever she was going to say, instinct really. "You seem to make of habit of walking in on me." And that was a mistake. It was all there on her face, wide-eyed realization and then horror.

She could click the pieces of a puzzle together just as easily as he could, and Rodney got to watch her do it. "That's, oh my God, that's why—I never realized, and you, and he—oh, God…" She turned and fled the kitchen.

Rodney was after her, chasing her down. "No, no, Jeannie, no just, wait. Will you just, for Christ's sake, sit down and listen to me," Rodney thundered at her in desperation. He was surprised when it worked, when she thunked down on the sofa and fist her hands on her knees.

"Jeannie, seriously. You know me. I don't say things just to be nice, ever. It was not your fault. You were just a kid. I never, never blamed you. Never. Jeannie, look at me. I mean this. Tell me you know I mean this?"
She looked at him, assessing, looking for the lie. She huffed in surprise when she didn't find it. "That's why you wouldn't come to the wedding. That's why you were so angry," she accused.

Rodney dropped into the chair opposite her. "Yeah well, that was me being me. I just couldn't get over it. You were, I saw it as throwing away, choosing I guess, choosing to give up something that I couldn't imagine living without. If there's any, anything lacking, it's in me not you okay? Anyway, it's entirely possible I may have a slightly different perspective these days."

Jeannie looked over his right shoulder and smiled wetly. Rodney turned and saw John leaning casually in the kitchen doorway in the pose Rodney recognized now as the indicator of profound tension. "Something you guys want to tell me?" Jeannie said.

John looked horrified. Rodney snorted at them both. "That extremely awkward conversation doesn't seem necessary now. Small favours etc."

"Coffee's ready," John said.

Jeannie got her spark back over coffee in the kitchen. Rodney found a hotel. Jeannie made a token protest and then raised her eyebrows over her coffee when he booked two rooms but mercifully kept silent. She explained that Madison was staying over at a friend's house and had forgotten her pyjamas, hence the lightning trip and untimely return. Rodney suggested they go out to dinner and then they argued about where and menus until Jeannie called Kaleb and turned the argument into a three-way affair. John clutched his coffee and maintained his observing strange customs that might turn violent posture.

Rodney escaped with John to their hotel as soon as humanly possible. John followed Rodney into his room and dumped his suitcase beside Rodney's. Rodney collapsed on the bed and groaned. "That went well."

"I am not slutty, by the way." John was looming over him, a petulant pout making him look about, well, about forty, and a silly forty at that.

"Are so. I'll prove it, I could crook my little finger and you'd drop your pants in under ten seconds."

"Ha."

Rodney held up one hand and crooked his finger under John's nose. John grinned at him, got his hands on his belt and one hip wiggle later, his pants were puddled on the floor.

"I love being right," Rodney said.

John stripped off his shirt and climbed on top of Rodney. "We have hours to kill before dinner and you're going to get those clothes all sticky if you don't get them off soon."

Dinner with the family in Vancouver was a world away from the dark wood and hushed tones of the restaurant in Frederick. The restaurant was bright with chrome and glass, and the menu had everything from vegan delights Rodney was happy to pass on to organic grass-fed beef. He was very happy with the beef, and the wine, and he was actually enjoying himself. The fact that John had managed to put him in a very good mood might have something to do with it.

Jeannie had obviously briefed Kaleb on the scene in the kitchen; he kept staring in blinking thoughtfulness at John. Jeannie also wanted to know how everyone was, so Rodney had to tell her about Teyla and the pregnancy, and found himself promising to take back a pile of baby things. Talk of Atlantis, of home, left him vaguely unsettled, so he started an argument with Kaleb about
who had the worst undergrads, arts or sciences. He actually had fun arguing with Kaleb; the world had gone mad.

Over dessert, Kaleb broached the idea of spending the rest of their time in Vancouver at his parent's cottage. "They are always telling me to use it, and Maddie would love to go, it's more a house really, on the beach in White Rock. We could all go up tomorrow, stay the weekend?"

"Um, okay with me, Rodney?" John poked at him.

"I thought you didn't like your parents?" Rodney looked at Kaleb suspiciously.

"Yeah, this would be a good way of making them feel, necessary and then they'll lay off for a while. Ulterior motive all the way." Kaleb grinned at him.

"Lay off how exactly," Rodney said, "they want you to do what?" Rodney was pretty sure he knew exactly what they wanted if he had read between the lines of Jeannie’s emails correctly.

"Mer." Jeannie tried to deflect him.

"No, it's fine." Kaleb smiled at her. "He is family. They want us to send Maddie to private school. The same institution of higher social standing my mother graduated from. They offer to pay for it, and it sounds more like demanding or blackmail, but letting them loan us the beach house will shut them up for a bit."

Rodney smirked at the description of the school. Kaleb wasn't as bad as he'd thought. An idea floated to the surface of his mind. "Tell them she's already got a spot in school. Pick whatever private school you want and I'll pay for it. Set it up now, do an end run."

Kaleb looked shocked and Jeannie scoffed at him. "Do you have any idea what that costs? Besides public school is fine for now, maybe when she's older we'll see. I want her to have a normal life. Seriously, you're insane. It's a lot of money."

Rodney waved this away impatiently. "Unless the IOA or the US government starts charging me rent for my tiny little cell in, you-know-where, I don't exactly have a lot of expenses, and I held their nuts to the fire when I signed my contract with them. I could afford it and probably not notice the difference in the bank balance I never look at. Seriously, consider it. Don't dawdle or I'll just set up a trust fund without consulting you. Might just do that anyway."

"So you're not just after me for my money Rodney, good to know." John smirked at the three sets of shocked gazes that swung his way.

"I thought you were a poor soldier anyway, gave all your shares in the evil Sheppard Empire to Dave or something." Rodney shot back.

"Tried, he won't take 'em."

"Maybe he doesn't like the idea of you giving away so easily something he values so much," Rodney groused.

John looked thoughtful. "Point." And then, "I like your trust fund idea, I could do that, unload all the shares into trust for Dave's kids."

Jeannie was looking at them both like they were morons, as only a McKay could do. "Before you guys go giving away all your assets, did you ever think you might want to have kids of your own?"
Rodney looked shocked, stared at her; she hadn't just said that had she? He looked at John, yup, shocked too.

Kaleb tilted his head and said to Jeannie, "You know considering what they do for a living, you seem to have effectively terrified them both pretty easily."

Rodney was saved, saved, blessedly saved by the arrival at their table of some friends of Kaleb's, or maybe just random strangers; he didn't even know, it's not like he listened to the introductions. Not until Kaleb was stumbling over how to introduce John, trying to convey my bother-in-law's boyfriend and Colonel in the Air Force in one sentence. John put his Dave face on and stood up offering to shake hands and told them his name was John. They all made little chitchat noises while Rodney tried very hard not to throw some glassware. Why was this so hard? He didn't care what people thought, he never had. Why was it so hard to just glibly lie and let them waft away on their stupid illusions?

John looked like the effort of putting on the charm was giving him a migraine; the smile evaporated the second the interlopers left. Rodney was getting his own tension born pain behind his eyes, and right now he wanted to be alone, alone with John. Their waiter drifted by and Rodney flagged him down and pressed his credit card on the guy, told him to give it to Jeannie when he'd rung it through. Jeannie was ready to argue at his hasty exit, but Rodney ploughed over her objections with a repetition of, "I can't right now, I just can't," until even she could see his desperation. They escaped the restaurant and Rodney didn't lose the feeling of being chased by unseen enemies until they were in the hotel.

Rodney tried to contain his rising irritation and desperation, tried to act calm and sane. He waved away John's offer of a drink, watched as John sank to the sofa to untie his shoes. Rodney had done a lot of crazy shit in front of, despite, because of and just with John. He hadn't shown any unwillingness to deal with it before now, seemed to have his own nice helping of crazy anyway. Rodney stripped himself naked as fast as any man having a nervous breakdown could be expected to and got a handful of John Sheppard and pulled him to the bed.

John let himself be manhandled, let Rodney undo the buttons of his shirt with shaking hands, let Rodney slowly strip him bare, stopping to kiss and caress and touch each bit of skin revealed, as he managed to pull away John's clothes. By the time he had John naked, Rodney was hard, aching and wound so tight he couldn't decide what to touch first, where to lay his hands, where to place his lips. John quieted him with a firm grip to his biceps and flipped them over on the bed. He stretched himself fully over Rodney, holding him down, pressing him into the bed. John touched, kissed, licked, bit, caressed Rodney, ground their bodies together.

John touched him, eased him open, never taking his mouth off Rodney's for longer than a breath. John pushed inside him and filled him up, and fucked harder, pounded into him when Rodney finally found his voice and demanded it. When they were both spent and panting, it was Rodney who burned with manic energy, who needed to grasp at John and feel him under his hands and lips.

Later, when yet another artfully stained hotel bedspread was tossed aside, Rodney held tight to John and promised himself he would get a grip in the morning. He was spending one night in the land of not coping.

In the morning, feeling marginally sane after a shower and coffee, Rodney called Jeannie. He refused to apologize for running off early, agreed the beach house in White Rock sounded lovely and made plans to meet them there that day.

The beach house really was more house than cottage. They had pulled into the garage mid-afternoon to find the Prius already there. They grabbed their bags and walked around the wrap-
around porch to the door that faced the beach. There were signs of habitation, towels on the porch rail and chairs and toys spread around, but no one was home. Rodney felt around in the potted shrub by the door and pulled out a slightly grimy key.

Inside, the house was bright, with wood floors shining in the afternoon sun. They found one big bedroom downstairs that Jeannie and Kaleb had obviously claimed, so they wandered upstairs. They were spoiled for choice; the upper floor was a warren of bedrooms. Madison's things were spread over the bed in one small room at the front of the house. They found a big room with a double bed that overlooked the road at the back of the house, and dumped their bags.

"I was thinking maybe a swim," John said.

Rodney frowned at that idea. "I was thinking stock the kitchen. We passed a store on the way here. Thought I'd get some actual meat and other edible foods. Anything you want?"

"You know what I like." John shrugged at him and handed him the keys to the car.

Rodney was finishing his second sandwich and his third beer when Jeannie found him.

"Where's the rest of the crew?"

"Kaleb and Maddie are making sand castles with John. We found him swimming all by himself."

"What no crowd of admirers, that's unusual. You know, I wanted to go to a lesbian bar in San Francisco, but John wouldn't let me. I think he doubted my motives, but I just wanted a little peace."

"Sure you did. I had to come back in before the sand castle was done. Kaleb was starting to notice I was staring at John's ass. God Mer, but he is—"

"Jeannie!"

"Yeah, like you're shocked. You haven't managed to be shocked by anything since the eighties. What are you doing in here anyway, sulking?"

"I got food, I ate food. No big thing."

"Yeah, and you ran out of that restaurant last night because you just remembered American Idol was on."

"Fine, fine. I'm just not handling this whole thing very well," Rodney snapped at her.

"And by thing," Jeannie expertly imitated his hand wave, "you mean?"

"The whole let's pretend aspects of this, whatever the fuck it is. You know how I deal with people who disapprove, who are stupid. You know how far my willingness to conform goes. I just didn't think. It's much harder than it should be, and I feel like, if I'm not coping now, what the hell happens when we step back through the looking glass?"

"What does John say about it?"

"Oh funny, very funny. That's—you have no idea. He can not talk about something so aggressively it just wears you out trying. The Sheppard genetic legacy apparently."

"Oh right, you got to meet the family, what was that like?"

"Illuminating. They are not in any way what you would expect, having met John. Rolling in
money for one thing. So uptight, I'm surprised the house doesn't implode from all the tension. I liked Karen though, Dave's wife. John doesn't like her though."

"Yeah, huh. That explains that after me for my money line and some other things. I thought you both were going to shit when I said that thing about kids." Jeannie laughed at him happily.

"It seems extremely impractical an idea."

"But you aren't saying never ever, are you?"

Rodney squirmed uncomfortably.

"You want a family with him don't you."

"I had a family with him." Rodney erupted out of his chair grabbed a bag of chips to pace with. "I think I may have fucked that up, that's the problem. I should have left it. Left it theoretical."

"Stupid. Dumbest thing you've said today."

Rodney waved a chip at her in possible concession.

"Why doesn't he like his sister-in-law?"

"I think she was kind of friends with his wife. You know, bad associations or something."

"What! John was married?"

"Oh, yeah sorry no reason you would know that. Yeah he was for a few years. I don't know—surprisingly, he never talks about it. Well he does a bit to me—now. Ronon met her, at the funeral. Very hard to pry any details out of him. Said the last time John looked that freaked out was when shit that story's classified. Anyway, Karen's interesting, has hidden depths."

"Mer, are you thinking about not going back?" Trust Jeannie to ask the question John couldn't.

"No, not that, I want to go back, of course. I am just having a great deal of difficulty reconciling what I may need to give up. I think I need to change some things. I just don't, fuck. Yes I want a family, however that constitutes itself. I don't want to run around like a fucking teenager sneaking around, and the risks if I screw up are terrifying. I think I want a normal life, argue about dirty dishes and what kind of peanut butter to buy, that sort of thing. I also want Atlantis and the adventure and the physics and all of it too."

"The irony, the irony Mer. It's killing me here."

"Yeah, yeah," Rodney said tiredly.

"Mer, you might want to try something radical like give John some time to catch up. Not everyone's brain is as over-clocked as yours. Sit still and wait for him. You'll figure it out, but sometimes the answers aren't all there, nice and clean and neat."

Maddie exploded into the kitchen, trailed by Kaleb and John. She plastered herself to her uncle and vividly recounted the building of her sand castle and it's inevitable meeting with the waves. When she wound down and transferred her attention to a banana, John spoke up. "What were you guys talking about?"

Rodney and Jeannie exchanged a glance and said in one voice, "M theory."
"Uh huh." John wandered over and stole Rodney's chips.

"It's cooling off a bit, breeze is coming in over the water," Kaleb said.

"Bonfire, bonfire, bonfire." Maddie punctuated her chanting with a bounce around the kitchen.

"We're allowed—on the beach?" John asked, sounding nearly as interested.

"There's a fire pit, but you can't collect driftwood to burn. There should be some wood stacked at the side of the house."

"Why don't you go shower off the salt water," Rodney said, "I'll get the fire started before it's too dark to see. And for God's sake, eat something more than chips," Rodney snatched the bag back.

"You can build a fire Uncle Mer?" Madison wasn't the only one who seemed sceptical.

"I can do all sorts of fun wilderness stuff you wouldn't expect a physicist to ever need to know." Rodney took the crucial supplies, chips and beer, with him as he went to inspect the fire pit for safety hazards.

John wandered down the porch steps when he was just finishing the first small fire he was planning to keep smouldering until the sun dipped into the sea. He had wood stacked up ready to build the fire up bigger once it was dark. John snagged a beer and they sat on the bench of a conveniently placed picnic table, backs to the house.

"They coming out?" Rodney asked.

"Dinner time."

"Oh yeah, kids. You eat?" Rodney was suspicious.

"Made a sandwich then escaped."

Rodney raised a brow.

"Your sister tells me you have something you want to say, and me not letting you talk it to death is a violation of the Geneva Conventions. I told her I wasn't aware I was holding you prisoner. She hit me."

"Don't look at me like that. I didn't tell her to nag you or to hit you."

"So talk. I can take it."

Rodney made a rude noise.

"You're worried about going back."

"Legitimately, I think. Look, John you know what I'm like. When confronted with stupidity I either knock it down or ignore it. I have no experience with and no patience for putting on some show of conformity to keep someone else's stupid fantasy of how they think the world should work intact. I don't like the stupid having power over me."

"Don't over think it. Really, what's private is private and that's it."

"Simple." Rodney made the word a slur.

"It can be."
"Fuck, you're an idiot. But you're not, you are not that fucking simple." Rodney sneered the word simple. "So I'll just simply tell myself hey, that Sheppard guy, great fuck, must hook up with him sometime, and we'll try through the wormhole to wonderland and enjoy some quick and dirty up against the wall some time. Maybe I can rig a lock on a storage closet. Sounds perfect, simple even. One problem, what we're doing stopped being just fucking somewhere in Virginia. Or I know, I know, a code. I'll call you up on the very public radio channel and say how about a game of tiddlywinks, but you'll know what I mean." Rodney threw a chip into the fire, they watched the grease catch in a rainbow of flame.

"I had started thinking here was the wonderland, the not-real place. There is what matters. I thought you felt that way too," John said.

"I did, I still do. I am going back, in case you have any doubts. I just don't know now if I plan on staying there forever. I don't know if I can."

"You're right, I—it's not simple. But it doesn't have to be so hard either. We'll figure it out."

"John, I love it there, I do. I love being the guy who gets to pull apart all those mysteries and make all those discoveries. I just don't want to be just that anymore. I want a whole life."

"I don't have any answers for you." John flicked his beer cap into the fire.

"Yeah well, makes two of us."

Maddie came along dragging her parents behind her and they sat in the sand, watching the sun streak the sky red. When it got dark enough, Rodney bustled around with the wood and a long stick and poked the fire into life, flames dancing and wood popping, smoke sweet in the air.

"How did you learn to do that?" Jeannie demanded.

John started snickering. Rodney glared at him. "Fine, yes, you might as well all laugh. Ronon, Ronon taught me how. We were, well, let's just say unexpectedly camping out, and leave it at that. He starts gathering up some deadfall, digs a pit in the er, turf, and then he just plunks down on his ass. Says he's done his part. So I had to admit I didn't know how to build a fire. There was then much oh my God, you admitted you didn't know something and other hilarity of that nature, yes I'm looking at you Sheppard. So he, Ronon that is, gets up and starts waving his arms about and saying things like are you an imbecile, anyone with an IQ of that tree over there can construct something as simple as a fire and fire Rodney, fire, it's been around for a while maybe you've heard of it. And ok, yes, it may have been just about the most accurate impression of me I've ever witnessed. That still doesn't excuse the amount of laughter my so-called team engaged in."

John was snickering harder, clearly trying not to laugh full out. At the time he had literally rolled on the silver-grey creeper that covered the ground and laughed until his head hurt. He had snorted great hooting guffaws as Ronon kept on and on, ultimately claiming Rodney was going to Blow Them All Up if he wasn't careful. Rodney himself had dropped straight to the ground and laughed silently, pounding his thigh with his fist as tears streamed down his face.

Kaleb and Jeannie both had their hands clapped over their mouths, eyes dancing as Rodney continued his story.

"Teyla now, she was, you wouldn't believe it. She started this giggle that just went on and on. She just couldn't stop. Her whole body just shook and this giggle reeled out of her. It just took her over. She had the hiccups for half the night after too. It was all worth it just for that. I actually did learn how to build a proper fire too."
Rodney sat back down and bumped John's shoulder.

"What, it was funny. You almost pissed yourself laughing."

"Yeah, it was. It was good." Rodney sighed happily.

Jeannie let Maddie toast a couple of marshmallows on the fire, but soon enough she and Kaleb were herding her to bed. When they came back, they settled on the porch steps with beers of their own.

Rodney finished the bag of chips and started licking the salt and grease off his fingers. He looked up, thumb in his mouth to find John staring at him. Rodney grinned and sucked on the ball of his thumb.

"See, now that right there, if you do that in the mess hall, we're doomed." John licked his own lips.

"Can't resist me, huh?"

"Oh now, I wouldn't want to make that ego of yours unnecessarily big."

"It's not my ego that gets big when you stare like that."

"Oh, oh, worst line ever. Bad even for you."

"Shut up." Rodney shoved at John. John just caught his hand and held on.

"I—I know I never say things, but I don't want to stop. I—you know that right? I'm not going to want to give you up."

"I know."

"Good, now stop making me talk. It makes my brain hurt."

"Okay," Rodney said, getting to his feet and pulling John up after him. "Time to go in. I think, since I made the fire, I'll let them worry about putting it out." Rodney gestured to Kaleb and Jeannie. He grinned at John, assessing. He glanced around at the sand underfoot. "Race you inside."

John grinned back at him, cocky. Rodney watched him, let him start to move and then Rodney kicked out, catching John behind one knee and took off without looking back. Fast, fast he had to be fast over the sand and yes onto the cement path. Crap, crap, Kaleb was sitting sideways on the steps, long legs stretched out. Rodney pounded up the first few steps; he could hear John behind him. He could see Kaleb, eyes going wide, mouth open, and he was leaping, yes, over Kaleb on to the porch and the door; he got the door open and then pulled shut behind him. Don't look back. Straight up the stairs. John's breath hot on his neck, as he turned the corner, and a burst of speed down the hall and, surprise deke around the bed, and John was on the bed reaching grasping, catching and pulling Rodney down with him.

"Cheater," John gasped out at him.

"Fully within the rules," Rodney said.

"You'll have to share these rules with me sometime."

"Soon as I'm done makin' ‘em up. Oh and loser has to get back up and close the door."
John got up to oblige. Rodney basked in his win and then had to stop basking to dodge a tee shirt heading for his face. John shucked his shorts on to the floor and climbed on Rodney. He settled in on top. "I let you win," he said into Rodney's mouth.

Rodney nipped his tongue. "Liar."

"Fine, then. I can be big about this. Winner's choice. Command me, and I will obey."

"Really?"

"Um, maybe?" John said.

"Relax, we can't make enough noise to do anything too exciting. Hmm. First I think the loser, that would be you, should undress the winner, who is—oh yeah, me."

John got back into the spirit and tugged off Rodney's tee shirt. He pulled Rodney's belt open and had his hand on the waistband of his shorts when his face lit with an evil fire. Rodney sucked in a breath when he realised why John was bending his head. John worked the button of Rodney's shorts loose with his teeth. He flicked his tongue out to lift the zipper pull and got his teeth fixed around it and pulled down. He made sure his nose got friendly with the bulge in Rodney's underwear on the way down. John had to get his hands back in the game again to pull the shorts off. He got his mouth busy again right quick, nuzzling and lipping at the firm flesh still covered by cotton. When he started using his teeth, Rodney squirmed and writhed and moaned. John eventually stopped the tease and pulled the last garment off. "So, oh great winner…"

"I think you should go back to that, what you were doing, but turn around." Rodney made what he hoped was an illustrative spinning motion with his hand.

"I think the technical term you're searching for there is a sixty-nine." John smirked at him, but started getting in position.

Rodney rolled on to his side to meet him, head on, as it were. "Yes, well I've always found that term a bit vulgar, so oh, that's good right, oh. Sorry, less talking more reciprocating." John sucked him down harder, likely to prevent anymore five syllable words.

Rodney got with the program and tipped his head to suck on the head of John's cock. John was moaning around him and totally lost his rhythm when Rodney brought his tongue into the action.

"We suck at this," John said, laughing.

Rodney answered that with his teeth, sucked hard on the head of John's cock for a while and pumped with his fist. John answered that by coming noisily in his mouth. When John got back to earth, he wriggled around again, pushed Rodney over on his back and finished Rodney off. He licked up the mess that resulted when he decided on a whim to make Rodney come straight up in the air.

"You got good height on that one," John said when he was finished.

"Totally insane," Rodney said.

The next day, British Columbia lived up to its billing by raining all morning. Rodney was getting cranky, trapped in a house that suddenly seemed tiny with a small child, a brother-in-law he still didn't like all that much and John. John clearly didn't know exactly how to act in such close proximity to Rodney's family. He kept adopting one of his several useful off-world personae and dropping them until he gave up and hid. At that point, Rodney figured he was finally being himself. Rodney tried to feel guilty for the uncharitable thought, gave it up as impossible, and
went upstairs to propose scheduling a trip through the looking glass and home.

Sylvia lived up to her billing as well, and got them a flight out that night. They red-eyed it again, arrived in Colorado in the middle of the night. Rodney declined all offers to visit the SGC labs and they were bunking in the Midway station for their twenty-four hour stopover before noon Colorado time. They left behind a car Kaleb had promised to find storage for and the bill for a string of hotel beds John had never slept in.

Before they had hopped in a cab at the White Rock house, Jeannie had reminded Rodney again that sometimes you just had to sit and wait. He was doing just that, eyeing the blinking light of the security camera in the midway sleeping compartment and trying not to count the hours since he had last had his hands on John.

They dialled Atlantis the next day and walked through the gate into the familiar bustle of an ordinary day in a floating city in the Pegasus Galaxy. Home.

End Notes

The original version of this story included a rambling ending that, had I the courage of my convictions at the time, I would have left off, as I have done here. If you want to read it, you can do so at my Dreamwidth journal. The wholly unedited ending section begins here.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!