

Second Wind

BY
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This is a work of Stargate SG-1 fan-fiction

Jack O'Neill/Daniel Jackson, Slash, Alternate Universe, Drama, NC17, Season 6 time frame. Daniel's 3rd person perspective.

Summary: In open mourning from Daniel's death, Jack comes face to face with a long-haired, dirty, and abused version of him from an alternate reality.

Author Notes:

- 1. NOT a romance. It's a harrowing journey from hell by alternate Daniel Jackson.*
- 2. As has been my practice of late, SG-1's timeline has been advanced from 1997 to 2010. It's now 2016.*
- 3. Daniel died from radiation poisoning and didn't ascend.*
- 4. Jack was born in 1970 instead of 1952. He's 46. Old/New Daniel was born in 1980. He's 36.*
- 5. Hammond's in charge, SG-1 is a 3-man team, Janet's the CMO.*
- 6. Quotes in order of appearance: "The Second Coming" by WB Yeats, "Behind Blue Eyes" by*

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*The Who, “Nothing Else Matters” by Metallica,
and “Slow Hand” by The Pointer Sisters.*

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*Things fall apart
the center cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed
and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned*

Chapter 1: The Dead Don't Stay Dead

Daniel couldn't see where he was going, but the burlap hood that had been shoved over his head had still allowed some visibility through the loosely woven strands of rough twine. He gritted his teeth as the jackbooted thugs half-dragged him by his armpits and hauled him into a black armored humvee van that had once upon a time been part of the Colorado Springs police department. This one had been converted into a prison transport, so the rear seats had been taken out. He crawled to a sitting position, putting his back to the bare metallic wall. It hurt to sit. But then, it hurt to lay down. He was skin and bones.

"Is he chained?" came a familiar resonating voice.

"Yes, my Lord," said a thug. Probably one of hers.

Hatred filled Daniel at the sound. It came from a Goa'uld who inhabited a woman named Colonel Janetta

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Frazier. He loathed the thing as much as the human woman because they were one and the same. He never found out why Frazier was given the reins in most of their interactions, though if he had to guess, it was because the woman and the snakehead had the same appetites. It was even odder that the thing had kept her name, that she refused Jaffa. He didn't really care because both were venomous creatures and given the chance, he would murder them if an opportunity presented itself. It wasn't at all likely, not in the shape he was in.

"What did you say, soldier?" she asked.

"Yes, *Colonel*."

"Better. I like the sound," she said. "These people have done away with their gods. They worship the war machine, which I like. So remember, soldier."

"Yes, Colonel."

"Is the device ready?"

"Awaiting your arrival."

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“Let’s get going.”

Horror filled him. The device was a quantum mirror. Once, a long time ago, he’d experienced it, going to another universe. It hadn’t been harmful, but that’s because its use had been benign. Not so with Frazier. She’d been threatening him with it for the past few weeks, instilling horror. Frazier wasn’t one to make empty threats. With her, it was only a matter of *when*, and she used it to *space* people. The Reform had ships, so it could be done that way, but instead, she’d have it dialed to a universe where the mirror would be floating in space. How she’d stumbled on that twisted pleasure, he didn’t know. She had told him herself that when a person is condemned, they’re thrown at the mirror, so that when they hit and transferred to the other universe, the momentum would carry them away from the mirror, ensuring they couldn’t touch it to return to safety, albeit a brutal one. No one wanted to die in space.

It was apparently his future and as the knowledge, the reality, finally sank in, he groaned and fell onto his side. Instead of weeping outright, he did it while screaming

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invectives and kicking at the rear doors. Up front, the driver, two guards, and the Goa'uld laughed at him. They found his horror amusing.

Frazier's method of ruling the Colorado Springs Auxiliary Reform, formerly Stargate Command, with an iron fist was to instill terror and suffering. She wasn't interested in providing a false hope to the slaves because they were just that: slaves. They weren't prisoners of war. They weren't personnel forced to work in harsh conditions. They had been, several months before. Now, they were slaves, and as such, they were either listed as a worker or forced to become a means of entertainment.

She'd caught sight of him after he'd been brought back from Chulak and had taken a special interest. She'd had him educated about many things he wished he'd never learned, and his translation skills were only a small part of her interests. If he didn't perform well, then a Goa'uld pain stick was applied. It was an effective weapon he'd experienced only once before the world had disappeared into a black hole. He'd once asked why she didn't use the hand device she wore on

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occasion, and her response had been, “Aside from death, it causes brain damage. I don’t want my favorite pet deprived of all of his faculties.” So she used the pain stick, telling him that she loved watching the light burst forth out of a person’s orifices, and if they were naked, the light escaped in those other areas, too.

Frazier was one deeply disturbed and scary bitch.

The shackles around Daniel’s wrists and neck tinkled ominously during his fit of rage, sliding easily over shiny pale skin, a sign of long wear. They were heavy and uncomfortable, used to control, not restrain. When his body and mind grew tired of the emotional outburst, he lay there wondering what the cold of space would do to the metal against his skin. The thought changed into pictures of popsicles, and he remembered that he used to love the root beer flavored ones. He tried to laugh at himself, but it turned into a grimace of pain instead. His mind went to weird places. It always had, but during suffering, it went altogether mad.

Fifteen minutes later, the vehicle came to a stop and he was pulled from the van, once again by his armpits. At

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least it wasn't by his restraints. He managed to keep on his feet in order to avoid being dragged, unlike when they'd thrown him into the van. If he was going to go to his death, he'd go without fear, but as he walked, the more that resolution dissipated, and his legs began to give out, making his escort pull him up.

"That's far enough."

Her voice sounded to his left. All he wanted was to get his hands around that throat. The hood was yanked off and the sudden light made him squint and duck his head. High heels clacked over concrete, coming closer, then someone grabbed his collar from behind and hands made him jerk in surprise and revulsion. They traveled over him and he tried not to react, but he couldn't stop the twitching of his body. That hateful face came into view as her hands left him.

"I'm going to miss you," said Frazier with a heavy sigh. "But you've outlived your usefulness." She gave him another once over with her eyes. "I should have kept better care of you I suppose but you have only yourself to blame for the state you're now in." She leaned in

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until her face was about six inches away. “There’s been talk that I should get you back your health and beauty so I can put you on retainer in the Section Twelve house.”

Cold ran through him. It was a whorehouse. “Pity,” he said, dredging up the last vestiges of his free will to throw sarcasm at her.

She laughed. “Alas, no, my pet. My patience has all but evaporated because it would take much too long to rehabilitate you.”

“Maybe you should’ve thought ahead,” he murmured. He couldn’t help himself. It was just who he was. All these months of pain and humiliation couldn’t rob him of it. He waited for the guards to punish him for his insolence, but to his surprise, nothing happened. She just smiled at him, the vicious cunt. That epithet was one he’d rarely thought of, never mind used, until he’d met her.

She wore her all-black collarless frock coat, embroidered with snake patterns. She’d also cut her

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hair again, and the buzz cut was even shorter than the last time he'd seen her over a month ago. It made it easier to see the coiled snake tattoo she wore on the back of her neck. If it had been a joke about what lay under her skin, coiled around her spine and nervous system, it wasn't all that funny or clever. Regardless, she appeared to love showing it off, hence the haircut. When he'd first met her, a billion years ago, she'd sported a pixie haircut. And now, the shorter hair made her ugly and severe. Didn't the Goa'uld like their hair? Or was just the headdresses? He couldn't remember.

The head of the Reform smiled at him with a malevolence that was frightening. It was a smile that would've been beautiful on anyone else, but on her, it was revolting. To his knowledge, he'd never hated anyone's smile more, not even that smirk by Apophis. He'd learned to hate seeing it form on her face with a ferocity that was scary. As the smile widened, her eyes flashed that familiar golden glow.

"I see that hatred in your eyes," came resonant voice. "It's so sweet. Now come on, *Doctor Jackson*. Give me an insolent comment."

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She used his former title as a slur and he desperately wished he had the strength to react and give her a reason to stay in her sarcophagus for a week or two. She stared at him for the longest time, then suddenly sighed impatiently. He knew that expression. She'd grown bored. Her eyes glowed again.

She snapped her fingers at one black-uniformed security officer. "You have found suitable coordinates?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Shouldn't that be *my Lord*?" Daniel asked. "How'd you get downgraded from a god?"

Frazier laughed as she gave him a "give me" gesture with her hand. But when she spoke, she dropped the resonance, sounding like the human, Janetta. "Lovely. Come. Anything else you wish to say, dear Daniel, to your mistress?"

"A few questions, if your majesty wouldn't mind?"

"Ask."

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“Why are you still called Frazier and not by the name of that snake in your head? Whose name is what? And for that matter, where’re your Jaffa? I’ve never seen Jaffa.”

Her smile turned vulpine and she drew a leather-gloved forefinger down the side of his cheek. “Yes you have because they *are* my Jaffa. They aren’t wearing their old-fashioned armor. How do you people say it? We’ve gone *native*.” She laughed again as her eyes glowed and the resonance returned. “As for me, darling,” she said with that purring tone he loathed, “die in ignorance. Bye-bye, little whore.”

One of her guards took him under the arm and hauled him toward the center of the darkened building that had once housed C5A transports. Daniel saw the irregularly shaped object with its normally grey slate surface now a solid black, but as he was dragged closer, he saw white dots. Space.

“No,” he said weakly, tears frozen in his throat. He wasn’t afraid of death. He was only afraid of certain methods, and this was one of the worst. Fifteen

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seconds, then you drop unconscious due to lack of breathable air and last for a few more minutes while the water in his body boiled. How would his mind experience it all, even unconscious? Where would he go? Into the black? And then ... wherever it is you believe you go? Would he see Jack? If he wanted to die more quickly, he could hold his breath. But the closer he got to the mirror, to space, he found he didn't want to die that way. Death, fine. Space, not so fine.

He stiffened his legs, surprised to find some strength remained and he managed to put up a fight. He waited for the bullet or the knife, but instead, the hot, sharp two-pronged ends of the pain stick stabbed him in the center of his back. It sent a severe electrical current through his body and he fell to the cold concrete floor in a rictus of agony. He heard a dim sound of clapping and laughing that seemed very far away, but he knew it came from that evil bitch, and it continued while he was tortured for the next five minutes. By the time it was over, he was too weak to do a damn thing. He couldn't even summon the will to open his eyes.

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“Tsk, tsk, Daniel,” said Frazier as the clicking of her high heels drew near. “Let’s give you a goodbye present.”

“Just kill me,” he begged, finding his voice wavery. “Please, you fucking bitch. Just kill me.” He heard movement.

“Hold!” Frazier commanded. “Stand aside.”

Daniel heard the guard retreat, but a swift kick from a pointed high-heeled toe landed in the center of his right buttock and sharp pain shot down his leg and up his spine. He had strength enough to jerk, but that was all. “Be my good little whore and face your death with some semblance of dignity, or I’ll have my *Jaffa* teach you your final lesson about resistance. By the time they’re done, you’ll welcome the cold of space.”

“It can’t be a lesson if I’m to die afterward, can it?” he argued through thin gasps. “Why don’t you just kill me now, here?”

She dropped to a knee and stroked his face with a leather object that drove even more fear into him. He hadn’t seen her carrying it. A riding crop. In his mind,

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her favorite security blanket. Once an innocent tool, it now created nausea throughout his body and he began to shake.

“Because you don’t deserve a relatively easy death, even though you’ve been a very *good boy*,” she drawled slowly, pronouncing the last two words as if he was a dog. “*Good boy*,” she repeated.

He squeezed his eyes shut as he held still, biting back the tears of hatred and humiliation as she stroked his ass with the crop. It was a reminder. Long before, if she saw tears, she would whip him with it, then follow it up with a taser against his balls, screaming in laughter as he was forced to ejaculate semen like some prize bull or stallion.

“You fucking—” he managed to say before choking it off.

“What’s that?” she asked, and snatched a handful of his hair in her gloved hand.

“Nothing,” he said, eyes hot. He had to work hard to keep the tears away.

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“Nothing what, Daniel?”

“Nothing, *mistress*,” he said, but tears fell anyway. “I hate you.”

“*Good boy*,” she drawled again. Suddenly she stood up and stepped back, throwing a sharp gesture at the instrument of his impending death. “Bored now,” she sang in monotone. She looked at the guard holding the pain stick. “You want another turn at him, don’t you?”

“Yes, Colonel.”

“That dried up husk? You can’t fuck a dried up husk, soldier.” She snapped her fingers at the other guard. “Pick him up and get rid of him.”

The other guard came over quickly and his two jailors picked him up by his ankles and armpits and without a pause in their actions, threw him at the mirror.

He screamed in fury, “Die screaming, bi—”

At the same time, he thought he heard explosions. Just before contact with the mirror, shock waves hit the

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hangar and he somehow felt a tremor of impact as he landed on the other side of the mirror, rolling over and over until he hit what might have been a wall. His brain recorded two things at once: One, as he looked back at the mirror, a firebomb had enveloped the hangar and she was screaming. Absolute joy spread through him as she was quickly roasted along with her guards. The humvee transport exploded, flying into the air, and the fireball that had hit the hanger hit the mirror.

“Fuck!” he screamed, the word containing all his sorrow and rage, and curled into a protective ball, expecting the blast to transfer and roast him alive. Except, anticlimactically, the fireball only enveloped the mirror in a translucent blue flame, evaporating like ether as the mirror turned off. He stared at the now-grey slate surface. What had caused that explosion? If it was the Resistance, he hoped they firebombed half the country, starting with Washington D.C.

There was biting cold underneath him and he spread searching fingers. Concrete? And he could breathe. He wasn't in space. But what about those stars he thought he'd seen? He rolled over to look behind him and found

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a wall, the one he'd hit, decorated with what appeared to be an immense poster of stars. At the bottom, a label read *Quadrant Two*, whatever that meant. He huffed out half a laugh and pressed the palms of his hands against his eyes. He was safe. For the moment.

He sat up and stared at the things around him. MALPs, boxes, tarps over large objects, and to his immediate left sat an elongated pentagram-shaped window that curved outward, following the shape of a bulkhead. Colors whirled outside the window. He recognized them. Hyperspace. He was on a ship.

He took a deep breath and let it out. Facts flitted through his mind. The label was in English. The MALP was something that Stargate Command used, but it wasn't specific to that location. It was, however, generally a military support vehicle.

It was then that he noticed the fine red lines that crisscrossed over and around him. Security lasers. He looked down at himself, finding a few crossed over him. His ears finally registered sound: a deep-toned bell that repeated every one and a half seconds, a security alarm

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letting the people on the ship know that they had an unwanted guest. What would happen next depended entirely on the universe he'd landed in. Panicked, he looked around wildly, searching for the control device that operated the mirror. He found nothing. Was his death imminent? Maybe. Incarceration was most definitely in his future. No. He couldn't do that again, torture or no torture. He had to force someone to kill him. He didn't have the strength to be threatening enough to warrant it unless he was found by trigger-happy drones who refused cognitive thinking. For once, he hoped that was who he'd meet, until he realized that those sort of people torture first, then kill. Like a cat playing with a mouse.

He closed his eyes as his body slumped in resignation and he fell back onto his side. His view now followed the plane of the floor and the minimal lighting from the colors of hyperspace was the only thing that allowed him to see where the door was likely located. It had to be directly across the room, but not necessarily straight ahead. He waited to find out.

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A minute later came the sound of beeping, then the mechanical whine of a door sliding open. Brief light from the open doorway allowed him to see only black silhouettes, then the room lights were turned on, forcing him to squint and raise an arm over his eyes. Under it, he saw several combat-booted feet and legs wearing an old BDU pattern. Earth? In his universe, only the military on Earth wore such boot design and fabric pattern. Providing he was making sound deductions, and he had to admit that it was entirely possible he wasn't thinking straight. A starvation diet plan did wonders for the mind.

It didn't matter. If these people somehow let him live, they wouldn't keep him here. If he couldn't get them to kill him, then he had to devise an escape. Find another mirror. However, he couldn't do any of that until he had been nursed back to health. Until he was strong enough, planning was as pointless as a spiderweb in a windstorm.

The booted feet stayed just inside the door and to the side. Logic said they were waiting for others. Twenty seconds passed while he kept his focus on the boots,

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not allowing himself to look up. Finally, another pair of boots entered. Then two more. These people wore solid olive drab. Two of them had big, male-sized feet. Another had smaller. A woman? Maybe. Why did he care?

There was a long silence. What were they thinking? It didn't matter. Someone just shoot him now. He was so tired.

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“Sir,” Carter said, staring.

“Yeah,” Jack said. Teal’c glanced at him with the same stunned look and Jack just jogged his brows at him.

On the floor before them lay a man covered in bruises and dirt, with long matted hair and a face caked in blood down one side. He wore a ragged, brown garment that looked like a long potato sack.

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Jack went to the right side of the door and pressed a button below a small, circular speaker. “Infirmary, we need a stretcher in Cargo Bay Four. We have an injured ... guest.”

“On our way.”

Jack gestured at the SFs. “Stand down. We’re not in any danger.” He looked around. “But, just in case he’s not the only one, remain outside.” They nodded and retreated from the cargo bay.

As soon as they stationed themselves in the corridor, Jack walked over to the man and crouched down. “Hey, you’re safe. We won’t harm you. You’re on a ship called Andromeda. Not the TV show, and I didn’t choose it.” The levity didn’t engender a smile. He sighed. “Okie dokie. I’m in command. If you are who I think you are, then maybe you know who I am? And who those two characters are?” Teal’c raised a brow and Jack grinned. It faded when he met the confused expression in the bloodshot blue eyes, wide with fear. “Guess not.” He held out a hand, but the man shrank away from him, so he withdrew it. “Okay. Let’s start

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small. How about you sit up, take in your surroundings?”

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Daniel pushed up and drew his knees to his chest. The odds that he'd landed in an advantageous reality seemed incredibly low, so he couldn't be seeing what he was seeing. He sighed as carefully as he could, hoping that this wasn't a starvation-induced hallucination but he had to admit that it probably was. The man who'd spoken to him looked like Jack. But it couldn't be Jack. Jack was dead. Had been for almost eleven months. He'd watched him die on Chulak. There was Sam and Teal'c, too, but they had been murdered two months before Jack. He was looking at ghosts. The signature line from an old movie popped in his head and it damn near made him laugh hysterically: *I see dead people*. His brain always had a peculiar way of handling stress.

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He would have said something, but he had no idea *what*. What do you say to a hallucination? But that hallucination turned something strange into a nightmare when two white-clad corpsmen arrived with a litter. Memories from McKenzie's snake pit passed before his eyes and he pushed back on his hands and ass until he found himself backed against the bulkhead window. Things just couldn't go his way, could they?

"No."

"Hey," Jack said, waving the corpsmen to the side. "Hang tight," he told them. Then to this wild Daniel creature, he said soothingly, "We're not going to hurt you. You're safe among friends."

Daniel managed a derisive laugh. "Yeah right." A part of him said he was being irrational, that this world might be okay, that he had lucked out. Then the more paranoid part of his mind said that his luck hadn't been all that great and this was just a trick.

"I give you my word," said the man whose features made his heart ache.

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Then the voice of *his Jack* whispered in his mind that the best thing to do was to gather intel, to find a way to escape as soon as it was feasible. *“In the meantime,”* said the voice, *“play along.”*

“Okay,” Daniel said, taking a deep breath as he used the wall to push to his feet. The ghost of Jack seemed to relax and he held out an arm. “I can walk.” As he used the wall to tremble his way to his feet, the collar dragged heavily and the chains tinkled between his wrists.

Jack frowned angrily. “What the hell?” He looked over his shoulder at his teammates. “Could you guys find something we can use to get those damn things off him?”

“Yes, sir,” she said, and both she and Teal’c hesitated before leaving.

Jack put a hand out. “C’mon. We’ll get you to the infirmary and get you checked out.”

Daniel hesitantly came forward and stayed just out of Jack’s reach as he walked toward the door. His eyes

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were slightly unfocused as he tried to keep an eye on everything at once. The SFs who stood by outside made him flinch and hesitate. “Who’s in charge?” he asked as Jack went into the corridor.

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“I am,” Jack answered. He approved the way this man handled himself, despite what he’d apparently been through.

“Okay, but who’s in charge of your infirmary?” Daniel said. If *she* was there, it would take all his strength not to bolt. Or kill.

“Doc Carmichael.”

Daniel felt intense relief, but he dared not show it. He put on the mask that telegraphed simple acknowledgment. Would this O’Neill know that, like his

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Jack would have? No. Probably not. He suddenly looked around, searching. “Where am I?”

“On a ship called Andromeda.”

Daniel grimaced. “No, the me in this reality.” He saw this ghost of Jack turn stony. Not a good question then.

“He’s not here,” Jack said. “He passed away.”

“Why’s there a mirror on this ship?” Daniel said, not bothering to digest the answer to his question as he asked the next. His brain was fogging up and he couldn’t think. Died?

“Transferring a lot of equipment to Omega.”

Daniel paused, placing one hand on the door jamb. His stomach was reeling and a wave of nausea spread through him. If he evacuated his bowels now, he might just empty his intestines with them. What the hell was left? He had to think of something else or he might just vomit up his organs instead. He concentrated on the man’s words, flipping through memories like a rolodex. “Omega. Omega,” he repeated, and he bit back the

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anger that almost made him verbally lash out. It wasn't their fault his mind was slow. "Omega. Last letter of the Greek alphabet," he said, latching on to the familiar.

After that hurdle, he grabbed hold of familiar thought processes but he couldn't concentrate and come up with other answers ... too many answers ... and he realized that the problem wasn't that he was slow. His mind, in fact, was tackling things too fast. The input of facts gathered from his surroundings as well cogitating the last five minutes were computing way too fast. He was in danger of overload. He shook his head as one bare foot stepped in front of the other. Nausea was worsening. "Go away," he mumbled.

"Excuse me?" Jack asked.

"Not talking ..." Daniel said, gritting his teeth as he stared at the floor while he used the wall as a crutch. "I need water. Can't focus."

"Don't worry. We'll get you fixed up."

Daniel whipped his head up, eyes wide. *We'll get you fixed up.* His Jack had said that a few times. The

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movement made him dizzy. He closed his eyes, brushing against the wall for support as he stumbled back. This Jack was waiting for something. Why?

“What’s wrong, Daniel?” Jack asked.

Daniel stared at his arm. The patch grabbed his attention: SG-1. The men around them: SFs. Not ... jackbooted. The ship was Asgard-designed, not Goa’uld. He hadn’t seen one in ages. And then came the awareness of Jack’s smell. That particular scent of his with that scant cologne he wore that used to drive him crazy ... Then images of his Jack *dying* filled his mind. The ghost stared at him in concern. It was too much.

“No, no, no ...” He began to slide down the wall and Jack rushed at him. “You’re dead,” he managed. “Why aren’t you dead? Or am I dead?” He vaguely felt Jack’s hands on him. *Thank you, god, he thought. I can die in Jack’s arms, even if it isn’t really him.*

“Shit!” Jack said, catching him. The corpsmen came over quickly and set the litter on the floor, then lifted

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the poor man onto the stretcher. On the way to the infirmary, Jack took in the details more thoroughly: starved, bruises everywhere, eyes sunken with blue shadows underneath. There were scabs on his forehead, his cheeks, his chin. The blood wasn't just on the side of his head, either. There was caked flakes down his outer right thigh and calf. He had blood under the fingernails and new dirt streaked over old dirt. Dry skin flakes at the elbows and along his hairline. A trace of something had leaked out of the corner of his mouth to form a now-dry trail past the jawline. There was a faint scar near the hairline he'd at first taken for a strand of white hair.

His feet were scarred and his ankles were bruised under the shackles. There were broken toenails, broken fingernails, and that hair. At first, he'd thought it looked long because of the clumps of dirt and mud clinging to thick strands. But once it was washed and thoroughly brushed, that damn stuff really would fall between the shoulder blades. He was so thin, he worried that the man would die. Jack didn't know if he could take that again. He didn't know him, but it didn't

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matter. It was Daniel. Then Jack saw something that made his blood run so cold he did a stutter-step before getting into the medical service elevator that would travel sideways down the length of the ship.

Near the elbow, there was a small, tattooed number on the inside of his left arm.

Chapter 2: Unified Memories

Daniel awoke to bright light and he curled into a tight ball and wrapped his arms over his head.

“Sir, what’s the matter?” came a woman’s voice.

“Light! Where am I?”

“Infirmary. One second. I’ll lower the lights.”

Through his arms, he peeked just a bit under and raised them slowly. There was light, but not as bright. He unfolded himself into a sitting position with his knees up and feet tucked under. He wrapped his arms around them and hugged them to him—an oft-used position to keep warm.

“Are you cold?”

He nodded.

The nurse, as it turned out, judging by the stethoscope around her neck, and she removed a white blanket from

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a very wide set of drawers, unfolded it, and wrapped it around his shoulders. It was warm. Pre-heated? He'd never heard of such a thing. It cooled quickly against his skin and he still shivered. "Could I get another one?" She wrapped another one around his shoulders.

"I'll have a bed made up next to you."

"You don't have to bother," he said.

"It's not," she said, and she left the ward.

He wondered where she was going but she returned instantly. She came to the left side of his bed, or gurney, or whatever it was. It had an odd, thin mattress, and felt as if it had been stuffed with straw. Which was ridiculous when he thought it over.

"I'm going to take your vitals," she said, and withdrew a few things from the second drawer of a medical cabinet. "First your blood pressure."

He nodded absently, but she didn't put a cuff around his upper arm. Instead, it was a small device like a large watch with a cloth strap that was secured by Velcro. He

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stared at it, curious, as she moved the loose manacle and strapped it gently to his wrist. Then it began to puff up and squeeze his wrist. It wasn't hard, unlike what happened to your arm with a cuff, but instant fear gripped him as the memory of a table and something horrific being done while he was strapped down. With an intense whine, he ripped it off and threw it as he shot off the bed. The shackles and chain between them rattled and his already intense fear skyrocketed. Wild-eyed, he looked around for a place to hide.

Corpsmen ran into the six-bed ward while the nurse came toward him, absently holding the torture device and he began to hyperventilate. Terror grabbed a hold of his heart and consciousness fled.

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Jack wanted to be near the man. There was no logical reason why, only emotional. *It was Daniel.* But he was also the commander of the ship for this mission, *and for*

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two months after arrival, the interim commander of the Omega base. It was a plum assignment from Hammond. It would give him the distraction he needed while he continued to mourn the loss of his better half. Except that was now in the toilet as Jack had, in his estimation, been given a swift kick in the balls.

He sat back down in his office just off the Command Deck and sighed as he picked up the digital tablet with all the Omega specs. He needed it memorized, and most of it already was. What he wanted to memorize was the order of unloading, the names of the department heads to oversee that unloading, what should be prepped for it, and the personnel assigned under those departments heads, in charge of installing equipment, seeing to the plumbing, the electrical, and any construction that hadn't yet been finished.

Carter was temporary head of the science division and it was her task to get that operational. She'd assign the personnel, get the protocols in place, and all the equipment in operation. Teal'c would head up tactical and make sure the weapons and security personnel had everything they needed and their own protocols were in

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place, and during off time, he'd teach his classes in the art of mastering control of your mind. Also known as the Chulak version of Zen mysticism via Kung Fu ...

Jack's mind hiccupped, because the person who'd described it that way had been Daniel. He'd been taking Teal'c's classes, but once upon a time, it had all started with meditation. Jack took a slow breath and moved on.

The ongoing part of the job on Omega was to ensure that everyone was happy, did their jobs correctly, and properly delegated so they didn't do everything themselves, and on the opposite end, to communicate how delegation works. Carter had given him the names of some scientists who tended to hover over their sections so Jack would give them a word before he and his teammates would go home. Easy peasy, lemon squeezy.

With just one Daniel-sized, Daniel-shaped catch.

He now had a painfully unwanted distraction. He hated that there was an emotional pull from a direction that

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by all rights shouldn't be there. If he were an asshole, he'd have sent the dude back where he came from. But he wasn't an asshole, and the man needed medical attention. He needed help. Jack left no one behind, even those he didn't know, because once they became his responsibility, you were in charge of their welfare. This Daniel Jackson might not *want* his help, but he'd get it nonetheless. It was now up to him to get his ass squared away. The only problem with that was having his heart ripped out for the second time.

His Daniel had only died six months ago so the pain was fresh. He'd only *just* been able to sleep through the night without nightmares and he wasn't snapping at people anymore. He didn't feel the insane urge to cry himself to sleep every night, and he'd only let go twice. And now ... here was this man. Why? Why was he here? Did god send him? Made it possible?

Jack was both mad and scared. A part of him, that was gaining ground for no logical reason, had begun to look at the situation as an opportunity. A chance to stop grieving, to begin again, and to have a second chance. If so, could it happen? Was this man like his late Daniel?

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If he had loved him in the other universe, would he want to carry on with this other Jack? Should he even do that? Would it betray his late lover?

Questions, questions, and variations of yes, no, and maybe, with a lot of invectives. And damn it to hell, the even crazier thought was that the shithead in the universe who had sent him had been Daniel himself. Maybe he was in heaven or Valhalla or Nirvana, looking down with sympathy. The thought was uncomfortable because who was he to get this special treatment?

It then occurred to Jack that perhaps this potential second chance had its own caveat: this Daniel looked *broken*. What was he supposed to do with that? And perhaps, that was the whole thing in a nutshell. He imagined Daniel saying, *Fix him. You know how. So stop complaining and just do it.*

..

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Daniel woke up disoriented. Again. Take two. He was on his side, under blankets, and he didn't dare move. He tried to take stock of himself. Neck shackle, check. Wrist shackles, check. He moved a foot. No restraints, check. He moved the arm underneath him and felt the same sort of mattress as before so he was back on the bed. Those corpsmen must've manhandled him and a weakness began to filter through his body starting at the neck. It was a sign that he might begin to weep. It had been his version of anger for a while. They enjoyed the anger and he couldn't do anything about it. Despair crept in, the tears came. But here? Away from his torturers, and away from *her*, he had to put a stop to the tears.

He moved even more and when nothing bad happened, he pushed himself up to a sitting position. The chain tinkled between his wrists and he winced. He hated the sound. He saw a nurse standing at the foot of the bed, writing on something. A file started for him? Maybe. *Déjà vu*. Only that file had been about two inches thick and the sight of a nurse writing in it, or a doctor, had become common place. It's what happened when the

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fight hadn't been taken from him yet. Those thoughts vanished when he spied another table—was it one of those tables that could be rolled and have the table top cross over the bed? On it sat a plastic pitcher. A clear cup sat next to it.

He cleared his throat, then cleared it again. It wouldn't smooth out and he gave up. "Water?" he asked, fully expecting to be told 'no'. After which, he'd launch himself off the bed and guzzle as much as he could before they'd take it away. And then his mind reminded him where he was. Not his universe. A reminder came when the nurse smiled at him and filled the cup halfway.

"Here you go. Sip. Don't guzzle. Your stomach will revolt if you do."

He took it, chains tinkling horribly. Water. Good god, it tasted sweet. No medicine. There might be LSD in it, like the few times he'd been given water, but he didn't care. He gulped air with the medium swallows and when he burped it back up, it hurt his throat. He went a lot slower and when he was done, he held it out. She

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refilled it again. He began again when this world's Sam and Teal'c came into the room. They were walking too fast, or too loudly, he couldn't tell which. Alive. Strong. Unafraid. Like he used to be.

"Daniel?" Sam asked cautiously. "Daniel Jackson, right?" He nodded. "I'm sorry those chains aren't off yet, but it's taken a few tries to find the right kind of tool. The locking mechanism is really odd." She held up a tool in her hand, lying vertically across her palm so he could see it. It looked like an awl with the tip bent slightly. "I think this'll do the trick. Could I try? I give you my word I mean you no harm."

He nodded again.

"Can I take that?" Sam asked, referring to the cup. When he hesitated, she said, "You'll get it right back when the chains are off."

He didn't believe her. Part of him told him that Sam would never betray him like that, that she wasn't one of the sadistic people he'd come to know. But hope wasn't something he was familiar with. Not anymore.

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He was used to game playing. He wanted to object, but he was so tired, so thirsty. He sagged and handed her the cup of water in a shaky hand. Unexpressed anger and humiliation filled his mind and his face went blank as he ordered himself not to show weakness.

“What’s wrong?” Sam asked, fully alarmed. “Teal’c?”

Teal’c tipped his head to the side as he considered Daniel’s non-expression and body language. It hurt him to see someone in such condition and sadly, he recognized it. He gave Sam a sad look and lowered his voice. “I have seen similar behavior by the prison laborers on one of the many mining planets owned by Apophis. I believe this man has assumed that he will get no more water.”

“No, no, no,” Sam said, placing the cup in his hands. “I just didn’t want you to spill it.”

Daniel nodded mutely, not trusting that her behavior was genuine. It felt real, but he’d been fooled so often that he no longer took anyone at their word. Voices argued inside his mind.

Second Wind

They were being kind. *No, they were playing.*

They weren't strangers. *Yes, they were.*

He flinched when she inserted the tool into the lock mechanism of his shackles on his right wrist and twisted around until it popped and fell open.

“There. Let's do the other one.”

Daniel raised his eyes slightly, jarred by the sudden absence of weight on his right wrist. It felt as if his arm wasn't there. The left one popped off and the lack of weight as he held the cup was as startling as the loss on the other wrist. He dropped the cup of water.

“Oops!” Sam said, trying to catch it but ended up jumping back. She picked up the wrist shackles, scowling at them, and dropped them on the bed behind her before coming forward. “Teal’c, get him another cup. Daniel, lean over a bit so I can get the collar.”

Woodenly, Daniel obeyed, while his body tried to recognize the immense relief it felt not having cold weights around his wrists. There were minor burns

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there, made by that goddamn pain stick, but he was used to them. He wasn't used to their exposure to air and somehow, that made them hurt worse. It made no sense. A grinding penetrated his ears and he sucked in a breath and started to shy away.

"No, hang on. I've almost got it."

He swallowed hard and held still, ordering himself to calm down, that what was happening was happening and he couldn't stop it. He tried to believe that she was helping, but as she picked the lock on the collar, he kept wondering why she was taking it off.

"There!" she said, and pulled it off him.

It was light. He felt absurdly naked, which was stupid. Even worse was the stupid idea that he'd lost some sort of protection. He crossed his arms in front him, hands covering his throat.

"Here," Sam said, taking the water from Teal'c and handing it to Daniel.

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Kindness. Even more kindness. He blinked several times, ordering himself not to cry. It was getting ridiculous, all that weakness.

Sam stared at him, watching as his eyes grew redder. “Oh, honey, I’m so sorry.” She put her arms around him. “Shh,” she said, rubbing his back. “It’ll be okay.”

“Hey, Sam,” Carmichael said as she entered. “Something happen?”

While Sam hugged him, Daniel kept the cup of water close to his lips, sipping a teaspoon at a time. When she pulled back, he glanced at her face, then into his water. She looked concerned and it didn’t look like she was faking. Still, he ordered himself to show no emotion, no semblance of weakness. But a few tears dropped unbidden, unwanted, and he sniffed and wiped at his eyes, looking anywhere but at the people in the room who acted like they wanted to help. He wanted to believe, so badly, but he just couldn’t take the chance.

“We took the chains off,” Sam said. “He’s upset anyway. I don’t get it.”

Second Wind

“I know,” Carmichael said. “It’s PTSS, Sam. Now, you guys need to skedaddle while he gets cleaned up and has his physical exam. You can come back in a while.”

“Okay, thanks, Cat.”

The doctor nodded and watched the two friends reluctantly leave. She wondered what Sam’s reaction would be when she realized she had his dirt all over her uniform.

“Okay, Daniel, c’mon. Let’s get you cleaned up.”

“No, I’m fine,” he said, refusing to budge.

She sighed. “I’m not gonna touch you. You’ll clean yourself. So let’s walk to the showers, unless you’d like a wheelchair.”

Water, he told himself. A shower. It compelled him to move. “No, I’ll walk,” he said. He looked at his knees, lower legs, and feet, and you couldn’t tell that he used to be pale and pink under all that brown. Would the dirt even wash off? Good god, what if it stained? Does dirt stain? He couldn’t remember.

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They reached the showers after five minutes of careful walking, and he realized that two of his toenails were bleeding.

“Take special care there,” Carmichael pointed. “I’ll have a nurse tend to your feet after we get everything settled. Don’t worry, Daniel. We’ll get you right as rain. Physically, at least. There’s plenty of water because of the recycling system in this particular Asgard-Human hybrid ship design, so you can take your time.”

The shower room contained eight shower stalls, with full doors for privacy, though they had a foot’s clearance at the top and bottom. She walked across the room and opened a cabinet with her ring of keys and withdrew a terry cloth white robe. She set it on the hook outside a center stall, then pointed to a large hamper with piles of white folded towels. “Use however many you need. There’re sponges and shampoo, conditioner, and soap dispensers. When you’re done, just return to the infirmary.” She pointed her hand at the exit. “Left, Left, and in.”

He nodded. “Thanks.”

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“I’ll leave a set of scrubs for you on the bed. You can pull the curtain around to dress in privacy.”

“You won’t be there when I get back, Doctor Carmichael?” he asked, realizing that he’d already formed a clingy attachment. In just ten minutes. That wouldn’t do, but he couldn’t go back to being afraid of her either, so he had to find a compromise. It would give his mind a problem to solve.

“I’ll be around somewhere,” she grinned. “I have things to sort out for the Omega site’s medical facilities.”

“Oh.” When she was gone, he grabbed some towels and draped them over the door, then paused as he opened it. He spied an orthopedic stool by the cupboard where the robes were kept and he brought it into the shower with him, then looked around before closing the door. He checked all the stalls, opened cupboards, then walked with a wince to the entrance of the shower room. He held still, listening. No one was around.

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Cautiously, he returned to the shower stall and closed the door behind him, and finding that it locked, he turned the knob. It made a satisfying click. He pulled off the tunic and dropped it to the floor, then stood to the side and turned on the shower to avoid the cold shock. Thankfully, it was hot in under ten seconds. He angled the shower head so that when he sat down with his back to it, it caught almost all of him, then tipped his head back and closed his eyes.

Water. It was surreal. Glorious. Hot water, at that. His frayed nerves kept expecting something bad to occur but as the minutes passed and nothing happened, he allowed himself to relax just a little. After nearly half an hour of doing nothing but soaking himself, he looked at the contents of the shower, remembering what the doctor had said. Hanging on metal hooks were two fake loofah sponges and a long-handled brush, all wrapped in clear plastic packaging. Three dispensers held body gel, shampoo, and conditioner. No 'soap,' but he figured that's what the body gel was for. It was *almost* like being in a hotel.

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He wet the loofah and began to scrub with the gel. Thankfully, the loofah was loosely woven and rough. He needed that to slough off all the layers of dead skin. It took several washings, and the same was done for his hair. Several matted clumps of it dropped through the drain along with the caked mud that had held it together. He didn't have a brush or comb, so he had to use the conditioner twice in order to run his fingers through it. He refused to leave the stall until he was dry and wrapped up in the robe. He went to the sink ... and realized he'd done it without thinking. He'd expected to shave and brush his teeth, but he didn't have the things he needed for either. He'd have to *ask*. The prospect left him cold and he shivered. Before walking away from the sink, he caught himself in the half-clouded mirror and was surprised by how long his hair had gotten. The bangs were several inches past his chin. They'd been semi-fashionable tufts over a year ago. Sometimes he hated how fast his hair grew.

As he examined it critically, he finally focused on his face and his eyes widened in alarm. They were bloodshot, with dark smudges underneath that made

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him look like he had been given black eyes. His cheekbones and jawline were sharply lined, making his eyes look all the larger. His neck was thin enough to accentuate the veins and as he pulled aside the robe, he found his collarbones stark. He looked *hideous*. He didn't dare open the robe and look at the rest of himself. As he padded back to his bed on bare, stinging feet, he was extremely self-conscious of his appearance, afraid to have anyone see him. A *holocaust survivor*, his mind told him, though he knew it hadn't been as bad as that, but a few more months of starvation meals and he would have been. Given the way he felt, he wasn't sure he would've lasted another few months.

He was dizzy by the time he reached the bed and steadied himself with a hand on the bed rail. "Jesus Christ," he whispered. His eyes started to water and he sniffed angrily and pushed it back. "Stop fucking crying, you stupid dumbass." He wondered why the hell he was so goddamn emotional, crying at the drop of a damn hat. There was no answer, which was more depressing, so tried to distract himself with the scrubs. He pulled the curtain along on its ceiling rails until it was

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all the way around his bed, then unfolded the sharp-creased maroon-colored clothes. He'd never seen them that color. He'd gotten used to sterile green.

After dressing, he noticed the terry-cloth booties and slippers sitting on the rolling food table, both still in their clear packaging. He climbed in bed and took care to put the booties on around broken toenails, glad to hide them from sight. He wished he could do the same for his head and face. He looked at his hands, finding them just as bad, resembling thin rakes. The nails were broken down to the nub and further, with some just barely covering the nail bed, having just started to grow back. Daniel pulled the blankets and sheet around him like a shield, and out of habit, curled into a ball. He fell into a fitful sleep, but it didn't last long.

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“Penny for your thoughts?” Doctor Carmichael said as she knocked on the door jamb to Jack's office.

Second Wind

“Hmm?” he said, looking up, pulled from his thoughts. He hadn’t noticed her approach and he was facing the door, for cryin’ out loud. “Come on in, Doc. Close the door and have a seat,” he said, sitting back in his chair. “How’s your new patient?”

She gave him a sad smile. “In bad shape, but he can be treated. You’ve seen the shape of him?” He nodded. “Starvation is obvious, and there are the tests to run. Meanwhile, I’m concerned about his mind. He’s terrified and paranoid of everything.”

Jack sighed. “I was afraid of that. What problems are you having?”

“It’s taking time to get his vitals done. He passed out while having his blood pressure taken.” Jack’s brows shot up and she nodded. “He flung the wrist reader across the room, startled my nurse. She went to put it back on, which was a mistake, but she’s in training—”

“Put pros on him, Doc.”

“Taken care of,” she said, raising her hand. “But he fainted after getting off the bed. She said he kept

Second Wind

looking around, eyes wide, as if looking for a place to hide, then he just sagged and lost consciousness. If it weren't for his reaction to the reader, I would have strapped him to the bed. Plus, he's not a threat to anyone so far, so it's alright."

He nodded. "What else?"

"As I said, he's paranoid. He's also light sensitive so the ward lights have to be dimmed. I suspect I'll have more problems. But if he has the same high-functioning mind as our late Doctor Jackson, then he'll be doubly stressed out. A mind like that, of a genius, operates like a fast-moving rollercoaster that rarely slows down. When its out of whack from problems with the body, starved for essential vitamins and minerals, it ... misfires."

"I know," he nodded.

"Later, when we get to the Omega colony, we should give him a lot of puzzles. Not literal things because they can become monotonous, but science puzzles we haven't worked out yet. It should help him recover from his trauma. Whatever happened to him, I think

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we can be relatively certain that he'll be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome."

Jack winced. "Which means, depending on the traumas he's suffered, his examination might engender some problems. You think he'll have to be forcibly sedated?"

She winced in return. "I don't want to, but if he can't be calmed ..." She paused, giving him a look of hesitation.

"What?"

"There *is* a person onboard who has the psychological knowledge to help him in this preliminary state."

Jack raised a brow. "Who?"

She gave him another sad smile. "I know you won't want to hear this, but that person is you." When his brows skyrocketed in shock, she held up her hands. "I know, I know. You have your hands full. Just ... when you can, talk to him. I know you don't have the degree, but you have the experience. You know what steps to take." When he gave her a dubious look, she said

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slowly, “For example. You know just by looking at him and observing that he’s been traumatized.”

“Anyone with sense can see that,” he objected.

“Yes, but there’s additional understanding with you.” She lowered her voice. “He keeps himself very compacted. Legs together, heels tucked under. He’s protecting himself physically. You know what that sounds like? What happened to SG-6’s Myers after her teammates were murdered and she was held hostage by those Anderphile people. And, if I may, with your experience in Iraq.”

Jack grimaced and shaded his eyes. “Goddammit.”

She sighed. “I know. I don’t like to think of that either, but I think it’s necessary to prepare to deal with all forms of abuse, because it looks like he’s been through them all.” She put a hand on his arm. “So if you think you can help, please stop by.”

“I’ll see what I can manage.”

Second Wind

She held up her own tablet. “Here’re just my prelim observations. I’ll get you the test results with my final report, but only after I’m able to *run* those tests. I think you could be a great help.”

He eyed her. “You mean, *if* this Daniel Jackson had the same relationship with that Jack O’Neill.”

She shook her head. “A close friendship would do it. If he trusted you, that is. As we can see, not all universes are the same.”

“Yeah, like the time with Carter and Kowalsky.” He winced again. “What a nightmare that was.”

“How so?”

He blinked at her. “Well, finding out that we were married, for one.” He shuddered.

She teased, “With Carter or Kowalsky.”

He tapped the pencil on the table. “Your sense of humor is as bad as mine.”

Second Wind

“Why thank you, Colonel,” she grinned. Turning more serious, she added quietly, “I know this is a difficult situation for you. And I’m trying to think ahead to solve problems that haven’t happened yet.”

“Sure, what’s your point?”

“If he asks for you, and it’s *not* some medical emergency ...”

A twinge hit Jack between the eyebrows. He rubbed at it. “Then call me. I’ll be there when I can, which might not be right away. If he’s like our late Doctor J, he should understand. If he doesn’t, he’ll have to learn to.”

She nodded, tapped his arm, and left. He turned his attention to his tablet, delving back into summaries, maps, and cargo lists. In the back of his thoughts, his inner warning system said, “*Be careful. He’s not your Daniel.*” The part that had told him that Daniel might be a second chance warred with the other half of himself that told him to stay away. But after a consideration, he reluctantly admitted that doing that

Second Wind

had never been his way. He faced things head on and damn the consequences.

..

Sometime later, Daniel sat up in bed with a start, gasping, with a choked keening. His heart was pumping so hard and fast that it *hurt*. He felt the tears well up in hot eyes and swallowed repeatedly to try and stop it. The tears came anyway and it pissed him off. As the anger intensified, it grew out of control, raging against the nightmares, the reason for them, the fact that he kept crying and that his emotions were out of control. He expressed by screaming. There were no words. Only sound. When Carmichael and two nurses ran into the ward, eyes wide, he drew up his knees and dropped his head down, surrounding it with his arms so he could muffle the anguish.

“Daniel, oh my god! What’s wrong?”

Second Wind

“Wrong?” he cried out in anger, voice muffled. “Take a fucking guess!” It wasn’t like him to lash out at someone there to help and it only made him angrier. He balled up his hands and squeezed hard, wishing he had fingernails long enough to gouge into his skin. It was self-destructive, and that too made him rage. He didn’t want to appear like a martyr, hating himself, feeling unworthy, but it wasn’t exactly far from what he privately felt every hour of every day, and long before he’d been a member of SG-1. The SGC, however, had only intensified it, especially when going through the stargate had only made things worse. And they gave him *credit* for opening the damn thing. Abruptly, Daniel’s will evaporated and he dropped his hands to his side and raised his head.

The doctor had on her stethoscope and there were a few devices in her pocket. He vaguely recalled check-ups with instruments that looked into your nose and ears. He then remembered that it was time for his exam and he hated the fear it caused.

She rubbed his back, eyes intense and worried. “Are you okay now? What just happened?”

Second Wind

“Purging,” he said automatically, his tone flat and lifeless. “I think.” He looked at her pockets. “Exam? Can’t it wait?”

“No, sorry. I have to look you over and find out how injured you are. It’s obvious that you need food and water, but there are the other things I need to know to get a good look at your condition. Please? The only thing that will hurt will be the sting of a needle.”

He spied the tray with the blood vials and the hypo syringe pieces that a nurse set on the food tray. “No needles!” he whispered, eyes wide with fear as he drew his knees closer to his chest.

“I have to take your blood, Daniel.”

Events flooded his mind and his body shuddered with sense memory. “Kill me first,” he said, and he wasn’t joking.

“Who are you?” she asked abruptly.

He blinked, startled. “I ... I’m sorry?”

Second Wind

“Are you Daniel Jackson?”

He frowned. “Yeah.”

She sighed heavily. “Do you think you can remember who you are? A strong, intelligent man with a resilience that would break most people.”

He closed his eyes and bowed his head for a few seconds. “I haven’t been that person in a long time,” he said, looking up to meet her gaze. “You were his friend?” he asked, cringing as she picked up the open-ended syringe and needle. The closer it came, the more horror he felt because of the futility of resisting. He was in control, he knew that, but he still had to do this. Or die. A keening sound threatened to spill from his throat and he swallowed against it and held his breath.

She watched him, heart wrenching. “Yes, he was my friend. And seeing you is ... the others may think it’s hard, but I find it somehow comforting.”

“What?” he asked, sounding more like his old self.

“That’s silly.”

Second Wind

She held up her hand and waggled it. “Meh.” Her hand turned over, asking for his. She was so gentle that he only felt a slight sting as the needle went in. He watched as four vials were drawn. “I didn’t think I had that much left in me,” he half-joked.

She smiled. “That’s better. A bit of wit.” She paused as she gave the supplies to the nurse and took off the blue sterile gloves. She frowned then, looking into his eyes. “Let’s get this over with. I’ll be as gentle as I can.”

He shook with hard fear as she listened to his heart, his lungs, tested reflexes, then felt his abdomen and listened to it through her stethoscope. Her touch was so careful that he began to relax until she pressed her lips together and asked, “I won’t look unless you let me. How are your genitals?”

He swallowed as she stepped back, putting the stethoscope back around her neck. “As desiccated as the rest of me.”

She nodded. “I’ll order x-rays done while your bloodwork is getting analyzed.”

Second Wind

“Why x-rays?” he asked.

She looked at him in surprise. “Because I need to see your history. Best way to see that is inside. And I’ll need a full set.”

“Oh. Is that standard?”

“It is for me. Now, lay down, rest, and I’ll have someone bring you some broth and Jell-O.”

He nodded and lay on his side, but after she left, there was nothing to do but think, and he didn’t want to do that. The one good thing about his weakness was that sleep came easily. Unfortunately, it was also interruptive and he startled himself a wake several times thinking he’d heard *her* voice. Or Jack’s. His mind recalled hearing PTSS and he lay there trying to think of what the second S stood for until he drifted off again. Sometime later, he awoke to the sound of a woman’s voice and he sat up in alarm and panic, clutching the blankets to his chest. He’d thought it was *her* voice.

“Daniel?”

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He blinked and narrowed his eyes, focusing. Sam. He looked away, bringing his knees to his chest.

“You want me to go?” she asked.

“It’s just that ... I saw myself in the mirror and I look hideous.”

“No you don’t.”

He looked up and gave her a long-suffering look.

“You just need food and proper care, that’s all. Cat said you should have broth and Jell-O, so I brought you some.”

He inhaled slowly and the smell of the chicken broth assaulted his nose and his stomach growled painfully. He swallowed as unbrushed hair fell into his face and he grimaced. “I forgot to ask the doctor. Don’t suppose you have a brush I can use?”

She handed him a sixteen ounce plastic soup container with a sippy cup lid. “Small sips, or you’ll throw it up. I’ll be right back with a brush.”

Second Wind

While she was gone, he went to great pains to keep himself covered up while he drank the broth. He might be wearing scrubs, but he was still awfully cold. Didn't they heat these damn places? But as he drank the liquid, his insides began to warm. He wanted to guzzle but resisted solely on the fact that his stomach already hurt. There was no sense in making it worse, and sure enough, a minute later, the pain in his stomach didn't exactly worsen, but he felt stuffed. He held up the container against the light. Looked like four ounces was all that he'd drank, but his stomach seemed to be rebelling at *that much food*. He recalled the protocol for feeding starvation victims and sighed heavily.

Sam returned with a food tray and Doctor Carmichael followed her in. She set the tray on the table and wheeled it over. There was a mug filled with something light brown, which he guessed was tea, a glass of orange juice, sugar packets, a small pill cup containing three pills. There were three cups of Jell-O of differing colors: green, red, and orange.

"This is some of what you'll have for your first day of recovery," the doctor told him. "Later, I'll bring in some

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milk and oatmeal. No butter, but you can sweeten it with sugar. Tomorrow, there'll be more of the same but we can add toast with the oatmeal and broth. On the third day, we can build up to a small, regular meal, but it has to be low-fat to begin with."

Daniel's stomach growled at the end of her recitation and he smiled as she and Sam did the same. "Okay, thanks."

Sam held up a brush and he nodded but didn't take it. He was determined to finish the broth slowly and told his stomach to go fuck itself. She tipped her head, looking at his hair.

"I can do it, if you want."

He frowned. "Why?"

She frowned back. "Why what?"

"Why do you want to help me brush my hair?"

Sam's frown turned uncomfortable. "Okay then," she said, and set the brush on the table.

Second Wind

He felt ashamed and stopped drinking, but he held the soup container to his chest. His stomach growled again and it made him more aware of the state of his body. In the shower, he'd felt his ribs and while they hadn't looked that bad, they still showed. He swallowed against the emotion that brought up and followed it up with anger, hating how he kept wanting to cry.

"I'm sorry, Major. It's not you," he said thickly. "Could you help me with the robe? I'm cold."

"Sure." She picked it up off the foot of the bed and went around to the other side. He dropped the blankets and slid in one arm, then the other. She hurried around to the other side to help him off the bed, but he just sat there with the robe bunched around his waist. "You're okay with it like that?"

He nodded.

"Okay, Daniel, let's get you hooked up," Doctor Carmichael told him as she gestured to a nurse, who wheeled over a small cart. It had medical things on it.

Second Wind

And a needle. All thoughts of food were replaced with the horror of that sharp instrument.

“What’re you planning to do?” he asked, eyes widening.

“We need to give you an I.V.,” she answered. “You need it to rebuild the serum proteins in your blood. I’ll know how long after the blood tests come back.”

“Can’t I just ... take pills?”

“Your digestive system might rebel,” she warned.

“I’ll risk it,” he said, hating how afraid he was of the size of that needle. He’d never been afraid of that stuff before. *Before*. “I don’t have much skin to stick that into,” he said, shaking even worse. His stomach was rumbling, but not for a good reason.

“Are you cold?” Carmichael asked.

He nodded, pulling the covers around him. “Major Carter?”

“Yeah?”

Second Wind

“Distract me with the brush?” he asked, eyes stuck on the needle.

“Sure,” she said, and rounded the bed again.

“What’s your first name?” he asked the doctor. “Major Carter called you Cat.”

“Catherine,” Carmichael said, throwing Sam a look he couldn’t read. Turning her attention back to Daniel, she said, “You can call me Cat if you want.”

He shook his head. “I was just wondering.”

“For future reference then.”

“Okay.”

She pulled the cart up, looked at it, then said to her nurse, “Get me the spray. It’ll help.”

“Spray?” he asked as Sam knelt on the bed behind him and gently pulled all of his hair over the back of his robe and the blankets.

Second Wind

“Cold spray,” Carmichael said. “It’s mostly used to freeze the skin before a cortisone shot, but sometimes it’s needed for I.V. insertion. Children get it sometimes.”

His eyes widened. “Are there children on this ship?”

“Sure,” she nodded. “Don’t be alarmed. They won’t come in here. The families intended for the colony are housed in another area of the ship, separated from the crew.”

“I’m not afraid of children,” he frowned.

“That’s good to know. My point is that no one will come in here to bother you.”

“Right,” he said, remembering his standard reply when no answer was actually needed. He noticed the surprised look that Carmichael and Sam shared.

“What?”

Carmichael shook her head. “You just sounded like ...”

“Our Daniel,” Sam finished.

Second Wind

“Sorry,” Carmichael said. “For hesitating. I don’t know how to refer to either of you. Saying ‘our’ Daniel sounds alienating.”

“Ouch,” Sam said. “You’re right.”

“I get it. I won’t take offense,” Daniel said. Carmichael took his right hand in hers and tapped at the vein on the back of the hand. He twitched and wanted to pull his hand away. “Can’t you do the inner arm?”

“The vein in the hand is best, in case of failure. If your hand veins somehow fail, then we go up the arm. If that fails, we go to the neck by the collarbone.”

He cringed and gave her his hand. As she sprayed, he concentrated on the minimalist brushing Sam was doing, yet when Carmichael opened the sterile kit for the need, he was surprised by the small size. “I thought you needed a large gauge for I.V.s.” Carmichael shook her head as she smoothly and quickly inserted the needle. He felt a little sting and that was all. “Wow. I didn’t ... expect that.”

Second Wind

“What did you expect?” she asked as she coiled the tubing near the catheter and taped it all down.

“A lot of pain,” he admitted. He frowned then and turned his head slightly to talk to Sam. “Major Carter, are you brushing my hair because I don’t feel anything.”

“I’m taking my time with your hair because it has some really nasty knots.”

“I thought I got rid of them all.”

She paused and put a hand on his shoulder. “We can give you a haircut if you want.”

“You know how to cut hair?”

“No. We have a barber.”

His brows went up. “You do? On a ship?”

“For now, because of the extra people.”

“Why didn’t you just transport through the stargate?” he asked as he felt her tug at his hair.

Second Wind

“Power utilization wasn’t available,” Sam said.

“Meaning you needed more?” he asked.

“Yep.”

He frowned in thought. “So ... that means that the Omega base is outside the seven chevron address field.” He looked behind him, then at Carmichael. “That’s it, right?”

“Yes,” Sam said, stopping the brushing of his hair and she came around and handed him the brush. “I’ve gotten most of it. I think I should let you handle the hard ones. I don’t wanna spook you if I cause you pain.”

Daniel snorted derisively. “I’ve been through a lot worse, trust me.” He pointed the brush at his hair. “This is a picnic in the park compared to the war crimes the SGC has committed.” They stared at him, wide-eyed, and he blinked, stunned at his own words. “I’m so sorry. I have no idea where that came from. I did *not* mean anything by it where this universe is concerned.”

Second Wind

“What happened to it?” Sam asked.

“It went bad. Then it was renamed,” he said dully.

“Into what?” Sam asked.

“The Colorado Springs Auxiliary Reform.”

Carmichael blinked. “The what? What is that?”

“In a nutshell, the Goa’uld Pentagon.”

The room went deadly quiet. At the door, Jack stood, mouth slightly open in shock. He walked in, his gaze on Daniel. “Goa’uld,” he said after a minute. He found a wheeled stool and brought it over to sit upon. “Fuckin’ figures.” Sam winced and Jack rolled his eyes before looking back at Daniel. “So. What happened to the other Pentagon?”

Daniel was startled by his presence. There came a yearning that was non-sexual. It was a demand for comfort because he knew he could find it there. Except he wasn’t his Jack. He let out a heavy sigh. “It stayed in

Second Wind

D.C. The Goa'uld set up their version at the SGC, taking control of the stargate."

"Of course," Jack sighed, shaking his head.

Daniel took a deep breath. "Okay, guys, here's the gist of it. After a bunch of BS, the United States of America ceased to exist when the presidency and the cabinet agencies went full fascist state two years ago, during our sixth year in operation. Long story short, chaos followed after martial law. Everything was insane. Shock troops went out in force and ..." He made a lift and fall of his hands. "People just didn't see it coming because they got complacent. News was restricted long before. Anyway, a lot of us got out through the gate. We made it to the Tok'ra, and we started to form a massive resistance. But then things got ... Jack ... uh, my Jack. They got him. Us."

His voice had dropped to a whisper. "So yeah," he said with sudden false bravado and a sick, fake smile. "All in all, a swell time. I ... wanted to kill myself. Then I remembered that he once told me, the last time we'd been captured by Apophis, that no matter what, as long

Second Wind

as there was a chance for me to make the bad guys pay, I had to hold out. I tried. But then I got weaker ...”

His words faded as he beheld six horrified people, as Teal’c and one other nurse had entered the room. He cleared his throat. “Ever been on the business end of a Goa’uld pain stick?” Jack, Sam, and Teal’c’s expressions said they did. “Well, five minutes of that tends to kill all the energy in you. It’s why they could so easily toss me into space.”

Jack blinked. “They used that as punishment?”

“No, they had creative ways for inflicting punishment,” Daniel said, wishing he would ditch the matter-of-factness in his voice. “Spacing was body disposal while inflicting the last bit of torture. Like being sent to an even worse hell than the one you were already in. It was for when you ... served no more purpose.” He gave them all a look. And still, his mind said, *ghosts*. His mind was still mush. He wondered how long it would be like that. “They mistook that poster in the cargo bay for space.”

Second Wind

“What’s that smile for?” Jack asked, disturbed.

“Joke’s on them. Plus the hangar I was in was hit with plasma bombs, given the explosion type. I thought I was toast, literally, but the firebomb didn’t fully transfer through the mirror.”

“Justice. Thank god,” Jack said, sitting on the opposite bed.

Daniel gave him a wan smile. “Maybe. Maybe it was the rebels. And maybe it was another Goa’uld. Either way, that fucking bitch is dead.” He shuddered and Sam came forward to help, but he put up a hand. “What’re you doing?”

Sam looked confused. “To help you get more covered up. You’re cold.”

“Why can’t you people just leave me the hell alone?!” he shouted. The silence afterward was deafening. He sucked in a breath and said between clenched teeth, “I’m sorry. I need to be alone for a while. Please leave.”

Second Wind

Jack pinched the bridge of his nose, then got up. “Come on, people.” They left the ward before him, but Jack paused. “Daniel, let Carmichael do her job. I’ll come back later to check up on you.” Without another word, he left.

Daniel stared after him, feeling a strong sense of déjà vu. Jack had once told him, *“You have a brilliant mind and a kind heart. That is why you’re a valuable member of this command and **not** replaceable. Tell me you’re not important one more time and I’ll reassign you to the science lab with Lee.”*

“That could’ve been handled differently,” Carmichael said, pulling Daniel out of his memory. “Consider that we care about what happens to you.” She patted the bed. “I’ll be back after my rounds.”

..

Second Wind

Jack walked down the corridor and when someone started to open their mouth to ask him something, he simply raised two fingers in warning and the person shut up and kept on their way. He headed for the top deck, the observation room. A small, peaceful place. It held, of all things, a round-backed wicker chair and a koi fish pond. The first was real. The second was a hologram. He sat down and stared into the ship's wake. From there, tendrils of purple and white flared outward, leftover from the energy of hyperspace. Beyond that, nothing but black. It was relaxing and the only place he could go to scream, if necessary, or to keep from screaming.

He asked himself why Daniel wouldn't let anyone help him. There was the state of him: starved, brutalized. Jack had had a similar trauma, being held captive in Iraq. He hadn't been as damaged, physically, but mentally? During the first few hours after his escape, he'd been hyper-alert, paranoid, and on constant defense. Everyone was a threat. After returning home, that behavior had continued, and he'd had to stay in the VA for a few weeks to get his head on straight. There

Second Wind

had been so much *anger* that he hadn't wanted to risk being around Sara and baby Charlie. There had also been times when he'd been a danger to *himself*.

He hit the comm unit around his ear. "Lieutenant Murphy, get me Doc Carmichael."

"One second, sir."

"Carmichael, sir," said the doctor.

"Doc, I was just thinking. Given Doctor Jackson's state of mind, don't you think he should be on suicide watch?" There was a significant pause. He'd surprised her, which was disappointing. She should have anticipated this, but some MDs just didn't have the knack for psychology. They tended to call someone in, however, when that was the case.

"I'm not so sure, Colonel. I think he's stable, but ... what's made you ask?"

"Because, as you said, I know a thing or two. The depression can hit hard, and out of nowhere. I think it's best you have him watched."

Second Wind

“Not by SFs, Colonel,” she said adamantly. “He’s severely paranoid of them. He hasn’t said anything, but you can tell how his eyes constantly watch the ward entrance whenever they go by.”

“Who would you suggest?” he asked.

“My nurses are tied up at the moment and I have rounds to make in the civilian section.”

Jack sighed. “How long will you be?”

“Two hours, maybe three.”

“Fine. I can spare the time. I’ll be down shortly. O’Neill out.” He stared at the fish as they circled a dark stone at the bottom of the pond. He wondered if there was a metaphor in there somewhere. “Why didn’t you ...” he said to the stone, as if it was his lost love. “The dead don’t stay dead, do they Daniel?”

When he came downstairs, he found Carter walking onto the bridge with a rigid posture and a stony expression. She was pissed off.

Second Wind

“Carter?” She just looked at him and he nodded. “I know. Keep the chair warm. I’ll be in the infirmary, whether he likes it or not.”

..

Daniel got what he wanted. He’d alienated them. The doc was kinder, but she too didn’t have time for his bullshit, which was just as well. He wanted to be alienated. He wanted pain. It was what he was used to. Everything felt temporary. *Ghostly*. And when they were nice, it was almost abhorrent. If they only knew the anger, the *hatred*, that permeated his thoughts when he wasn’t thinking of Jack. It didn’t matter which one.

Next to the alienation, he also wanted Jack’s arms around him. He wanted that comfort. He yearned for it. With the yearning came another feeling, sexual in nature, and a type of claustrophobia hit him as nausea took control. That reaction had started four months

Second Wind

ago. Whenever he'd thought of having sex with Jack, even recalling a memory, the nausea showed up. Always unbidden, uncontrolled, unwanted. And it was still with him. He couldn't even grieve by way of jerking off, remembering Jack's touch, his kiss, his ... everything.

An emotional chasm opened up and his self-esteem fell into it. His face crumpled as he squeezed his eyes shut. He was broken. Damaged. He wasn't a man anymore.

"I miss you, Jack." The tears came, and when he opened his eyes, several drops fell down his cheek and hit his hand. Like before. He looked down, and his gaze rested on the I.V., reminding him of the fear of needles he now possessed. Like a scar. It wasn't the only one.

Self-loathing followed, and it made sense to have it, given all the hatred that filled up everywhere else in his mind. A dichotomy: love, hate, nothing else. There didn't seem to be a way out. He couldn't think of the love he had, not without getting sick. So all that was left to him was this simmering hatred that would come

Second Wind

to a boiling point sooner or later. He might lash out without thinking. He couldn't have that.

He touched the tape, then gently pulled it off his hand to study the needle. It would be easy. Just pull it out, detach the tube, then stick the needle into his carotid artery.

..

Jack started to round the corner, eyes on the inside of the ward. Daniel wasn't in sight yet, but what caught Jack's attention right away was an I.V. line on the floor. He frowned as he entered the ward and found that Daniel was holding the needle and catheter, *and he was aiming for his neck.*

He ran at him and Daniel froze, needle inches from his artery. "I have t—" he began.

Second Wind

Jack placed a hand on Daniel's chest, just under his collarbones, and shoved him backward, hard, as he grabbed the Daniel's wrist with his other hand and squeezed hard, forcing him to drop the needle. He said nothing. Instead, he let go of his wrist and searched the cabinet, snatching a packet of gauze. He ripped it open and slapped the material over Daniel's bleeding hand and with his free arm, pulled him into his embrace.

"Shh."

Daniel didn't want comfort and he pushed him away. He held the gauze in place, but he needed the distance. "You don't understand," he said tiredly and sat on the edge of the bed.

Jack found more gauze and wiped his own hands mostly free of blood, then grabbed a stool and rolled it over to sit up close to him. "Enlighten me then."

"What purpose would I serve in staying alive in this universe?"

"What kind of stupid question is that?" Jack asked, deeply disturbed.

Second Wind

Daniel shook his head as he kept looking up at nothing, then back to Jack. He tried to grab hold of something, anything, that would get his point across. Then something occurred to him. “Did you guys go to Kheb? See a being called Oma Desala?”

“Sure,” Jack asked, puzzled. “What about her?”

Daniel took a deep breath. “In my timeline, or reality, or whatever you want to call it ...”

“Universe?”

“Yeah, whatever.” Daniel frowned, confused for a second. “Did you ever visit a planet with a country called Kelowna?” Jack’s face went blank and Daniel watched him try to put up a wall of pain. “Yeah, I can see you did. What happened?”

“You went,” Jack said. “You exposed yourself to a lethal dose of radiation when you deactivated a bomb that would’ve killed millions. And you died three days later.”

Daniel swallowed. “The same thing happened in my universe, except we had this hand device that was

Second Wind

stronger than the usual one the Goa'uld use. Jacob brought me back with it."

"He tried that here, with a regular hand device. And it didn't work. You died."

Daniel frowned. "Didn't I ascend?"

Jack matched the frown. "No. You just died. What do you mean, ascend?"

"Ah," Daniel said. "One more difference."

"Aside from the fact that you lived."

"And a lot of other factors," Daniel said. "My point is that Oma came to me while I was dying. She asked me if I wanted to ascend, and I told her I didn't think I was worthy of it. She said I was, but that I'll never ascend until I believe I can. Or that I deserve to. And I was prepared to die. But Jacob wouldn't let me go. And I was sick for about a week after that, then Ja ... you and Sam and Teal'c ran into Lord Yu. He died, and his First Prime let us take the sarcophagus back to the SGC."

Daniel remembered the last time he'd seen it. *She* had

Second Wind

been rising from it. He swallowed and concentrated hard to get rid of that memory and get back on track with his talk with Jack. “Point is, I lived.”

“How long ago did this happen?” Jack asked.

“Three years ago.”

“Wow, I think your universe’s timeline, if you can call it that, is way different than ours because you ... he ... died six months ago.”

Daniel frowned, looking away. “Right.”

“That wasn’t your point though,” Jack said.

Daniel blinked. “What?”

“That you lived. What was the real point?”

“How do you know that?” Daniel asked.

“I know suicidal when I see it,” Jack said. “The only time a person does that is when they’ve given up. And now, here, you’ve given up, and I don’t understand why.”

Second Wind

Don't you understand that you're being given a second chance?"

Daniel blinked several times. "I ... guess ... but it just doesn't ..." He took a shaky breath and half-laughed, half-sobbed. "I don't know what to do. What to think." He dropped his tone. "It's like I'm having a very vivid dream-slash-nightmare. You're ..." He gestured at Jack, waving an aery hand. "You. Here. And I'm ..." He gestured at himself while grimacing. "And then there's ..." He waved at the ceiling, the walls. "This." He sighed looked down. "I couldn't ascend because I didn't think I was worthy, and I can't go on ... here ... because I'm not worthy. I'm broken."

"One minute at a time," Jack said slowly.

Daniel blinked a few times, confused. "What?"

"That's all you have to give yourself. Or give the universe, or god, me, Carter, Teal'c, the doc—just give us a minute. Give *yourself* a minute. Allow that things can improve. Just for a minute. Then give it another minute. You last until the next minute. And the next.

Second Wind

Sooner or later, the feelings of anger and hatred and this burning need for a revenge you can't have will fade. You'll climb out of that pit. You won't feel that you need to be on guard all the time."

Daniel said tiredly, "I just want to be normal again. And I won't be."

"Why not?"

"I just ... won't," Daniel said evasively. "I'm not ready to explain why."

"Okay. But consider something else. I'm here," Jack said, grasping at things he hoped would help not just Daniel, but himself. "I know you're not him, except you are, and he's you. And I will not have you checking out on me." His voice became commanding as he took Daniel's hand and squeezed. "I will not have it, Daniel. Don't do that to me a second time."

Daniel blinked a few times, listening to him.

"Are you listening?"

Second Wind

Daniel tried to pull free but Jack wouldn't let him. "You don't understand! I *hate!* I *hate!* I *hate!* so fucking much! Take it away." He dropped his chin to his chest. "Just take it away."

Jack remembered something from years ago. On Abydos. When Daniel had said something like, "*Hate is evil. It's poison. It seeps into everything and I abhor it.*"

"Wish I could. Trust me. I really wish I could." He suddenly found himself getting up and lifting Daniel's chin with his fingers in order to force him to look his eyes, and in doing so, he wound up staring into those heart-wrenching, pain-filled blue eyes and feeling his own heart wrench. "But I'll help however much I can. Just let me do that." And without thinking, he kissed him. It was chaste and dry and lasted only a second before he sat back down.

Daniel's eyes widened and he swallowed hard. The moment froze in time, seconds stretching into an eternity. He feared a bodily reaction, to be followed by nausea, but instead, he studied the warm brown eyes

who seemed to be studying him in return. “But ... I’m not him.”

“Yes you are. You’re just not the same,” Jack said. “And if you ask me to explain that, I can’t.” He took his hand again, then turned over his other hand and waited for Daniel to take it. When he did, he asked, “Why worry about that?”

Daniel huffed out another half-laugh, half-sob. “Isn’t it obvious?” He forced Jack to look at his fingernails. “Look.” Jack only nodded, and raised his brows, waiting for explanation. Instead, Daniel closed his eyes. “I’m afraid. I’ve been in such a ... I just *hate*. I’m so angry, weak, and I can’t even brush my own hair. I just think it’s better to ...” He shook his head and whispered, “All I want to do is push you all away. It’s too much. The kindness. After all that horror. And ...”

“And?” Jack repeated.

“It hurts,” Daniel said. “He died. You, I mean. And I just want the pain to stop.”

Jack sighed. “Me, too,” he admitted quietly.

Second Wind

Daniel's eyes widened and he grimaced in guilt. "Oh god, Jack. I'm such a self-centered bastard. I'm so sorry."

Jack shook his head. "Don't. Don't do that. My grief is six months old. Yours is fresh."

"No," Daniel said, examining the emotion in Jack's eyes. "He died a long time ago. Almost a year."

"So? Besides, you were never allowed to grieve," Jack pointed out. "You went from one horror into another."

"Well ... yes," Daniel said, making a face.

"You were in limbo. Now you're not. You're free to feel however you want. And the only thing that's not acceptable is suicide."

Daniel swallowed. "You kissed me."

Jack nodded. "I needed to. I'm not all that interested in examining why."

"It's not ... It's too soon, isn't it?" Daniel said.

Second Wind

“Not really.” Jack looked down as he took Daniel’s right hand in his, frowning at the jagged edges of some of the nails. What little there was of them. “I think we need each other, and it doesn’t matter that we are who we are.”

“Are you sure?” Daniel asked.

Jack sighed. “No. I’m just winging it here.”

Daniel frowned. “Why aren’t you yelling at me for trying to kill myself?”

“Is that what I’m supposed to do? Yell at you for being in despair? What good would that do?” He reached over and caressed his cheek. “You need to heal. You’re a mess. It’d be sub-human to fault you for it.”

Daniel let the words sink in. “I guess.”

“So, we’ll just tackle one problem at a time. A minute at a time. Or an hour. A day. It’s up to you.”

Daniel swallowed and he forced himself to take his hands away because feelings started to stir. Jack didn’t

Second Wind

know why, but he seemed at ease with letting him go. Daniel moved back on the bed and crossed his legs. At first, it felt wrong. He was too exposed. But he laid his hands in his lap to mitigate it. “One problem at a time?”

“Sure.”

“Okay,” he said, hating the fear that began to rise. “There’s something.”

“Shoot,” Jack said.

“Where we’re going, you said we’ll be there for two months?” Jack nodded. “And then we’ll go back to the SGC?”

Jack nodded. “You afraid of what Hammond—”

“No,” Daniel said, cutting him off. “Is Frazier the CMO?”

Jack gave him a puzzled look. “Yeah, why?”

“She ... I mean, her counterpart in my universe ... was a sadist. A really nasty piece of work. Please tell me she’s not the same here.”

Second Wind

“Hell no she’s *not*,” Jack said, eyes wide in alarm. “She’s one of the most kind and empathetic people I know.”

“Agreed,” Carmichael said, walking in.

“I thought you were going to be gone a few hours?” Jack asked.

“I just stopped by, picking up a few charts. Daniel, you’ll never find a more caring person than Janet Fraiser.” She then took in the I.V. tubing, the bloody gauze, Jack’s red-smudged fingers. She stared at Daniel, then said, “You two. Stay right where you are. Do. Not. Move.” She turned and left the ward.

“What?” Daniel began, but Jack held up a hand. The gesture reminded him so much of his Jack that he was made speechless.

Carmichael returned with a hypodermic needle. She gave Daniel a stern look. “I’m not having this happen again. Whatever it was that compelled you to pull out your I.V, it’s not gonna happen again.”

Second Wind

“No, no,” Daniel said, heart hammering instantly. “No, please.”

“Daniel, maybe it’s a good idea,” Jack said.

Daniel’s face turned anguished and he asked, “What is it?” when she lifted his right sleeve, rubbed the skin with alcohol.

“A mild sedative.”

Before she inserted the needle, he grabbed hold of Jack’s hand and a tear flew from his right eye. He nodded to her and she proceeded to give him the shot. He sucked in a breath. Afterward, he said, “I can’t ...” He blinked at the sudden head rush. “That’s fast.”

“It’s due to your weakened system. Now, if you continue this behavior, I’ll increase the dosage.”

He sighed and let Jack go. “I’m sorry.”

“I know,” she said. “But let us help you. And by so doing, help yourself. This is the beginning of a long road.”

Second Wind

“Yeah, and it’ll get worse the second I see *her*. How the hell am I going to get better if I have to see her all the time when we get back to the SGC?”

“It’s that bad?” Jack asked, trading worrying looks with Carmichael.

Daniel opened his mouth, then shut it. He didn’t know how to respond.

“*Can* you talk about it?” Jack asked. “Explain what happened with her?”

Daniel shuddered as memories flipped through his head like a rapid slideshow. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “You guys have a World War II?”

“Yep.”

“Nazis?”

“Yeah,” Jack said warily.

“A holocaust?” Daniel went on. “A Doctor Mengele? Concentration camps?”

Second Wind

Jack nodded slowly. “That’s where you got that tattoo on your inner arm?”

Daniel frowned, then looked down. Redness crept up over his ears, his cheeks, down his neck. “Squeeze my hand.”

“What?” Jack asked, caught off guard.

“Daniel, what’s wrong?” Carmichael asked.

“I think you’d call it an anxiety attack.” He bit his lips together and did his best not to cry. “I don’t want to cry. Squeeze my hand. Hard.”

“I’ll break fingers.”

“Squeeze.”

Jack did, but not hard. Still, Daniel grimaced and he began to breathe deep but too fast. “Slow down,” Jack urged. Daniel did. “What happened?” he asked, releasing the hard grip, but kept hold as lightly as he could. He didn’t really want to let go.

Second Wind

“My emotions are raw. When I get upset, it’s too much. It’s like being flooded and I can’t seem to stop. Does that qualify as an anxiety attack? I’m pretty sure it doesn’t. I just don’t know what else to call it.”

Jack reached up and smoothed a strand of hair from Daniel’s face. “It’s gonna be like that for a while until your mind accepts your new reality. You’re at the beginning of PTSS, Daniel. It’s normal. But it’ll get better. I promise.”

“PTSS? You mean PTSD?”

“Changed to PTSS, as a syndrome, not a disorder, because it’s like a wound, not a psychiatric malfunction.”

Daniel thought about that. “That actually makes sense.”

“The tattoo,” Jack reminded him. “What happened to make you have an anxiety attack?”

“I was just thinking that I’ll have that fucking thing for the rest of my life.”

Second Wind

“No you won’t. We can get it removed.”

“Really?” Daniel asked, surprised. He didn’t really believe it, but he wanted to. He cleared his throat. “Okay. About Frazier. Colonel Janetta Frazier was this floating doctor who visited the SGC once in a while. When the Goa’uld invaded, she’d already been messing with personnel, eliminating people she didn’t like. She was fascinated with the Goa’uld and made a devil’s bargain with one. She welcomed the infernal thing into her.” Jack’s and Carmichael’s eyes were widening in shock. “Yeah. And here’s the kicker with her. It let her have control. Frazier kept her name, used her voice half the time. For some stupid reason that I have *never* learned the Goa’uld allowed it.”

“That’s weird,” Jack said, both puzzled and dismayed.

“Tell me about it. Before the Goa’uld, she’d already earned a rep as a despicable human being.”

“How’d Hammond allow that?”

“He wasn’t there. A fascist state like North Korea had taken over. Those in the government who didn’t play

Second Wind

ball were quietly, systemically replaced, and the rest *welcomed* the Goa'uld as long as they could stay in local power, and I never learned why the Goa'uld allowed *that* either." He swallowed and bared his teeth in a snarl. "That bomb I saw as I crossed over. I hope they're all dead now."

The pronouncement startled Carmichael and Jack because *their* Daniel would never have said such a thing, but Jack couldn't really blame him since it was a Goa'uld who died. "What else?" Sam and Teal'c came in at that moment. They were hesitant but Jack waved them over. "Pull up a stool. We need to hear this to understand what he's been through." He caught them up on what Daniel had already said.

"Janet?" Sam asked. "Oh my god."

"No," Daniel corrected mildly. "*Janetta*." He took a deep breath, started to speak, then asked as his eyes widened. "What year is it here?"

Second Wind

“2016,” Jack said, then his Red Alert sounded. “You think those Goa’uld are headed to Earth?” he asked, standing.

“I don’t think so, judging by all the stuff that’s different here. But in my in my ... former universe ... it was 2021. The Goa’uld in charge was Ares.”

“Ares,” Teal’c repeated. He looked at Jack. “Ares is one of the oldest Goa’uld after Ba’al and Lord Yu. He was one of the System Lords who banished Anubis. Master Bra’tac believes that he was the reason Anubis vanished for many millennia, but he was told by Apophis that it was Cronus who forced him into exile.”

“One big happy family,” Jack said dryly.

“At any rate,” Daniel said, “Ares forced all the others to bend to his will. I don’t know how.”

“What other Goa’uld were involved on Earth? Or do you refer to the Goa’uld as a whole?” Teal’c asked.

“As a whole, as far as I know,” Daniel said. “There were eight on Earth ...” He closed his eyes to focus, then

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listed them with a significant pause between each name. “Osiris, Ba’al, Kali, Inanna, Sekhmet ... um ...” He sighed and shook his head. “There are three more. They divvied up the planet. The U.S. got split in three ways. The western half, including Stargate Command, was given to Osiris.”

“When did all this happen?” Sam asked.

“Over ten months ago, in twenty-twenty. Just after the fixed election of John Bolton, who started wars all over the planet while instituting Martial Law. It took four years before that to get him elected. His private army enforced new regulations—”

“Hang on,” Jack said, scowling. “*Private* army? How the hell was a private army allowed on our own soil?”

“Corporatization,” Daniel said simply. “Everything was privatized, and while we still had a military, all police were either inducted into the new so-called security force, called Blackwater. They ordered an agency named ICE to round up everyone who wasn’t born here and boot them out, except they weren’t booted

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anywhere. They were housed in detention centers and eventually turned into the first slaves. Cops either joined or were kicked off the local police forces, which were absorbed into Blackwater. So when you guys hear me call these people jackbooted thugs—”

“Hang on,” Jack repeated. “Where were the Jaffa?”

Daniel shook his head. “I don’t ... I finally asked Frazier that before I was thrown into this universe. One of the few times she let me ask questions. She said the security force *were* her Jaffa, that they assimilated. Or rather, in her words, ditched the armor and went native.”

“That’s ...” Jack began, but stopped and pinched his nose.

Daniel continued. “Anyone who didn’t tow the line about the new regime were rounded up and sent to shipyards to build Goa’uld motherships.” He paused, looking at their faces. “Uh. What kind of government do you have on Earth?”

Second Wind

“Left wing, science-based,” Sam said, and rather smugly.

Daniel sighed heavily. “Thank god. You can all put up a good fight then, I hope?” He twirled the forefinger of his left hand over his head. “Given the tech you have? Asgard?”

Jack nodded. “We helped save their bacon from the Replicators. They gifted us with space travel and tech to protect the planet, and I don’t mean with guns. We have a defensive platform that consists of satellites.” Jack twirled a finger vertically. “Boom.”

“What was happening in the galaxy, with the Goa’uld?” Teal’c asked.

“Okay. Um. What you need to beware of?” he asked. They all nodded. “Okay. Um. Ares is gaining power. If it’s not him, then it’s someone else I guess. In my old world, they attacked Earth as soon as they had most of the System Lords under their control.”

“The Goa’uld currently absorbing other domains is Ba’al,” Teal’c said.

Second Wind

Jack nodded. “He doesn’t have everyone yet. Just cleaning up smaller territories.”

Daniel searched his memory but he couldn’t think. “Just make sure there are warning systems at the edge of the solar system, never mind in hyperspace.”

“We have those already,” Sam said. “Set at the edge of the system.”

Daniel blinked. “Oh. In hyperspace?”

Sam blinked in surprise. “In hyperspace? No. I didn’t know you could do that.”

“I can draw a rough diagram of one the modules your other self built. She devised a way to place markers inside hyperspace.” He rubbed at his forehead. “I’m not quite with it so the drawings would be crude.” He looked at Jack. “You find that second Ancients’ database?”

“There’s another one of those things?” Jack asked back, eyes wide. He threaded a hand through his hair. “Christ, one was enough.”

Second Wind

“Six. There’re six. If Ba’al hasn’t learned about them yet, he will. I suggest you grab them up before he does.”

“And how do we do that?” Jack asked.

“Ask the Asgard,” Daniel replied. At the consternation on the faces around him, he cleared his throat. “Look, I’m sorry that I’m not being more helpful. But they’re the ones who can keep the person who downloaded the database from dying. Like, I’m assuming, they did for you, Jack.”

He nodded as he got up. “No one’s got the ability to launch an attack or we’d have heard about it by now. Still, after we get to the Omega site, I’ll send out feelers, have people activate a higher alert.”

“Can’t you contact the Asgard to help with the databases? And Earth’s still protected, isn’t it?” Daniel asked.

“Yeah, but the Asgard are a bit busy,” Jack said, chewing at the inside of his cheek. “Be back in a few.”

Second Wind

Daniel looked around. “Um ...” He suddenly had no idea what to do or say. He picked up his brush, absently meaning to run it through his hair, but he glanced at Sam and set it aside. “I’m sorry, Sam. Sorry for pushing you away. It’s just ... it seems weird that you’re all just so willing to accept me. It’s like it’s sacrilegious somehow.”

“It’s not. We’re just ... we couldn’t help him. We *can* help you.”

Daniel blinked as metaphorical tumblers clicked into place, unlocking understanding. “That makes sense.”

“I can finish that, if you want,” she said, gesturing at the brush.

“Um. You could always let a nurse take care of it, Sam. I mean, it’s that what they’re supposed to do?” He frowned, looking around, and finding none. “When they’re around, I guess.”

“It’s okay,” Sam said, rounding the bed. She picked up the brush and began to work on his hair. “You want to put this in a ponytail?”

Second Wind

“And find me a bandana,” he said. “Uh. Please?”

She smiled.

“Daniel Jackson,” Teal’c said. “Would you like to continue sharing what else you know?”

“What’s relevant?” Daniel asked him. “I don’t know. I can’t really think of anything.” His stomach growled rather loudly and he placed his free arm over his stomach. “Sorry.”

Carmichael got up. “Well, that’s my cue. I’ll replace the Jell-O with some new stuff. Any flavor you prefer?”

Daniel shook his head. “Jell-O is Jell-O. I’ll be happy to have some Cool Whip on it though.” He looked at her hopefully.

Grinning, Carmichael shook her head. “Sorry. Gelatin is good for you. Right now, Cool Whip isn’t.” She left the ward.

Daniel observed her appearance, wondering why he’d never noticed. She had reddish-blond hair, blue eyes,

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and was almost Sam's height. No wonder he wasn't afraid of her. He then thought that perhaps he hadn't noticed because she didn't look like Frazier. "About Frazier. What's she look like?"

"Brown hair," Sam said. "Five-foot nothing. Big brown eyes. Slender."

Daniel nodded, trying to grasp at something bugging him. He rubbed at his forehead.

"You have a headache?" Carmichael asked. He nodded. "It might be a side-effect from the medicine. Might not be."

"Can I get some Tylenol?" he asked. While she was gone, the thing that was bugging him solidified into a question. "Her name. How's it spelled?"

"Whose?" Sam asked.

"Frazier."

"F r a i s e r," Sam answered.

Second Wind

Daniel felt a band loosening across his chest as he let that sink in. “That’s different. I just suddenly wondered.”

“How’s the bad one spell it?” she asked.

“F r a z i e r.” His jaws tightened by habit and he ground his teeth together, then ordered himself to stop and ran his tongue over them. “Here’s a weird thing. During my ... incarceration ... I rarely got to use toothpaste. And my teeth haven’t rotted. I don’t get it. So I really need some, and a toothbrush. Could you ask someone for a shaving kit too?” He rubbed at the two day stubble he sported. “It’s itchy. I don’t like hair on my face.”

“Why’d they keep you dirty but shave your face?” Sam asked.

Daniel paled and rubbed at his forehead again.

“Because *she* liked me clean-shaven.”

“Oh,” Sam said, cringing. “Sorry.” He waved a hand.

“May I ask you a question about your universe, Daniel Jackson?” Teal’c asked.

Second Wind

“Sure. As long as you sit down,” Daniel said. Teal’c hesitated. “You’re as bad as the other one. Please sit down?” Teal’c took a seat on the opposite bed.

“Thanks. Ask away.”

“Are Major Carter and myself alive in your universe?”

Daniel shook his head. “You were both part of the Resistance, headquartered offworld. It used to be at a Tok’ra base, but then you had to move. You both got hit by Ba’al’s forces after defending one of the offworld sites.”

“Like the Alpha site?” Sam asked.

“Yeah,” he said, pausing. Sorrow filled him, but it was diffused by the presence of Sam and Teal’c in this reality.

“And the Colonel?” Sam asked. She handed him the brush and went to sit next to Teal’c. “I think Cat has hair bands. You’ll have to wait.”

“Okay.” He cleared his throat again. “Jack and I were at Chulak.” He had to take a deep breath. “We were

Second Wind

evacuating your son and his family, Teal'c, along with other rebel Jaffa and their families, even though the Tok'ra had a lot of defenses, they—”

“The Tok'ra?” Teal'c asked.

“Their base was there. Coordinating with the Rebel Jaffa.”

“Wow, that's a nice change, compared to here,” Sam said.

“What?” Daniel said. “They don't get along?”

Teal'c shook his head. “They do not.”

Daniel made a face. “Oh. The, uh, outer defenses held until ...” He cleared his throat. “They came for us. Osiris' motherships just blasted the shit out of Chulak. Jaffa ringed down everywhere outside the ... uh, can I get some water?” Teal'c was closer to the sink across the room so he brought him a small cup. “Thanks,” he said, frowning at the size. He downed it, then quietly panicked when he realized he probably shouldn't have done that. But his stomach didn't rebel.

Second Wind

“You need more?” Teal’c asked.

Daniel gave him a desperate smile. “Please?” he said, handing him the cup. After drinking the refill a lot slower, he was quiet for a minute. He tried to *not* see what had happened next quite so vividly, but the scene was permanently stamped in his head. “Jack ... we’d just come from the gate, after seeing off a few dozen people, and we heard ring transports behind us, then there was staff weapon’s fire all around us. We were almost to the fortress gate when Jack was hit in the left shoulder.”

He paused, his chest tightening again and he couldn’t look at them. “Two more blasts hit him and one hit me between the shoulder blades. I went down. Jack ... several ... they just kept firing ...” He didn’t realize he was hyperventilating until Carmichael appeared, as if out of nowhere, and grabbed an oxygen mask off the machinery behind the bed and quickly placed it over his mouth and nose, telling him to breathe. “They didn’t need to do that,” he said, pulling the mask away. “They didn’t need to ...” He held the mask to his face as he tried to gulp air.

Second Wind

Jack was standing in the doorway. He'd heard everything. As he'd approached the door, he'd heard his name and Chulak and had stopped dead. He wanted to rush to Daniel's side as he gulped down air, but he couldn't move. The shock was broken when Sam and Teal'c came over.

"Did you hear that?" she asked. He nodded, eyes on Daniel. "I didn't realize. They were the same, sir. You and Daniel. He and Jack."

"I knew that already," Jack said, nodding. "So did you." Sam clearly didn't. "Weren't you in the room?" He thought it over. "No. No, sorry. You weren't. He was ... I distracted him with a kiss." Both she and Teal'c gave him looks of shock that made him narrow his eyes. "A *chaste* kiss. Jeez." He looked back at Daniel. "Point is, it didn't even faze him, but it did calm him down." They gave him a look. "No, I'm not gonna do it again." He rolled his eyes.

"Colonel," Carmichael said, jerking her chin at him.

Second Wind

Jack looked at his teammates. “Mess Hall’s open. You guys go ahead. I’ll join you in a bit.”

“We’ll see you later, Daniel, okay?” Sam asked from the door.

“Sure,” he said, but the word was muffled and unintelligible through the mask. He gave her and Teal’c a thumbs-up instead. They nodded and left.

Jack stared at him in hesitation. He was torn by his presence. Part of him wanted to kiss him again. Part of him wished he wasn’t there. It was the state of him. It was appalling and it filled him with anguish because it was all up to Daniel to heal. He walked over and took his right hand as he pushed hair strands out of Daniel’s eyes. Daniel started to talk but Jack tapped the filter. “Shh. Breathe, stupid.”

Daniel’s panic attack abruptly calmed as he focused on Jack’s face. The feel of his hands. “I’m s—”

“Stop saying that,” Jack chided. “You’re allowed to be whacky for a while. If you’re still like this two years from now, I’ll have you committed.” Amazingly, Daniel

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took it like the joke it was meant to be. Just like his late Daniel would have.

Through the mask, Daniel smiled a little and said, “Deal.”

Carmichael picked up the pieces of the I.V., sighed, and said, “We’ll just have to forgo this part until I’m sure you won’t pull it out again.”

“I’m fine,” Daniel began, then froze, realized what he’d just said, then took the mask off. “It won’t happen again.”

Carmichael nodded slowly, studying him. “Then I’ll get that other hand, if you don’t mind.”

He didn’t say anything because he was too ashamed and he sat still, controlling the fear of the needle as she and a nurse gave him a new I.V.

“There,” Jack said. “You’re a pincushion again.”

“You’re getting funnier by the hour, sir,” Carmichael said. Patting Daniel’s shoulder, she said, “Jell-O,” and

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pulled the food table over. Three small plastic cups held different colors. “Colonel, I think you can manage this part.”

“Thanks, doc,” he said as she left the ward. He pulled the table over so it overlapped the bed. “Orange, red, and green. Guess that means, orange, cherry, and lime.” A white plastic spork sat next to them and he handed it to Daniel. “Which?”

“Lime,” he said, surprising Jack.

“Yeah?”

“Let me guess. *He* wouldn’t have chosen lime.”

Jack shook his head. “Cherry. You remember those Luden cherry cough drops?”

“That were actually candy?” Daniel asked around a small mouthful of gelatin.

Jack nodded. “He’d buy about ten packs, then take them on missions. He smelled like cherry cough drops

Second Wind

for the entire time we'd be gone." He cleared his throat and Daniel took his hand.

"It's okay. Talk about something else. I'll change topics, too."

Jack took a deep breath and nodded. "Deal."

They talked about the ship. Where Jack's office was. What his quarters were like. What the planet was like, and his office and quarters there. Jack then told him about the average news on Earth. Movies. Games. How the planet was handling their nearly-complete cessation of fossil fuel use. "My truck is electric, but my bike is not. Gotta get it converted."

"You can do that?"

Jack nodded.

"Aside from your Daniel not being here, I think I landed in a universe with its head on straight." He hesitated, thinking of the kiss. A world with its head on straight except for himself. It wasn't fair.

Second Wind

“Sorry?” Jack asked.

Daniel blinked. “What?”

“You said it wasn’t fair. What do you mean?”

Daniel abruptly colored. “Wow. I didn’t even realize I was saying that shit out loud. That’s really ...” He winced. “Sorry.”

“Would you stop saying that?” Jack asked gently. “It’s not necessary when you’re apologizing for shit that’s out of your control.”

Daniel sighed through his nose. “Fair enough.”

“Just remember that you’re recovering from a lot of stuff. You’re underweight—”

Daniel sputtered. “Underweight? I look like a corpse.”

“You do not,” Jack scowled. “You’re too thin. You’re not skeletal.”

Second Wind

“Like hell,” Daniel argued, yanking up his scrubs top. “Look at this!” His stomach was sunken a bit and you could just see the outline of his ribs.

Jack winced and reached over, but he didn’t touch. “Daniel. Two things. One, you look like you haven’t eaten in a few weeks. You don’t look like a holocaust survivor.”

Daniel blinked, surprised that Jack would use that very same term. For some reason, it made him listen, and believe. “I don’t?” He lifted the top again, but he made a face and pushed it back down. “I look awful.”

“Two. You’re black and blue and you’re worried about looking starved?” He shook his head. “And since when does Daniel Jackson give a shit about the way he looks when he’s sick?”

Again, Daniel was taken aback. Sick. He hadn’t even ... “I hadn’t thought of it like that.”

“Cue dramatic theme music,” Jack said sarcastically.

Second Wind

Daniel shot him a look of reproachment. “Funny guy. You always were, and you apparently still are.” He blushed then, hating that he’d connected the two men. “I think that should require an ‘I’m Sorry’.”

Jack wagged his hand. “For both of us, since stuff like that’s gonna continue.”

Daniel’s brows lifted. “Ain’t we a pair.”

Jack smiled broadly and almost said, “That sounds like you.” But he just shook his head instead, then gestured at the gelatin. “Eat that.”

Daniel made a face and gave him the cup of green. “Give me the orange.” After a bite of that, he asked for the cherry. He ended up eating the entire cup. “I think I get why he likes this one more.” He blinked. “Um. Liked.”

Jack gave him a wan smile. “I know what you meant.”

“Right.”

Second Wind

Jack got to his feet. “Time for me to do some Command stuff.”

Daniel nodded, then asked, “Doesn’t it bug you that, as a Colonel, you have to change to Commander or Captain just because you’re on a ship?”

Jack shrugged, grinning. “It is what it is.”

Daniel nodded and watched him leave. He stared at the ceiling, amazed at the axiom he’d never heard before. “It is what it is,” he repeated. “It sure is.”

Chapter 3: Revealing Truths

Daniel was singing to himself. Jack stood just outside the man's quarters on the base, watching him without him noticing. He took a moment to make a critical assessment of his improved appearance. It had only been three weeks, and one week at the base. He'd filled out a bit in the face and neck. His hands weren't as thin. The hair though? He wouldn't cut it and had only had the ends trimmed. It was a darker reddish-brown now, maybe because he hadn't been out in the sun. Plus, it had been overcast from the day they'd beamed down. At present, he had it in a pony tail and covered by a green bandana. He almost looked like the man Jack had met seven years ago, except a bit older, and with one glaring difference: this Daniel was left-handed.

He sat on the bed, drawing on the digital tablet that Sam had given him. His Daniel had known how to draw but it had never been as much of an interest as it was for this Daniel. To his Daniel, drawing had been a

Second Wind

means to an end. This one saw it as something else, as a focusing tool as well as a pleasurable activity. Jack then took a moment to listen to the song he was singing.

“... all my childish fears. And if you have to leave, I wish that you would just leave, 'cause your presence still lingers here, and it won't leave me alone. These wounds won't ...”

Jack knew that song from somewhere. Was Daniel singing that song on purpose, or was it just something rattling around in his head? It was a bit of a downer, regardless, even if the tune was pleasant. Aside from that, he was surprised by how well Daniel could sing. The sound of it made things stir and he swallowed and pushed it aside. He was about to open his mouth, alert Daniel to his presence, make him blush for having heard him singing, then tease him about the reason for singing in the first place, but instead, Jack took another moment to look at the walls of his quarters, decorated with print-outs of the digital drawings he did on the tablet. Most were artistic renderings of the pictures taken of local structures found a few miles away. They

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were thousands of years old and had been decorated with alien writings. He'd found the pictures the survey team had made from the rubble of stones and had been copying them, arranging them like a jigsaw puzzle on the wall.

When asked why he wanted to draw these images, he'd said, *"I don't know. There's just something here that's bugging me. Something vaguely familiar, but I can't remember. I'm not actually a member of the SGC so I can't access the database or go see the ruins, so I'm just working on it for my own ... satisfaction, I guess."*

"How'd you get the pics?" Jack had asked.

"One of the scientists. He said if I wanted something to do, I could study them. And ..." He'd gestured at the wall. *"I'm studying."*

Jack hadn't seen anything wrong with the answer, either. And Daniel was right. He wasn't an officially sanctioned civilian. He technically shouldn't be on the base because he wasn't a member of the SGC. But the circumstances were special—you couldn't very well

Second Wind

ditch the guy who came aboard the ship via that blasted mirror, which in Jack's opinion belonged in a cement grave somewhere. Or at least a high security warehouse like the other two they'd found. He hadn't even wanted it on the ship, but Hammond had insisted that it be taken to another galaxy, so its present location was in a newly-built crate. Perhaps the next jackass who tried to come over would see it boarded up and dial elsewhere. Not that Daniel was a jackass, or that it had been his doing.

But Jack also believed in destiny, and fate, and that people were where they were for a reason, even if the only person who knew why was god. Or the universe. Same thing, in his mind. It wasn't fair, either. Why did the bad things have to happen? He was all for learning lessons, but there was some stuff that was beyond the pale. He'd had this discussion with new Daniel and the man's answer had been aggravating. *"You can't have good without evil, light without dark. The universe requires balance."* It was aggravating because old Daniel would have said the same thing.

Second Wind

And as far as fate went, was it possible that their better halves were now together in some other form? Realm? Leaving the living to ... what? There hadn't been any discussion between them about personal feelings that were inevitable because Daniel was still 'sick' and would be in recovery for quite a while, and the sad part there was that there was no licensed psychologist at the base able to properly deal with PTSS. A huge oversight, and one Jack planned to fix when they went back home. For now, Daniel needed to gain weight, put on muscle, heal from wounds no one but Carmichael had seen, and decompress from the extreme trauma he'd been through. All Jack could do was have Carmichael brush up on psychology because Daniel didn't trust anyone else.

And then there was the fallout when they got home, and Jack was worried about how it would play out. Where could Daniel go? He was dead, for all intents and purposes. They couldn't just *resurrect* him. That's not how things went. He had no papers, no history, no formal education that would get him hired at the SGC. The best argument Jack had, however, was that neither

did Teal'c. So he'd work it out with Hammond and the brass one way or another.

"You're lost in thought," Daniel said, staring at him with a curious look on his face.

Jack blinked and took a step inside his room. "Just going over your situation in my head. For when we get home. And ..." He made an aery gesture at Daniel's head and body. "Giving you a critical eye. You're sure you're gonna keep those tresses?"

Daniel covered his head with both arms and groaned, then dropped them and stared at him. "Will you stop saying that?" he asked, wrinkling his nose. "I don't need you reassigning my gender."

"Is that the roundabout way of saying *tresses* only applies to girls?"

Daniel rolled his eyes and returned to drawing with the stylus. "I guess." He drew a little more, then did a slow double take of Jack. "You're hovering," he said, putting aside the tablet. "What's up?"

Jack did the internal argument one more time. It took mere seconds. It consisted of, *Do I start this conversation or do I wait? If I wait, for how long?* Because the truth was, given how busy Carmichael was, he'd decided to play amateur psychologist. She'd been right. He was the best person for the job. At least until they got home. "I've got some free time. Come take a walk with me."

Daniel's brows went up. He hadn't spent any decent amount of time with Jack since arriving on the base. Just meal times in the mess hall. "Yeah, sure." He looked down at himself, realizing he was still in his underwear, which consisted of a t-shirt and boxers. "Um, step outside while I get dressed."

Jack frowned, puzzled. "I'm seeing you in your underwear at this very moment. Defeats the purpose of stepping outside, doesn't it? You can always avoid this nonsense in the future by keeping your door closed or by getting dressed before leaving it open." Daniel sighed and didn't budge. Jack shook his head and stepped out, closing the door. "You're very weird, Daniel."

Second Wind

“I’m gonna change into briefs,” he said through the door.

“Well you could’ve ... never mind. Hurry up.”

Daniel grinned to himself and opened the small closet to change. He took down the plain olive drab fatigues, and after putting on the trousers and buckling them up, he opened the door. “Okay, come back in.” He sat down on the bed to put on his socks and combat boots. He liked the black suede that was now standard issue. The old shiny leather versions were harder to break in. “Where’re we going?”

“Just around. I need to walk,” Jack said, and when Daniel frowned at him, he sighed. “Fine. I was gonna take a walk around the lake and have a look at our greenhouses. Figured you could use the exercise.”

“Yeah, okay,” Daniel repeated. He was an old hat with boots and they were laced up rather quickly. Ten months of torture didn’t negate the six years living as a member of SG-1. Pulling on the fatigue shirt and buttoning it up, he felt self-conscious because Jack was

staring at his hair. Again. Maybe he *should* cut it, but the moment he did, he'd literally cut all ties to his old universe. To the old Jack. He wasn't ready. He grabbed his cane that Carmichael had given him for the dizzy spells he was still experiencing. He thought it was attributed to his condition but she thought otherwise. It had to be inner ear. Trouble was, she didn't have the PT section of her hospital properly put together and a therapist could set him right. So he had to wait until they returned to Earth.

"Damn pain in the ass," he said as he gestured for Jack to leave first.

"Better to have it and not need it," Jack said, in the tone of one reciting a sacred mantra.

"Ah huh," Daniel said, following him out and shutting the door. "That axiom is supposedly meant for guns and condoms, isn't it?" Jack snorted out some laughter, making him smile. He added, "Although technically-speaking, aren't guns and condoms related?"

Second Wind

Jack gave him an appraising smile. “Did you have that dry wit before?”

Daniel had a feeling Jack had left something out of that question, judging by the interrogative frown and turning away. Out of deference of their ongoing happy mood as a start to the day, he skipped over it. “I did, actually.” He would have added something else, but it would’ve been about the old Jack and he’d had enough with comparing the two. They were, in his estimation, identical. Was it mad that Jack’s mere presence somehow helped instead of hindered?

Was it mad that he was afraid to tell him how badly scarred his psyche really was? To go from semi-pacifist to happy murderer was only one traumatic event away from happening. He knew he was broken that way, not just sexually. Here he was, however, able to make Jack smile. But something, somewhere, somehow, was going to make him snap. And he had a feeling it would happen the moment he saw the nice version of the devil—waiting for him in the SGC’s infirmary. He had to try very hard to overcome the fear when the meeting eventually happened.

Second Wind

Jack looked over at him, observing the frown of concentration on Daniel's face as they walked. He was worried about something. "Penny for your thoughts," he said.

"Hay penny, maybe," Daniel said before he could stop himself. Jack hated it when he knocked himself down. He held up a hand, stalling the impending scold. "Sorry, I forgot."

Jack sighed. "Guess it's better out than in."

Daniel snorted. "Like bodily fluids."

"Ew," Jack said, brows wrinkling, even though it really hadn't bothered him.

They exited the main quarters wing and headed down the dirt road created for easier travel between the main buildings and the myriad of greenhouses two hundred yards to the right of the lake. Daniel looked around, making sure no one was within earshot, and for a second, he had no idea why he was doing it. Then he just blurted it out there. He put a hand on Jack's arm.

Second Wind

“Jack, I don’t want to leave.”

“Why?” Jack asked, touching his arm in return. It was the first time the Daniel had touched him outside the infirmary. “This is going to be a colony, Daniel. Earth’s first. Protected by the Asgard. I don’t have the patience to run a colony. And we’re too far away from Teal’c’s and Carter’s family. The Tok’ra don’t even know this base is here.”

“What galaxy are we in?”

“Orilla. New home of the Asgard.”

Daniel froze. “The Replicators, Jack. They’ll—”

Jack held up a hand. “Taken care of, Daniel. They finally figured out what that Reece robot did in creating them and were able to get ahead of their ... evolution. Carter explained it was like a virus, and I have no idea what she and Thor were talking about.” He then winced and admitted, “Actually, I wasn’t paying attention. I wanted the bottom line, not the long division.”

Second Wind

Daniel snorted, amused, but it quickly faded as he resumed his preoccupation about meeting Frazier Fraiser. The panic rising inside him had him imagining ways of escaping, to avoid meeting her at all. He thought of stealing a dialing code and using it to go through the gate and escape. At present, a person needed a code to open the iris and use the DHD. Sam had set it up. Could he get her to ... No. He couldn't.

Jack touched his shoulder, making him stop and turn to him. "What's going on in that head of yours?" Daniel tugged at Jack's shirt sleeve and continued walking. Jack frowned, watching him create distance. He sighed and caught up with him with just a few long strides. "Out with it."

"I ... don't want to see her."

"Who, Fraiser?"

Daniel nodded. "I'm afraid of her. I haven't met her, and I'm afraid."

"She's not the one from your reality."

Second Wind

“No, but the trauma her evil twin caused is ... was ... she really did a number on ... me. And when I see this reality’s Fraiser, different spelling or not, I ...” He stopped and gave Jack a long, hard look. “Promise me something then.”

“If I can.”

“No, I need an absolute promise, Jack.”

Jack stared back, weighing the pros and cons of getting Hammond pissed off at him. Fuck it. This was Daniel.

“Fine. You have it. What am I promising?”

“To stay by my side while I’m in that infirmary. Or whenever she’s nearby, no matter what. And to get Hammond to agree to my not ever being in the same room with her, alone.”

“She won’t harm you, Dan—”

“No!” Daniel said, eyes flashing angrily, but he kept his voice low so he wouldn’t alarm anyone within possible earshot. “You don’t *get it!* I’m not afraid that *she’ll* do something to *me*. I’m afraid *I’ll* do something to *her*.”

Second Wind

Jack's eyes widened. "Oh."

"I'm deadly serious, Jack. Fear causes people to do things out of their immediate control and I don't trust myself." He saw the alarm on Jack's face, but more than that, he saw doubt and disbelief. For that reason, he plunged ahead because it needed saying. He had to get it out. As Jack had said, *better out than in*. "That creature, that demon in the other universe. She, *it*, you don't know what she did. What she put me through. And I'm not even going there, so don't ask. My point is that I used to be someone who'd feel guilt at having to shoot a Jaffa. I used to feel guilt at harming any other creature, for that matter. But after her fucking mindless, brutal, sadistic criminal acts ..."

He took a deep breath. "Now that I'm away from her, the stronger I get. And I don't trust myself. I mean, I'm pretty sure I'm cognizant enough to stop myself. But there's a part of me that doesn't want to, and given how I feel about the other one, it makes me sick to my stomach. But I just want ..."

Second Wind

Like a litany of feelings past, Jack said, “You want revenge and you can’t get it, so you’re afraid you’ll take the next best thing and it’s this world’s copycat.” Daniel stared. “How’d I do?”

“How’d you ...?” Daniel asked. “I mean, you’re half right, but still. How?”

Jack bit his lips together. “When I mentioned Iraq?” Daniel nodded. “Same deal. Different circumstances. Didn’t get the chance for payback. All I got was the chance to get away, to live another day. Once upon a time, my team worked with a team of Russians. They went to the wall in order to obey orders exactly as written and they got two of my guys killed because they wouldn’t bend and adapt. So if you ever wonder why I can’t stand Russians, that’s why.” Daniel opened his mouth and Jack held up a hand, silencing him. “My *point* is that I felt a strong need to strangle the next Russian I met, even though they weren’t responsible for the death of two members of my team. So I get it, Daniel. I really do. So what you have to do is ...” Get a grip, he thought, and then immediately hated himself for it.

Second Wind

Daniel swallowed, bracing for the look he expected to get. “Thanks, I always wondered. The thing is, I don’t have guilt about these feelings, and I should.” He paused, then said very slowly and deliberately, “I can kill her, murder her, and feel nothing but cold satisfaction.” There. There was the look. He swallowed. “I know it’s bad. I’m sorry. So I need you to promise me that you’ll keep me from being alone with her until ... I don’t know. I get it through my head that she’s not ... *her*.”

Jack stared at him, nodded, then took his arm. He led Daniel left, toward the other side of the lake, not the greenhouses.

“Where’re we going?” Daniel asked, removing his arm from Jack’s hand, though he continued to walk at his side.

“See those shaded trees and the two benches and table?” Jack asked. He pointed to an area with the planet’s version of elm and maple trees.

“Yeah.”

Second Wind

“We’re gonna go there, sit down, and hash out your feelings about this,” Jack said. He planned on asking the questions. Getting it all out in one go. Or as much as Daniel could manage and do it by releasing all those fears. Whatever Daniel needed to get rid of the poison in his head, it had to be exorcised, like a demon.

After they got there, Jack had him sit down on one bench and he sat down across from him. “Okay. We’re gonna get all this poison out of your system. First leg of that is talking. Getting all of the shit that happened out in the open. Exposed to the light, if you like. Darkness doesn’t like that.”

Daniel blinked. “Iraq was that bad, I take it. You didn’t go over *everything*, and I didn’t push because I understood why not.”

Jack only nodded. “Release what you’re comfortable with. I don’t need every detail. That’s where the second leg of this comes in. The plan is to physically purge it. Running. Boxing. Martial art training, if you’d like Teal’c to teach you. It has to be grueling, like trying

Second Wind

to sweat out toxins, because emotionally, that's the point."

Daniel frowned in confusion. "I don't see how that second leg helps the first."

"Because you'll be talking about it while exercising. It's works wonders when boxing or hitting the bag."

"Not if I'm boxing a real person," Daniel countered. "I'm not as weak as I was, but I could hurt someone. And I don't want to box, because when talking about that stuff, I'll want to puke, then scream, then kill whoever is making me relive that shit."

"And *that*," Jack said, pointing at Daniel's chest, then head, "is exactly what I'm talking about. You need to purge it. And you won't kill me."

Daniel stared hard at him. "*What?*" he asked, stunned. "You?"

"Well who the hell else?"

"This is crazy."

Second Wind

Jack stared. “Is it? Which is crazier? Asking me to guard you so you won’t kill a woman you’ve never met? Or working out all your hatred before we go back to Earth?”

Daniel made a face. “I hate you.”

“No you don’t. You just don’t like being given a better alternative than going to jail and staying in a cage for the rest of your life.”

Daniel stared at the ground. “Once upon a time, it was me offering alternatives.”

“Yeah?” Jack asked as he got up and sat down next to him, resuming the same position. “Who?”

“You,” Daniel said automatically. “I mean, the other you.”

Jack laced his fingers together. It made him think about how much he missed his fingerless gloves. “Why?”

“Ba’al,” Daniel said.

Jack frowned. “Ba’al?”

Second Wind

“He ... you ...” Daniel made a growling sound. “*You* and Teal’c got captured behind enemy lines, thanks to an asshole Tok’ra who lied about the mission. Ba’al tortured you. We got you out of there. Teal’c used his kel’no’reem to balance his chi, or whatever the Jaffa version is, I forget, but you couldn’t do that. What you did want to do ...”

“Let me guess,” Jack said. “I wanted to go after the sonofabitch.”

Daniel nodded slowly. “Pretty much.”

Jack rubbed his hands together. “And what did you do?”

“Dragged you to a boxing gym and forced you to work it out by hitting me.”

Jack raised a brow. “You’re joking.”

“It worked.”

Jack gave him a wary look. “Exactly how did that work?”

Second Wind

Daniel nodded. "I put on a lot of padding. Then I wore one of these throat gadgets that makes you sound like a Goa'uld. Then I goaded you. Over and over."

Jack scowled. "I could've killed you, Daniel."

"No," Daniel said. "And I never said I didn't hit you back. Plus I knew how to box, *know* how to box, for real, and he didn't."

Jack's brows went up into his hairline. "*No shit?*"

Daniel nodded seriously. "No shit."

"Huh."

The way he said it made Daniel look at him carefully. "Let me guess. You know how, too."

Jack nodded slowly. "Guess it's gonna be a helluva fight. We'll both need lots of padding."

Daniel shook his head. "I can't."

"Why not?"

Second Wind

“Because I’m not capable of doing that to you. He was different because he needed it. You don’t.”

“I can goad pretty well, Daniel.”

“Not this,” Daniel said very quietly. “This is different. The sort of trauma I went through ...”

Jack regarded him, trying to understand what he meant.

“The type of torture, you mean,” he prompted.

Daniel swallowed. “Yes. It’s not, it’s not something you can push a person into a rage because it would re-traumatize them. Do you understand?”

Jack felt a chill down his spine. “I ... think so.”

“When I pushed him in the ring, goaded him about Ba’al, it was to get him to admit how much Ba’al hurt him, which he wouldn’t admit to. It’s not the same thing here. I can tell you what she did. What her jackbooted thugs did on her orders. I *know* the pain she caused. You saw how I reacted. But to goad me about it?” He swallowed. “I don’t want to end up hating *you* or wanting *you* dead.”

Second Wind

Jack's spine now went cold. "What exactly happened?"

"You want to talk about that now? Here?" Daniel asked, turning to him. "I thought—"

"I changed my mind. What I wanted to do won't work. But you need to get the poison out of your system. I can't guard you twenty-four seven, Daniel."

Daniel got up, rubbing his hand on his hips, then making fists. He turned to Jack, then turned away and took a few steps. "C'mon. I don't ... let's go talk where no one will hear. Or see."

Jack frowned with worry. "I know a place. But ... what if you fall apart like that day in the infirmary? I don't even have a paper bag for you to breathe in."

"Just ... I don't know. Wing it."

Jack's eyes widened. "That's a stupid plan."

Daniel lowered his voice again. "I can't talk about it and not react. I can't be around others. I'll ..." He started to shake and hated it.

Second Wind

“Hey, hey,” Jack said, getting up and going to him. He put his arms around him. “C’mon then. But if you have a fit or something ... I don’t like it.”

“Then slap me or punch me.”

“I’m not gonna do that.”

“Just don’t kiss me,” Daniel said as they walked.

Jack flashed on that moment in the infirmary when he’d kissed him. It had seemed the thing to do and had been as natural to him as breathing. The solution had worked, as he’d somehow known it would. Would he dare to do such a thing again? *Could* he? A *chaste* kiss? Jack felt the attraction as easily. He could fall in love all over again. It wasn’t hard to care about him, because he was who he was. Plus, he saw the love there in his eyes. Once Daniel was healed, though, then what happened between them? Would they continue on, as a couple? Would they split up? If they were destined to be together that is? Just the thought made Jack’s stomach flutter uneasily and he decided to take his own

Second Wind

advice. A minute at a time. Or more like one day at a time.

“Where are we going?” Daniel asked several minutes later as they walked to the left, further and further away from the lake.

“There,” Jack said.

Daniel frowned, not understanding. Jack pointed at a section of land that seemed to be split by small creeks. He followed the water as it moved uphill. “I don’t get it.”

“It’s just this general area, Daniel. Choose a spot to sit down.”

Daniel looked around him and walked to an evergreen and sat down against its base between two large roots. “This’ll do.”

Jack looked around, shrugged, and said, “It might now be far enough away if you don’t want people to hear you.”

Second Wind

Daniel sighed. “Why didn’t you just grab an ATV?”

“They’re being used at the moment.”

“Well, that’s awesome,” Daniel said dryly. “How about you ferry some horses next time. That’ll give the place a real colony feel.”

Jack had no idea whether Daniel was kidding or not. “I’ll add that to the list,” he said with the same heavy sarcasm as Daniel had used. He sat down next to him and pulled a flask from his side pocket. “Here. Water.”

Daniel took it with a look of chagrin. “Why didn’t we get provisions?”

“Because we were originally going to go to the greenhouses, which have provisions. And fresh snacks.”

“And then you made a detour.”

Jack jogged his brows. “Yeah, so ... my fault.”

Daniel handed back the flask. “I’m not blaming you. But why didn’t you just say that this is what you wanted

Second Wind

to do instead of making up something about touring greenhouses?”

“Because I wasn’t sure. I was, as you said, winging it.”

Jack dug into the other pocket and pulled out a baggie of dried apple slices. He held it out but Daniel declined. He took one himself and nibbled on it. It wasn’t great, but it was something to eat that wasn’t too sweet. They were quiet for a while and he could see Daniel tensing up a bit. He tended to flick the nails of his thumb and ring finger against each other. It didn’t matter which hand.

“What happened when you were brought back home from Chulak?” he finally asked quietly.

Daniel swallowed. “I’ll take that apple slice,” he said, but when Jack gave it to him, he used it to pick at, gouging it with thumbnail marks. He was quiet for a few minutes, then said very slowly, “I was raped.”

Jack closed his eyes and sighed. When he opened them, Daniel was looking away. “By Jaffa?”

Second Wind

Daniel shook his head and looked at the water running in the creek. “Rape is a tool of war and it’s not just women who suffer. I was dragged into a warehouse in ... Denver, I think. Doesn’t matter. I was separated from other prisoners and that collar was put on me. I was then questioned for ...” He swallowed again. “Several weeks. It was by members of that Blackwater mercenary force that the president used.” His hands began to shake a bit and he buried them in his armpits, making fists. “They beat me for a while. Whipped. Then used the pain stick. With that collar on, the pain was intensified. What a few of them loved best was to rape you while they stuck you with that stick. Said it turned your body into a vibrator.”

Horror filled Jack and he covered his mouth with his hand. He swallowed hard as he watched the tears flow down Daniel’s cheeks though there was no sign of those tears in his voice. Instead, Daniel spoke in monotone.

“It became routine. I had to work a cornfield for a week, which saved me from the abuse, but then *she* sent for me. And for the next several months, I became her favorite plaything. She’d question me. Wanted to

Second Wind

know where we went on missions. And I wouldn't tell her, so she'd use this miniature pain stick that ..." He brought his knees up to his chest, feet tucked in firmly. "She liked pain. She would invent new things. I wasn't the only one, so I got a rest once in a while. I ... almost bled to death once." Suddenly the tears clogged his throat.

"Imagine being violated by a serial killer," he said thickly and gave Jack a wild, intensely heartbreaking stare.

Jack stared, horrified, as Daniel's voice changed. It turned gravelly as he held back the rage and seemed to yank the words out like thorns.

"Jack," he managed, and then the emotion flooded into his voice. "I can't get aroused anymore." The sobs began. "Not without getting sick to my stomach." He buried his head under his arms and began to sob more fully. Abruptly, he started kicking the tree roots with the heels of his boots. "I'm sick! Broken! I can't ever be a man! How the fucking hell am I supposed to ever have a normal fucking relationship with you?" he bellowed, and began coughing, following it up with

Second Wind

vicious kicking at the roots. It became so violent that his back dug into the tree bark, tearing it off. *His shirt began to shred.*

Frightened, Jack yanked him away from the tree, across the roots, and into his arms. Daniel tried to push him away but Jack held him tightly, rocking him as he screamed and struggled in rage, and tears fell down his own face as he, too, cried. For him, and for his own loss.

...

A few days later, they were sitting in one of the vegetable greenhouses, plucking Chinese peapods from one of the raised beds to put in canvas sacks. Others were harvesting their own beds of lettuce, radishes, carrots, onions, and other stock vegetables. Since their own bed of peas was set a little further away from the others, Jack asked in a low tone, "How's your back?"

Second Wind

“Better,” Daniel said, and made an effort to control the blush of embarrassment. “Doc Carmichael was livid when I finally asked her for muscle relaxers.”

“I did warn you,” Jack said, giving him an understanding half-smile. “Don’t keep things from her while you’re under her care.”

Daniel nodded, then winced as he looked down at Jack’s legs. He couldn’t see them through the fatigues, but he knew there were black and blue half-moon marks made by the heels of his boots. “Um. How’re your bruises?”

“Negligible,” Jack said. Truth was, he was still reeling from the revelation about the depth of Daniel’s trauma. He wanted so much to kiss him, make love to him, but it wasn’t possible. What he *could* do was find someone who could help him heal, to separate the memories from the physical reactions. In a minor way, he understood how he felt. After escaping his Iraqi prison, it had taken him over a year to feel normal again. To be able to make love to his wife had taken longer and he’d spent most of that time focusing on Charlie. Then ...

Second Wind

Jack shuddered and shook off the memory.

Daniel looked over, noticing. “What’s wrong?”

Jack took a deep breath and finally told him every detail about what had happened in Iraq, and how bad it had been after coming home. “It’s not as bad as what you’re going through, but I get it. I *know*. And it took a while to climb out of that hole.”

“How long?” Daniel asked.

Jack cringed. “Over a year.” At the horrified look on Daniel’s face, he was nearly overcome by the urge to pull him into his arms. “I’m sorry, Danny.”

Somehow, the revelation took a backseat to being called by that nickname. He let out a choking laugh and sniffed back the more negative emotions. “Danny.” He half-laughed again. “Neither you have ever called me that before.”

“Yeah?” Jack asked, surprised himself because it had just slipped out without conscious thought.

Second Wind

“Truthfully?” Daniel raised a brow. “It just came out. It wasn’t on purpose.”

“Huh,” Daniel grunted. He picked up the full sack and tied it off, then opened another and set it between them on the table. He looked calm and collected, but he was hiding the inner turmoil. “Jack?”

“What?” Jack asked as he moved around the table to get at the plants from that side.

“On the ship. When I tried committing suicide?”

Jack stopped what he was doing and stared back, remembering the terror that had gripped him. “I remember.”

Daniel took a deep breath. “What I told you, about getting sick whenever I ... uh, well, that was why.” He set bean pods in the sack and leaned on the table, bowing his head. He took a few more deep breaths. “I ... don’t trust myself not to fall into that hole again. Not yet.”

Second Wind

Jack's eyes widened and he came around the table and put a hand on Daniel's shoulder and pushed a bit, forcing him to straighten and look at him. "How can we put a stop to that? Keep you from wanting it?"

Daniel half-laughed, but it was sour. He turned around and leaned against the table, gripping the edges tightly. "I don't have a fucking clue," he said quietly. "But I can see myself succumbing to the despair. I can feel that knot, that hole in my stomach. In my heart." He sighed heavily and turned around, reaching for bean pods to remove and place in the bag. "I don't know how to stop it."

"Would it help if I told you that sex didn't matter to me?"

"No," Daniel said, letting out another laugh as he shot Jack a doubtful look. "Because I wouldn't believe you."

Jack let out a disgusted snort. "Worth a try."

"You were my husband, you know," Daniel suddenly revealed.

Second Wind

Jack's eyes widened to saucers. "We were *married*?"
Daniel nodded. "How long?"

"Uh, well," Daniel laughed nervously, worried about what Jack would think. "We got married right after Shau're died."

Jack blinked at him. "*Right* after?"

Daniel nodded. "We'd been seeing each other from day one, Jack. I mean, right after she was taken." When Jack didn't say anything, Daniel sighed. "Don't judge."

"I'm not. I just thought you loved Shau're."

"I did. But I was also in love with you. I realized it after you ... uh ... he ... left me on Abydos."

Jack's mouth dropped open. "Are you serious?"

"Will you quit asking me that?" Daniel asked, rolling his eyes.

Jack frowned, embarrassed. "I ..." He frowned even more, staring into the peas, thinking. "Holy shit," he

Second Wind

whispered. “Do you think *he* was too? My ... sorry.” Jack made a face. “The old Daniel?”

Daniel raised a brow as he kept his attention on the peas. “If he and I are anything alike, then I’m quite certain he was.”

After a long silent minute, Jack said, “Wow.”

Daniel gave him a sad smile. “Yeah, I know. But we ... it just ... we just ...”

“How did that happen?”

Daniel cleared his throat. “Uh, I can’t. Not now. Another time, Jack, when I’m healthier.” He looked up and met his eyes. “Is that okay?”

Jack nodded soberly. “Whatever you want.”

More than curious, Daniel asked, “Isn’t marriage done here? I mean, between guys?” Despite his physical and mental conditioning, a sense of doom wanted to intrude upon his mind.

“Sure,” Jack said. “It’s just not a thing in the military. We *can*, but there are still too many homophobes, so gay men are *discouraged*. Many have left the service because of it. Frankly, I think the phobic atmosphere is tolerated in order to get that result. But then, it’s been a few years and people have gotten more used to the idea.”

“Would you ...” Daniel began, but paused.

“Get married?” Jack asked. Daniel nodded. Jack shook his head. “There’s only one man I want to marry and he ... you ...” Jack frowned, confused. “If I asked?”

“Yes,” Daniel said, blushing hotly. “I just don’t see the point, since I can’t ... you know.”

“Love doesn’t need sex,” Jack put out there.

“I’m sorry, but it does.” Daniel stopped and rested a hand on the table as flattened his other hand over his stomach, pushing in. He held his breath and turned away, expecting to hurl all over floor. He felt Jack close in behind him and he panicked. “No, stay away.” He breathed shallowly, carefully, and thought of cold

Second Wind

water. Imagined it flowing over him, cleansing away all thought. The nausea vanished and he turned back around and gave Jack a look of sadness. “I’m so fucked. No pun intended.”

Jack thought of something and laughed sadly. “If ever there was a need to think of sex between us as boring ...”

Daniel shared in the light joke, letting out a sad laugh. “Right?”

They were silent for a minute and Jack reran the entire conversation in his head and what had just happened. What had just been revealed. “Uh, Daniel?”

“Yeah?” Daniel asked. And he looked embarrassed.

“Did we just have a conversation about getting married? I mean ...” His mouth just dropped open and he shook his head. “Are we getting carried away because we’re just so happy to be around each other given that they’re not here anymore.”

Second Wind

“No argument from me,” Daniel with a sigh of relief.

“Wish it was different.”

“Me, too.”

“So, at the very least, we can say for sure that we’re friends?” Jack teased. He gave Daniel that devastatingly gorgeous lopsided grin.

Daniel’s mouth turned up at the ends. “Friends.”

..

On the way to another greenhouse, which held the citrus crops, they met up with Sam and Teal’c heading their way.

“Hey, Daniel. Sir,” Sam greeted, her eyes on Daniel.

“How’re you doing?”

Daniel almost lied. Almost. “Comes and goes. The fears, I mean.” He gestured at Jack. “We were talking

Second Wind

about active ways for me to purge the crap, but goading me in boxing isn't the way." He shook his arms at his sides. "But I need to do *something*."

"I have a suggestion, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said.

"Yeah?" Daniel asked. He and Jack turned around, deciding to walk with the duo back to the base complex.

"I have begun classes on the Chulak forms of Tai Chi and Kung Fu. You are welcome to join."

"Thanks, Teal'c," Daniel said, "but I'm not ready to be around a crowd, even if that's what I do every day during breakfast, lunch, and dinner. A class is more personal, and would invite questions I'm not ready to answer. And I already harbor enough anger. It doesn't need to be misplaced, on accident of course."

"Then perhaps you could join me in meditation, as your counterpart did before you. We could also arrange gym time separately, to spar. Did you learn any martial arts from time in your universe?"

Second Wind

Daniel nodded. “A little. But it’s boxing that I know how to do.”

Teal’c’s eyebrow went up. “Truly?”

“Yep.”

“We could do that instead, if you desire.”

Daniel glanced at Jack, then answered, “Sure. As long as you don’t provoke me.”

“Explain.”

“Well, stop here a second,” Daniel began, and he faced Teal’c about six feet in distance and turned his body slightly. He put up his hand in loose fists. “For example, if we’re boxing ...” He began to dodge and weave, and Teal’c became amused and shadowed him.

Sam looked at Jack and he quickly shook his head, grinning, and crossed his arms. “Watch,” he mouthed. She crossed her arms as well and watched.

Daniel moved off the gravel and onto the grass and Teal’c followed. They weren’t affecting boxing moves

Second Wind

any longer, but faced each other. “You know what kickboxing is?”

Teal’c was surprised. “Indeed.”

“That’s part of what I know. So let’s say we’re doing that.” He began to bounce on the pads of his feet, though it was a little more difficult in boots and on the grass. He moved back and forth, pretending Teal’c was faking moves at his head. “And you started to goad me.” He suddenly stopped. “If you said something wrong, without meaning to, I don’t know that I wouldn’t automatically react due to the strong emotion.” He sighed. “Like I told Jack. I don’t want to end up hating you for saying things, no matter how well-intentioned.”

“I see,” Teal’c said. He and Daniel moved back on the gravel and the quartet continued on. “Perhaps it would be best to set verbal communication aside. It is not necessary when training.”

Daniel nodded. “Except when you’re teaching.”

“Perhaps,” Teal’c said. “But I do believe you would benefit by it, simply by toning the muscles you need to

Second Wind

rebuild. No contact is necessary, and truthfully, in your current condition, it would be hazardous to your help.”

Daniel winced. “Thanks, Teal’c. And I agree. So. Wanna set it up?”

*No one knows what it's like
To be the bad man
To be the sad man
Behind blue eyes
And no one knows what it's like
To be hated
To be faded to telling only lies
But my dreams they aren't as empty
As my conscience seems to be
I have hours, only lonely*

*My love is vengeance
That's never free*

Chapter 4: Coming Home

Jack stood in General Hammond's office instead of taking the offered seat. He fidgeted behind the chair and kept looking through the window to the Briefing Room. Teal'c and Carter waited, looking anxious. All three of them were feeling antsy, worrying about their new, and yet somehow old, friend, Doctor Daniel Jackson. He'd remained on the ship, waiting to hear Hammond's verdict about accepting him on the base as an alien contractor. Like Teal'c.

"You know how crazy this sounds?" Hammond asked him.

"Yeah," Jack said, threading fingers through his hair. "But remember when we had that visit from alternate Carter and Kowalsky?"

Hammond nodded, but gave Jack a puzzled look. "What's your point?"

Second Wind

“How’d you feel about them? What if Kowalsky had stayed behind? Would it have been any different than accepting an alternate Daniel Jackson?”

Hammond frowned deeper. He stood up, pen in hand, tapping the desk. “I get what you’re saying. And I don’t have a problem with bringing him down. But the brass will want to see him the moment they receive my report. While there may not be an attack pending, they’ll want to hear other things that could be of use.”

Jack stared. “You haven’t sent it yet?”

“No,” Hammond said. “I want to talk to him myself.” He sat back down and eased back in his chair, studying Jack. “As for your argument. Let’s say we accept him as a visiting alien who takes over the job as Chief Linguist. Then what?”

“We move on.”

“How do we do that?” Hammond asked. “I was only his commanding officer, but I thought of Doctor Jackson as a friend. To see him, another him, again and accept him *as* Doctor Jackson ...”

Second Wind

Jack sighed. “I hate to answer a question with a question, but how’d we accept Teal’c? He was a stranger. This is different because we already know what to expect.”

Hammond’s brows rose. “First, Jack, we weren’t replacing Teal’c with a double from another universe. Second, and you’ll hate to hear this *but*, Teal’c also had valuable intel on a new enemy.”

“And Daniel has his knowledge of *alien* languages, no different than the guy who passed away eight and a half months ago.”

“Okay. For the sake of argument, let’s assume he’s allowed to stay. He comes to work for us. He’s assigned to SG-1 as a linguist.”

“Okay,” Jack said slowly, waiting.

“He can’t leave the base.”

Jack blinked. “Why not?”

“He has no history, never mind that he might spook people he knew off the base.”

Jack ticked off his fingers. “That’s easily explained away. Twin thing. But you know that Daniel didn’t have any family living because Nick is off playing anthropologist with Quazicoatl, that Mayan god, so there’s no one to make a fuss about the man coming back from the dead.”

Hammond’s lips twitched with the effort of not smiling. “Quetzalcoatl,” he corrected. When Jack just frowned at him, he moved on. “So where’s he supposed to live?”

Jack hesitated. “With me.”

Hammond pinched the bridge of his nose. “You know I give people a wide latitude about personal relationships because our jobs here are highly stressful. That said, please don’t tell me you’ve formed a relationship with this ... doppelganger.”

Second Wind

“He’s *not that*,” Jack argued. “And yes, I have. A *friendship*. If it becomes something else, that’s not your business, sir. No offense.”

“It *is* my business, Jack, and you know—”

“Sir—”

“Colonel!” Hammond said more forcefully.

Jack quieted and swallowed.

Hammond sighed. “I’m concerned about *you* too. Is it healthy to form a relationship with someone—”

“Who’s no different than the man we lost. I swear, General. The *only* difference that means anything is the trauma he’s gone through. And trust me, if you’d seen him, you’d know it isn’t an act or that he’s a danger to us. He’s Daniel Jackson, sir: doctor, linguist, friend. It doesn’t matter where he came from. Why can’t we accept him?”

Hammond sighed. “Jack, I’m sorry, but you’re letting your personal feelings interfere—”

Second Wind

“No, I’m ...” Jack shaded his eyes before nodding. “Fine. I’m personally involved. It doesn’t make my argument any less valid. But let me make one more point, which will in no way make any sense whatsoever?”

Hammond sighed and gestured. “Go ahead.”

“It feels like Daniel sent him to me.” When Hammond’s brows went up, Jack held up his hands. “Yes, I know *exactly* how that sounds. Exactly. And I still can’t shake the idea.”

Hammond shook his head, mystified, and gestured again, this time at the door. “Let’s talk to your teammates.”

Jack got up and he and the General entered the main room. Hammond got right to the point, without bothering to take seats at the table.

“Do the both of you concur with Colonel O’Neill’s opinion that this alternate Daniel Jackson is no different than the one who passed away over eight months ago?”

“Yes, sir,” Carter said, nodding readily.

Second Wind

Teal'c bowed his head once. "I concur. While there are subtle differences, physically, and if we set aside the severe trauma he has undergone, this Daniel Jackson is the same as the one we lost."

Hammond detected something interesting.

"Physically?" he asked, then looked at Jack, then Carter. "Is that a specific choice of words, Teal'c, or is it incidental?"

"This Daniel Jackson is left-handed," Teal'c said matter-of-factly.

Hammond's brows went up briefly. "Do either of you consider the trauma this man has experienced a possible security risk?"

"I do not," Teal'c said. "He sees us as friends, and we will help him with the healing he requires."

"I agree," Sam said. "He's trying very hard to overcome what's happened, but it's gonna take a professional."

Jack shoved his hands in his pockets. "You know what I think."

Second Wind

“Can any of you define the trauma?” Hammond asked.

“He’s suffering from severe PTSS, sir,” Jack said, wishing Hammond would just leave it at that.

“*Explain.*”

Jack winced. “Sir, maybe it’s best *he* tell you.”

“Jack,” Hammond said, losing his patience.

“Sir,” Carter put in. “I think the Colonel’s right. You should talk to him yourself.”

Hammond looked at Teal’c. “And?”

“I concur,” Teal’c said. “I do not believe it is our place. We do not, in fact, *know* what happened. We have only seen the results.”

“Very well. Colonel, bring him down.”

“Yes, sir.” Jack keyed his comm mic. “Rogers. Beam him down to the Briefing Room.”

“Yes, *sir*,” came the tinny response.

Second Wind

Daniel materialized in a white Asgard beam. He was still in the olive drab uniform, but he'd changed the bandana from plain olive to a forest BDU pattern.

When he had his bearings and saw General Hammond, he stared at the man with a bit of unexplainable shock. It was extremely surreal to him because the last time he'd seen this man ... He swallowed and held out his hand. Hammond shook it. "Good to meet you, sir."

"Welcome, Doctor Jackson. Let's have a seat everyone."

Sam and Teal'c took seats to Hammond's left, leaving Jack and Daniel on the right. Daniel glanced at Jack, then Sam and Teal'c, and though he tried to maintain some composure learned over the course of the last two months, he was still adjusting to seeing ghosts.

The General frowned. "What's wrong, son?"

Again, Daniel looked at Jack, Sam, and Teal'c, and after getting nods from them, he said, "I'm sorry, sir. It's like seeing a ghost."

Second Wind

“To be honest, he gave us the same look at first, too,” Jack put in.

“Why a ghost?” Hammond asked.

“Forgive me, sir,” Daniel drawled, feeling awkward. “But the last time I saw you, you’d been shot to death in this very office.”

“I beg your pardon?” Hammond asked, shocked. “What in the world ... What kind of situation were you in when you left your universe?”

Daniel quickly outlined the world he’d come from without going into detail about what he’d endured at the hands of Colonel Frazier. “That kind of world, sir.”

Hammond looked stunned. “No matter how many times you may repeat that state of existence for the Unites States of America, it’s nearly impossible to believe. But that’s neither here nor there. Colonel O’Neill said you’re suffering from PTSS. That’s a very serious condition. Those suffering from it have been known to exhibit violent behavior. I need reassurances from you that nothing like that will occur.”

Second Wind

Daniel nodded. “I give you my word,” he said, summoning the only trick he knew on making someone believe a lie. Basically: look innocent.

Hammond gave him a look that told him he’d made the wrong play. With his hands on the desk, the General raised his forefinger and pointed it Daniel. “I know that tactic, Doctor.”

Daniel sagged against the back of the chair and Jack once again placed a calming hand on his arm. “I’m sorry, sir,” he said to Hammond. “I have no violent feelings for anyone on board Andromeda or at the Omega base. Most of the people I knew as friends, loved ones, and acquaintances left the SGC through the stargate, and they either found rebel strongholds or were murdered in assaults by the Goa’uld. I’ll see their counterparts here and it’ll be like seeing ghosts. But there are others I was acquainted with, if not friends with, who turned traitor and worked for the fascists or the Goa’uld or both. Many of the SFs seemed to have no problem working for the other side. Some went to work for Blackwater, which was like the SS, I guess.”

Second Wind

“Blackwater? They’re a private security force owned by Erik Prince. That Blackwater?”

“Yes, sir.”

“To put your mind at ease, they’re not involved with the government. They were, many years ago.”

“I suggest that the FBI and CIA have them investigated. I guarantee they’ve been murdering and raping wherever they’re assigned.”

Hammond frowned deeply. “That’s a very serious charge, Doctor Jackson.”

“Maybe they aren’t as bad in this universe. All the same, they need to be investigated.”

“I’ll make a note of that. Please continue.”

“The SFs, along with several others, are likely to give me pause, but I have enough wherewithal to treat them like different people.” He glanced at Jack again for reassurance and got a nod. “There *is* someone here that I’m afraid of, even though we’ve never met.”

Second Wind

“Who’s that, Doctor?”

“Doctor Fraiser, sir.”

Hammond’s brows shot into his hairline. “What? What on god’s Earth has she done in your universe to make you afraid of her?”

“Doctor Mengele ring a bell, sir?” Jack instantly put in.

Hammond blinked. “Are you serious?” he asked.

“Doctor Jackson, I can assure you that she’s a decent human being here, and our Chief Medical Officer. More importantly, you will have no choice but to talk to her. You can’t get around that.”

Daniel closed his eyes for a moment. “Then could I have Jack, Sam, or Teal’c be at my side at all times while I’m in the infirmary?”

Hammond scowled, sitting forward. “Are you saying that you *are* violent?”

“I ... no, sir. It’s just that ... I’m extremely afraid of her. What her counterpart ... got up to was very chilling.”

Second Wind

Hammond regarded him for a minute. “Give me your word that you will do nothing to harm any of my people. Colonel O’Neill, Major Carter, and Teal’c cannot be with you twenty-four seven, and if I have to worry about you, you *will* have a security escort during your entire probationary time here.”

“Probation?” Jack asked.

The General gave him a quelling glance. “Doctor?”

Daniel had gone pale at the notion of an escort. “I believe that is enough to keep myself in close check, sir. The worse thing that can happen is that I’ll puke. Or hide. Nothing else.”

Hammond frowned at him. “That’s not very reassuring, Doctor.”

“I know that, sir,” Daniel said, rubbing his forehead.

“Are you feeling okay?” Hammond asked.

Daniel shook his head. “Headache. I’ll deal with it.”

Second Wind

The General looked at Jack, Sam, and Teal'c. "Give me your word you'll take precautions with him while in the infirmary."

"Already done," said Jack.

"You have it," Sam said.

"You have it," Teal'c said.

Hammond gave him a slight smile, then focused on Daniel. "My first command for you is that you seek professional help. Get it done today or tomorrow, by end of business. It's non-negotiable, Doctor."

Daniel nodded. "Yes, sir."

"I'll take responsibility, sir," Jack said.

"You already have," Hammond said sternly.

"Yes, sir."

"Getting scanned and examined is also non-negotiable," Hammond told Daniel. "It's the same for everyone who

Second Wind

returns from off-world. Every time. You'll do this before you do anything else. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. I remember."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I used to be a member of SG-1, sir. For nearly six years."

"I see." Hammond stood and everyone else stood with him. "I want you to take Doctor Jackson to the mess hall after you're cleared by Doctor Fraiser," he told Jack. "In the meantime, I'll call Doctor Fraiser and explain the situation so you don't give her a heart attack walking into the infirmary."

"Yes, sir," Jack said.

Hammond said to Daniel, "Have you been told that your counterpart had a very close friendship with Doctor Fraiser?"

Daniel's eyes widened as he looked around accusingly at his three potential teammates. "No, sir."

“Does it change anything?” Jack countered.

Daniel frowned back, then thought about it. Did it matter? Not to him. It would to her, he supposed, and he couldn't give a shit. It was wrong, and he knew it. She shouldn't be punished for something a counterpart did but the deep need was there nonetheless. “No,” he finally said. “It changes nothing.”

“I'm not sure that statement gives you credit,” Hammond said, frowning in concern. He rose from the table and when Daniel approached, he held out his hand. Daniel shook it. “Welcome to Earth, and to the SGC, Doctor Jackson.”

“Thank you, sir,” Daniel said.

They started to leave, but Hammond said, “Colonel, a word.”

Jack touched Daniel's elbow. “Hang tight. Don't worry.” He stepped into the office and Hammond closed the door nearly all the way and lowered his voice.

Second Wind

“Is it my imagination or is this man severely underweight?”

“Not your imagination, sir. He’s *gained* weight, if you can believe that, at the Omega base.”

Hammond’s eyes widened. “How did he get that way?”

Jack sighed. “You heard what he said. Starvation is a torture tool.” He thinned his mouth. “Speaks for itself.”

“It does, and so knowing that, please be careful with him, Jack,” Hammond said soberly. “Don’t get carried away and blind yourself to the help he needs over the help you want him to have. It’s going to be tough for him for a while, if what he said is true.”

Jack blinked. “Who in their right mind would make that up? You should’ve seen him, sir. It’s not some hallucination. The man was in chains and bruised head to toe and ... he wasn’t just afraid of us. He was terrified.”

Second Wind

Hammond sighed. “That poor man. I can’t even imagine.”

Jack gave him a pained smile. “I can. And on that note, sir, I’m gonna skedaddle.”

..

Moving through the double doors of the infirmary entrance, Daniel made fists to stop the shaking of his hands. It was only partially successful. To his left was the nurse’s station and hallways that led to other wards. To his right, the entrance to Ward 1. The nurses at the station adopted deer-in-headlights expressions as they stared at him. More people staring. Watching. *At least it’s a small group this time*, Daniel thought, but that didn’t give him any comfort.

“Colonel O’Neill?” asked one of the older nurses.

Second Wind

“Chapman,” Jack nodded. “Fraiser tell you we were coming? More accurately, that *he* was coming with us for our standard scan and checkup?”

The moment he saw her and took in her details, Daniel felt relaxed. She wore pink scrubs and a vest over the top that had bunnies all over it. It was something typically worn in a children’s ward, which made him wonder if she’d started her shift at the Academy hospital or the university hospital. In any case, because she wasn’t in uniform, he knew she must’ve been a civilian. A stethoscope was hung around her long neck and was partially covered by her grey-streaked black hair. When her blue eyes rested on him, they were calm, telling him that she’d had years of experience in putting on the mask that would calm anxious visitors—or startled nurses. In any case, he appreciated it.

“Hi,” he said, feeling twelve.

“Hi,” she said, gesturing at the entrance to Ward 1. To Jack, she said, “You guys know the drill. Have a seat on the beds and we’ll get your vitals while we wait for the CAT room to be cleared.”

Second Wind

“Another team?” Jack asked.

She nodded. “SG-4 is just finishing up.”

“Oy,” Jack said under his breath.

Daniel went to the last of the four beds, preferring to stay the hell out of the line of sight from the entrance, and the lookilooos who’d pass it on their way out. Chapman followed him, seeing to his vitals first. He watched as other nurses came in to do the same for his unofficial teammates. When Chapman put her hands on either side of his throat, however, he reared back in alarm, giving her a hard glare.

“I’m sorry, sir. This is standard,” she said. Her voice was soothing while there was worry in her eyes. Was it for him or herself, he wondered. “I’m checking for Goa’uld intrusion. There’s a typical swelling of lymph nodes.” He wanted to tell her that he wasn’t a goddamn snakehead, but he told himself to stop being an asshole and took a deep breath, forcing himself to relax. After that exam, she removed a tongue

Second Wind

depressor from her pocket and clicked on her pen light.
“Say ah.”

The memory of these exams was old, but it came back to him. She was checking for the tell-tale scar as well as abnormalities around the lymph nodes. Except he began to shake because her exam was taking too long. He knew why.

She narrowed her eyes and peered harder, then removed the depressor. “You have a discoloration at the top of the throat wall, in back. Do you know what could’ve caused that?”

He did. He swallowed and nodded. “I’m not going to explain. But you can be certain it has nothing to do with being in the control of a Goa’uld.”

“No, I’m certain of that,” she said, the worry in her eyes deepening. “It looks like an injury.”

As good an excuse as any since it was partially true.
“Yes, it is.”

“From what?” she asked.

Second Wind

He stared at her, then over her shoulder at Jack, in the next bed. “Jack?”

“What?”

“Do I have to answer that?”

She answered instead. “No. I’m just concerned, that’s all.”

Daniel nodded and he caught worry in Jack’s eyes now. He blinked a few times and looked at Chapman, then her bunny rabbits, twice. “Ever been waterboarded?” he asked. Her eyes went as round as saucers and he gave her a sick smile. She stepped back and asked him to bend his head down so she could examine the back of his neck. “Why?” he asked, as a flight or fight response was kicking in and he did his mental best to get it to go away.

“Security measure,” she said. “A Goa’uld doesn’t like to feel vulnerable, and when you’re bent over like that, a person is vulnerable.”

Second Wind

“I can imagine that quite accurately,” Daniel said, his mouth going dry. “Except, do you think I could just skip that bit?”

“Let him do it his way, Chapman,” Jack said from across the room at bed number one. “He’s not a snake. And you’ll find that out soon enough.”

She raised a brow at Daniel and he turned around and lifted his ponytail. Her eyes widened at the length of his hair. “Wow. That’s a head of hair, Doctor Jackson,” she said as she pulled down his collar.

She pressed something cold against nape of his neck and he shrank slightly from the touch. “It’s okay,” she said, putting his hair down.

He turned around, choking down a rush of fear even as his guard was let down a little, simply because of her compliment—and the fact that she’d called him Doctor. “What was that cold thing against my neck?”

“What’s the matter?” she asked, alarmed. She held up the penlight. “It was this. You know how when you put a flashlight against your skin, you can see just under it?”

Second Wind

He nodded. “Same thing. Sometimes the Goa’uld will have healed the scar on the outside but it’s a lot more difficult to hide the scarring of the tissue underneath. Unless they’ve gone through a sarcophagus, of course, but the point here is that if someone had just been attacked, there wouldn’t have been time to heal the inner tissue.”

“Oh.” He tried to fight it off but he could feel sweat gather over his forehead and above his upper lip. It trickled around the tiny bristles of his five o’clock shadow and he absently wiped at his upper lip with the back of his hand.

“Are you feeling ill?”

He nodded. His stomach was beginning to hurt as if he’d been hurling for half an hour. The nausea followed. “Nerves, I think.” He’d meant for it to be casual but his voice seemed to waver a little. He closed his eyes and wrapped both arms over his stomach.

“You have any pot?”

Second Wind

Jack straightened up, surprised. “What?” Behind him, Sam and Teal’c wore the same expression.

Chapman was equally surprised. “For what?”

“Nausea. Stress reduction.”

“I’m sorry, Doctor, but it’s federally prohibited, so we can’t stock or prescribe it.”

“Jeez, you guys are advanced in other areas but pot is still seen as a threat to the beer industry?” he asked.

She blinked a few times, frowning. “I never thought of it that way.”

“Yeah, well,” he said.

Jack came over to sit next to him. “Hey.”

Daniel frowned, trying to feel amused but his stomach wouldn’t let him. “Hey.”

“I’ll wait here with you. That okay?”

“Sure.”

Second Wind

Chapman looked confused, which was understandable. “Sorry, Chapman,” Jack said. “He’s been through a tough time. Came from a place where infirmaries weren’t run by decent people. He’s nervous.”

“I’m not nervous,” Daniel said. When she walked away, he admitted to Jack, “I’m terrified.”

“Because of Fraiser?”

“With a Z. Yes. Back in the other reality’s infirmary, I was ordered to have a so-called exam every month and I always refused.” He shuddered. “Every time, I was punished. I’m really, really not going to tell you why I refused, nor what the punishment was, so don’t ask, okay?”

“Okay,” Jack said, frowning in dismay.

Two beds over, Teal’c got up and walked over to sit on the bed Jack had vacated. Sam joined him. They seemed to be waiting. Daniel said, “What is it?”

“CAT scan waiting time,” Jack said, and Sam sighed.

Second Wind

“How long does it take?” Daniel asked.

“You didn’t have them before the world went to shit?” Jack asked.

“X-rays, not CAT scans.”

Teal’c said, “Nurse Chapman seemed very worried.”

“I got a bit nauseated,” Daniel said. “I had nasty experiences in this place.”

“Oh,” Sam drawled. “No wonder.” She frowned, thinking, then thumbed behind her. “I can go get my chessboard. Or a deck of cards.”

“I’ll pass, but thanks anyway,” Daniel said, pushing back on the bed until his back hit the wall.

“I’m in,” Jack said to her.

“Cool.”

Sam left and returned, and for the next half hour, the three members of SG-1 played a few rounds of Spades

Second Wind

while Daniel watched with amusement. It kept him entertained, and therefore well distracted.

A nurse came for Teal'c first. Then Sam. When they returned, Jack left, and Daniel hated the clinginess he felt because he wanted to go with him. Sam and Teal'c kept him company and Daniel had wondered why until he remembered his panicky request about not being left alone.

"No, we're fine," Sam said. "You didn't want to risk being alone, so we're staying."

"You have reports to do," Daniel said.

"We will remain by your side, Daniel Jackson."

Daniel smiled gently at him. "Thanks, Teal'c." A question hit him. "How're you feeling about all this? Me, I mean. My presence. You and he were pretty good friends, I'm guessing?" Teal'c bowed his head. "And now here I am. I already know how Sam and Jack feel but you've hardly said a few words about it."

Second Wind

“Oh you know how he is,” Sam said, giving Teal’c a grin. “Big ol’ softy doesn’t know how to express himself.”

Teal’c raised his chin. “I am very eloquent when I need to be, Major Carter.”

She grinned her head off, having succeeded in taunting him. He raised a brow at her, then regarded Daniel.

“I have to admit that I still find this situation extremely ... unusual. We were, as you said, good friends, and I will miss him deeply for the rest of my life. But having you here, in his stead, seems to me to be very calming. I am saddened and angry at all that you have suffered, and though you have not said much about it, I have seen great brutality as First Prime of Apophis and as an acolyte before that. I do indeed know what kind of horrors are visited upon men and women by what you Tau’ri call sadists. You have a term here that defines the type of person that comes close to those to whom I am referring.”

“What’s that?” Daniel asked warily, having felt chills down his spine, just because he was pretty sure that

Second Wind

Teal'c did indeed know what kind of horror he'd been through.

"Serial killers," Teal'c said. "I have made a great study of them on this planet. What many have done are not so very different from the horrors I have seen inflicted by the Goa'uld."

"Are you serious?" Sam asked in a low tone.

"I am. I should not be surprised, but I am."

"What, that humans can get up to some pretty nasty behavior?" Daniel asked.

"Indeed."

Daniel gave him a grim, closed-mouthed smile.

"Welcome to the real world of the Tau'ri. And what you've read, Teal'c, probably hasn't even scratched the surface. The human race has a long, bloody history of torture and madness, and those that *weren't* called serial killers were called *monsters* instead, and for all intents and purposes, there's very little that separates them."

Second Wind

Sam shuddered and hugged herself. “Ugh. Let’s talk about something else.”

At the ward entrance, Doctor *Fraiser* walked in, barely aware of them as she read from a clipboard. She turned over a page and kept reading. Sam and Teal’c rose to guard their friend and keep him from doing anything crazy, as he’d put it once.

Daniel felt the fight or flight response kick in again as his heart rate skyrocketed. Sweat beaded on his forehead and over his upper lip, negating the dried sheen that had been there before. A whine sat at the back of his throat and he held his breath to keep from issuing it. He kept telling himself that it wasn’t her and ran through a mental checklist of comparisons: brown hair in a French twist, bangs over her forehead, eye makeup, lipstick, a white coat over Air Force officer’s Class Bs. She had a pen over her left ear, a stethoscope around her neck, and a penlight in the pocket of her lab coat.

Daniel swallowed hard. She resembled *Frazier*, but she clearly *wasn’t*, and his mind was grasping onto that for dear life. Her face was softer. Kind. The only way he’d

Second Wind

know for certain would be to see her eyes, but he didn't want her to come close enough to have him check. Phantom pains tried to take over his senses and he clenched his jaw and made fists at his sides as he got to his feet.

"I can't," he began, eyes as round as saucers. "I can't. I can't. Send her away ... please." The entreaty carried the whine at the back of his throat and his stomach fluttered a bit. Sam and Teal'c glanced at him in alarm and Sam reached for him just as Fraiser looked up, then began to walk toward them.

"Well," she said.

Daniel didn't hear her. He heard the clicking of her heels as they came toward him. He clapped a hand over his mouth and dropped to the floor, grabbing the small trash can, and up came the little bit of food and coffee he'd had on the ship.

"What's wrong?" Fraiser said, rushing over in concern.

He heard her come nearer, heard the alarm in her voice, but her heels ...

Second Wind

He dry-heaved into the trash and eventually bile started coming up. “Stop it, dammit!” he ordered himself in a half-sob.

“Hey, Doc?” Jack said, rushing into the ward. “Come back this way. We need to have a chat.”

“I beg your pardon?” she asked, looking back and forth between the man on the floor, Jack, and Sam and Teal’c. “What’s going on?”

Jack ran over and got down on a knee, putting a hand on Daniel’s back. “I’m here.” Over his shoulder, he said, “Just give us a few minutes. Carter, could you take her aside and re-explain the situation to her. I know she’s not gonna like it but it can’t be helped.”

“*She* is standing right here,” Fraiser said, annoyed.

“Janet, c’mon,” Sam said.

Daniel heard the woman’s voice, much less tighter than the one he recognized, but it didn’t matter. He felt Jack rubbing his back and the fit subsided. He bowed his

Second Wind

head. “I’m such a coward,” he whispered to Jack. “I’m such a fucking coward. Look at me.”

“Stop it,” Jack chided. “Deep breath. Daniel, don’t argue. Deep breath.”

Daniel breathed in, breathed out. “I can’t,” he said tightly. “It’s not doing me any good. I taste puke. Makes it worse.” The beads of sweat cooled over his brows and he covered his mouth with his hand.

“Thanks.”

“Sure.”

“I need to brush,” he said, trying to sound normal. “And to refill my system with coffee.” He sagged onto his haunches.

Jack waited until Daniel got to his feet and kept him from sitting back down. “Let’s get your CAT scan done, then we’ll get you cleaned up and refilled.”

Daniel gave him a look. “Can’t I just skip the CAT scan?”

Second Wind

“I don’t think so. They don’t care if you were sick. Mandatory order means business. They’re more worried about snakeheads.”

“For good reason,” Daniel said shakily.

When he left the ward and didn’t see Fraiser anywhere, he relaxed slightly. The scan was over quickly enough and it didn’t faze him in the least. But when he and Jack came back down the hall to the nurse’s station, Sam was at the entrance to the ward with Fraiser.

“No,” Daniel said, backing into Jack.

“Try,” Jack said. “Just give her a chance.”

“Where’s Teal’c?” Daniel asked. He needed his big friend near him, and recognizing that surprised him. Wasn’t Jack enough? No. Because he wanted Jack and Sam there, too.

“Nearby,” Jack said. “By the double doors.”

Second Wind

Waves of fear swept over Daniel and he began to shake. He tried like hell to get control of himself and grabbed Jack's hand.

"Daniel," Jack said, pulling his hand away. "That won't fly, no matter how badly you're freaking out."

Daniel turned to him, about to say something nasty as a comparison, but he bit it back. He looked away and took hesitant steps toward Sam and *Fraiser*. "Shit."

"I'm not going anywhere," Jack said. "She's not the evil twin, and I can't believe I just said that."

Daniel gave him a weak smile but it faded quickly. He and Jack approached Sam and Fraiser and stopped three feet away. Daniel was startled to discover that the doctor looked nervous, and if he wasn't imagining it, she also looked worried. She was looking him over as if she was concerned ... *for him*. It was the same look he'd last seen on Carmichael before leaving Omega. She held her hands together in front of her and her thumbs were circling each other. A common nervous gesture. Unless it was something she always did. The doctor

Second Wind

held out her hand. It wasn't straight out, nor was it too low. A natural gesture. Nothing suspicious.

"Hello," she said. "I'm Janet Fraiser. You are obviously Daniel Jackson, but a much different one."

Jack nudged him and Daniel realized he'd been staring. Into her eyes. Warm, affectionate. They somehow belonged to someone else entirely. This wasn't Frazier's counterpart at all. This was *Fraiser*. He took a step and carefully whispered his hand into hers. He was shaking badly now, fighting the urge to flee. She squeezed his hand just a tiny bit firmly, then placed her other hand on top of his, patting it before she let his hand go.

"It's okay, Doctor Jackson," she said soothingly, in a quiet tone. One that harpy bitch could never have managed. "I won't hurt you. Ever. You have my word. And if the people around you haven't been lying to my face all this time, they'll vouch for me." She held out a hand toward the ward. "Would you like to have a seat on the bed here? We can have a chat. With your friends, of course."

Second Wind

“Okay,” Daniel managed. He moved his feet, and it suddenly felt odd. As if one of his nightmares had been replaced by something with a foggy shroud over it. Dreamlike, he thought. He watched her go to the second bed and lean against it, facing the first one. He approached the bed and leaned against it. It might look like he was copying her, but he did it so he wasn’t at a disadvantage. If he needed to run, he’d be ready. He glanced to his left. He’d have to run through Jack and Sam and around Teal’c. Would they stop him? Would they really make him stay there and talk to her if he didn’t want to? An ornery side to him wanted to test it and he shut it down.

There was still a bit of weakness in his legs, accompanied by slight nausea. He began to wonder how many women on the base were forced into wearing heels. He began to count the likely number while hating the fact that the military was still operating under sexist bullshit. At final count, he figured about sixty-five. Sixty-five pairs of heels he’d have to put up with and it horrified him. Fraiser rolled a stool over and

Second Wind

sat down. He took a deep breath. “Your name is different,” he said. “And the spelling.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Her name was Janetta,” he said. She made a face. He liked that.

“That was my grandmother’s name.” Fraiser took a breath and to Daniel, she seemed to be studying his eyes. “How long were you held captive?”

He wanted to correct her because her question made it sound like he’d just been in a prison. “Under a year.”

She sighed, frowning a bit. She removed the penlight from her breast pocket. “Will you permit me a look into your eyes?” she asked.

“Are you going to touch me?” he asked, leaning back a little, even though she hadn’t come any closer.

“I don’t have to, no,” she said slowly. “That’s apparently a problem?”

Second Wind

He felt like screaming, *“Of course it’s a problem, you stupid bitch! Can’t you see I’m shaking hard enough to fall apart?”* Instead, he nodded, then forced himself to say, “I’m sorry, but it’s just too much right now.”

“Okay. I won’t touch. May I perform some eye movement tests?”

“Why?”

“Because you seem to have a tremor in your right eye. It might indicate an inner ear imbalance.”

“He does?” Jack asked, bending over.

“Colonel,” she admonished.

“Sorry.”

Daniel blinked at him, then at her. “Okay.”

She scooted forward and held the penlight about eight inches in front of his right eye. “Stare straight ahead.”

“Okay.”

Second Wind

She shone the light just off both eyes, then flicked it several times over each one. He blinked repeatedly when she was done, then squeezed his eyes shut and pinched the bridge of his nose for a few long seconds to refocus.

“Headaches?” Fraiser asked.

He nodded, then blinked several times to try and get rid of the red, then green, dots that floated in the air like holographic imprints.

“Do you have dizzy spells?”

He nodded again.

She pointed at the ceiling. “Look up.”

Daniel did, and immediately grabbed Jack’s arm as the right side of his world spun a bit.

“Dizzy?”

He nodded.

“How is it when you lie down?”

Second Wind

“The room spins when I look to the right.”

She nodded this time and dropped her hands to her lap.

“Did you sustain any head injuries while being held hostage?”

“Why?” he asked, hating that she’d brought it up, simply because he was forced to recall them, even for a second.

“Because if your dizziness isn’t caused by inner ear imbalance, then it might be TBI.”

“TBI,” he repeated. “Traumatic brain injury?”

“Yes, and it’s more common than people think. Any hard knock on the head can put a person at risk, and concussions are a form of TBI.”

“I’ve had two diagnosed concussions. I got them after getting cracked unconscious by a staff weapon and then a baton. Like a police baton.”

She frowned. “Did they cause unconsciousness?”

“No,” he said.

Second Wind

She nodded and pointed her penlight vertically, light casting off the ceiling. “Watch the pen,” she said, moving it slowly from left to right to back to left again, over and over. He started to get a little dizzy and leaned back and closed his eyes as he grimaced. She didn’t stop the pen from moving. “Watch the pen. I know it’s making you dizzy. I’m sorry. But this is a test.”

In all that time, he hadn’t let Jack go, and he refused to do it now. He sighed and watched the pen. “I don’t see the point.”

She stopped and put the pen down. “Have you heard about a new method of handling traumatic events called EMDR, or Eye Movement and Desensitization Reprocessing?” she asked, not looking at anyone but Daniel.

He shook his head. “What is it?”

“It’s a method of getting the brain to diffuse trauma by focusing on happier memories or feelings. You watch a moving object, you listen to sounds. Then you’re asked

Second Wind

questions about a particularly traumatic event and as you describe the heart of what is causing the issue you're dealing with, you're asked to stop, then think of something happy or pleasant. Your mind is abruptly redirected."

He frowned.

"I know it doesn't sound like much, but there's been remarkable progress with it. I'd like you to see a therapist who specializes in this method." She pulled out a card and handed it to him. "Nurse Chapman will help you set up the appointment, as well as two others for an eye exam and a visit with a physical therapist to get your inner ear back in balance. Chapman?"

"Ma'am," the nurse called back.

"He'll need a few appointments. May I have his chart?"

"Ma'am."

Chapman brought his chart over and Fraiser spent a few minutes writing on one page, then two more, and finally wrote on two script sheets. She handed them to Daniel.

Second Wind

“Chapman here’ll get you your appointments. When you’ve completed them, I’ll see you after. The day after tomorrow, most likely.”

He stared at her, hard. He was astonished to find that he no longer saw the other one. He saw *this* woman. Her voice was different. Her eyes were different. Her manner was radically different. And, of course, her appearance. While there was still some part of her that made him afraid, he was pretty sure he could trust himself around her. Maybe eighty-percent sure. That twenty percent was the part of him that was on edge, ready to bolt at a moment’s notice. Just in case. There was no logical reason for it, but then, PTSS wasn’t logical, was it?

“What is it, Doctor Jackson?” she asked.

It was then that he noticed a sadness in her. Her eyes. The sound of her question. He remembered Hammond telling him that his other self had been good friends with her, which, of course, went the other way, didn’t it? He told himself to see things from her perspective, as he had been used to doing a million years ago. She

clearly missed him, and she was probably having a hard time seeing *him*. But instead of betraying any emotion, she'd put on her professional hat in order to put him at ease. That was so Jan ... et. Daniel startled himself by the observation.

"Daniel?" Jack asked.

Daniel blinked. "Sorry," he said, coming out of his introspection. "I'm so sorry this is upsetting you. You were good friends with him, I'm told."

She held up her wall well. "Yes, that's right."

"I'm sorry I reacted like I did." He made a face. "I'm pretty sure I'm not over it. Yet." She fidgeted as she got up, and he was reading body language correctly, she was controlling the impulse to touch him. She was someone who did that. As a doctor. As a person. As a medical professional, it would have been a good bedside manner trait, wouldn't it? But his other self had been her friend, so it was more than that. How long before he was able to let her hug him? He swallowed, knowing it might be a while.

Second Wind

“You’ll be fine, if you’re anything like he was. I’m not saying it’ll be easy, or that it’ll ever go away, but you’ll win in the end, Daniel.”

“Wait, Doc,” Jack said. She paused. “Doc Carmichael gave Daniel muscle relaxants.”

“Why?” she asked, showing concern.

“He bruised his back and had spasms for a little while.”

“You still need them?” she asked Daniel. He shook his head. “Do you have them with you?” she asked. Again, he shook his head. “When you can, turn in the prescription to the pharmacy so they can dispose of them safely.” She looked at her watch. “I’ve got other patients. And I’ll need Chapman to get more bloodwork done.”

“More? Can’t you just use the results on board the Andromeda?”

Fraiser shook her head. “Sorry, I need a fresh look.” She departed without another word and went to talk to the nurses.

Second Wind

The sound of her heels made him both nauseous and dizzy and he sat down on the stool Fraiser had vacated.

“Daniel?” Jack asked.

“Heels,” Daniel said, swallowing hard, and then began to take deep breaths.

“Count to ten on each breath, Daniel,” Jack told him.

“It’s better for some reason.”

Daniel nodded and did so, but the nausea didn’t go away. Chapman appeared with implements of torture ... also known as the blood drawing equipment, and she withdrew scripts and an appointment card from a pocket.

“Here. Now, I’ll get this done as painlessly and quickly as possible.”

Daniel nodded again, and at least there was only a bit of fear now compared to two months and three weeks ago. He had to get rid of that goddamn fear. It was starting to piss him off. When she was done, he said,

Second Wind

“Thanks,” and raised the scripts and card. “And thanks.”

“Sure,” she said, leaving.

“Well, time for lunch,” Jack said, eyeing Daniel. “Think you can force something down? With the state you’re in, you can’t skip meals.”

“I ... yeah, maybe,” he said, grimacing at the taste in his mouth and throat. He covered his lips with a hand.

“Gross. I need to brush my teeth, but I left the stuff you gave me aboard Andromeda.”

“It’s already been beamed down,” Jack said.

“To where?”

“The VIP room you’ll be staying in temporarily.”

“Temporarily? Until ...?”

Jack shrugged and started for the exit. “C’mon, kids. Let’s get Daniel cleaned up—”

“Jack, for cryin’ —”

Second Wind

“and then lunch awaits. The all those fun reports await writing. Except for Daniel, who gets to draw or whatever till dinner.”

“Thanks, Jack,” Daniel sighed, and the man gave him that devastatingly gorgeous smile he remembered and his eyes grew hot.

..

For Daniel, the surreal feeling continued, intensifying as the team turned down a corridor that led to the mess hall. The SFs didn't pay him much *direct* attention, but he saw them watching his progress down the corridors anyway. A creepiness began to crawl up and down his spine and goosebumps formed on his forearms. Normally, no one would have noticed, but he'd rolled up the sleeves of his fatigue shirt. As the four of them entered the elevator, Jack stared at his arm as he pressed the button for the appropriate floor.

Second Wind

“What’s walked over your grave?” he asked, unthinking.

“What?” Daniel asked, startled.

“Goosebumps?” Jack said.

“No, what was that saying?”

“Haven’t you ever heard that?” Sam asked him.

Daniel shook his head and Teal’c agreed. “I have not heard that particular phrase, either. What does it mean?”

Sam and Jack exchanged frowns. “Well ...” she began, but paused. “It’s when something spooks you for no discernible reason.”

“But ...” Daniel said, then shook his head. “No, skip that. You’re right. I’m spooked.”

“Why?” Jack asked.

“It’s the SFs,” Daniel said in a tone that only Jack, Sam, and Teal’c would hear. “I don’t trust them.”

Second Wind

“They aren’t the same people, Daniel,” Jack told him.

“Yes, thank you, I know that,” Daniel snapped. “Doesn’t change a thing.” When Jack gave him widened eyes, he raised a hand in apology and received a nod in reply.

They reached the mess hall and Daniel nearly groaned out loud in relief because it was only half full and the far left corner table was free. “Over there,” he said, but then factored in the six people ahead of them and sighed inwardly. Once he moved down the buffet line to grab a tray, silverware, and glasses or mugs, he discovered the blessed aroma of coffee and grabbed two more mugs. Jack gave him an eyebrow and Daniel shrugged. He copied Sam, taking blue Jell-O, and though he took the plate of fried chicken and mashed potatoes, his stomach felt too fluttery. When they were finished in line, Daniel was relieved to find that the back table was still available and he quickly went around the table to take the seat that would leave his back to the wall. That way, he could easily see anyone coming their way.

Second Wind

Jack recognized the behavior. He'd learned it while serving in Special Ops and the habit was hard to break, even when going to a familiar restaurant in town. He watched in amusement as Daniel fixed his mugs of coffee with packets of sugar and powdered cream.

"Get enough coffee?"

"Oh hell no," Daniel said, and he downed one mug in under thirty seconds while his friends were still seasoning their food.

"I take it you'll want a refill," Jack said sarcastically, but to his surprise, Daniel took him seriously.

"Sure," he said, and offered him his mug. "Could you get it for me?"

"Something wrong with your legs?" Jack asked, but as soon as the words were out of his mouth, he suspected there was a reason Daniel didn't want to get it himself. "You feeling overwhelmed around this many people?"

Second Wind

“Well, no, but it’s ...” He blinked a few times as he quickly looked behind Jack and to the right. “They’re staring. It’s unnerving.”

“Haven’t you ever been around people who stare at you?” Sam asked.

“Yes, but that’s during a lecture,” Daniel said to her. “But outside of one, or outside of a meeting? No. When’s the last time a bunch of people were staring at *you* except when you were giving a briefing or teaching at the Academy?”

Sam frowned, then looked over her shoulder. A few people had been looking over their shoulders and upon seeing her frown at them, they turned back around. “I see your point.”

Jack sighed. “I think Hammond’s gonna have to put out a mandatory notice via email to inform everyone to please show some damn respect and not stare.”

“Yeah, that’s likely,” Daniel sighing.

Second Wind

“Well,” Jack said, getting up and taking Daniel’s mug. He went to the coffee machine to refill it and mentally tried to formulate a proper request for Hammond to send out a base-wide notice.

“Colonel,” said another of the same rank as he moved around him and set his tray back on the serving line. “Is that who I think it is?”

“Yep. And he’s not a ghost,” Jack answered as he grabbed a handful of sugar and cream packets.

“Where’d he come from?”

“What’s the matter, Reynolds?” Jack asked dryly.

“Haven’t you read the mission reports on the quantum mirrors?”

“Yeah, but those’re locked up.”

“Not the one we had aboard the Andromeda,” Jack said, jogging his brows.

“Holy crap,” Reynolds said.

Second Wind

“Do me a favor?” Jack asked, and he didn’t keep his voice that low.

“Sure, Colonel.”

“Pass it along that he’s Daniel Jackson from another universe and he’s going to be staying here. And I would take it as a personal favor if people didn’t *stare*.”

“It’s hard not to,” Reynolds said.

“Yeah, I get that. Try it out anyway.”

“Sir,” Reynolds said with a nod and moved down the line.

Jack jogged his brows and wove his way back to their table. He set the mug down in front of Daniel and sat down. “That might help.”

“What?” Daniel said unhappily as men and women from other tables kept looking over their shoulders.

“I asked Colonel Reynolds to pass it alone that it would be appreciated if people didn’t stare.”

Second Wind

“Oh,” Daniel said, surprised. “Uh, thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

“So what about the SFs isn’t trustworthy?” Sam asked around a mouthful of blue gelatin.

Daniel took a spoonful of his own blue stuff first, then pushed it aside and stuck with his coffee.

“You are not hungry?” Teal’c asked, sitting across from him with a nearly overflowing tray of food.

Daniel grinned and offered his plate. “Take it.”

“No,” Jack said, pushing Daniel’s plate back down on his tray. “Eat. At least some of it. You can’t afford to go hungry, Daniel.”

“Except my stomach is a little ...” Daniel wagged his hand.

“O’Neill is right, Daniel Jackson. You must eat something.”

Second Wind

“Thanks, Teal’c,” Daniel said dryly. “And Teal’c? Don’t you think it’s about time you used your friends’ first names?” Teal’c seemed flummoxed by the question. He opened his mouth to answer but Daniel held up a hand. “I know, I know. You’re going to say that it’s disrespectful, right?”

“Indeed,” Teal’c said.

Daniel rolled his eyes, getting grins from Sam and Jack. She pointed a spoon at him, getting ready to talk, and he headed her off, too. “I know. SFs. But you heard me tell Hammond about the ones in the other universe. That’s why. They were the first to sign on to the new fascist regime. They betrayed Hammond without a second thought.”

“All of them?” Sam asked.

“There were some who defended him. They were just outnumbered.”

“That isn’t reassuring,” Jack said. “Do you remember any names?”

Second Wind

Daniel frowned, thinking, then shook his head. “I can give you a list later, but mostly, it’s mainly faces I remember. Aren’t they supposed to maintain a stoic post, like the Buckingham Palace guard?” Teal’c asked who they were and Daniel went into a long, involved explanation.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Jack said. “You can talk to them though. Not so much the palace guard.”

“That’s true.”

“You said the entire country was fascist,” Sam said.

“That was *before* the Goa’uld showed up?”

Daniel nodded. “Started in our third year as a team. It was subtle at first, then more bold.”

“Suddenly our non-war research division was eliminated and the science teams were disbanded unless they were mining for naquada and trinium.”

“But you were kept on,” Sam said. “Why?”

Second Wind

Daniel gave her a pained smile. “Because I’m a linguist and they needed translations to the tech they were stealing.” He sighed. “Then one day, the SG teams were replaced by those rogues who’d been in the Area 51 prison.”

“Maybourne’s guys?” Jack asked.

Daniel nodded. “A Senator Kinsey was responsible.” Jack growled in disgust. “Ah. You know him here, too?”

“A pain in the ass,” Jack said. “He’s already tried removing Hammond via blackmail.”

Daniel closed his eyes. “Happened during our first year. He tried shutting us down, but ...”

“What did they actually do?” Sam asked. “The SFs, I mean.”

“Because some of them killed the General, Sam. The rest did nothing.”

“Oh. Right.”

Second Wind

Daniel took his time taking a drink from his mug. “They blithely accepted the Nazi rule, and greeted that psycho bitch from hell with open arms. Makes me wary of the SFs here if they are even *slightly* the same people. If it were up to me, I’d have their allegiances tested.”

“That’d be difficult without a valid reason why,” Jack said.

“I know,” Daniel sighed.

“Was she already a member of the SGC?” Sam asked.
“Frazier.”

Daniel shook his head. “Not as CMO. Went back and forth between the hospital, the SGC, and the Pentagon. When the regime changed, she replaced Hammond.” Daniel was rather proud of himself for speaking so calmly about her. “Changed the SFs’ mission and made them part of the Reform Security Force.”

“Reform ...” Sam asked, then shook herself. “Oh, right. Was that what the SGC became? The Colorado Springs Auxiliary Reform?”

Second Wind

Daniel nodded over his mug. “How come you didn’t ask me these question before, when we were at the Omega base?”

Sam glanced at Jack, and he answered for her. “Because I told them to go easy on the questions until you got your sea legs. So to speak.”

“For two months?” Daniel asked. “I wasn’t *that* crazy, Jack.”

Jack wagged a hand and Daniel cringed. “Yes, you were. Well, no, not on the Omega base, just on the ship for that first week. But at Omega, you were pretty much frazzled. Your nerves were a mess. I thought it wouldn’t be a good idea to have you talk about that place without stressing you out, so I wanted to give you time to ...”

“Acclimate?” Daniel asked.

“That,” Jack said around a mouth of food.

Daniel nodded, thinking back to the first hours after transfer. His mind had been stuck in that universe. He

Second Wind

kept seeing the explosions, and the surprise on Frazier's face, along with her undercover Jaffa. After that, his world was all about getting used to not being under a constant threat of rape, torture, and inventive, sadistic methods of control. He'd admitted some things to Jack and he'd mentioned them as if speaking matter-of-factly, but that constant threat had been still there, to a degree, and the bad memories of Frazier had been brought to the forefront when he'd met *Fraiser*.

Normally, a man had a hard time even saying the word rape, never mind admitting to being a victim of it. It had become part of his life and now that it was over, he had tried to be pragmatic about it. It was the past. But seeing Fraiser had brought it all back. When it came time for a full physical, would it include a prostate exam? If he didn't want that exam but was told he had no choice, Daniel knew damn well that he would be re-traumatized, no matter how gentle the doctor would be. Nothing had even happened yet and he was wondering when the *assault* would begin.

Daniel had often prided himself on being able to see things pragmatically, but it was taking a backseat to

paranoia. He knew his self-image was at an all-time low, and it seemed to him that everyone could see that he'd been assaulted just by looking at him. Look, there's a guy who's been raped. Is he gay? Did he like it? How the hell did women put up with the disbelief? Was there a lesson in there for men? Or was he, like all the others, left to flounder without a lifeline? Jack had been there to—

“Daniel?” Jack asked.

Daniel jerked, torn from his depressing introspection.

“What?” he asked, wondering if he had missed something.

“You were lost in there somewhere,” Jack said.

Daniel nodded and sipped his coffee, and for a second, he looked past Sam and Teal’c, only to find that he was still being scrutinized. He closed his eyes and swallowed. “Can’t they just eat their fucking meals and leave?” he muttered into his coffee.

“Stop looking,” Jack said.

Second Wind

“How?” Daniel asked, scowling angrily. “I just happened to look past Sam and Teal’c. A typical sweep of the eyes. Everyone does it. You don’t even notice you’re doing it. Just like I didn’t. And then ... boom. There they are. The lookiloo brigade.” Sam snorted. He tried scowling at her, but the earnest look on her face, and how her snort of amusement was clearly not *at* him doused his fiery anger. “Sorry,” he said to Jack. “I’m being an asshole, aren’t I?”

“You’re on edge,” Jack said. “Can’t fault you for it. A year from now, if you’re still doing it, we’ll have a talk.”

Daniel rolled his eyes. “Point taken.”

“Lookiloo?” Teal’c asked.

Sam snorted again as Jack tried and failed to explain what it meant. “When you can’t look away from something,” she said, earning a mock-glare from her team leader. “It’s when people stare at a train wreck. Or a car wreck. People are curious, but they’re more curious than circumspect. Basically, it’s just plain rude.”

“Thank you, Carter. I think I could’ve handled that.”

Second Wind

“You tried to, sir,” she said, grinning.

“All right, so giving a definition caught me off guard. We should just give Teal’c a slang dictionary.” He paused. “Is there such a thing?”

“It’s called urban dictionary dot com, sir.”

Jack sighed. “A website isn’t helpful. I want a book.” He tapped the table several times. “A physical entity.”

“It *is* a physical entity, sir,” Sam argued. “You type in the address on your phone or computer, go there, look it up. It’s no different than opening a book.”

Jack grumbled. “I like paper.”

“A finite resource, sir.”

“Carter, for cryin’ out loud,” Jack went on. And so did the friendly argument.

Their banter made Daniel relax a bit. They were engaging in typical, every-day, random conversation. It was ironic that he couldn’t express how grateful he was for that normalcy without having them look at him

funny—and he was long past sick of getting such looks. He sighed inwardly, wishing he wouldn't turn everything into a negative. Maybe that would stop when he grew accustomed to his new life and threats would evaporate. But just how long that took would depend on his therapy. And exactly who the hell had the expertise to handle this sort of trauma? A part of him said rape trauma was universal, but not all rape was the same. One rape versus several deepens the trauma doesn't it? Aren't there layers of issues that aren't present in—

“Daniel?”

He looked up, realizing his name had been spoken a few times. “Sorry. Again.” He suddenly remembered that Carmichael had said something to him about Jack being the person to help him, but he couldn't help him through this. Jack was, unfortunately, part of his problem.

“What's goin' on?” Jack asked.

Second Wind

“Worrying,” Daniel said. “About ...” He blinked a few times, his eyes moving slightly in Sam’s and Teal’c’s direction. He couldn’t talk about physicals or therapy in front of them. Maybe in time, he thought, then dismissed that idea. “About ... stuff.”

“Try to put *stuff* aside and focus on getting food into your system. *Eat.*”

Daniel stared at the chicken and mashed potatoes. “They’re cold now.” He made a face, but only because what he’d said sounded like a pout.

Jack made a throaty growl. “Daniel, for cryin’ out loud.”

“Here,” Teal’c said, and held out a small branch of green grapes.

Daniel took them and popped one into his mouth. As he chewed, the hunger appeared and before he knew it, the grapes were gone. Jack nodded. “Teal’c?”

“Go ahead, O’Neill,” Teal’c said.

Second Wind

“No, I mean ...” He stared at Teal’s food, then shook his head. “Never mind.” He looked at Daniel. “Take the bull by the horns, Daniel. Get up, go to the display case with the fruits and deserts and get more grapes. Add some oranges and other stuff, too.”

Daniel wanted to protest, but he felt that it would make him look like a sulky child. He took a deep breath, muttered, “I hate you,” and purposely didn’t look at Jack afterward. In one fluid motion, he got up and headed down the aisle. He found himself peripherally watching the rows of tables as he kept his eye on the part of the buffet line that he needed to get to. He found he was absently counting. One row. Two rows. Three. Six rows later, he was free of them and had the urge to scream at himself for being stupid.

He knew why he hated being there. Being watched. Eyed. It was a full-on creepy feeling on the back of his neck, even as he went to the display, lifted the bottom window, and reached in to pick a bunch of grapes. They were the red ones instead of green, but he didn’t care. His stomach rumbled, out of both anxiety and hunger. He turned around to head back to the table when

Second Wind

someone behind him said, “I thought he was dead.” He found himself coming to a halt and looking over his shoulder. He stared at two men, toyed with the idea of saying, “Wishful thinking?” but dismissed it and turned forward. He headed back through the rows, counting as he did, but found that his mind left off at row three.

“What was that about?” Jack asked as Daniel retook his seat.

“Nothing. They’re seeing ghosts. I thought I’d answer them with sarcasm but I just decided it would be a waste of time.”

Jack sighed. “Yeah, I think a system-wide email or notice is in order.”

“I need to go somewhere and scream,” Daniel said suddenly before popping a grape in his mouth. His three friends looked at him, apparently puzzled. He tried to block the emotion, but their looks made him mad. He wondered why it was that they couldn’t understand why he’d want to scream. The Japanese did it all the time in order to vent stress. Damned good

Second Wind

idea, to his way of thinking. He'd figure out a way to get to the top of the mountain and just let loose. Unless he could find a soundproof room somewhere.

He ate the grapes slowly, ordering himself to take his time or his stomach would bitch. He looked up, finding their still-puzzled expressions, only they were looking a little guilty now. It was probably his imagination. What *wasn't* his imagination were the looks he was still getting from around the room and he popped three grapes in at once to stop himself from calling out, "I'm not the 'droid you're looking for!" The thought made him grin to himself and abruptly, his mood began to lighten a little. But only a little.

..

"Sir?" Sam said to Jack.

They'd forgotten that Daniel had needed to stop off at the pharmacy, so while he was at the pharmacy

Second Wind

window, waiting to get the proper forms done for a person who wasn't technically supposed to be there, she'd had an idea that she wanted to run by the Colonel.

"Carter?" Jack asked.

She pointed her head toward the exit, indicating she wanted to talk to him out of Daniel's earshot. "Teal'c?" The two men joined her.

"What's up?" Jack asked.

She glanced to her left, watching Daniel. "Sir, maybe it's just me but ..." She made a face. "Has Daniel had much physical contact with you or Carmichael or anyone outside of a touch on the arm or holding your hand for a second?"

Jack shifted uncomfortably. "I haven't done—"

She held up a hand. "No, I'm not implying anything untoward or intimate. What I'm talking about is a person's basic need for human contact. While we can

Second Wind

manage to go without it, we don't because we have friends, family—"

"Carter, what's your point?" Jack asked impatiently.

"I believe I know what Major Carter is trying to infer," Teal'c said. "That Daniel Jackson has been in need of basic contact. Yet, due to his past, he cannot seek it."

"That's partly correct," Sam said. "He grabbed your hand, sir. Then your sleeve. When he's stressed, I've noticed he reaches for you. Now, aside from the fact that he was involved with your counterpart, so it makes it natural that he'd seek you for comfort, I think it's a sign of something deeper. Maybe he's simply, or not so simply, missing the comfort we normally get. Hugs, for example."

"Carter, I'm not a hugger."

"With Daniel you were."

"That's different."

Second Wind

She sighed and bit her lips together. “My *point* is that we should, I don’t know, see if it will make him more at ease. I know a person’s traumas can make them shy away from contact, but I think it’s counterproductive, *if* they’re able to work to overcome it. So maybe we can help?”

“Maybe,” said Daniel. He’d heard Sam as he’d drawn closer. At first he’d started to get mad because they were talking about him while he was distracted, but he’d calmed down after listening to what she had to say. He gave her a hesitant, shy smile. “Thanks, Sam. I appreciate it. I *can* hug you three. It’s just that I’m not really someone who does that, apart from hellos and goodbyes.”

“We aren’t either,” Sam said, blushing a bit as she gestured at herself, Jack, and Teal’c. “I was just thinking that maybe there’s something to it, aside from the comfort or reassurance you seek when you’re in turmoil.”

He looked down at the small bag he held, then up into her eyes. “Yeah, maybe. We’ll just see how it goes, talk

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about it. I'm not sure *what* the point is, but maybe you're right, maybe you're not. Maybe it's something related." He gave her a lopsided grin that all three of his friends had never seen on him, and missed. "I'll bring it up with the doctor I'll see in ..." He pulled the card out of his pants. "Four days."

"Okay, now that that awkwardness is settled," Jack said, gesturing at the exit. "What was that thing about reports?"

..

After Sam and Teal'c took off, Jack escorted Daniel to the VIP room he had been assigned. "Think there's something to what Carter was saying?" Jack asked, well out of earshot of the SF down the hall.

"Maybe," Daniel said. "I have to think about it."

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Jack handed him his temporary ID which held the barcode needed to open doors and elevators. “You gonna be okay?” he asked as Daniel swiped the ID over the scanner. The door clicked open and Daniel went in, dropping his things on the foot of the bed.

“Yeah,” he said, turning to him. “You’re off to do those reports?”

Jack nodded, hand on the doorknob. “I’ll come get you for dinner. If you want any coffee or something else to drink, there’s a rec room two corridors over.”

He blanched a bit. “Thanks.”

“That bother you?” Jack asked. “Going alone?”

“Because of ... well. Me. I’m coming to the realization that being around personnel here isn’t a problem. It’s getting gawked at. I mean, you saw all those looks on the way here. Worse than the mess hall.”

Jack nodded. “I know. It’ll be like that for a while. No getting around it.” He grinned. “I’ll ask Hammond to send out an announcement.”

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Daniel looked at him, horrified. “Oh, I thought you were joking.”

Jack pursed his lips, thinking it over. “You know, it’s actually not a bad idea.”

“Heh,” Daniel said, feeling sick. He looked around, just in case a nightmare caused a midnight vomiting session but there was no attached bathroom. “Crap.”

“What?”

“Where’s the bathroom?”

Jack stepped out of the doorway and pointed. One door down on the right was a blue sign that indicated a unisex bathroom. “For the VIP rooms.” He pointed at the door past that. “That VIP room is empty, so you’ll have the bathroom all to yourself. Only you can use it with that key card there.”

“Swell,” Daniel said woodenly. “If I have to puke, I first have to open this door, have the presence of mind to grab the key card, open *that* door, and then make it to the toilet before I hurl all over the damn thing.” He

glanced through the door, not thrilled with the presence of the SFs down the corridor. They weren't too close, but he didn't like seeing them regardless. "I need a phone," he blurted out. "In case I need to hear a friendly voice for grounding."

Jack frowned. "Yeah, you do. Why didn't I think of that. Let's see. I think the PX sells smartphones. I'll go up top and get you one until you're assigned one specifically used by base personnel. Better than a Blackberry."

"I'm sorry. Smartphone?" Daniel began, then frowned. "That like a Blackberry?"

That surprised Jack. "Didn't you have those? In 2021?" he asked. Daniel shook his head. "Oh, well, don't go crazy all at once with it, like Teal'c did, although that was fun, watching him get addicted to a game app."

"App," Daniel said, thinking. "Hey, yeah, I think we did have smartphones, but they weren't called that." He rubbed at his forehead because he couldn't recall and

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trying to remember gave him another headache. “So, you can show me at dinner.”

“Good deal,” Jack said, and winced as he looked at his watch. “See you in a few hours.” He shut the door behind him.

Daniel was suddenly alone for the first time since they’d beamed down from the Andromeda. Andromeda. He vaguely remembered Jack saying something about a TV show. What had he been talking about? He pulled out his tablet, intending to distract himself with drawing. He plugged it in and sat on the bed to draw, but after only ten minutes, he set it aside and laid down.

He rubbed at his eyes, then recalled what Janet had said about his eyes and looked around for a mirror. There was one over the dresser but the light in the room was too dim. He grabbed the key card and went to the bathroom. He looked for a tremor in his eyes but found nothing. Sighing, he took that moment to shave, then shook out the bandana and brushed out his hair.

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Returning to his room, he put the bandana back on and laid down, thinking about people staring at him. In the mess hall, the corridors, the pharmacy, the ship, the Omega base. It was becoming a problem, wearing on his nerves, and he was afraid he'd lose his temper and shout at people for doing nothing wrong.

It wasn't their fault. What Jack and the others didn't know, nor would they ever know, was why he didn't like all the staring. It wasn't that different from *watching*. Eight months ago, people in the other universe had literally paid to be able to *watch* him, and the things he'd been forced to do. Or had done to him.

...

At dinner, Daniel stared at the biggest gift he'd ever gotten in his life: the smartphone Jack had given him. He was now properly distracted, and wasn't focusing on being stared at. He swiped through all sorts of settings and checked out app after app. He finally set it down to

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drink the third cup of coffee Jack had just set in front of him.

“You look tired,” Jack said. Daniel nodded. “Then eat,” he said, pointing his knife at his plate. “If you don’t, Fraiser will have you hooked up to an I.V.”

Daniel shuddered. “Point taken. Where’s Sam and Teal’c?”

“Teal’c’s gonna be late because he’s teaching a class and Carter went home to talk to her plants.”

Daniel smiled. “I remember she used to ...” The smile faded. “... do that.” He sighed and picked at the beef steak and gravy and mashed potatoes, then seasoned them and began to eat. He went back to the smartphone as he ate, and after a while, he realized Jack was watching him.

“Stop it, Jack.”

“Sorry, Daniel but ...”

Daniel sat back and gave him a hard look. “*What?*”

Second Wind

Jack gestured at him with his fork. “You’re not wearing *glasses*.”

“Of course I’m not. I used to. I had laser surgery just before I went to the Oriental Institute in Chicago ... which really needs to change its name.” He frowned. “Assuming that’s the name of the research and museum wing at the university of Chicago.”

“Why change the name?”

“Because you don’t say oriental anymore, Jack.”

Jack frowned. “You don’t?”

“Where have you been?” Daniel asked.

“With my head in the sand, apparently.” Jack sighed. “Never mind. Now I know.” He pointed again at Daniel’s eyes. “I kept thinking, all this time, that there was something else different about you. My head *really* hasn’t been in the game.”

“Wait. Something *else*?” Daniel asked, picking that up.

“What?”

“You said something *e/se* different. What else is?”

Jack pointed his own fork at his left hand. “You’re left-handed. He was right-handed.”

“I feel like a lab specimen,” Daniel murmured, and pushed his plate aside to dig into the chocolate pudding. “I *was* right-handed. Now I’m ambidextrous. Broke my hand when I was five so I learned to use my left for six weeks. That young, I guess I just decided to use both. I write and draw with my left and I do everything else with my right.”

“You don’t write like a typical left-hander,” Jack said, recalling the form at the pharmacy that Daniel had to fill out.

“What? Upside-down?” Daniel asked. “Do you know why some lefties write that way?”

“No, but you’re gonna tell me,” Jack grinned.

“Because they’re conformists,” Daniel said.

Jack blinked. “Ya lost me.”

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“When you’re learning to write in school, everyone’s paper is turned to the left because most people are right-handed. I turned the page to the right. My first grade teacher started to get on me about it until my mom came down and had a few words with her.”

Daniel smiled a bit at the memory.

“I never saw it like that,” Jack said thoughtfully. “But it fits you to a tee, you non-conformist you.”

Daniel rolled his eyes.

..

At his VIP room door, Jack said, “So you do everything else with your right hand?”

“If your mind is even in the same area code as something dirty,” Daniel growled at him, “let me remind you what happens when I get close to arousal.”

Second Wind

“And on that note, goodnight, Daniel.” He squeezed his shoulder and left, a Cheshire Cat grin on his face.

Daniel groaned and went inside, only just realizing that Jack had touched him. He spent the next hour teasing Jack via text messages, asking him if he’d given him a pseudo-hug.

Chapter 5: Phases

As Daniel headed up the curving staircase of the converted 1922 mansion, he still wore the olive drab fatigue trousers and a black t-shirt he'd been assigned. In the short amount of time spent at the SGC, getting civilian clothes hadn't been important. While Jack had told him on the way to the appointment that it was time to take him clothes shopping, it didn't do any good at the moment.

"But I appreciate it and I'll figure out a way to pay you back," Daniel had replied. Jack had rolled his eyes, and Daniel knew that, like his late husband, he wouldn't care about getting paid back. It didn't matter because Daniel paid his debts, even when the other person forgot about them.

At the top of the stairs was an old-fashioned sitting room with hallways that branched out on each side, bearing two doors apiece. He went to the first one on the right, as directed by Doctor Fraiser, and knocked.

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Instead of telling him to come in, a man about Jack's age and height answered the door. He looked very non-threatening. He had a round face with kind blue eyes, short brown hair, a beard and moustache that looked unfinished, and a slender build.

"Doctor Daniel Jackson?" the doctor asked, holding out his hand.

"Yes. Doctor William Palmer?" Daniel asked as they shook hands.

"That's me," he said. "Come on in."

Daniel surveyed the room quickly, determining points of egress, as well as ordinary facts. The furniture appeared to be as old as the house: clawfoot chairs with heavy leather upholstery, a clawfoot desk, made of mahogany, and refinished. There were old landscape paintings on the walls. They were bland and calming, and aimed to put patients at ease unless a patient found the outdoors a threat. There were vanity desks on opposite ends of the long, rectangular room.

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The far wall held two sets of wide Bay windows, multi-paned on the sides as well as on the straight windows that separated them. There were plants on small settees and hanging from the ceiling. All in all, a rather serene atmosphere, including the very pale yellow paint. He was glad it wasn't a medium green. It was an antiseptic color and there were too many bad memories associated with it. Sadly, most of the tile in the SGC bathrooms was the same color.

"You have any opinion on the decorating scheme?"
Doctor Palmer asked.

Daniel turned to him. "No. I mean, I like it. Very ..." He waved an aery hand. "Non-threatening." He gestured questioningly at the chairs in front of his desk and the doctor nodded and pointed with his pen. He was surprised that the doctor had accurately guessed what he was doing, but after a few more seconds of thought, the man probably had multiple patients who did the same thing. He waved a hand again. "Do many people do that?" he asked, sitting in the right-hand chair. "Examine the office?"

Second Wind

“Almost always,” the doctor said, and instead of sitting behind his desk, he chose to sit in the chair next to Daniel’s and turned it so he’d be facing him. “First things first. There was a sharing of information between your main primary care doctor, who is Doctor Janet Fraiser, and myself. She told me your symptoms and your background, but when it came to specifics about your traumas, she wasn’t free to share that information, particularly because it came second hand.”

Daniel nodded. Sam.

“Second thing is that I won’t be sharing any information about our sessions unless you give me permission to do so, and even then, it would be broad strokes, so no details.”

“What kind of information would you be sharing?”

“How you’re doing,” Palmer said. “I’m expected to report your progress on a weekly basis, and the *only* reason for that otherwise breach of ethics is due to the secret nature of the work and *where* you work. It’s

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unavoidable, and the government can pull this sort of thing at the drop of a hat and call it national security.”

Daniel gave him a small smile. “Which, I’m guessing, you don’t approve of?”

“No,” Palmer said on a sigh, “frankly, I don’t. I don’t appreciate having the health of my patients compromised based on erroneous judgments and nonsensical belief systems. And I don’t mean religious. Sometimes those at the top lose sight of the rights of those below them.”

“Yes, they do,” Daniel nodded. “So basically, when Doctor Fraiser calls and asks how I’m doing, you’ll let her know that I’m doing well, that there haven’t been any problems, or that if there are problems, you’ll tell her that, too.”

“I will tell her what I’ve always answered when asked by a person’s mother, father, priest, employer, lawyer, prosecutor, and primary care physician. Quote, ‘I am not at liberty to divulge my patients’ welfare. If he or

she is a danger to themselves or others, I will take steps.”

“Steps?” Daniel interrupted, eyes wide.

Doctor Palmer gave him a grim, sad smile. “If a patient has a psychotic break, then I would order an involuntary stay at our best facility. Seventy-two hours is the minimum, and patients generally need more than thirty days to recover from something that severe.”

“Right,” Daniel sighed, jogging his brows.

“Unless or until that becomes a factor, you are not authorized to have that information as long as the patient hasn’t given their consent to share it,’ unquote. And in your case, it would be ‘Doctor Jackson’s treatment is proceeding normally. Unless he gives me permission to elaborate, that is all I will tell you.’”

Daniel was relieved, but he frowned and said, “In the past, there was a shrink who ordered Doctor Fraiser to share our medical information with our commander of the base. We weren’t happy to hear that.”

Palmer gave him a displeased look. “Yes, I’m aware of that sort of thing. It’s a different thing entirely to deal with military regulations. If the psychiatrist was military—”

“He was.”

“—and the doctor was military—”

Daniel nodded.

“Then both are bound by regulations. For us, here, that doesn’t apply because I’m a civilian. I’m under no legal obligation to share any information with the military, regulations or no regulations.”

Daniel frowned. “You’re contracted, right? I used to be a Department of the Air Force civilian contractor. I had to abide by their regulations.”

“That doesn’t apply to the *civilian* medical profession, which is bound by an ethical code that overrides other regulations.” He gave him a rueful grin. “We’re like priests, only without the religious end of it. There are layers of involvement when it comes to the illegal

behavior of my patients. If you tell me that you're about to murder someone, but haven't done it yet, I'm not allowed to contact the police. I am, however, obligated to talk you out of it. If you tell me that you have committed the murder, then I am obligated to talk you into turning yourself in. Now, if you've become a multiple murderer, such as a serial killer, and you confess that to me, or I find out in another manner, then I have to risk censure or my license to practice in order to turn you in to the police."

Daniel nodded all throughout the doctor's recitation. "I understand. So let's be plain here. I give you permission to tell Doctor Fraiser how the treatments are progressing. I do *not* give you permission to give her details. For example, if I tell you about the type of assault that happened, I don't grant permission to divulge that information. It's no one's business but mine, and yours, as my therapist."

Doctor Palmer nodded. "Of course. I wouldn't divulge that information anyway, with or without your consent. Now, by the consent you've just orally given, but will have to be done in a sworn document, I will be able to

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tell her how well you're progressing. Good or bad. I won't elaborate. I can simply word it so that it sounds more than just good or bad."

Daniel snorted. "You sound like a lawyer."

"The medical profession deals with the same legal wording. It's annoying but true."

Daniel nodded.

Doctor Palmer said, "Now, let's talk about you, shall we? Do you have any conditions that can affect hand-eye coordination?"

"Hand-eye? I have a possible inner ear problem, but that doesn't involve hand to eye."

Doctor Palmer nodded. "Now, I have to do a MMPI assessment. Do you know what that is?"

"Psych test," Daniel said, nodding.

Doctor Palmer gave him a rueful grin. "Not precisely, but for all intents and purposes, that'll do. But to be more accurate, it's the Minnesota Multiphasic

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Personality Inventory. It's a psychological test that assesses personality traits and psychopathology and is primarily intended to test people who are suspected of having mental health or other clinical issues. Where you are concerned, it's appropriate, due the prolonged trauma you've suffered. It's also a test commonly given to patients suffering the aftermath of sexual assault."

"Right," Daniel said.

"So, I'll ask true-false questions. There are a lot of them, and they focus on specific areas of examination, and they include hypochondriasis, depression, hysteria, psychopathic deviate, masculine/feminine, paranoia, psychoasthenia, schizophrenia, hypomania, and social introversion. There are no right or wrong answers."

"Psychoasthenia?" Daniel asked, fully intrigued, but partially worried. He was afraid of what the test would reveal, but he also knew that he wasn't put together. He needed this help.

"The definition is a psychological disorder characterized by phobias, obsessions, compulsions, or excessive

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anxiety, but for this test, it looks for actions or thoughts that you are unable to resist, abnormal fears, difficulty in concentration, guilty feelings and thoughts, compulsive self-criticisms such as the compulsive need to put yourself down. Lastly, basic obsessive-compulsive behaviors that have developed due to the assaults and related trauma.”

“Wow.”

“Indeed,” Doctor Palmer said. “Let’s begin.”

..

After the questions were finished, Doctor Palmer set his clipboard on the desk and sat forward.

“What’s the verdict?” Daniel asked nervously. “Am I headed for the rubber room?”

Doctor Palmer grinned. “You have some problems, but you knew that, and they’re also standard for someone

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who's suffered prolonged trauma. And you know that, too. But it's designed mainly for me to be able to guide your treatment. Now, do me a favor." He reached for a penlight sitting on his desktop. Sitting back, he held it vertically at eye level. "Watch the pen, and tell me when you feel dizzy."

"Okay." Doctor Palmer moved it left and right, down and up. When he went up on Daniel's right, Daniel raised a hand as he blinked rapidly and squeezed the armrest with his left hand. "There." The doctor stood up and raised the pen upward enough that Daniel had to tip his head back. "There."

The doctor sat back down. "Sorry. Just confirming the inner ear issue. Did you have scans done to exclude other possible diagnoses?"

Daniel nodded. "Clear. No TBI or swelling."

"Are you scheduled to see a physical therapist to get the inner ear balanced?"

Again, Daniel nodded. "After I leave here. Why do you ask about that? Did someone say something?"

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“No, it’s a standard question from me because the work I do here is called Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.” He grinned, showing even, white teeth. “I know. It’s a mouthful. EMDR, for short. After we discuss the results of the MMPI, we’ll begin work on the EMDR.” He grinned. “Gotta love the acronyms. Now, I prefer to start treatment with as much of a clean bill of health as possible. Physical health, I mean. EMDR is meant to help in a patient’s mental health, but it uses physical sensations to help a person fix what is wrong. Inner ear is a tricky problem.”

“Before we go further, what do you know about me? Specifically.”

Palmer gave him a more serious look. “You’re from an alternate, or parallel, universe. You arrived through a device called a quantum mirror.”

“Oh, okay. So you know a great deal about the SGC and what we do, what I did, there?”

“I do. I’ve done some consulting work before for Doctor Fraiser. You travel to other planets via an alien device

called a stargate, and that it was you who coined the term after transcribing the word from an ancient Egyptian cartouche. You then figured out what the symbols meant on the stargate itself and how they worked in a spatial grid.”

If Daniel didn’t know better, he’d have thought that Sam had given him that information. “Okay,” he said, nodding. “What do you need from me?”

“I’ll need to know why and how you appeared in this universe, where you came from, what your traumas were, how they were inflicted, and what you are currently experiencing in the form of PTSS.”

Daniel let out a long breath. “That’s a lot of information for one sitting, Doctor Palmer.”

“I don’t expect to hear it in detail in one sitting. The details are to be part of the treatment, if those details are causing you stress whenever you remember them. If they have affected your behavior in a negative, or positive, manner, then we’ll work to get you to a state

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where they don't. And I could have said, 'back to normal', but normal is relative."

Daniel let out a snort. "Yes, it is."

"We'll try to avoid that term here. What I'd like to know, also, is what you expect to get out of this treatment."

"I have a lot of fear, anger, hatred, rage, nightmares, nausea, vomiting. Those last two are what happens what a particular fear is activated."

"That's nicely general, but also specific. What is most important?"

Daniel swallowed. "It's gonna sound stupid."

"No it won't. There's no such thing here."

Daniel let out a wan half-laugh. "Yeah, well." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Then another. And another. It was a full five minutes, and several raises of his hand, before he opened his eyes and looked at the

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wood grain of the front of the doctor's desk instead of into his eyes.

"I get sick to my stomach every time I get aroused. I really, really want that to end." He met the doctor's eyes.

"Of course you do," the doctor said, frowning. "That is a particularly nasty side effect because part of your body's natural function is fighting you."

Daniel sighed silently as relief ebbed through him. The doctor noticed.

"You didn't believe it was that important?"

"Important to me. Just not to ... well, you. A doctor."

"There will be no judgments in this office, Daniel. I give you my word."

"Thanks," Daniel said, but he reserved his own judgment on that. Time would tell.

"Any other issues?"

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“Yes,” Daniel said with a sharp sound on the consonants. “First, I should tell you that the idea of never being able to be aroused again, for the rest of my life, without getting sick to my stomach ... it made me suicidal.” The doctor’s eyes widened in alarm and Daniel held up a hand. “I’m not anymore, but you should know. It happened aboard the Andromeda, a ship we have in orbit.”

Doctor Palmer had started writing things down on a steno pad. “Go on.”

“I’m afraid of Doctor Fraiser.”

“Why?” Doctor Palmer asked, looking only slightly surprised. He looked more curious.

“Because of her counterpart in the other universe.”

The doctor nodded, writing, and he paused and grinned at him. “To a much lesser and for different reasons, many in the SGC are afraid of the one in this universe. Although ‘annoyed with’ is probably more accurate. She’s in charge of their well-being and takes her job very seriously.”

Daniel sighed. “That’s understandable.”

“What else do you think needs examining?”

“Intimacy, where sex is concerned. I’m bisexual, and I was married to a man on the other side. I’m worried that because of ... some ... uh ... assaults ... that I won’t ever enjoy that kind of relationship again.”

“Can you be more specific?” Palmer asked. “I have an idea what you mean, but I don’t want to begin our professional relationship by making assumptions.”

Daniel cringed. “Oh. Sex. Anal ... sex. I received, so to speak.” Palmer frowned, clearly bothered. Or concerned. Daniel couldn’t tell.

“And are you saying that you are worried that there’s some damage there that will keep you from enjoying anal sex again?”

The way he said it, so matter-of-factly, without any judgment, made Daniel relax a bit, but only a bit. “Yes,” he said, waiting for any tic of disapproval. He didn’t see any. So either the doctor was a fair person or he hid his

homophobia well. Daniel couldn't work with one, no matter how professional. "Does that bother you? My being bisexual? Or in this particular case, gay?"

"No," Doctor Palmer said after writing a line. He looked up and something in Daniel's expression made his brows go up.

"Am I giving you a challenging look?" Daniel asked. "Confrontational? If you're reading that, you're reading it correctly. I should have asked a few minutes ago. I won't work with homophobic doctors. It shows a complete lack of empathy for a percentage of the population."

"You don't need to be concerned," Doctor Palmer said. "People love who they love. My only problem with a person's sexual desires are when those desires either intentionally harm another or their desire overrides any sense of empathy in the harming of the object of their desire. Specifically, pedophiles, and sexual sadists that pervert the more normal sexual explorations of BDSM. For example, Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade would be particularly disgusted with the average BDSM

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community because there is no enjoyment of another's pain at the expense of their suffering, instead of at the expense of their pleasure."

Daniel blinked in partial surprise and partial amusement. "You do give thorough answers, Doctor Palmer. I appreciate that."

Doctor Palmer smiled. "You're a professional, and an academic, if you're anything like your counterpart. You appreciate a qualitative answer."

"You know about his work?" Daniel asked.

"I looked it up. Doctor Fraiser told me about the person who died almost nine months ago. He had written several papers on cross-cultural pollination that I found fascinating. Did you do the same in your former universe?"

Daniel nodded, impressed.

"Well, that would be a great discussion for another day. Now, let's get back to your traumas. Or more accurately, the stress produced by them."

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“Okay.”

“Would you be able to discuss what has caused this aversion to arousal, and your fear that you will never again be able to enjoy anal sex?”

Daniel stared at him and swallowed, then flushed from his ears to his neck and said shakily, and in a very quiet voice, “Rape.”

“Once?” Doctor Palmer asked, lowering his own voice as well, but nowhere near the almost whisper-level of Daniel’s.

Daniel gave him a micro-shake of his head.

“Many?”

A micro-nod.

“One assailant?”

Daniel shook his head minutely, and slowly.

Doctor Palmer wrote on the pad. “More than two?”

Daniel nodded more fully, and very slowly, carefully. Sweat began to appear on his forehead.

Doctor Palmer nodded. “Okay,” he said, sighing slightly as he regarded him. “Let me say this, because I have to say it to all victims of sexual assault.” Daniel winced. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“Not necessary,” Daniel said, and the slight frown turned slowly into a scowl. “I was a prisoner of a war no one was fighting because we all lost it. I was kept for nearly a year. I know it’s not my fault.”

“Good,” Doctor Palmer said, writing. “Would you be able to discuss what other forms of assault you endured?”

Daniel nodded, swallowing again. “Torture. Daily. Some of it was psychological. Threatening me or others with death if I didn’t do a translation within a specific amount of time. Or if I didn’t learn an alien language they wanted to know about. Then there were the punishments when I didn’t cooperate or be good enough, but that came after the initial questioning

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period after I was captured. Waterboarding, freezing, forced wakefulness.”

As he spoke, the doctor’s frown became just as severe as Daniel’s as he became horrified by the abuse inflicted on his patient. He wrote for a few minutes while Daniel waited. His shakiness subsided, and the sweat began to go tacky at the hairline. He had been afraid the doctor would overreact. Or rather, that he would do what Jack would probably do if Daniel told him everything. Instead, he was calm, professional, and Daniel appreciated it to no end.

“Okay,” Doctor Palmer said, setting his pad down on the desk. “We have some work to do.”

Daniel gave him a wan smile.

“There is one thing I was surprised by what you said, and that was the ability to use the word rape.”

Daniel cringed.

“You reacted to the word as I expected, but you’re also able to say it. Will you continue to be able to say the

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word, or do you think it will get difficult the more we discuss it?”

“I don’t know. Maybe more difficult. There are things that she ...” He stopped talking.

“She,” Palmer repeated. “A specific abuser,” he surmised.

“Who is somehow the same woman, physiologically, and genetically, as Doctor Fraiser, apart from the Goa’uld presence. It’s why I’m afraid of her. And the sound of ...” He swallowed and started to become nauseous. “High heels clicking on hard surfaces.”

“Daniel, you’ve gone a bit pale. Are you nauseous?” Daniel nodded. “Sit up for me, stare straight ahead.” Daniel did so. The doctor picked up his penlight and held it vertically in front of Daniel’s eyes. “Watch the penlight.”

“Okay,” Daniel said shakily.

“What happened when you met this world’s Doctor Fraiser?”

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“I froze,” Daniel said, watching as the pen moved slowly from side to side.

“And then?”

“She came walking toward me and I heard the heels. I vomited into the trash can. And I kept doing it until bile started coming up.” He was shaking now, his voice wavering.

“Okay, listen carefully. Tell me about a happy moment from when you were in the fourth grade.”

Daniel heard the tinkling of a tiny bell, frowned at its sound, then concentrated. “I ... got a book for my birthday.”

“What was the book?”

“The original stories of the Brothers Grimm. I wanted to know the source material for fairy tales.”

“Why?”

Second Wind

“Because I studied them in the library and it didn’t make sense that their fairy tales would be so clean compared to the time they lived in.”

“And getting that book made you happy?”

“Yeah, because my foster mother had never gotten me a present before. Then I she got me that, and we had a lot of talks about the stories.” Daniel’s body language changed dramatically. The stress he’d been under was primarily gone.

“Now, let’s go back to the sound of high heels.”

Daniel sighed heavily. “Really?”

“Humor me,” Doctor Palmer said, half-smiling. “You heard the sound of her high heels as she came toward you, and you threw up. Then what?”

“Sam took her out of the infirmary and I calmed down.”

“Was seeing her the problem? Or the sound of her heels?”

“Both.”

“And what were you thinking the moment you saw her?”

“I started doing comparisons. What was different.”

Doctor Palmer’s brows went up. “That’s encouraging, Daniel.” He set the pen on the table. “Relax.”

“What’s encouraging?” Daniel asked, slightly relaxing the muscles in his back. Sweat had beaded on his forehead and he absently wiped at it. Doctor Palmer handed him some tissues from the box on the desk.

“Your brain didn’t juxtapose the two women. You began to find ways to differentiate. Your subconscious, whether you realize it or not, was trying to protect you by forcing you to see the Janet Fraiser of this world, not the other one.”

Daniel frowned. “Well, no. I was *consciously* doing that. On purpose. It’s what I do, gather facts. Maybe it’s an emotional withdrawal, I don’t know.”

“A good observation, but it’s more a protective act.”

Second Wind

“And how do you feel now, recalling the event?”

Daniel frowned again, confused. “You mean, you want me to tell it to you again?”

“No, just think about it. Picture her coming toward you. You hear the heels.”

Daniel swallowed and felt the panic rise. He held his stomach. “Nauseated.”

Doctor Palmer nodded. “What’s missing from your reactions, during the initial telling?”

Daniel concentrated, then his eyes widened. “I’m not sweating and my heart isn’t beating hard.”

The doctor nodded again and got up to go around his desk. “That’s a good beginning. What the essence of your fear is focusing on is the sound, not so much the sight. So we’ll work on that. What we just did, Daniel, was EMDR, though there’s a lot more to it than that. We’ll get to it next time.” Palmer opened a date planner off the desk, making Daniel raise his brows.

Second Wind

“You make your own appointments?” he asked.

“You see a receptionist outside?” Palmer asked with a grin. “Yes, I schedule my own appointments. And I’d like to see you in two days. We’ll start our regimen at twice a week. Is that okay?”

Daniel stared at him, pleasantly surprised. “Absolutely.”

“You’re surprised,” the doctor said, writing. “Why?”

“I’m used to cold, clinical detachment. And doctors who don’t make their own appointments. More importantly, you believe this is important enough to see me twice a week.”

“Before you jump to conclusions,” Palmer said, continuing to write, but this time on an appointment card. “It’s standard practice for multiple sessions in one week. If you weren’t as well-adjusted, we’d be seeing each other every day.”

That took Daniel off-guard. “Well-adjusted? You’re kidding, right?”

Second Wind

“Hardly,” Palmer said, and ticked off the fingers of one hand by holding them up one at a time. “You’re not hallucinating. You’re not *actively* suicidal and have taken control over it. You’re not exhibiting signs of mental confusion. And you’re not evasive, confrontational, or scared of *me*. So, yes, you’re well-adjusted. What you *are* is someone experiencing stressors *hourly*, as a result of your extreme traumas, so we’ll meet twice a week. What we’ll be doing in our EMDR sessions are called Phases. There are seven. Phases one thru six are bi-weekly.” He gave him a brochure. “Read up on it online, too. Depending on the severity of some issues will depend on how long the bi-weekly appointments will last. At two months, there’s an evaluation. Then we move forward on a weekly time frame to see how you progress. The entire treatment can last as little as two months or as much as twelve. It all depends on the patient.”

“That’s all?” Daniel asked.

“Depends on the patient. Those are averages I gave you.”

Second Wind

“Oh.”

After a minute, Palmer handed him a card with six appointments. “For the rest of the month.”

“Thanks, Doc,” Daniel said, and again, shook hands with the man. “Really. Thanks.” Daniel hesitated. “Can you tell me, straight out, and no pun intended, how likely is it that I’ll be able to have a full, healthy relationship with someone?”

“Sex, you mean?”

Daniel gave him a wince. “Yeah.”

“It’ll depend entirely on how well you do with this type of treatment. I would like to say that you have a very good chance, but the caveat is to not put the cart before the horse and guess. I feel positive, if that’s of any help.”

“Thanks,” Daniel said as he left the office.

..

By the time he reached Jack's truck, Daniel felt hope for the first time in long time.

"You look better than I thought you would," Jack said, surprised and relieved.

"It's not the usual mumbo jumbo, as you call it. Not the sharing of feelings that will somehow make it all okay again."

"It's not?" Jack asked, brows up.

"Well ..." Daniel wagged a hand. "It's sharing, but it's wackier. And it seems to work, but we didn't go into depth. That's for the day after tomorrow."

"What?"

"Twice a week, no exceptions."

"Oy."

"Well, if you want this as bad as I do—"

Second Wind

“No, because I’m not you, but I come a close second.”

Daniel grinned.

“So, tell me what’s what,” Jack asked as he backed out of the parking space. Daniel did, and Jack privately wished he’d had someone like that to help when he’d returned from Iraq.

As they drove down the road, Daniel looked at his watch. It was just after 11:00. The PT appointment wasn’t until 1:15 at the base. “What’re you planning now?” he asked. Jack frowned, clearly confused by what he meant. “I mean ... wanna grab some lunch or do you have to head back right away?”

Jack was at a loss. He hadn’t even thought about lunch, which was a first. He always seemed to be hungry lately, and there’d been times when he’d wondered if it was because his body was confusing the need with something else entirely. After all, *hungry* didn’t just apply to food. On the heels of that thought, sexual desires started to rise to the surface of active thought

Second Wind

and he quickly suppressed them. There was no need to torture himself.

“You have a look,” Daniel said.

Jack was taken completely off guard by Daniel’s oddly accurate intuition. “No I don’t. What do you mean?” Daniel burst out laughing. It was the first time Jack’d seen genuine laughter from the man and it looked good on him. “What? What’d I say?” Jack grinned. He especially needed to know so he could duplicate it when needed.

“You contradicted yourself. Sort of,” Daniel said, trying and failing to stifle the huge grin on his face. “You said ‘no you don’t’ to the comment, but then asked what I meant. How can you refute something you don’t understand?” He frowned, thinking. “Wait, never mind. Congress does it all the time, don’t they? And racists, Nazis, fascists, people who hate science—”

“Daniel!”

He started giggling again. Or chuckling. Jack had no idea which adjective applied to Daniel’s soft laughter. It

didn't matter. He tried to be annoyed but the man's laughter, like most laughter, was infectious and he couldn't stop the grin on his own face. "That doc must've given you a happy pill. It's weird. Stop that. So what do you mean by *look?*"

Daniel sobered up eventually and cleared his throat as he sat up straighter. "Focused. Thinking about something serious," Daniel said thoughtfully. "Maybe with a touch of guilt."

"You can't know that," Jack said, disturbed by that blasted accuracy. Daniel's brows rose. "Seriously, Daniel. You *can't* know that."

Daniel went quiet, suddenly self-conscious and cursed himself for treating Jack like his late husband. He knew him so well he could read the tiniest of facial expressions and be eighty percent right. He rolled down the window, needing air, even though Jack was running the A/C. The weather was abnormally warm for June. Or July. He suddenly didn't know what month it was and dug out his appointment card from the front pocket of his fatigues. July. His next appointment was

Second Wind

the day after tomorrow, which the card said was the 10th, so that meant today was the 8th. One day away.

“Now it’s you who has a look,” Jack said. “And I don’t need some sort of special intuition to see it. It’s all over your face.”

But unlike him, Daniel nodded. He also didn’t feel the need to explain. They were passing many fast food restaurants and up ahead, Daniel pointed. “Go in there, please?” Jack gave him a slight smile, maybe of acknowledgement, maybe of amusement. He turned into the access drive and headed for the Drive-Thru lane. Daniel abruptly thought of money and blurted out, “Unless you’re not buying, then never mind.”

“Of course I’m buying,” Jack said, giving Daniel an odd look.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“You had a look,” Daniel said. “Again. Definitely. What’s it mean? And no, I’m not playing the guessing

Second Wind

game just because I was semi-accurate about the other look.”

Jack sighed. “It’s not about *you*. I was just thinking about how long it would take the Pentagon to approve your status and start paying you.”

“Only when I start contributing to their For-Profit bullshit,” Daniel replied with a cynical sigh.

Jack was surprised by the comment, but he couldn’t argue with it. He also didn’t want to talk politics. “I think I can cover what you need or want. It’s not like I’m spending it on anything or anyone else. There’s just me.” He pulled up to the window and they both ordered. After paying, Jack drove to a nearby city park to have their lunch but remained in the truck because there weren’t any tables. Apparently the park was meant for activity, not picnicking. The humidity began to feel cloying and Daniel rolled up his window.

“Thanks,” he said, sipping some of the Coke he’d ordered.

“Sure.”

Second Wind

“Jack?”

“Daniel?”

“Don’t you find it odd that I never once asked what month or day it was? All I ever asked about was the year.”

Jack shrugged. “No.”

“I just realized what month and day it was.”

Jack suddenly spit out, “Holy shit!”

Daniel’s brows went up, hoping that Jack was realizing what day it was tomorrow. “What?” he asked, keeping a smile off his face.

“It’s your birthday,” Jack said, sighing in disgust.

Daniel *was* surprised this time. “No, it’s tomorrow.”

Jack frowned. “The 9th instead of the 8th. Huh.” It then occurred to him that he actually had a whole day’s reprieve to get Daniel a present. Although ... “Uh oh.”

Second Wind

“What?”

“Listen. Carter and Teal’c might think it’s today.”

Daniel felt a little claustrophobic as the image of a party came to mind. He wasn’t ready by any stretch of the imagination. “I don’t want a party.”

Jack gave him a definite look. “Why? Just a team thing.”

Daniel winced. “Can I take a rain check?”

“For a year?”

“I know, and I know it’s just Sam and Teal’c. And you. But ...”

“But?”

Daniel sighed. “I’m getting this feeling. Closest I can describe it is anxiety. A weight pressing down, or of being cornered.”

“Why?” Jack asked, frowning in confusion.

Second Wind

“Because of the memories of my last birthday.” He closed his eyes, trying and failing to block out the past. “My late husband and I,” he said slowly, “had a private celebration. Thinking about it causes *those* feelings, and I’d rather not give up my lunch, so I’m not going to tell you about it. And right now, a party in its place feels stupidly, insanely, sacrilegious. And no, that doesn’t make sense.”

Jack frowned at him and shook his head. “Okay. But what about presents?”

“I’d rather not.”

Jack’s brows knotted in consternation. “Why not?”

“Because ... I’m not him.” Jack opened his mouth to start that argument all over again but Daniel threw up a hand, signaling STOP. “I *know!* But think about it, Jack. You’ve only known *me* for a few months. It feels like it’s too early.” Jack opened his mouth. “*And* you probably think that doesn’t make sense since we’ve all become friends.”

Second Wind

“Yep, pretty much. Now, here’s my counterargument and this one might be uncomfortable for you to hear, but remember that I’m being completely honest here.”

Daniel gave him a wary look. “Okay,” he said slowly.

Purposely, Jack stared out the window instead of giving Daniel a direct look. “It doesn’t matter how long I’ve known you. I already feel more than friendship, and so do you. It’s not just inevitable, it’s who we are. Don’t you agree?”

“Yeah,” Daniel drawled, then sighed. “It is.”

“So, given that, don’t you think I can buy you a present and you can buy me one? Jesus, Daniel, where the hell does this lack of self-worth come from?” He waited several beats before he looked over at him.

“God knows,” Daniel said automatically, too busy redirecting his thoughts away from *those* feelings that Jack had forcibly, albeit innocently, awakened. When was he going to realize that he can’t even *talk* about it with him? He blinked several times, concentrating on the scenery. It wasn’t working. He decided to take a

Second Wind

long drink of his soda instead, hoping the ice cold would give him an *ice cream headache*. It worked, doing what he'd hoped it would do: act like a cold shower for his brain. He still pressed his tongue to the roof of his mouth to warm the nerves and get the pain to stop.

"What'd you just do?" Jack asked.

"Diverted my mind from the feelings you just provoked by giving myself an ice cream headache."

Jack made a growling, gurgling noise at the back of his throat. "It must take some kind of extreme willpower to keep your mind from going where it naturally wants to go. I admire that, while hating why you have to do it."

Daniel shot him a startled look. It made him speechless for nearly a minute. "I wish I didn't feel the need to thank you, but thank you."

Jack grinned mildly. "Now that we've covered the completely dysfunctional part of the *friendship*, how about we just play things by ear, day to day. The less pressure, the better."

Second Wind

Daniel didn't realize he'd been worried about it, but after Jack's suggestion, he felt his body relax. "Yeah. That ... that actually sounds like a great idea."

"And let Carter and Teal'c give you presents." Daniel sighed but said nothing. Jack started up the truck and headed back to the mountain. "Back to business. I'm not sure what you're supposed to be doing after PT. I'll have to ask Hammond." He shot him a quick, wary look. "If you don't mind, I'll give you the code to the archaeology lab. *His* office. You can start setting up shop there yourself."

Daniel wasn't comfortable with the idea, but he kept that to himself. If he wanted to belong here, stay here, then where else was he going to work? "Sure. Thanks. Providing Hammond doesn't mind."

"I'd say you could go to the office anyway, but I'll check with him first. Sometimes you don't know which way he'll swing."

"Oh, no, you didn't," Daniel said, grimacing and pressing a thumb between his eyes. "Rephrase that."

Second Wind

Jack refused. Or rather, he couldn't. He was too busy laughing.

..

At the SGC, Physical Therapist Kyle Mathers instructed Daniel to sit on a therapy table, one whose upholstered surface was divided into four sections. When Daniel sat down, the tall, dark-skinned man wearing blue medical scrubs had him tip his head back, then move it side to side.

“Okay, lie down on your back and grab onto the table. I’m going to tilt the table’s head downward at an angle and I need you to stay put.”

“Okay,” Daniel said, puzzled. He waited and Kyle adjusted the table with a plunking sound, then moved around the table and tilted Daniel nearly ninety degrees backward, angling his head downward. He bent over to look into his eyes. “Yep. You feel that sensation?”

Second Wind

“Yeah,” Daniel said, holding his breath while he *felt* his right eyes wobble. Or as Janet had put it, *tremor*. He was severely disoriented.

“You’re going to stay in that position, then we’ll tip you in the opposite direction. What’s happened is that the balancing crystals, for lack of a better term, that are housed in the cavity behind your ears have become somewhat dislodged, and over time, the condition has worsened. So when you lie down in one position, or look up far enough, your balance is lost and the room spins. What we’re doing is resetting them.”

“Okay,” Daniel said in a strained voice as he held himself still.

After a minute, Kyle rotated the bed, then kept Daniel in that position for another minute, checking on his eyes. Then the bed was set right again and he hovered near his shoulders.

“Need help sitting up?”

“No,” Daniel said as pushed up and sat. He shook his head and blinked several times.

Second Wind

“Check your balance.”

Daniel did, and found that the spinning was gone.

“Holy shit.”

“Fixed?” Kyle asked.

“Yeah,” Daniel answered, amazed. “How in the hell does doing that even work?”

“Realigns the crystals, as I mentioned.”

“Go figure.”

“Look forward,” Kyle said, and did the penlight motion thing. “Yep. Seems to be fixed.” He handed him a card. “If not, call me. I’ll put you on the books and we’ll try again. But I don’t think it’ll be necessary.” He eyed Daniel’s bandana-free hair as the man redid his ponytail. “That’s long. Are you going to cut it?”

Daniel sighed. “You’re the fifth person today who’s asked me that. And the answer is no. I’m not ready yet.”

Second Wind

“Why not?” Kyle asked, curious. “What’s keeping you from cutting it?”

“My past. The ... problems there that ended up landing me in this universe. And no offense, but I’m not elaborating.”

Kyle shrugged. “Fair enough.”

Daniel got off the bed and dropped his head back, turning it first left then right. Vertical again, he saw Kyle grinning, and shook his hand as he said, “Just checking. Thanks so much.”

Kyle gave him a firm grip. “You’re welcome.”

Daniel left the office and pulled out his phone, calling Jack. “All fixed. Now what?”

“Ah. Head over to Carter’s lab. You know where it is?”

“Level 19?” he asked, going by his old universe.

“Level 20. We’re gonna talk about your lab.”

Second Wind

Daniel suspected a white lie. “Jack,” he drawled in a scolding tone, as if Jack was a kid stealing a cookie. A passing airman raised an eyebrow at him and he quickly ducked through the infirmary’s double doors. The nurses looked at him questioningly and he shook his head at them. He’d missed the first part of what Jack was saying, catching only “—*new lab.*” “Sorry, could you repeat that. I had to hide in the infirmary. I was in the corridor and got a look.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. It was the way I said your name.”

It made Jack laugh. *“What I said was that we’ll talk about your lab while having a little welcome to your new lab thing.”*

“Jack,” Daniel sighed with exasperation.

“A mini celebration. Tiny. Miniscule.”

Daniel smirked. “You just repeated yourself.”

“I did?”

Second Wind

“Mini. Miniscule. Hello.”

“Grammar police. I love it.”

“Ha. Liar.”

“It’s bad manners to call your superior a liar.”

“Well, first, it’s considered insubordination, not bad manners; and second, you’re not my superior. Yet.”

“Give it time.”

Daniel was a bit taken aback. “Wait.” He lowered his voice. “Are you saying Hammond’s going to assign ...” He couldn’t say it.

“May-bee,” Jack said, turning a simple word into two.

Daniel had absolutely no idea what to say that wouldn’t bring on a lecture from Jack about self-worth. “Okay, so hang tight. I’m on my way.” He hung up before Jack could start grilling him about the PT. He’d rather have time to think before he arrived at Sam’s lab.

“Daniel?”

Second Wind

Daniel spun around to see Janet at the station. “Hey,” he greeted, good mood *gone*. He swallowed, prepared to bolt the moment his stomach did a flip after hearing her walk. Strangely, she stayed at the nurse’s station and didn’t approach. It looked like she wanted to. He made fists with his hands, then realized it might look threatening and put one hand in his pocket instead, and placed the other on the door. “Uh, good to see you. Exc—” he began, intended to leave.

“How’d PT go?”

Trapped. He gulped and looked away. “All fixed.”

“Excellent. And Doctor Palmer?”

“Promising,” he said, nodding.

“That’s great,” she said cautiously.

He lowered his voice. “It is. I actually experienced *hope* afterward. First time in a long, long time.” Her response was to stare at him with eyes had that deer-in-headlights look. Apparently she found the comment disturbing and that, in turn, bothered him. He rapidly

Second Wind

said, “Okay, so Jack wants me to meet up at Sam’s lab. See you later.” He backed through the double doors before she could get over the surprise and say something weird. Or worse, walk.

...

Stargate Command had a station hut atop one of the peaks of Cheyenne Mountain. It was used for emergency exits and training and was otherwise locked and barricaded. Daniel had seen them using the entrance up on Level 12 earlier in the week, so he’d gone up in the freight elevator and out into the open air before he could change his mind. He sat behind the structure, hugging his knees and leaned his chin on the latter, watching birds fly over the wide chasm before him. He wasn’t supposed to be there.

Ten minutes earlier, he’d been in Sam’s lab with her, Jack, and Teal’c, putting up with a celebration that, for lack of a better description, didn’t belong to him. He

Second Wind

knew they'd meant nothing but kindness and friendship, but he'd suddenly experienced an odd panic attack the moment he'd seen the arranged presents and drinks for someone born on the 8th of July. At least there hadn't been a cake.

He knew they would be wondering what had taken him so long since a trip to the bathroom took three minutes, tops. Any minute now, the phone would ring. He wouldn't avoid answering, but he needed time to get over the fact that he was, well, *mad*. He loved these people, these new people. He wanted to appreciate the kindness, the inclusiveness. They were going out of their way. And still, there had been an acute sensation of surrealism combined with a spooky sense of déjà vu and an instant recall of something that had happened over a year ago and in another universe, with Jack, Sam, and Teal'c, celebrating his thirty-fifth birthday. They hadn't been at Stargate Command though. They'd been at a Jaffa stronghold, visiting some of Teal'c's allies and brothers-in-arms. And everyone had died within a month. He should have died, too.

Second Wind

And therein lay the crux of his problem: a sense of wrongness. He was supposed to be dead. Either shot to death next to Jack or a frozen dead thing, floating in the cold of space inside another reality. Was it destiny that he should end up here? He couldn't believe that because it implied fate and he didn't believe in fate. So was the sense of wrongness part of his PTSS or maybe part of his grief?

At first, he'd meant to visit the double's office. To check and see if there were gouges over the desk's middle drawer lock. Whether the green laminate over the metal of the desk had started peeling away. If there was a coffee stain on the floor by the right front leg. Was there a small book behind two blue atlas volumes that was his old address book? He'd thought he'd lost it and during a boring day, he'd decided to rearrange the books and had found it there. It had been missing. The last location had been the top right drawer. The most likely suspect had been Jack, who liked his little pranks.

And now here he was, in a world where he felt like an intruder, an interloper. The people he cared about were dead. And they were also alive and well. If it felt

Second Wind

like they were getting a second chance with Doctor Daniel Jackson, couldn't he think the same? Couldn't he just stop with the damn comparisons? Why was he continuing to devalue himself? Why did he keep thinking he wasn't worthy? Clearly, he had self-esteem issues, but unfortunately, they weren't a result of trauma. At least, he didn't think so. He would have to bring it up with Doctor Palmer. He pulled the notepad and pencil out of his front right pocket and began to jot down the note, and while he was at it, he thought up a few more. And a few more after that.

...

Jack paused at Daniel's office, swiped his key card, then opened the door. Immediately to his right was the old Daniel's desk. Empty. He frowned and pulled out his phone.

Second Wind

..

Daniel's phone rang mid-word and he finished it before answering. "Hey."

"*Where are you?*" Jack asked instead of responding with the usual 'hey' back.

"At the observation peak, behind the building." There was a long pause. "Jack?"

"*On my way.*"

He sounded mad. Daniel sighed, hung up, dropped his phone on the grass, and went back to writing the list of things he thought Doctor Palmer should know. As he wrote *outsider*, another word came to him, and it said everything about what the hell he was doing on a mountain peak: *distancing*.

..

Jack headed up in the second freight elevator, which began on Level 11. He knew it would take about five minutes and during that time, he cursed himself for being a fool. He'd pushed this party thing on Daniel, who just might be feeling overwhelmed by it, never mind the fact that today wasn't his birthday. It belonged to the other Daniel. *His* Daniel. And if there was ever a reason to feel like an imposter or that he didn't belong, it was having a party *today* instead of tomorrow. How stupid could he have been to think Daniel would just set it all aside for the sake of teammates celebrating a birthday that wasn't his?

Guilt increased as he wondered if their acceptance of him had gone too fast. They had meant well, but had they simply accepted him too soon because, if they were all truly honest, they had only seen their old Daniel in rough shape? It had almost been like that with the Kowalsky from another universe. Jack had easily felt comfortable with him, even though the man had been dead two and a half years. The guy acted and thought like the friend he'd lost and he'd invited the

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man to stay. They could pick up where they left off. *Almost.* But Kowalsky had said it plainly: “This isn’t my world, Jack. I don’t belong here.” Plus he had a fight with the Goa’uld to get back to and Kowalsky’s sense of honor was as strong as Jack’s.

Jack kept getting mad at Daniel for his lack of self-worth, and while that was justified on a certain level, it wasn’t fully appropriate because Daniel had every right to feel how he felt. Who was he, Jack O’Neill, to tell him how to feel? In what universe were these three people, who missed their friend and loved one, in a place to judge Daniel’s behavior? They’d all gotten mad at him on the ship for treating them like strangers. They hadn’t tried to see things from his perspective. They were too wrapped up in grief, and when this man showed up, they were all too willing to see him as the man they’d lost.

In the two months on Omega, they’d grown closer, and so it felt as if the stages of grief had been aborted. There was Daniel again, even though he wasn’t

precisely the same guy. They were drawn to him, just as he was drawn to them. And Jack had to face that he was falling for him. He'd started to deny it, thinking that it was his imagination, but it wasn't, and worse yet, it had only taken three months. A foundation was already in place, so he hadn't had to start from scratch, and while this man had a different personality, in some respects, there had been many times when he'd said or done something that was identical to his counterpart. And he was still doing it.

The biggest issue, in Jack's mind, was that Daniel was damaged, and none of them, not even himself, had the slightest idea what this Daniel had gone through. He'd lost his own Jack, his own friends. He, too, had been in mourning, however abbreviated, and they couldn't see it. They'd only seen their own. Their Daniel had died a gruesome death, and the new Daniel had seen his friends, and his *husband*, murdered. So what was he feeling now? Unable to grieve, thanks to his trauma, what did Daniel need? Given the distancing he was seeking, it felt like he wanted to be alone, but wasn't

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that supposed to be a bad idea? Didn't Daniel require a support system to help him through healing?

Jack exited the elevator and walked around the structure. Daniel was sitting on the ground, writing on a notepad that rested on his knees. He walked over and laid a hand on the back of Daniel's head. His hair was silky soft. "Hey."

Daniel didn't look up and continued writing. "Hey," he said.

Jack sat down next to him. "Was it a fear that brought this on, or another sense of not belonging?"

Daniel didn't look at him. He paused in his writing and looked straight ahead. "I'm sorry."

"For?" Jack prodded.

"The latter." He set the notepad down and crossed his arms over his knees, continuing to stare at the mountain peaks and slopes that filled the landscape. "I've been here long enough to get used to you, Sam,

Second Wind

Teal’c, but it just gets to be too much sometimes. And today ...”

Jack sat down next to him. “It’s us who should apologize to you, Daniel. So for my part, I’m sorry.”

Daniel looked at him, frowning. “That’s ...” He paused, brows twitching, as if he didn’t know whether to be surprised, puzzled, or angry. “Thanks. But what’re you apologizing for?”

“For today. For not waiting until tomorrow, as if you would just accept today as your birthday when it isn’t. I’m sorry.”

Daniel sighed and looked back at the scenery, absently noting number of green tones in the trees and shrubs, and a part of his mind said *pollen*, which reminded him of the last paper he’d written on the expansion of civilizations and how the blend of cultures was a mixed bag of positives and negatives. It seemed to go well with his own situation, odd as he felt that was. Was he a speck of pollen, just floating along until it landed somewhere to disperse its activating DNA? The

Second Wind

metaphor was too vague and silly and he shook his head to clear it.

Jack wondered what he was shaking his head for. He patted his mid-back. “If you’re still acting this way a year from now, then we’ll have a problem. But for now, you have every right to act like a dick whenever necessary. Not that—”

“Dick?” Daniel asked, scowling as he turned to him. “What are you talking about? I’m not being a dick.”

Jack raised a brow.

“Okay,” Daniel allowed. “So checking out without a word was a dick move, so I’ll grant you that, but the reason for doing it *wasn’t* a dick move.”

Jack picked up the notepad. “What’re you writing?” He read the list of adjectives, verbs, and nouns. The last one said *isolation*.

“Topics to discuss with Doctor Palmer.”

Jack nodded absently. “You like this guy?”

Daniel nodded. “I looked up all the theories and papers this guy has written, as well as the in-depth studies done on EMDR. He’s pretty smart and pretty innovative.”

Jack grinned. “Like you.” Daniel snorted, making him grin. “By the way, you have the office. It’s no longer *his*. It’s *yours*.”

Another wide-eyed stare. “I do,” he stated, then thought it over. “Weird.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because ...” Daniel began, then paused as he tried to form the most coherent response. In the end, he just laid it out plainly without trying to sound *too* apologetic. “Okay, here goes, and I’m sorry for the arrogance of this statement: it’s weird because it’s *already my office*. I’m just being allowed to have it back.” Jack stared at him, brows raised. “Yes, I know how that sounded. *But*, the truth is ...” He froze, refusing to say the words in his head out loud, and scrambled to find something else to say instead.

“You don’t think you’re ready for it?” Jack guessed.

Daniel blinked a few times. It was as good an answer as any. “Maybe.”

“Well, don’t think it’s my doing. Your getting the office, I mean. It’s Hammond you have to thank.”

Daniel eyed him. “*Just* Hammond?”

“Okay, there’s a little more to it, but it’s now your office. Plus, I have a surprise.”

Daniel dropped his head back and closed his eyes. “Hit me.”

Jack tapped his leg before standing up. “You’re coming home with me.” Daniel got to his feet in a snap, eyes wide. “Calm down. I’m not asking you to sleep in the same bed. You’ll have the spare bedroom.”

Daniel’s heart beat at his chest like bongo drums and he forced himself to breathe. He really, really wished he hadn’t needed to do it. On the heels of that damn fear came relief. No more VIP room with green tile. “That

Second Wind

really means a lot, Jack. Thanks.” He also wanted to hug him but that would lead to bad things. But he also remembered Sam’s comments about touching and how he seemed to subconsciously reach for him. How was he supposed to avoid the desire part while getting that needed comfort?

“C’mon. Let’s get you packed.”

“But it’s—” Daniel began. “What time is it?” he asked, picking up his phone to look.

“After two, but we’re leaving early so we can get you squared away.”

“Okay, cool,” Daniel said, hiding his excitement. He didn’t want Jack to get the *right* idea. But shouldn’t he show a bit more—

“Try to contain your enthusiasm,” Jack said with a blandness he didn’t feel.

--Enthusiasm. Daniel smiled and got to his feet. “I *am* excited. Trust me.”

Second Wind

*So close, no matter how far
Couldn't be much more from the heart
Forever trusting who we are
And nothing else matters*

Chapter 6: One Month Later

Daniel felt the sweat trickle at his hairline as he walked outside to call for a taxi. The doctor's office had been air conditioned and cool compared to the late-summer heatwave outside, but it hadn't mattered. They had been going through the hardest of his traumas, and today had been the start of zeroing in on the substance of his *psychosomatic* nausea.

They were on Phase Five of Seven. The doctor had explained that in the first six phases, targets were identified and processed. They involved particular events that required him to recall sight, smell, sound, taste. Everything had to be concentrated on, and while he was in distress, he'd watch the doctor's hand. An audial tone would be added for additional external stimulation. In the midst of his stress, he would be asked to think of a happy memory. The point was to diffuse the stress while not removing it so that when he went back to it, the emotional feedback would be less

Second Wind

and less until it was no more than a bad memory and an active dislike.

So far, that was all that they had done. He had watched the doctor's moving hand, listened to the tone, and upon the moment of the doctor's request, Daniel had searched for something happy. It had taken a dozen tries on some of the worst stressors because, as he had warned the doctor, he didn't have a whole lot of happy memories. The ones he did have involved Shau're, Abydos, and Jack. Some involved academic achievements. Put together, they were limited in number and the problems came when recalling the same happy memory didn't work as well as the first time.

When he couldn't find a particularly happy moment in time, he had to settle for satisfaction and events that were pleasurable. He'd discovered that instances like his first Christmas or birthday present were good enough to dispel the emotional upset. Doctor Palmer learned that for Daniel's treatment to be successful, *happy* had to be redefined.

Second Wind

The current issue had been extremely difficult to recall without vomiting or being overwhelmed with hate. As a result, he was wiped. The weather wasn't helping. As he waited for the cab, he wished for the millionth time that he had his own car. Jack was no longer picking him up from his treatments because Daniel needed to be alone afterward. He didn't think it was fair to deny Jack his emotional support, but Daniel didn't know what to say, do, or think when he was around right after a session. All he wanted to do was scream and rage and hear the sound of something breaking.

For the last few weeks, he'd held a mantra in his head that had said, *I'm doing this so I can be with Jack in both body and mind*. When he'd mentioned it to Doctor Palmer, the Doc had abruptly put a halt to the therapy in order to spend one entire visit on re-grounding to make sure Daniel *believed* that his therapy was for his own benefit, not *for* someone else. It was difficult because his love for Jack interfered with his own well-being. It was what Doctor Palmer called a martyr complex and just knowing that helped Daniel fight against it.

Second Wind

When it came to tackling the sexual traumas, love was a hindrance, and at the source of his difficulty because his sole interest in getting past the damn trauma was so he could be intimate. It was more than important, it was an imperative. At least he'd accomplished one big change: he had stopped believing that he didn't belong in this universe.

..

Daniel walked into the house and began to undress immediately knowing that Jack wouldn't be home for a while. He didn't care that his clothes lay scattered all the way to the bathroom because his goal was to get under the hot spray as soon as possible. He was about to step into the shower when he remembered two things: he needed to wait for the water to warm up, and he needed a mixed ale from the kitchen. The latest favorite was *Mike's Harder* lemonade.

Second Wind

He wasn't happy about not being able to smoke pot. It was legal in Colorado, and he would get some as soon as he had the money, but he wasn't going to ask Jack for it. Unfortunately, he *had to make do* with alcohol and he was getting awfully sick of doing that—no matter the subject matter of the treatments.

After downing half the can, aiming directly for that buzz, right or wrong, he got into the shower and let the hot water wash over him for a while. It might be hot outside, but he needed that hot water to relax the muscles in his neck and back, and ease away the headache that stabbed at his temples and applied pressure right above his brows.

Ten minutes passed and his mind began to settle. Another ten minutes, and he began to float on a tide of ale-assisted endorphins as the pain retreated. Drawing up happy memories during the session had been just as exhausting as going through the traumas themselves. What he needed to do was to look for those memories throughout his day. In the shower, he looked for associated memories and found himself revisiting a happy moment with his late husband: the last time

Second Wind

they'd shared a shower. They'd been playing driveway hockey and there'd been the typical teasing and taunting. Afterward, there was a lot of sexual pampering. He sighed as the memory expanded . . .

Behind him in the shower, Jack had wrapped his arms around him, inhaling his scent and growling against his neck. Those hands had moved downward to take hold of his cock and he'd jerked him off, slow and easy for a while until Daniel's breathing had told him it was time to speed up and get him off. They'd swayed afterward with slow anal sex.

Without thinking, Daniel took hold of his cock and began to stroke himself as he immersed himself in the memory ... and then his hand froze and eyes flew open in alarm.

He was hard. *And he wasn't sick to his stomach.*

His mouth dropped open, partly in shock, partly in lust, partly in fear, waiting for the nausea to ambush him. But it didn't arrive. Tentatively, with a purposeful focus, he recalled the memory again but with a very specific

Second Wind

aim in mind. He used the technique the doctor had given him and focused on sight, sound, touch, and taste. He focused on the feel of Jack body, and the touch of his gifted hands and tanned forearms, the smell of his sweat, the scent of his own arousal, the taste of the water and of Jack's deep kiss as he had been brought to orgasm in his husband's hand. Daniel stroked rapidly, desperately, as his body finally responded to desires without the overwhelming nausea.

He wanted to keep the memory alive, to climax reliving it, but his subconscious had other ideas and instead of his husband, it was the Jack he lived with who took over. He was the one now standing behind him, hand wrapping around his cock. The arousal amped up to eleven and Daniel gasped in startled, welcomed relief as the fantasy erupted in climax. "Jack!" The orgasm that ripped through his body was explosive, as if it were gun powder that had been stockpiled, and he collapsed to his knees, free hand on the tile to hold himself up.

He squeezed and pulled his dick through that keen, beautiful release, wishing for more, but it was all he was going to get. He half-laughed, half-cried with a relief

Second Wind

beyond description and he didn't dare fantasize about anything else, especially the future, and simply accepted what he was able to accomplish.

That night after Jack got home, Daniel said nothing, not wanting to jinx it, nor give premature hope, but he knew that Jack could tell something had happened because he caught Daniel smiling to himself. And bless Jack's angelic heart. He didn't ask.

...

"Here," Jack said the next morning, and he handed Daniel a set of keys after they cleaned up the breakfast dishes.

Daniel looked at them, expecting to see an extra fancy set of house keys or something equally silly since his copies were just fine. Instead, he took another look and realized that they weren't house keys. An emblem on one key was an upside-down triangle. He turned it

over. It said, *Rocket III*. He frowned, having never heard of the car make before. “Is this a car?”

Jack shook his head, making him frown. “C’mon, follow me,” he said, and led Daniel out to the garage. It was a place Daniel had avoided. “I’ve been wondering why you never asked about what’s in here,” Jack said, opening the side door by the laundry room.

“A guy likes his privacy,” Daniel said, shrugging. “Tool shop and all that. Besides, when you gave me the penny tour, it didn’t include the garage, so I didn’t ask.”

Jack gave him an odd look. “What was in this garage in the other universe?”

“His workshop,” Daniel answered, grinning. “He liked his alone time with blocks of wood.”

“Okay, I’m not touching that,” Jack said and flipped a switch just inside the door. A set of florescent light fixtures flickered on. The garage was filled with the usual shelves of power tools, including the customary pegboard with the equally customary hand tools. It was pretty clean, as garages went. In the center of the

Second Wind

garage, however, sat something under a brown tarp that most obviously wasn't a car. It was a bike.

"A motorcycle?" Daniel asked, eyes wide. "Rocket III is what?"

"Let's find out," Jack smirked as he went over and stepped on something at the foot of the garage door, then pulled it up along its tracks until it was fully retracted. He then pulled on the tarp and drew it off, folding it up as he went. Sitting there was a sloping black motorcycle with fancy pistons and a flared exhaust. The name on the top of the gas tank said Triumph.

Daniel's mouth dropped open. A thousand questions ran through his head. "When ... how ... what ... did ... I ..." He shut his mouth out of consternation at his own inability to form a frickin' sentence. Surprised was one thing. Speechless was another. "Wow. That's gorgeous."

Jack grinned as he looked at his watch. "We have time to stop at the gas station to get it filled up, and before

Second Wind

you ask, it's not regular fuel but biofuel. Based on corn."

Daniel stared. "No shit?"

"No shit. This weekend, we can go find you some appropriate riding clothes."

Daniel rolled his eyes. "I don't need riding clothes. It's got a helmet. That's all I need."

"You need a jacket, boots, and in a few months, a coat. Trust me, will ya?"

Daniel swallowed, bracing for a scolding. "Why?" he asked. "And I don't mean, 'I don't deserve blah, blah, blah'."

Jack put a hand on his arm. "To make life simple. I can only imagine having to deal with the fallout from your therapy sessions in the back of a damn cab. Too bad fixing what's broken isn't as simple as fixing your inner ear."

"If only," Daniel said.

Second Wind

“So, let’s just make going to your appointments as painless as possible. Besides, this baby never gets ridden. You said once that you used to ride.” He held out both hands. “Voila. Here he is. Ready to go.”

“Don’t people usually refer to inanimate objects as ‘she’?” Daniel said as he followed Jack back in the house to get his phone and house keys.

“Do I look like a sexist asshole to you?” Jack asked.

“I’m going to assume that was rhetorical,” Daniel said.

Jack threw a pair of gloves at him and Daniel half-ducked, smiling, as he caught them anyway. Jack locked up the house while Daniel pushed the bike out and locked up the garage. Heading for his truck, Jack said, “By the way. Next week, Hammond’s thinking about having you go out on a cake walk mission with us.”

Daniel paused in the act of inserting the key, eyes wide. “Really? You’re not just yanking my chain?”

“No,” Jack drawled, walking around his truck. He opened the door and said, “I’m not. Not for this.”

“What kind of cake walk?”

“Don’t know yet. But you deserve a head’s up.”

“Right,” Daniel said, turning on the bike. It had a powerful sound and the buzz under his balls was tantalizingly pleasant. He looked down at his combat boots and thought that maybe Jack was half right. He needed proper boots. By the time he got to the mountain, he’d also decided he needed a leather jacket. The base ID he carried was the special driver’s license, so until they decided what his real name would be, at least for now, he was *Doctor Daniel Jackson*.

Five Days Later

Daniel headed into the doctor's office with conflicting thoughts. He hadn't seen the man for five days, which was a no-no, and he wasn't looking forward to the reprimand. Despite this, he was contradictorily self-conscious and self-centered in his excitement about his shower breakthrough—even though talking about his sexual behavior was still a bit awkward. A hat trick of dysfunction, if he was honest with himself.

Palmer was standing by one of the bay windows, looking down at the parking lot. "Did you buy a motorcycle?" he asked. "I thought you didn't have a decent paycheck coming in yet."

"It's Jack's," Daniel said, taking a seat.

"Ah." He came back to his desk and like always during their sessions, he sat next to Daniel instead of putting the desk between them. "Do you like riding?"

Second Wind

Daniel nodded. “I didn’t realize how much I missed it until I was heading down the road. All the old reflexes kicked in. I used to ride all throughout college and my post-graduate fellowships, but then I lost grants and support because I couldn’t keep my mouth shut, so I had to sell the bike. The next time I rode was when my late husband bought me a bike for my birthday.”

“Hell of a birthday present,” Palmer said with a smile.

“Right? Though my husband bought me a Harley and Jack’s is a Triumph.”

“Do you like one make more than the other?”

Daniel sighed slowly, thinking. “The Triumph, and it’s only because of the seat. It feels better. Other than that, they’re identical in power. But I’ve never been a fan of making them loud. It’s grating to me. Gets on the nerves of those around you who *don’t* ride, and why inflict that on someone just for some false masculinity?”

Palmer pursed his lips, studying him. “Riding a bike suits you.”

Second Wind

“It does?” Daniel asked, surprised. “How so?”

“The image. Free of constraints, compared to when you’re in a car or truck and you’re surrounded by steel. Your personality reflects the desire to be free of restraint.”

Daniel thought about that and chewed at his lip. “I’ve had to put up walls to protect myself, and can only release that when I ride.”

Doctor Palmer smiled. “Precisely, Daniel.”

Daniel gave him a mild look of exasperation. “Well done. You steered me into a metaphor, so let’s skip the manipulation and get down to business.”

Palmer nodded. “I apologize. Manipulation was not on my mind, and metaphors were originally designed to teach.” Daniel nodded agreement. “So how’ve been things since last Tuesday? When you cancelled Thursday, I was worried.”

Daniel made a face. “I’m sorry. But there was a briefing I wasn’t allowed to skip.” The doctor frowned as he got

Second Wind

up and reached across his desk to write something down, then returned to his chair. “What was that?” Daniel asked.

“Remember when I said your therapy is paramount? Well, apparently my orders about its precedence are being ignored, so someone’s getting a phone call. Your therapy is far more important than anything that isn’t an emergency security issue. You can’t commit to your life, or your job, until your mind is properly realigned.”

Daniel sighed. “I knew it wouldn’t go over well. I *did* warn them. And frankly, part of that is my own fault because I could’ve rescheduled.”

“Not really. I had a lecture to give the next day so that day was important.”

Daniel made a face. “Consider me reprimanded.”

“That’s not my intent,” Palmer said, leaning over and placing a hand on Daniel’s forearm. “You need to learn to value yourself.”

“I do.” He grinned. “More than I did two weeks ago.”

Second Wind

“You seem pretty upbeat,” the doctor noted. “Is it the bike or something else?”

Daniel gave him a hesitant smile and cleared his throat a few times. “I, uh, got aroused and didn’t get nauseated.” The doctor’s brows rose slightly. “I was in the shower,” Daniel said quickly. “I was thinking about my late husband and the last time we shared one. I didn’t even call up the memory on purpose. Well, sort of. I was thinking about happy memories and that moment just popped into my head. Things just kind of went on from there.”

“And you orgasmed?” the doctor asked.

Daniel swallowed back the embarrassment and nodded. “I did. It was rather ...”

“Intense?”

Daniel nodded.

“I’m not surprised, given how long you’ve had to go without enjoying a release of any kind.” He paused, considering him. “Did Jack feature in any part of the

Second Wind

recollection, turning it into fantasy, or was it only your late husband and the memory itself?”

Daniel gave him a guilty look and nodded. “The former. I know why it happened, but it felt wrong somehow.”

“Fantasies are normal and there’s no right or wrong. Given that you’ve had this breakthrough, do you think you’re ready to move forward and leave fantasy for reality?”

Daniel shrank a bit. “Not yet. I’m too afraid of something triggering fear or nausea.”

“Can you give me an example?”

“A touch, specifically. On any part of me, not just in the focused ... areas. There are some things I just can’t do yet, and I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to. And if you don’t mind, I’d rather not explain.”

“Would explaining cause you stress?” Palmer asked pointedly.

Second Wind

Daniel frowned. “Yes, and I really don’t want to go there right now.” He had paled then, afraid that the doctor would insist.

“It’s all tied together, Daniel. What happened to you. It wasn’t just the physical. It was psychological. So what you’re referring to will need to be examined.”

Daniel grimaced. “It’s ... bad enough that I think I’ll retraumatize myself by just talking about it. Can’t we skip it?”

“I’d rather not, but your mental health is more important than risking a relapse just because I think we should examine everything.”

“Thank you,” Daniel said, relieved.

“However, can you give me a generalized description so I’m aware of the problem? It’ll relate to other things, I guarantee.”

Daniel heaved a sigh of trepidation. “It’s a sexual position. Facing downward. I can’t talk about it. I know I can’t *do* it. If or when I’m finally intimate with Jack,

every position will be with Jack facing me. I don't think I can even spoon with him, sex or no sex."

"Then we'll skip that for now until you're ready. When we go into Phase Seven, we'll have to bookmark this problem and get back to it."

"Ugh," Daniel said, sagging in his chair. "Okay." He straightened. "Remind me what Phase Seven entails?"

"You'll keep a log for one week. Record everything that's related to the material we've gone over, and anything that we haven't, including what you've described. For example, when you sleep with Jack, and I mean *sleep*, you might wake up in a spooning position, so however that makes you feel and react, I want you to write it down. That goes for *all* stressors, no matter how potentially insignificant. It will also serve to remind you to employ the self-calming techniques we discovered that work for you. Now remember. If you do decide to use the practice of recall on your own, remember to let your mind go blank. You then mark any thought, feeling, image, memory, or sensation that comes to mind, and write it down in the log, and then

Second Wind

we'll go over those instances as well as any others in sessions next Tuesday and Thursday."

"I, uh, actually did that in the shower. After I realized what I was, um, doing, as I thought about him, my late husband, I employed the recall of all the senses."

"Very good," Palmer said with a nod. "After you complete a log, two weeks from now, we'll start the next phase, if all goes well."

"Remind me what that is?"

"It's a review of your progress and the successes or failures that have happened. We can then go over stressors that still need work."

Daniel sighed. "Okay." His eyes widened. "Oh, crap! I'm supposed to go out on a test mission. I don't know how long it'll last. It's next week, Jack said." He gave the doctor an imploring look. "Can we extend the log phase? I really want to get off this planet for a while."

"To prove yourself, you mean."

Second Wind

“Is it that obvious?” Daniel asked with chagrin.

Palmer grinned. “Only to me. And probably those who know you best, like Jack. So if you pass the test, does that mean you’ll be rejoining SG-1?”

“I think so.”

Doctor Palmer pursed his lips thoughtfully. “Then I’ll expect a phone call from Hammond.”

“Really?” Daniel asked.

“As I said, therapy comes first, which *also* means that any decisions he makes will include my opinion on your progress and outlook.”

“Are you feeling positive about that?” Daniel asked worriedly.

“I am. But let’s not jump the gun and put the cart before the horse. I’ll agree to the mission, so long as it’s only dealing with known factors that aren’t life-threatening.”

Daniel made a face. “If it’s not?”

Second Wind

“I suppose throwing you into the lion’s den, so to speak, is a test, but I’ll insist it can’t be that. No strange aliens or unknown situations, Daniel. I mean it.”

“Can you give me an example?”

Palmer pursed his lips again. “Well, if the planet you go to has a population of Unas, skip it. If you’re going to see the Asgard, skip it.”

“I get why I should steer clear of the Unas, but why the Asgard?”

“Replicators.”

“You know about them?” Daniel asked, surprised. He looked at the doctor’s desk and laptop sitting open.

“I’m going to assume you have security measures in place to keep that information private?”

“Military-grade encryption,” Doctor Palmer said. “And I know about replicators only because they’re a threat to SG personnel, and therefore are of particular note in their fears. It saves time when patients don’t have to use up their therapy hour having to explain.”

Second Wind

“That makes sense. I’m just surprised that you were told.”

“Janet and I have discussed work with many patients, and in order for me to do my job, facts needed to be shared, regardless of their secrecy level.”

“Ah,” Daniel said. “Got it. So. What’s on the agenda for today?”

“The Goa’uld Frazier.” Palmer checked his notes rather quickly. “What happened during the fourteenth week at the Reform, in the cargo bay on Level 15.”

Daniel swallowed hard and grabbed a sickness bag.

..

Laughter. Maniacal. Pain. The blinding, overhead light above the table.

“NO!”

Second Wind

Daniel screamed the word, mind filled with fear and hatred, and he awoke from a nightmare where he had been reliving a painful, hideous memory. He wouldn't have had the stupid thing if he hadn't done the image stimulation in therapy. Damn Doctor Palmer for making him go through that. At least the nightmare hadn't been sexual.

"Fuck," he said, getting up and throwing the covers aside. Now he had to walk around, get something to drink while he ran into things thanks to how damn tired he was. When he headed for the door, the floor creaked and the door opened. There was Jack's black silhouette as he appeared in the doorway. "You okay?"

Jack was in pajama bottoms and nothing else. They were in response to Daniel's request that he wear something more than boxers. Seeing him in those things had been just a bit too ... well, things *stirred* that weren't supposed to. Hopefully, that would change soon. But Jesus. The guy was still half naked anyway and looking sexy as hell.

Second Wind

“Yeah, I’m okay. And you’re ...” He waved an aery hand and averted his gaze. “Half naked.”

Jack snorted. “I don’t have a shirt on. That’s not half naked.”

Daniel groaned and shaded his eyes. “Whatever you say. Now get out of the way so I can do my thing.”

Jack stepped aside and watched Daniel go down the hall and disappear into the kitchen. It was now routine, unfortunately, whenever he had a nightmare. Daniel would go to the kitchen, take some Tylenol with a mixed ale, then go out onto the deck behind the house and stand there, waiting, as the nightmare faded. He wouldn’t go back to sleep until he was sure his mind wouldn’t pick up where it had left off upon waking. He followed him into the kitchen, just to make sure he was alright and watched as he retrieved a can from the fridge.

Daniel looked over at him as he opened the bottle of Tylenol kept on the kitchen counter. “Did I wake you?” he asked, cringing. “I’m sorry.”

Second Wind

Jack leaned against the entryway's support column that separated the kitchen from the dining room and crossed his arms. "There's nothing to apologize for. I was already up. I can't sleep."

Daniel gave him a lop-sided grin. "Wanna talk about it?"

Jack snorted and laughed. "That's funny."

"Yeah. And here's the even funnier part. I'm serious." He was. "And maybe listening to you will get my mind off the crap. Or I can go out back and stand in the dark."

"Maybe," Jack said, and turned around, heading for the hallway.

Daniel frowned as he guzzled the drink, stopping after five seconds. The fizz burned nicely, making him twitch his nose as it tickled his throat where nasal passage exited. Jack returned with the leather-bound journal Daniel had bought for his log writing. He set it on the counter next to him and said, "Write it down before it

fades. A nightmare qualifies as the distress the doc told you to record.”

Daniel gave him a disgusted look and skipped answering him because it had all been said and done twice over. He’d say, *“That’s what I get for telling you everything.”* And Jack would respond with, *“Then stop telling me.”*

“I keep forgetting to ask,” Daniel said instead as he moved aside while Jack grabbed a beer. “Why can’t you get to sleep at nine or ten anymore?”

“It’s been a thing for the last year,” Jack admitted. “Since *his* death, I can’t go to sleep early. Partly because I’d wake up from nightmares not long after I’d drop off. If I stay up, or fall asleep watching TV, that doesn’t happen. I don’t know why.”

Daniel frowned as he took a sip from the now-half-empty can. “You’re still having nightmares?” he asked. “Why haven’t you said anything?”

“Because the nightmares have passed. So I *could* go to sleep, except ...”

Second Wind

“You’re afraid the nightmares will come back? I think you need to see Doctor Palmer. His method helps me. Maybe it’ll help you.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Jack jerked his chin in the direction of Daniel’s bedroom. “You going back to bed?”

Daniel shook his head and tipped his can at the back door. “Going to do my thing.”

“Maybe you should talk about it instead?” Jack asked, knowing already what the answer would be, but he had to offer an ear anyway.

Daniel shook his head as he gave him a small, pained smile. “Sorry. I’m not sharing this stuff.”

“Burdens are meant to be shared,” Jack offered.

“Not these,” Daniel said, and he tapped Jack’s arm with the side of his fist as he walked past him, heading for the back door. Jack didn’t follow when he stepped onto the deck and the tension in Daniel’s neck and shoulders relaxed. He needed Jack to stay away. What he wanted most at that moment was to wrap his hands around

Second Wind

Frazier's neck and squeeze the life from her, watching with glee as her face turned red, then purple. He didn't like the murderous hatred and he needed to be alone so that Jack wouldn't see it in his eyes. That was something he refused to share, no matter how much he wanted to vent.

He leaned over, elbows resting on the deck's wooden railing, and stared into the dark of the backyard, forcing himself to think of nothing in particular. If he focused on what had woken him up, the nightmare would continue when he went back to bed. Movement to his right caught his eye and he froze as a small family of raccoons appeared, skirting the extremely tall hedges and copse of trees that separated Jack's house from the neighbors on the next street over. He watched the four little kids follow mom as they foraged and part of him wanted to go in and get them something to eat. As a kid, he used to feed them unshelled peanuts, watching as they cracked them open.

Eventually, the brood moved on without detecting his presence, mostly because he'd kept himself very still and barely breathed. He wasn't sure what mama

Second Wind

raccoon would've done, but he sure as hell would not have bolted back inside if she had taken notice. With animals, if you showed no fear, they left you alone. It's too bad humans couldn't do the same thing. The thought nearly made him go back to the nightmare so he forced himself to think of something else. Anything else. Twenty minutes later, he went back inside. Jack's bedroom was now dark and he paused, listening, to see if he'd fallen asleep. There was no reason to do so, since he wouldn't have done anything if Jack *had* been awake. It was just the unacted wish to climb into bed with him, to have that contact. To feel his body heat beside him as he slept.

Daniel climbed back into his own bed and arranged himself in a cocoon of covers. As he drifted back to sleep, his mind focused on images of Jack's firm chest and abdominal muscles, dusted with hair. Down below, something stirred and no nausea followed to wake him up.

...

The next day, Jack popped his head into Daniel's office.
"Hey."

"Hey," Daniel said, not looking up as he tapped a key on the computer.

"Hammond wants to see us."

"Now?" Daniel asked, still not looking up. He scowled and tapped another key. "We need a better database."

Jack paused, confused, and not giving a shit.

"Whatever. Yeah, now."

Daniel sighed. He'd only just finished reading about the latest SG-1 missions, which had been far different from his former universe's reports. There'd been significant differences—apart from him not being dead. But at the moment, he had been waiting for keyword search results and wasn't happy because they were incomplete. Logging out and shutting off the monitor, he got up from his desk and grabbed his fatigue shirt, phone, and keys. "What's up?" he asked, then scowled

Second Wind

again because Jack was moving faster than usual and Daniel had to half-run to catch up. But after five seconds, Daniel decided that half-running was stupid. The Briefing Room and Hammond weren't going anywhere. He caught up with Jack at the elevator just as it was about to open. He didn't say anything about running and neither did Jack.

"So what's the deal?" he asked.

"I don't know," Jack shrugged as the two of them entered. He pushed the button for Level 27 and the doors closed.

In the elevator, Daniel straightened out his fatigue shirt. "You're so full of shit," he said. Jack tried for a bland look that Daniel didn't buy. Then his eyes widened as a thought came to him. "Wait. Is this the mission?"

"I don't know," Jack said, shaking his head and frowning.

Daniel held up his hands in apology. "Okay, sorry, but you've pulled a lot of stuff on me. It's kinda been the norm for you lie. Even for a good cause, it's annoying."

Second Wind

Jack sighed. “Okay, fair point. But this time, not a clue. It might be *the* mission, or it might be something else.”

By the time they were nearly to the Briefing Room, Daniel was even further annoyed. “Well, if it *isn't* the mission, I don't see why I'm supposed to be here.”

“We'll find out,” Jack said. He really didn't have a clue. They entered the conference room and found Teal'c and Carter waiting. “What's goin' on?” he asked them. She shrugged and Teal'c shook his head. Hammond came out of his office and approached them, looking serious. Daniel looked at Jack's expression, which would tell him whether he needed to be worried or not. Jack only jogged his brows, so Daniel assumed there would be bad news.

“We've finally heard back from the Tok'ra,” Hammond told them. “They've completed their move to their new base of operations, and everything checks out, but they *say* they'd like an outsider's view of their security.”

“You don't believe them?” Jack asked.

Second Wind

“We’ve all been burned a few times so, no, I don’t. There’s something going on.” He regarded Sam, who looked as if she was about to object. “Your father notwithstanding, Major. I’m positive he wouldn’t be leading us down the wrong path.”

“More like a dangerous path, sir,” Jack said.

“Agreed,” Hammond said. “That said, he may not be involved in whatever ulterior motive may be in play. To be honest, this gives us a unique opportunity to do an assessment. While the Tok’ra want another view of security, I want your objective to find out *where* this new base is.”

“We don’t know?” Jack asked, brows rising.

“They’ve been tight-lipped about it. All we know is that the Asgard were involved somehow.”

“There’s the unexpected shoe,” Jack said. “Have they ever done anything together prior to this new base?”

Second Wind

“Not to our knowledge, Colonel. So I want eyes and ears.” He looked at Daniel. “And I’m including you in the mission, Doctor.”

Daniel’s eyes widened and he and Jack traded looks.

“Is this, by any chance, the cake walk you were hinting about?” Jack asked the General.

“Yes, Colonel, it is. It’s time to throw him into the pool and see how he swims.”

Daniel gave him a flat look. “You mean to see if I drown.”

Hammond grimly nodded. “That’s the way it was put to me by the Joint Chiefs, Doctor Jackson. In my personal opinion, there’s no problem. You’ve been doing a good job with the few Goa’uld translations we’ve tossed your way. They’ve been minor enough to both keep you on your toes and not put any undue stress on you at the same time. This is the next logical step, given that the Tok’ra sound just like the Goa’uld, but aren’t. They’re no threat, so you’ll have nothing to fear except failing a mission by your own standards.”

Second Wind

“Doctor Palmer never said anything about clearing me for this kind of mission.”

“It’s been cleared,” Hammond assured him. “You’ll be tested on your ability to rebound after being confronted by perceived stressors. The Tok’ra voices, specifically. Think you can handle that?”

Daniel kept the worry off his face. “I’ll do my best, sir. But is there anything I should be doing during the mission other than tagging along?”

“Were you a member of SG-1 in the other reality?”

Daniel dropped his mouth open, then closed it, feeling somewhat stupid. “I said I was, sir, yes.”

“Then you have your answer, Doctor.” Hammond gave Jack a nod. “You’ll leave this afternoon at 1700 hours. Uniform code is black.” He returned to his office and shut the door.

“Sweet,” Jack said, then turned to Daniel and looked him up and down. “Don’t worry. It’ll look great.” He leaned back to look at Daniel’s long hair. “For the most

Second Wind

part.” He grinned at him. “C’mon, kids. Go home, gather what typical non-essentials you need, and meet back in the locker room at 1630.”

“Yes, sir,” Sam said as she and Teal’c left the room first, followed by Jack and Daniel.

“Non-essentials?” Daniel asked.

“Snacks, books to read, music to listen to, that sort of thing.”

“Oh, right.”

Jack eyed him. “And you’re taking your log, Daniel, or you’re not going.”

Daniel stopped in the corridor, mouth gaping open as he watched Jack continue down the corridor. “You little shit.”

“I heard that,” Jack said without turning around.

Daniel sighed and hurried to catch up. “Fine, I’ll bring it. Just promise me that you won’t embarrass me in front of them.”

Second Wind

“I swear,” Jack said, making an X over his heart.

“You’re a prince.”

“Watch it.”

Daniel rolled his eyes.

...

Jack had lost his patience. Daniel was late by ten minutes, having agreed to meet back at the house by 1630. He should have told him that whatever it was that he wanted to do at the last minute, it could’ve waited. He had no idea where he had gone. There were a lot of things that mystified Jack about Daniel, but they were also rather welcome because they were radically different from the late Daniel. Jack had to admit that he’d wanted something to separate the old and new men he loved. He liked the man who had bloomed from the dry wretch he’d found in the

Second Wind

Andromeda's cargo bay. The only thing that would make things perfect would be to take their relationship past the friendship stage.

Jack's ire suddenly changed to worry as he considered that Daniel might have gotten into a car accident, but a second after that, he heard the engine of the motorcycle. The sigh of relief was quickly followed by annoyance, and he went to the door and stepped onto the porch, mouth open to chide and scold, but what he'd planned on saying died on his lips.

"Sorry I'm late!" Daniel said, removing his helmet and running a hand through his hair. He left the bike running as he dismounted and stuffed his gloves into the helmet, then headed up the winding path to the door. "Really, really, sorry, but I had to ..." He stopped mid-step about three feet away because Jack was staring. He passed a hand over his hair. "What? Does it look bad?"

Jack replayed the last ten seconds over and over in rapid time even as he beheld the man's shorter hair. It looked *exactly* like the hair style he'd seen on him when

Second Wind

they'd first met. It was that layered look, with the length just past the bottom of his collar and the bangs that fell even with his eyelashes. Windblown and messy, it had been sexy as hell. Now, it was just messy, and still sexy. The auburn brown color seemed more vibrant, as if the extreme length had dulled it. Daniel ran his hand through his hair again, roughing it up even more and it made Jack's fingers itch. He stepped back, holding an arm out so that Daniel would enter the house first. He planned on listening to Daniel's explanation, even though it was clearly unnecessary, but he just ...

..

Daniel felt a bit warm under the jacket thanks to riding in the late afternoon sun. He looked at Jack a few times as he walked in the house. "You're not saying anything. Is it that bad? Look, I'm sorry I'm late, but I figured I'd

Second Wind

celebrate going offworld with the team by looking more like my old self and ...”

His words faded and a very different warmth started to spread through him thanks to the *stare* he was getting—and didn’t mind. It was also causing him to panic because Jack was looking at him in *that* way. He’d seen it often enough on his late husband’s face. Was it just because he’d cut his hair? He swallowed hard and cleared his throat. “Jack?” The man took a few steps toward him. Daniel took a few steps back and hit the small phone table by the front window. “Okay, look,” he said in a half-laugh. “You ... *look* ... a bit ... well, you know. It’s dangerous and you really shouldn’t ...” He discovered there was no accompanying nausea to go with the flat-out arousal Jack was bringing out in him.

Jack narrowed his eyes. “I’ll just bet it looks that way because the thoughts in my head actually *are*. Dangerous, I mean.”

“Ha huh,” Daniel said, half-laughing again. Jack came closer and Daniel looked over his shoulder for a clear path to escape, but he had to move sideways first,

Second Wind

which wasn't helping to move *away*. "You need to stop."

Jack nodded, stopping. "Any fear?"

"No."

"Nausea?"

Daniel shook his head, then inhaled sharply as Jack stepped into his personal space and reached out to thread the fingers of his right hand through his hair. Daniel closed his eyes at the caress, wanting more, even though several warring emotions swam into each other. Arousal, trepidation. Longing.

Then things magnified when Jack leaned in at the same time as he took a handful of Daniel's hair in his hand to pull him forward. Daniel sucked in a breath as his gaze traveled back and forth between Jack's emotion-filled eyes and his lips. "You shouldn't," he began, but the words were faint. "We shouldn't." He meant it to sound like a warning, but it actually came out as permission.

Second Wind

Jack said in a low voice, “You look just like you did that first day we met.” He threaded the fingers of his other hand through that wonderful hair. “I’m going to kiss you.”

“That a good idea?” Daniel said, heart rate climbing.

“I don’t know. Isn’t it?” Jack asked, only a few inches away now.

“No,” Daniel managed to say. “Maybe. Uh ...” What was wrong with him? Just say it!

“You’re shaking,” Jack paused. “Good or bad?”

“Just kiss me alr—”

Jack mashed their lips together, parting them soon after to forcefully seek out his tongue. Daniel met him with much more force and passion, as if all his pent-up desires tried to be expressed all at once. He wrapped his arms around Jack’s neck while Jack tightened his fingers in his hair, and those actions combined deepened the kiss. They changed angles twice, hungrily trying to consume each other, but when Jack wrapped

Second Wind

an arm around his waist to bring their bodies closer together, they both realized that the kiss couldn't go further. Jack was hard, as was Daniel, and they slowly broke apart.

Jack rested his forehead on Daniel's. "We'll finish this when we get home?" he asked in a murmur.

"Yes," Daniel managed, and the elation inside him was nearly too great to contain. He was hard, and Jack had made him that way—without any corresponding queasiness.

It took each of them more than a minute to get themselves together and it was the strongest effort of will Daniel had exerted in his entire *life*.

Jack would have agreed.

Chapter 7: Testing The Therapy

The lockers for SG-1 were in a completely different part of the locker wing than Daniel remembered. He gestured behind them as Jack paused at a door and swept his ID over the scanner port. “They’re not down there?” he asked. Up to that point, changing into fatigues had been in another section with a piece of masking tape over the locker’s door that had simply read, *D. Jackson*.

“Your locker’s been outfitted already,” Jack said. “It’s one of the things I did yesterday.”

“What?” Daniel asked as they went through the door. “What’re you talking about?”

They entered a short hallway and Jack turned to the right into a large room with four double-doored lockers with a shower room’s entryway dividing them evenly. Sam and Teal’c were already there, on the left, and Jack moved to the right. He pointed at the locker to the left of his own. “There’s yours.”

Second Wind

Daniel absently nodded as he looked at Sam and Teal'c.
"Hey guys."

"Hey," Sam said, grinning and turning away to step into a dressing room off to her left.

Daniel received a nod and smile from Teal'c, but if Daniel wasn't imagining things, their smiles were just a bit ... secretive. Crossing to the locker, Daniel set his gloves and helmet on a dressing bench behind him, then turned to open the locker. He was completely taken aback to find his name on a black name plate that had been slid into place on a tracked holder. The label read: Daniel T. Jackson.

He stared at it, confused. "Uh, what's this?" he asked, tapping the locker with a knuckle.

"Your locker," Jack said. "I was gonna tell you about it earlier but ... it sort of slipped my mind."

Daniel let a small smile appear on his lips as he opened the unlocked doors, but he sobered and looked back at the name plate. "Okay, first. That's ... a name plate. Shouldn't it be a temporary label?"

Second Wind

“No,” Jack said, busying himself with undressing.

“Ah huh. Didn’t someone tell me that I wasn’t going to be allowed to use my own name if I got accepted into the Program.” It was Jack, if memory served.

“Yeah, about that,” Jack said as he pulled on black trousers. “Maybe we can do something about that. Your middle name might be used as your first, for the time being.”

“Thomas?” Daniel groaned.

“Thomas?” Jack asked, looking surprised. “I thought it was Trevor.”

Daniel blinked. “*Trevor?* You’re joking.” Jack’s surprised expression melted. “Oh, ha ha. Trevor.” He shook his head. “Last person I knew named Trevor was Neville’s frog in Harry Potter.” In the dressing room, Sam started giggling. Daniel grinned.

Jack cleared his throat. “Anyway, *Thomas.*”

Second Wind

“Oh, you call me that again,” Daniel said in warning.

“Payback will be *epic*.”

Jack held up his hands. “I surrender. And it might not be Thomas. I think Hammond knows how important it is to keep your own name. Listen, hurry up and get the trousers on so Carter can come back out of the dressing room.”

“Right,” Daniel said, and absently, because he found that the locker had indeed been filled. Everything inside the locker was either hanging, folded, or rolled. Some anal retentive supply clerk had labels on the hangers that read *desert*, *jungle*, *tropical*, and *covert*, as if he couldn’t figure them out. Next to those, however, was a garment bag labeled *command*. He unzipped the top and found a suit inside. Dark grey. Light grey shirt. But the tie was a slate blue and that would have to go. He zipped it back up and pulled out the *covert* uniform. Black everything. “This is pretty cool.”

“Didn’t you have black uniforms?” Jack asked.

Second Wind

Daniel shook his head and felt a bit of creepiness slide down his back as he shucked off his jeans and pulled on the black fatigue trousers. The last time he'd seen all-black uniforms were on the personnel in the other universe, albeit those uniforms hadn't been standard fatigues, as these were.

"Carter, he's got his pants on," Jack called out, giving Daniel a jog of his brows when the man looked over.

Daniel grabbed something rolled up and tossed it at Jack's head. His team leader just smiled and tossed it back—a black t-shirt.

"Took you long enough," Sam said as she came out in her own black trousers and t-shirt.

"Yeah, well," Daniel said as he pulled off his blue and white plaid shirt and reached for the black tee. He found Jack giving him a look and turned away, frowning. "Jack."

"What? You're more filled out that I thought you'd be, that's all."

Second Wind

“Indeed,” Teal’c said, giving him a critical eyes.

“Okay,” Daniel said, quickly donning the tee. “Look elsewhere if you don’t mind.” He received silent smiles, even from Sam, and he would have grumbled under his breath if he didn’t become *re*-distracted by the contents of the locker. It was kitted out a lot better than the one he’d always had before.

There was a large section on the right side for more hangers, which held field vests of varying colors that would match the uniforms, although Daniel preferred the black vests with everything except the desert camo. Under the vests sections was another that held three pairs of boots, all suede, in dark green, desert, and black. He pulled out the black ones and set them on the floor, then reached into the shelf underneath to grab a pair of rolled up socks. Rolled on a shelf above the vests were the other t-shirts, from which he’d absently grabbed, and hanging on hooks on the inside of the right locker door were four different belts, the field belt he’d attach to the vest, and the matching fatigue caps. In a couple of hanging baskets were standard gear

Second Wind

items, such as a compass, a combat knife and sheath, and the small field binoculars.

He set to work, muscle memory kicking in as he fitted the field vest with its accoutrements. Before putting on the belt and buckling it, however, he stopped halfway and slipped the knife sheath between loops, adjusting it as the belt was closed. Making sure it was snug, he slid the combat knife in, then grabbed the black fatigue cap and stuck it into a side pocket.

He became aware of the silence around him and realized he had a three-person audience. He looked left, then right. “What?” he asked them. *The knife*, he told himself, because they all wore theirs in the standard, vertical position behind the back and to the right. “Right. I’ve been wearing my knives like this long before I joined SG-1 in my old universe. It’s easier for me. If I were hang it vertically, the muscle memory would be off and there’d be a delay.”

“Is this a tactical method?” Teal’c asked him.

“Not really.”

“It’s for Special Ops,” Jack said.

Daniel’s mouth opened and closed a few times before he said, “It’s just an archaeological trick I learned when you’re in dangerous territory.” Daniel turned his back to Teal’c and demonstrated placing his hands at the small of his back—at the belt—with his *left* holding the sheath and the *right* grabbing the handle while his thumb flicked open the snap. In one fluid motion, as he did this, the knife came out and was automatically held with the blade against his forearm, sharp edge outward, ready to cut anyone or anything about to strike.

“I shall make a note of that,” Teal’c nodded, keeping his knife where it was. “However, if you are left-handed, should not the grip be reversed?”

“No, because like I told Jack, I write with my left, but everything else is done with my right.”

Jack watched him, directly and peripherally, and was both impressed and turned on by the way Daniel had handled the knife. He wondered several things as he finished up. One, what else was going to be a pleasant

Second Wind

surprise during this cake walk mission? Two, should he start wearing his knife that way *again*, because once upon a time, he had. And three, maybe there's a way to cut short the mission. He'd have to cogitate on that one for a while.

Their first stop was S4, also known as Supply, where they picked up the med kits and enough MREs to last the mission. Sadly, they weren't given a choice. The Supply sergeant placed a box labeled *SG-1* on the counter and they had to divvy up three days' worth of rations and load them into the packs. They were supposedly going to be offered quarters, so there was no need to add their bedrolls. If they ended up needing shelter, the Field Remote Expeditionary Device, or FRED, would carry the tent.

Next stop was S6, aka Security, where they'd picked up the radio units that would clip onto the vests. There, too, Daniel's muscle memory kicked in and he didn't have to look when he slid it place, locked it snug with the snap, and fit the wireless black earpiece over his ear and adjusted the thin, translucent mic. That it had been wireless had been a surprise, but he knew how they

Second Wind

were worn and operated, so it hadn't caused a hiccup in his motions. The one thing he didn't want to do was look like an amateur in front of the Security personnel.

Daniel leaned against the wall across from Security's main door, waiting. Jack looked over his shoulder with a raised brow. "What're you doing? You have to sign these out."

Daniel pushed off the wall, frowning. "What're you talking about?"

"The P90, Glock, and zat. Hello."

"But ..." Daniel walked forward and he was only slightly relieved to find the Security sergeant frowning at Jack. He too was apparently confused.

"Colonel?" the man, Schaffer, asked.

"Sergeant?" Jack asked.

"Doctor Jackson hasn't been cleared for weapons assignment."

Second Wind

“Go ahead and issue the weapons, Sergeant. On my authority and responsibility,” Jack told him, realizing the man was new.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I believe General Hammond has to authorize it.”

“As the base XO,” Jack said, emphasizing the letters, “it’s *my* job. Did you somehow forget?”

The sergeant’s mouth dropped open. “I’m sorry, sir. I haven’t memorized all senior personnel yet.”

Daniel frowned. “I didn’t know you were XO.”

Jack jogged his brows. “Sergeant, issue the weapons. Next week, we’ll have this straightened out.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll need you to sign the waiver.”

He handed Jack a form, which he scanned and signed. “There ya go. Now, let’s get finished.”

“Yes, sir.”

Second Wind

Daniel took the P90, Glock sidearm, and the zat, then signed for them using his own name. He tied on their straps and loaded the two extra magazines for the P90 in a side pocket. He wasn't going to argue, given what Jack had just laid out, but he felt the weapons were superfluous, given where they were going. He grinned to himself, imagining a target range at the Tok'ra base.

"What's funny?" Jack asked.

"My mind," Daniel said.

"Well, duh—" Jack began, but Daniel absently put his fingers over Jack's lips as the team finished and headed for the elevator. Jack's brows rose and he received grins from Carter and Teal'c as they passed him. Like Daniel, he too elected not to respond. In the elevator, Daniel took the earpiece off and bent it a bit to adjust the fit. When he put it back on, it was a lot snugger. Again, Jack said nothing. He just watched and gave a micro nod.

Daniel gave him a small smile, and it was then that he allowed himself to notice the butterflies in his stomach.

Second Wind

“Uh, do you guys know which Tok’ra we’re going to be dealing with?”

“Well there’s my Dad,” Sam said automatically.

“There is the Tok’ra High Council,” Teal’c said.

“Who are ...?” Daniel asked.

“My Dad and Malek,” Sam said. “I don’t know who else. I think the council now has twelve members, but I’m not sure. We haven’t seen them all together for a long time.”

“Anyone else we’re likely to see?” Daniel continued.

“Aldwin,” Teal’c said. “Anise, perhaps.”

Jack groaned and Daniel looked over with a raised eyebrow but the man shook his head. He wasn’t explaining. Jack then nudged Daniel’s boot toe with his own. “Why the questions?” he asked, suspecting a reason.

Second Wind

“I was just wondering,” Daniel said as memories tried to heighten the nervousness he was struggling to suppress.

“Hogwash. There’s more to it than that,” Jack said. At Daniel’s frown, he said, as if it was obvious, “I can tell.”

Daniel sighed. “Bad memories. A few Tok’ra from my world were Goa’uld agents.”

“Who?” Jack asked.

“Tanith and Malaki.”

“Tanith is dead,” Teal’c said smugly.

“That he is,” Jack said, equally smug.

“Good,” Daniel nodded, relieved somewhat but not completely. There were things Jack, Sam, and Teal’c didn’t know and he wasn’t sure they needed to. Time on the Tok’ra planet would tell.

“What’s this Malaki look like?” Sam asked.

Second Wind

The elevator opened and they headed down the corridor. Daniel looked upward, focusing. “About Jack’s height, had tanned skin, light brown eyes. Not ugly but not handsome either. Sort of looked like an actor whose name now escapes me.” He grimaced. “I used to know all this pointless stuff without thinking. My late husband said I had a—”

“Magpie mind,” Jack finished with him. He grinned at Daniel. “Yeah. Heard that.”

Daniel gave him a sheepish look. “I have to keep an eye on those references. Sorry about that.”

“What’re you talking about?” Jack asked.

“Bringing up the dearly departed?” Daniel said.

“Because of who he was.”

“Oh. Right.” Jack shrugged. “Don’t sweat it. If you’re doing it in five or ten or twenty years, we’ll have a talk.”

“Oh, thanks,” Daniel said in a dry tone. “I’ll somehow try to remember that.”

Second Wind

Sam exchanged grins with Teal'c. The rest of the walk was silent until they made it into the Gateroom, where the wormhole had already been established. Jack gave him a look and put a hand on Daniel's shoulder. "Ya'll right?"

"Will ya quit it? I'm fine," Daniel said, rolling his eyes.

"As long as you don't go all squirrely."

Daniel frowned. "Define squirrely."

Jack shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe freak out over seeing this guy Malaki, if he's around?"

Daniel sighed. "The Tok'ra, en masse, are not part of any trauma, Jack. The traitors were just dicks. I'll be just fine. The only thing I need to check myself on is the voice and eye glow. Once that's managed, I'll be good to go."

"Sweet," Jack said with a warm smile. "Then it really will be a cake walk."

Second Wind

“SG-1,” Hammond said from the Control Room. “You have a go.”

Jack gave him a two-fingered salute and the men followed Sam and the FRED up the ramp and through.

...

The team found no one there to greet them as they emerged from the gate. “Huh,” Jack said.

Daniel blinked and looked around. “This is different.”

“It’s an old, Asgard-protected world,” Sam told him.

“That explains the runes,” Daniel said, waving a hand as he chewed at his lip.

“What?” Sam said, looking down and finding rune glyphs in the blue-grey stone. “Huh.”

Second Wind

“Yeah,” Daniel drawled as he crouched and ran a hand over the surface. “Interesting.”

Jack, Sam, and Teal’c exchanged looks. Except for his appearance, there was no other discernible difference between Daniel and his late counterpart. His words and actions were identical.

“What’s interesting?” Jack prodded when Daniel didn’t explain.

Daniel glanced up at him and gestured again. “The runes. They’re part of the structure and don’t seem to be embedded in any known Earth technique. If I ever see Thor again, I’d like to ask how they did it.”

Beneath their feet was a two-step grey stone circular dais approximately twenty-five feet in diameter, with each step’s tread unusually long and the riser only four inches. Etched within the stone were rune glyphs of slightly darker color positioned in tightly packed straight lines. They didn’t seem to be a message of any kind that Daniel could recognize. They were either a signal of who had lived here, or an aesthetic choice.

Second Wind

Extending forward beyond the dais was a pale cream walkway six feet wide, and it, too, was embedded with random runes, but unlike the grey stone runes, the runes were colored in random shades of yellow ochre. Both the stone dais and walkway, which extended into the brilliant green forest of trees, were weathered due to time, with scratches and small pits, but overall, they seemed to have withstood the ravages of time. Daniel dropped to one knee and ran a bare hand over the pale stone as he had the dark grey platform, brushing away forest detritus to feel the material.

“Cold, like marble, and remarkably preserved. If I didn’t know who created this, I’d say this was only a hundred years old.”

Standing on the top step, Jack wrinkled his brow, observing him. He was abruptly reminded of a moment on Abydos during their first mission. He’d been watching Daniel’s interaction with Kasuf and Skaara inside the pyramid’s cave structure while a sandstorm raged outside. He hadn’t fully read the file Catherine had on him. All he’d paid attention to was Daniel’s

Second Wind

education. To look at him, he seemed about twenty-four. He carried with him a wide-eyed innocence.

When Daniel had caught him looking, he'd come over to ask if he'd needed anything. *"Yeah. The point-of-origin glyph, Daniel. Got anything yet?"*

"What? Well, no. Haven't gotten around to it yet."

"What? You do realize we're stuck on this rock, right?"

"Yeah, obviously, but I mean, c'mon," Daniel had said, waving an aery hand.

The man had been so besotted with the culture that it had been massively irritating. *"Daniel, find us a way home. I'm not going to spend the rest of my life with a twenty-four year old academic who should've stayed home."*

"Thirty-one," Daniel had corrected, completely unruffled by Jack's criticism.

"No you're not," Jack had scoffed back.

Second Wind

Daniel had given him an amused look, and at the time, Jack hadn't known whether to slap it off his face or kiss it away. *"Yeah, I am. Thirty-one just ... a week ago. Wow. Time doesn't fly that much. I mean ..."* He'd actually laughed in awe. *"Look where we are."*

There'd been more arguing, mostly on Jack's side, with an unflappable Daniel Jackson who seemed either uncaring or ignorant of the insults hurled his way. Hammond's voice came through the FRED's attachment camera, pulling Jack from his recollection.

"This is Hammond. Status, Colonel."

"All quiet, sir. No one's here to meet us, however. Weren't we supposed to be greeted by Jacob and other Tok'ra?"

"You were," said Hammond.

"What do you want us to do?"

Daniel turned on his heel to look up at Jack, brows up in surprise. He didn't want to leave. He wanted to follow the path and see what else the Asgard had done. That

Second Wind

the Tok'ra were now living here spoke to the possibility that their new base might not be within a crystal-grown underground structure. The specifics for the mission had been absent, which had bothered him but he'd said nothing, trusting that Hammond and Jack knew what they were doing.

"Let's give it thirty minutes. If nothing has happened, you'll come home and we'll try this again when the Tok'ra have their timetables in line with our own."

"Copy that, sir."

"Hammond out."

The stargate shut down and Jack sighed as he turned around. "Well, kids. Stay on alert. Carter, the MALP's readings were done yesterday, so let's refresh them."

"Yes, sir," Sam replied.

Daniel looked around. "The MALP's not here."

"Carter's got her gizmo instead."

Second Wind

She waved a hand over her head without looking at him, her attention on said gizmo: a black sensor device the size of an old-style SAT phone.

“Oh, so the MALP was sent back earlier?” Daniel asked.

Jack nodded absently as he turned in a complete circle, then looked at Teal’c, knowing the man had been surveilling their surroundings the moment they’d arrived. “Anything different from yesterday?”

“It is unusually quiet, O’Neill. There are no birds.” He looked at Sam. “Major Carter, does the MALP not record the local animal life?”

She shook her head. “But this does,” and she held up her sensor device. “And you’re right.” She turned in a circle as she recorded readings. “No warm-blooded animal life.”

“Warm blooded?” Jack asked, brows raised.

“Heat signatures, sir.”

“Ah,” he said with a nod of acknowledgement.

Second Wind

Daniel frowned as he focused on the lack of sounds. “It’s creepy.” He walked over to the nearest tree branch and took a heart-shaped leaf bigger than his hand between thumb and forefinger, then looked up through the branches. “I’ve never seen a tree like this. Leaves shaped like this tend to belong to vine plants. If this is an evergreen, it’ll be pollinated by the wind, and perhaps there’s a cycle of life here that forces animals and insects elsewhere.”

“That sounds bad anyway,” Jack sighed. “Carter?”

She stared at the sensor readout on her handheld device. “Nothing detrimental. Oxygen is slightly higher than Earth’s.” She turned to him as she shut off the device and put it into a side pocket. “I don’t see a reason why there shouldn’t be birds and insects on this planet.”

“Maybe we’re on an island,” Daniel suggested.

“Why an island?” Jack asked, brows raised as he and Carter turned to give him raised eyebrows for making that assumption.

Second Wind

Daniel stared at them as if the question was idiotic. “Smell the air.” He lifted his chin and breathed in through his nose. “Salt water.”

“He is correct, O’Neill,” Teal’c said, inhaling. “I can faintly detect the sign of salted water, and my symbiote is uncomfortable. The Goa’uld do not like salted water.”

Jack pursed his lips. “Is that relevant to our situation?” He walked to the FRED that Carter had moved next to the DHD and lifted a side panel.

“Don’t know yet,” Sam answered.

“Hey,” Daniel said, watching Jack.

“What?” Jack asked, retrieving a heavy-duty lantern flashlight.

“Why are we carrying our MREs if we have the FRED?”

Jack frowned at him. “In case we get separated from the FRED.”

Second Wind

“Right,” Daniel said, annoyed at himself. “I’m so not paying attention. For instance ...” He sighed and took off his pack, then dug into the pack and retrieved his film camera. He waved it at Jack.

“Don’t worry about it,” Jack said as he reached up and turned on his RDF unit. “It’ll come back to you. This is supposed to be a cake walk, so maybe you just didn’t think of it as a typical mission?”

“Except I did, when I asked Hammond what I should be doing, remember?”

“Right,” Jack said, then pointed at the camera. “You packed it though, so doesn’t that tell you something?”

“What, that my subconscious is riding shot-gun? *Not* reassuring.”

“Point.”

Daniel turned on the camera and immediately received blinking red light. The charge was low. “Goddammit,” he muttered to himself.”

Second Wind

“What?” Jack asked.

“Low charge.”

Jack frowned. “Plug it into the FRED ...” he began, walking over to it and raising a panel to reveal a large battery with standard outlet plugs. And nothing else. “Never mind,” Jack sighed. “No USB ports.”

“I put in for an upgrade a month ago, sir,” Sam told him.

Jack nodded. “Daniel, you’ll have to make do.” He tapped his radio. “Everyone, switch on PRRs. Channel one.” They’d already checked them while at Security, but it was done again. “Test the units,” he said, and depressed the mic. “Testing.” He grinned as the others did the same, getting a repetitive fake echo, then he flipped up the cover on another compartment on the FRED, revealing the radio base. He double-checked the battery function and connections before closing the cover, making sure the antennae freely poked through its opening.

“I already checked it, sir,” Carter said.

Second Wind

“No offense intended, Carter. Just doing it again,” Jack told her as he adjusted his earpiece. “I wish the Tok’ra used radio. It’d be easier.”

“And more prone to jamming, O’Neill.”

Jack rolled his eyes. “Yes, I know that, Teal’c, but on that score, no system is infallible.” Teal’c bowed his head in acknowledgement. “Okay. So.” Jack looked behind him, getting ready to sit.

Teal’c suddenly went statue-still. “O’Neill. We are being watched.”

“What the hell now—” Jack began, unlatching and raising his P90.

Before them, ten yards past the DHD, two people *decloaked*. Jacob and another Tok’ra, wearing the same dark brown leathers Daniel had last seen them in.

“Whoa!” Jack said, dropping the nose of his P90, and scowled at the two men. “Are you *trying* to get yourselves shot?”

Second Wind

“Hey Dad,” Sam said soberly. “Good thing the safety was on.”

“Hey Sam,” Jacob said as he came forward to hug his daughter. “How ya doin’ kiddo?”

“Good. You?”

“The same, especially now that we’ve found a permanent home.”

“Thanks to the Asgard, I’m guessing,” Daniel said as he swept the nose of his own P90 over the stone dais.

Jacob’s brows twitched to a short frown as he glanced at him, then held his hand out to Jack. “Jack.”

Jack shook it. “Jacob.”

“You all know Malek,” Jacob said, nodding at the other Tok’ra.

Jack nodded to him. “Malek.”

Second Wind

“O’Neill,” Malek said. He looked at Sam and Teal’c.
“Major Carter. Teal’c.” He frowned when he gazed on Daniel. “Doctor Jackson.”

Though his eyes didn’t glow, the voice was unnerving, and Daniel nodded to him as he controlled his inner panic. There was the intense desire to dive for cover before opening fire but it was easily checked, if not gladly. Once upon a time, it would have been his go-to move to open fire had he found the chance to escape his prison. Tok’ra or Goa’uld, it wouldn’t have mattered. After his capture, he’d learned that most of the Tok’ra were dead, and those who had lived might as well have been Goa’uld.

“Something wrong?” Jacob asked him as he held out his hand.

“No,” Daniel said, shaking his hand while controlling his responses. “Hello, sir.”

“Doctor Jackson,” *Selmak* said. “You appear to be alarmed.”

Second Wind

Daniel's muscles twitched for a moment. "What makes you say that?"

"Your demeanor," Malek said. "What has prompted your wariness?"

Daniel checked with Jack, who nodded. He bit his lips together, considering his words. "The last time I heard the resonance caused by a symbiote, it belonged to a psychopath."

"Psychopath?" Jacob, not Selmak, asked, clearly alarmed.

"No offense, but I have too many bad memories and separating the Tok'ra between worlds might be about as difficult as it was for Jack, Sam, Teal'c, and everyone else to separate me from this world's counterpart."

"I wouldn't say it was difficult," Jack began. Daniel shrugged.

"I see. Shall we go?" Jacob asked, gesturing the path that disappeared into the woods.

Second Wind

“Where?” Jack asked, turning on the lantern and aiming it at the forest while Carter steered the FRED.

“At the end of this path is a transportation tube that will lead to the base,” Malek answered.

“Okay, but one second,” Jack said, and gestured at Carter. “Dial home, so we can tell Hammond that we’re good to go.” She did that and Jack moved to the FRED’s camera.

“We receive you, Colonel,” Hammond said. “What’s your situation?”

“Jacob and Malek have just arrived, sir. We’re on our way to the new base.”

“Let me speak to Jacob.”

Jacob walked over and gave the camera a two-fingered salute. “How ya doin’, George.”

“Jacob. I understand that it will be seventy-four hours before contact can be reestablished?”

Second Wind

“That’s correct. We’ll call not long after that for a mission report.”

“Roger that. Colonel?”

“Here, sir,” Jack said, frowning. He didn’t know what was meant by seventy-four hours. “You know I have the utmost faith in your leadership, sir, but ...”

“I apologize, Jack. It was determined to keep the details secret in order to test Doctor Jackson.”

Daniel frowned. “Sir, did Doctor Palmer authorize that?”

“He did, Doctor Jackson. He felt you were strong enough, otherwise you would not be there.”

“Right,” Daniel said. “Of course.”

“See you in seventy-four, General,” Jack said.

“Copy that. Hammond out.”

“Blame?” Daniel asked as the gate shut off.

Second Wind

“Relax, that was a joke, Daniel.”

“Yeah, I figured. Ha, ha.” He sighed.

“Seventy-four?” Jack asked Jacob and Malek as Sam took up the remote for the FRED and guided it down the rune-decorated path. “I had a feeling it would be longer than twenty-four, but why seventy-four?”

“Storms,” Jacob said. “Like clockwork. We’ll be under a protective dome while they hit this area of the planet. There is no risk of an attack from a ship in orbit because this gate isn’t included in the known network of stargates mapped by the Goa’uld.”

“Good to know,” Jack said. “But I wish Hammond had told us how long this mission was going to be. I really, *really* dislike being in the dark. As leader—”

“I know, I know,” Jacob said, cutting him off. “George and I generally agree, and it wasn’t really his idea, but as you heard, he’s taking responsibility.”

“Joint Chiefs?” Jack asked.

Second Wind

“In a manner of speaking,” Jacob sighed.

“Dammit.” Jack would have said more if Malek hadn’t been there. “Where are we going?”

“To the base,” Jacob said, smirking.

“Jacob,” Jack said, annoyed.

“We’re on an island,” Jacob said. “And we’re going to a transportation tube that will take us to the mainland.”

Jack gave Daniel a look, who tried for an innocent, wide-eyed ‘told you’ look, which made him glower. “Alright, Daniel.” The man grinned.

Jacob looked back and forth between them, then said to Daniel, “I take it you guessed correctly?”

“No, I surmised,” Daniel said, careful to keep his tone light, though what he wanted to do was snap. The man didn’t deserve it. “I took in available data and came to a logical conclusion.” He waved a hand in a circle. “Salt in the air. No birds. No bugs. Conclusion, we’re on an

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island that, for some reason, keeps most animal life away.”

Jacob gave him a look of respect. “Not bad, Daniel. Yes, we’re on an island, and we’re going to a complex on the mainland.”

“More than a complex,” Malek said.

“True, it’s a small city.”

“Seriously?” Jack asked. “How’re we getting there?”

“For the third time, Jack, by way of underwater tube rail, which is sort of like a monorail back home.”

“Oh great,” Daniel sighed, dreading the mere idea of being underwater.

“Problem?” Jack asked, noticing how pale he looked.

“What?”

“I don’t do *underwater anything* very well. I don’t mean I’ll puke or faint or some nonsense, but it’ll make me a little green around the gills.” He made a mental note to mention it to Doctor Palmer.

Second Wind

“You can’t swim?” Jack asked, surprised.

“Oh, I *can*,” Daniel said. “I made sure of it. But when I was a kid, I almost drowned. Now, even when I’m in a pool, if cold water goes over my sinuses, I get this intense feeling of claustrophobia. I can usually fight it back or I wouldn’t have learned how to swim, but it’s a fight. And it pisses me off because I can’t go diving without having to fight off the heebie-jeebies. For that reason, I avoided underwater expeditions whenever possible.”

Jack said dryly, “So no sunken ship treasure hunting in our future. Pity.”

Daniel grinned back. “If the water’s warm, I think we can. If not, I’ll be waiting in the boat. Emergencies aren’t a problem, but if it’s cold water, I’ll be wiggling out the entire time.”

“Daniel Jackson,” Teal’c said.

Daniel looked over his shoulder. “What?”

“*Green around the gills?*”

Second Wind

“Nauseated,” Sam told him.

“*Wigging out?*”

“Freaking out,” Jack said, then frowned.

“Frightened,” Daniel clarified, earning a mock-glare from Jack.

“Doesn’t sound right,” said the Colonel.

“No, which is why freaking out or wiggling out sounds better.”

“It is bizarre,” Teal’c said, making them grin.

“Welcome to the English language,” Jack quipped.

“*Heebie-jeebies?*” Teal’c asked.

“Similar to freaking out, only it’s being creeped out ... spooked ... um ...” Jack tried.

“Frightened but not severely,” Daniel said. “You don’t see what it is that’s scaring you, but the threat is there all the same.”

Second Wind

“Tal’shak’noh,” Teal’c said. “The feeling that one is in the presence of a danger that one cannot see.”

“Indeed,” Malek nodded.

“Thank you, Teal’c,” Jack said approvingly.

“You are welcome, O’Neill.”

“Tal’shak ...?”

“Tal’shak’noh,” Teal’c said.

“You ever experience it?” Jack asked.

“A few times,” Teal’c said. “It is a most unnerving sensation.”

“Right? Kind of like walking through this forest without birds and insects,” Jack said, waving a hand.

“Indeed,” Teal’c said.

“Or someone walking over your grave,” Daniel said. He earned an eyebrow from Teal’c. “Heebie-jeebies feeling. Tal’shak’noh.”

Second Wind

“That is a very unusual idiom,” Teal’c said. No one disagreed.

The cream-colored path came to an end at a fourteen-foot high, twenty-five foot wide structure that resembled a triangle with the top sawn off. It also reminded Daniel of a mine entrance. It was made from the same blue stone beneath the stargate. There didn’t appear to be a door, but in the center of the flat surface was an eight-inch square indentation with a short narrow hole.

Daniel stepped to the left to look around the *door*, expecting to see an abrupt rising of land. Instead, the structure sloped downward, like the back end of an elongated pyramid. Beyond it, the forest thinned. In the distance, there was the faint noise of ocean surf. He looked at the floor where the structure met the land and took his combat knife and slid it into the ground. He pulled the earth toward him to see what lay beneath.

“What’re you doing?” Jack asked.

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Daniel turned to Jacob. “How far down does this go?”

“Pretty far.” Jacob took an ornamental object from around his neck and inserted it into the slot. He turned it left ninety degrees, then withdrew the key. A blue neon light carved out a door that was the same shape as the structure, but twenty inches from the edges. Once the door was completely outlined, it dropped into the ground with a soft whisking-thud, revealing a bare foyer and a set of descending stairs made of the pale walkway stone. Jacob waited until everyone was inside before he slid the key into a slot on the left-hand wall and the *door* slid back up into place. The blue neon outline appeared again, then shut off. Once again, the door vanished and the surface was smooth again. Overhead, a circular light turned on, illuminating the entryway.

“Leave the FRED here, Sam,” Jacob said, replacing the key about his neck.

“Uh, no, not happening,” Jack said, eyeing the stairs, which were shallow enough for the FRED to traverse safely.

Second Wind

“Why?” Jacob asked.

Jack tapped his radio and earpiece, then the FRED.
“Base unit is on the FRED. I’m not losing communication.”

“I understand. Then you’ll have to leave the FRED just outside the tube after we arrive at the base,” Jacob said.

“We must hurry,” Malek said as he watched Sam maneuver the FRED down the stairs.

“Why?” Daniel asked.

“Because of the storm that is coming,” Malek said. “We have to be on the base before it hits.”

“Even under water?” Daniel asked.

“Yes,” Malek said.

Descending the stairs was like walking into a cave because the walls were roughhewn stone and they emptied onto a platform that was perhaps twenty-four feet square, revealing a transportation car shaped like a

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capsule. It was made of a transparent material, twelve feet in height, thirty feet deep, and fifty feet long. It was large enough to hold eight or nine people comfortably. Daniel and Sam peered underneath to see what it sat upon and found it floating in the air while a semi-translucent blue vapor clung to the car's underside.

Malek pushed on a flat clear square button and the door to the car whisked open. Once they were inside, the door closed again and Jacob pushed his palm against a large square button to the right and it glowed an amber yellow. "Grab hold of the hand grips on the far side of the car, folks."

After everyone did so, he let go of the button and quickly reached across to grab an available handle. The transport took off like a shot, though they only knew it by the speed of the exterior whizzing by.

"Artificial gravity," Daniel said.

Sam nodded. "I believe so, but how did you know that? Daniel ... the late Daniel ... wouldn't have."

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“I visited Othalla, the Asgard homeworld. They have a monorail just like this.”

“Damn,” Sam said. “I knew I should’ve asked to look around more.”

“You were there?” he asked. “Was it to fight the Replicators?”

She blinked. “Yeah. You were there to do that?”

“You and I,” he said, then made a face. “She and I.”

Sam grinned and wrinkled her nose at him. “Fair payback, after all the times we’ve done that to you.”

He nodded and sighed wistfully. She was standing right there. And still, he missed her. “Maybe we can go another time.”

“That’d be great,” she said. “Only, you know, without the emergency.”

He smiled and nodded. “That’d be nice.”

Second Wind

“What’re Teal’c and I?” Jack said, feigning offense. “Chopped liver?” The Jaffa raised an eyebrow and Jack stared back, straight-faced. “Inconsequential,” he clarified, but Teal’c’s eyebrow stayed. “Unneeded. Unwanted. Cast aside. Cast adrift—”

“You’ve mangled the metaphor, Jack,” Daniel grinned, earning one from the man.

The car cleared the island’s subterranean land mass and entered an ocean filled with life, but they were able to glimpse only flashes of gold, silver, and a rainbow of colors as they whizzed past. The track the car rode on appeared to be made of nothing more than dashes of pale blue light and it shifted around the car, instead of the other way around.

Daniel kept his eyes closed and fought off the depressed claustrophobic feeling by slowly counting prime numbers while periodically glimpsing the ocean to see if there was anything worth looking at. He felt Jack’s hand slip into his, out of sight of Jacob and Malek, and he grinned a little in appreciation. After a moment, he squeezed Jack’s hand and let go, giving him a nod.

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The capsule rose out of the ground and came to a stop over a circular platform that looked exactly like the one the gate rested on. It gave him a sense of déjà vu, but that ended after exiting.

The city was constructed of octagonal buildings connected to each other by enclosed walkways, and the octagonal buildings themselves were split into dozens of smaller octagonal units interconnected by open walkways. Almost every octagonal building was at a higher or lower level than its neighbors by slight margin of maybe four feet, and they zig-zagged in a crazy staircase manner. Daniel imagined that if he were to stand outside the dome, he'd see a city that looked like a many-petaled fractal flower. Even from the ground at the transport's location along the edge of the city, he could see a large waterfall array that appeared to be in the center of the base. It was comprised of rocky cliffs over which the water flowed and settled into a pool at the base before disappearing below ground. Daniel assumed there was either a cycling filtration system or the city was built over a creek, and possibly an aquifer.

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After their tour, the team was shown to an octagonal house that contained five rooms, which included three for sleeping, one as a type of kitchen, and a bathroom that held a shower that had no fixtures. As soon as you entered, it turned on, and turned off when you exited. Next to it was an *elimination* stool with a wide hole in it. It was part of the floor itself, as if it had grown a protuberance. The most decorative feature was a section of floor that was translucent and underneath there appeared to be a fish pond. After a while of staring at it, it was soon proven to be artificial. Jack made a mental note to one day ask Thor what the Asgard saw in such a design.

They were asked to set their gear aside and join Jacob and Malek for the evening meal, which was located several stories up in a great hall that Jack thought of as an oversized cafeteria. They were shown to a round table they shared with Jacob, Malek, and a few other Tok'ra, and dinner was comprised of fruits, rice, white and pink fish, and tiny pot pies filled with something Jack decided was the Tok'ra equivalent of dates, but

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unsweetened. There was a translucent blue liquid that was mildly sweet, and Daniel enjoyed it immensely.

“What is this?” he asked.

“Fala,” said Per’sus. “It’s made from an edible blue flower.”

“Like a tea,” Daniel said, sipping from the shallow cup provided.

“Yes, like a tea, only from petals, which are crushed immediately and made into paste, and water is added when refreshment is needed.”

“Huh,” Daniel said. “It’s good. Very light.”

Jack gestured above them at the opaque dome.

“Jacob? If the Goa’uld find this planet, the dome is vulnerable, unless you have defense systems in place.”

“We have laser platforms in strategic places around the planet, Colonel O’Neill,” Per’sus said.

Second Wind

“This storm,” Daniel began. “At the island where the gate is, there are no birds. If the storms are severe, then how do the plants survive?”

Jacob and Per’sus exchanged looks. Per’sus nodded at him and Jacob nodded back, as if he’d been given permission. “The island is under another dome, to protect the stargate from the storms.”

“The storms last seventy-four hours, with twelve-hour intervals of quiet,” Per’sus said.

“Then how do the plants survive under a dome?” Daniel asked. “If they only get twelve hours of sunlight every four days, that’s not long enough to sustain growth. They should all be dead.”

“The dome itself emits a synthetic light equal to a sun’s life-giving force,” *Selmak* said. “If we were to venture outside the protective domes, we would see nothing but green hills and valleys. There are no trees. Only the small plants escape the hundred-mile an hour winds.”

Daniel blinked. “How long’s the planet been this way?”

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“For two thousand years,” Selmak said.

“Then it appears that there’s no need for a second opinion about security,” Jack said, suspicious. “While I’m all for visiting, Jacob, I think this little ruse is uncalled for.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Look, if the Goa’uld don’t know you’re here, you have nothing to worry about. Anyone coming through the stargate won’t be able to get anywhere without a key to open up that triangular entrance. If you have weapons to defend you from above, you have that covered, too, unless the ships attacking from orbit have shields that can withstand your weapons platform. So, given all that, why are we here?”

Jacob sighed. “To give you a look at the base, which is part of the agreement that Per’sus signed along with the United States’ President. We share intel, technology, and weapons. You do the same.”

Daniel was suspicious, and it was based on negative behaviors from another reality. He decided to keep his

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concerns to himself, preferring to see whatever was going on to play out. From past experience, he knew the SGC and the Tok'ra wouldn't waste their time testing a single individual. On that basis, he wasn't that important. There had to be another reason.

...

At lunch the next day, Daniel thought he'd gotten a handle on the sound of the Tok'ra voices. There was nothing out of the ordinary, and there were no surprises until he learned that Aldwin's symbiote's name was Malaki. Given who his host was, Daniel didn't have a problem. The problem, he found, was the Tok'ra's curiosity about where he'd come from, and he wished they'd just leave it alone. He didn't want to talk about where he came from.

"Doctor Jackson," *Anise* said in that clipped tone that Daniel remembered. It tended to presage some annoying or embarrassing comment. The Anise from

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his former reality had asked all sort of personal questions, and he'd only later discovered that it was because she was interested in him. It had been, and still was, creepy.

"Yes, Anise," he answered, copying her manner of speech.

"We have discovered an indigenous life form, but have not, as yet, made progress in communicating with them. Would you care to assist?"

"They're capable of communication on our level?" Daniel asked, clearly interested.

"I believe they are."

"So you have to wait until the storms subside?"

"No," she said. "We have a flora garden and waterfall at the northwest section of the dome. They tunneled under the edge of the dome to get to it. Whether to escape a threat or to escape the storms, I do not know. They have not ventured past the garden."

Second Wind

“What do they look like?” Daniel asked, trying to maintain his composure. He wanted to go see them at once, prudence be damned.

“Humanoid, brown skin, no more than twelve of your inches tall. They wear clothing. It matches their surroundings, presumably for camouflage.”

“What efforts have you made to communicate?” Daniel asked.

“We have not had success in—”

“No, I’m sorry, you misunderstand. What *methods* have you used?”

“I have offered food. I have spoken. I have tried a crude form of sign language. None of it seems to work.”

Daniel nodded. “So what are you asking? That I try to communicate with them?”

“No,” she said diffidently. “I am asking if you would share your ideas on how I might succeed.”

Second Wind

“So when you asked that I *assist*, that’s what you meant?”

“Yes. I apologize if I was unclear.”

Meaning, Daniel thought, that she didn’t care and wanted the glory in the eyes of her people. Daniel couldn’t fault her for the desire. “I see. How did you offer them food?”

“I left a star pie on a stone.”

“Star pie?”

“The date tarts,” Jack said, picking one up and showing it to Daniel, tapping against the crust, which was shaped like an eight-pointed star with blunted tips. He took a bite, which meant eating half of it. “They’re good.”

“Good to know,” Daniel said, resisting the urge to grin his head off. He looked back at Anise. “What else have you offered them?”

“Nothing.”

“Any to drink?”

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“No, they have access to the waterfall.”

Daniel sighed. “Right. If they are who you suspect they are, why are you treating them like squirrels?” She looked confused. “Small, wild animals with big eyes and bushy tails that people feed treats to.”

Anise grew angry. “I do not appreciate being treated as if I am some sort of trainee.”

“No,” Daniel drawled blandly. “I can see why you wouldn’t. Doesn’t feel good, does it?”

Her eyes widened. “It was not my intention to do the same to you.”

“No, but ...” He had his hands folded on the table and at the last word, he opened them. He wanted to tell her that if she wanted information from people, treating them like dirt under her feet wasn’t a smart approach. “... you have, all the same.” He took a breath. “Offer them some of the Fala. Put it in a bowl. Put nuts, fruits, and anything else grown from the ground into separate bowls, and put some star pies on a

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plate. If they're intelligent beings, they'll have a concept of hospitality."

"Hospitality?"

Daniel nodded. "There's an old myth on our planet that one of the Norse gods, named Odin—"

"Gods?" Per'sus asked.

"From a belief system spawned by the Asgard, of all people. These gods, and others, served a specific culture on Earth and very few people still believe," Daniel said. "Some of these gods were clearly meant as a guideline for civilization. Now, the Norse god, Odin, used to visit the mortals of his domain disguised as a beggar. He was known to later shower gifts on those who would receive the beggar and give nasty punishments to those who turned him away."

"I do not see the relevance of the tale," Anise said.

"These little folk ..." Daniel had been about to call them by the planet's name, but they didn't know if it had one. "Do these indigenous folk have a name?"

Second Wind

“I have not discovered it,” Anise said. “However, the Asgard named this planet Dísir.”

Daniel half-laughed and shaded his eyes in an attempt to stifle his amusement. “Of course they did.”

“Daniel?” Jack asked.

“In Norse mythology, the Dísir were spirits of fate who guarded specific clans. Or they wreaked havoc on them. Depended on their mood.” Anise didn’t appear affected by what he’d said, which he found absurdly amusing. It must’ve been the word, *mythology*. He moved on. “These *Dísir* might just have such a concept of hospitality. What you do determines whether you’re worthy to talk to.”

“I see. Then I should alter my behavior how?”

Daniel sighed. “Haven’t you done this before?”

“Observed an alien species?” she asked. “No.”

“Ah huh,” Daniel said, ordering himself not argue over the statement she made when she’d come to the SGC

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bearing alien gauntlets: “*My area of expertise is ancient cultures.*” If her study was exactly that, then he felt that she had skipped the part about interacting with living cultures that had an ancient past. He wondered what she would have done when meeting the Abydonians. “Then I suggest that you go to the garden, sit down, put the bowls in front of you, and wait.”

“Wait?” Anise asked, brows up.

“Wait.”

“For how long?”

“Until they respond or leave. If they leave, they have no interest in speaking to you.”

“But they leave whenever anyone approaches,” she argued with mild exasperation.

Daniel sighed again. “You might have mentioned that before. In that case, you wait until they come back. It could be hours. I’d wait at least four or five.” He remembered that he had waited for the *second* visit with Chaka for over six, but he’d also brought things to

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read and write, too, and not just for his own needs. Chaka had been intrigued. “You might want to bring Freya’s journal and write in it. They might be drawn to the pen and the writing. Bring anything else you like to keep from growing bored as long as it doesn’t make noise and it’s not a weapon.”

She looked confused. “Why would I bring a weapon?”

“Why indeed,” Daniel said, then more slowly, said, “Some people think that a show of strength is somehow necessary. Given the size differential, a threat display is unnecessary.”

She gave him a smile. “I agree.” She looked around the table at her fellow Tok’ra. “Threats or defensive displays are unnecessary.” She got up from the table and started to leave.

Daniel said, “Anise?” She was wearing the knee-high lace-up suede boots the Tok’ra favored. He nodded at her legs. “Go barefoot.” She blinked a few times, then nodded once and left.

..

“That was rather gracious of you,” Jacob said to Daniel on the way back to their quarters.

“What? Helping? Seemed rude not to.”

“Yes, but she insulted you by not asking you to join her. Anise is a good scientist but her treatment of others is tempered only by her hosts. She’s always been that way.”

“Maybe someone should tell her to straighten out,” Jack growled as he sat down. “Jacob?” He gestured over his head an aery, circular wave. “Sixty more hours or something, stuck in this room?”

“You’re not stuck, Jack,” Jacob said. “Feel free to roam around. Visit science labs.” Jack made a face. “We have a firing range.” Jack perked up. “Where we test weapons we’re currently devising. I can give you directions.”

Second Wind

“Thank you,” Jack said. “But you’re not coming with?”

“No,” Jacob said, grinning at Sam. “There’s some tech I’d like Sam’s help with. Selmak knows what she’s doing but sometimes the internal explanation leaves me bored to death. Sam’s better at explaining.”

“Wow, Dad, that’s ... nice of you to say.”

“What?” he said with fake innocence. “I’m nice, aren’t I?” She just looked at him. He grinned and bowed his head. Selmak’s voice came next and she smiled. “‘*He’s really just a teddy bear.*’ Is that not what you told Martouf once?”

Sam grinned. “Yeah. And I meant it. It just gets lost under all that General bluster.”

Jacob took control. “Okay, you two. Enough.” He turned to Teal’c. “You’re welcome to join Jack at the range, Teal’c.”

“Thank you, Jacob Carter.”

“C’mon, Sam,” Jacob said.

Second Wind

“Wait, Dad. What about Daniel?”

Jacob hesitated. “He’s to wait in the quarters we’ve assigned.”

“Why?” Sam asked, growing mad.

Daniel sighed. “Because of where I came from.”

“Screw that,” Jack scowled.

“It’s not that at all,” Jacob said to Daniel.

Jack could clearly see the guilt on the man’s face. “The hell it’s not. You just wanted his help with the rug rats and now he’s supposed to be out of sight like a piece of equipment we brought.”

“Not me,” Jacob said, frowning at Jack. “I didn’t agree. The council wanted to test him. They have. Now ...”

“I’m no longer useful.”

“Sorry, Dad,” Sam said. “I’m going back to our quarters. Daniel’s either with us or we’re with him. He’s part of us.”

Second Wind

“Agreed,” Teal’c said.

Jack nodded and held up his hands. “Sorry, Jacob. C’mon, kids. Let’s go park our collective asses in the flower room and be bored to death.”

..

When they arrived in their quarters, Jack plopped down on one of the backless couches and groaned. “I really hate being bored.”

Sam plunked down on the opposite couch and pulled over her pack, digging through it. “You should’ve brought stuff with you, sir.”

“I did, Carter, but I’m not in the mood to read.”

“We could play charades,” Teal’c suggested, and his teammates gawked at him. “I have heard it is a common group activity.”

Second Wind

“Yeah, for people bored out of their minds,” Jack complained.

“As we are about to be, O’Neill,” Teal’c said.

Daniel detected a hint of a smile on their Jaffa friend’s face. Teal’c was teasing Jack and it was working, most likely because Jack allowed it. “Well, you never know,” he said to both of them, “but I’m not all that interested. I am, however, interested in what Anise is doing. I don’t understand why I can’t even walk around.”

Jack gave him a puzzled frown as he pushed up on his elbows. “Hey, where’d you come up with that Norse tale? Is that even true or were you just yanking her chain?”

Daniel frowned in consternation as he picked up his pack and sat in one of the five chairs placed randomly around the living area. “No, I wasn’t yanking her chain, and yes, it’s a real thing. Odin tested his people on their hospitality, for being both guests and hosts. There’re a lot of lesser known myths in other cultures where this is

Second Wind

a common theme. It's too bad that those lessons and traditions have died over time."

"What traditions?"

"Hospitality. The American South still has places where it's anathema to receive guests into your home and not offer them food and drink. I'm sure there're pockets of it throughout the rest of the U.S., too. My point, however, was that outside the US, and on other planets, there are cultures who are sticklers. It seems to be almost universal. These little folk here, who could be gnomes or trolls, for all intents and purposes, might just stick to those laws of hospitality, so it's best to proceed as if they do. The Unas set a lot of store in it, too."

"Chaka?" Jack asked. "You saw him more than once?"

"Sure," Daniel said. "Helped him broker a deal with Unas on another planet, before I was recalled and told to work on something else." He grimaced and sighed with disgust, remembering how it all fell apart, thanks to the new order at the Pentagon. "Uh ... anyway. I'd like to help with the little folk and it's just flagrant

Second Wind

stupidity or paranoia not to let me try. Besides, Anise doesn't like to share."

"Yeah," Jack said, lying flat and pinching the bridge of his nose. "I caught that vibe."

"Why wouldn't she want help?" Sam asked.

"You're a scientist, Sam," Daniel said. "You know how some folks get."

She made a face. "Right."

"I do not understand," Teal'c said.

"Because some people don't like to share credit, Teal'c," Sam said. "It's ego."

"In some respects, I understand it," Daniel said, "when it comes to working on something and having it stolen by someone else who then claims credit."

"Oh I hate that," Sam said with disgust. "It's a heinous thing for people to do."

Second Wind

Jack got up and retrieved his pack, and as he sat back down and began to dig out a book, he asked, “What made you think of this in the first place, Daniel?”

Daniel frowned. “I’m sorry?”

“The hospitality thing. I’ve never seen you do that before.” Jack then grimaced and held up a hand. “Sorry. Lost myself in universes for second there.”

“No, it’s okay,” Daniel said, coloring a little. “I, uh ...” He looked at them all and said, “I actually didn’t notice, and I was gonna answer you.”

Jack paused, staring at him, then looked at Carter and Teal’c. “Isn’t this supposed to be weird? Or wrong? Somehow disrespectful? ‘Cause I gotta say ...” He opened his mouth and then shook his head.

“I don’t think it’s any of those things, sir,” Sam said. “I think it’s a matter of remembering whose history. I mean, you grieve for those you lost, but this is entirely different.”

Second Wind

“Maybe,” both Jack and Daniel said together, then gave each other understanding nods.

“But to answer your question, Jack?” Daniel continued. “It *is* the first time I’ve thought of it in this kind of context. Using it with an alien life form, I mean. And the answer is, I don’t know. It just came to me.”

“Huh,” Jack said, and he started to lean back but there was no *back* to lean against. “Goddammit. Why can’t they have normal couches? How can you read without a back on a couch?” He grumbled and slid to the floor, using the couch itself as the prop.

“I know, right?” Sam asked. “Even these chairs are basically nothing more than stools with edges.”

Daniel snorted. “Well, I think we actually *do* have some recommendations to make to the Tok’ra after all, just not what they’d expect.”

Jack grinned. “Yeah, well, we’ll keep this stuff to ourselves, much as I’d love to drop off issues of *Home & Garden*.” Sam started laughing and he caught a frown from Teal’c. “It’s a magazine, Teal’c. Home design.”

Second Wind

“Thank you, O’Neill,” Teal’c said.

Minutes stretched to hours as Jack and Sam read from their books while Teal’c meditated. Daniel made a few entries into his Log, then took off his field vest and parked himself on the floor by the odd fish pond in the floor and made drawings of it on his tablet.

During hour three, Jack walked over, dragging a stool chair with him. “What are you doing?”

“Drawing,” Daniel said absently.

Jack leaned forward to look, then raised his brows.

“Those aren’t fish.”

“No. Just trying to mesh what Anise described with the tales of gnomes and trolls.”

“Aren’t gnomes the ugly little guys in gardens?”

Daniel nodded. “Originally, they were woodland sprites whose stories were sanitized by the church into caretakers of gardens. Or thieves, depending on the

Second Wind

decade and the priests in charge. During the Reformation, when Catholics were burned at the stake, the entire lot was relegated to demonology.” He rolled his eyes. “Ignorance is the evil, not myth.”

Jack made a face. “But what about trolls? Are they supposed to be huge guys?”

“Sure, in some cultures,” Daniel said, saving the art file and creating a new one. “In others they were cousins of dwarves who guarded the entrances of the mines. In other cultures, they weren’t trolls or dwarves but spirits who protected the souls of miners.”

“I’m glad to see your magpie mind is back to normal,” Jack said softly. “Maybe this mission was worth it just for that exercise.”

Daniel looked up at him and gave him a soft smile. “Maybe.” He looked at the doorway to their quarters and sighed. “Just wish I could actually *do* more.”

“Technically, if you were out there, you’d *still* be sitting,” Jack grinned.

Second Wind

“Yeah, but with a much better view.” Daniel tapped his tablet. “And I’d be using this, too.”

“Wouldn’t a video recording be better?” Jack asked.

“Sure, if I’d brought the damn thing,” Daniel sighed. “It’s sitting on the dining room table at home.”

Jack softly slapped his shoulder with his book. “What’d you leave it behind for?”

Daniel smirked and didn’t look up. “Because some fool distracted me.”

Jack colored and looked appropriately embarrassed. “Oh.” He cleared his throat. When he was about to cast for something else to say, Jacob appeared at the door, knocking on the edge as he came in. Jack frowned as he looked over his shoulder. “You know, that’s why you guys need doors. It’s weird. Not that I mind that it’s you but ...”

“Yes, Jack, I know,” Jacob said coming across the room. “Daniel?”

Second Wind

Daniel looked up. “Jacob?”

“I think it’s time for you to take a crack at the ... what did you call them?”

“Little folk?” Daniel asked, hurriedly getting to his feet.
“Uh, sure.”

“Finally, something else to do,” Jack said.

“Sure,” Jacob said. “If you like sitting and watching from a distance of over fifty feet.”

“Oh,” Jack said, disappointed. “Well. Whatever.”

They followed Jacob, and Daniel brought his tablet.

..

On the other side of the city there was indeed a large floral garden area with a waterfall structure that fell over long narrow boulders and thick vines. Extended

Second Wind

from its center were the smaller pools of water with tiny tributaries that seemed to disappear into the ground. The water itself came from an underground spring. A wide grassy knoll was the separator between the garden and the city's last two homes.

"The Asgard said," Jacob explained as they closed in on the area, "that they built the dome around the spring for the natural oxygen filters supplied by the plants. It's an entire ecosystem and we don't mess with it."

Daniel nodded. "So what's Anise having a problem with?" He looked for her but didn't see her as they walked along the path that ended in a small courtyard. Beyond that lay the knoll.

"Patience," Jacob said. "She doesn't agree that she should sit and wait. She set up cameras and left."

Daniel hid his disappointment. "And what about the offerings?"

Jacob gave him a look. "She didn't agree with that either."

Second Wind

“Ah,” Daniel said. “Okay. Well. You want me to try then?”

“If you would?”

“I’ll need some small bowls. Nuts, fruits, one of those pies, anything else made from the ground, and the Fala.”

Jacob nodded. “I have a few people getting those.”

“So,” Daniel asked, looking around as he bent down and began to unlace his boots. “Where’d she go?”

“To her lab to figure out another strategy.”

“Huh. Okay. How long to do I have?”

“As long as you need, until you have to leave, that is.”

“Right.” One boot was free, and he quickly undid the second and pulled it off, then came the socks. “Here.” He handed them to Jack.

“Thanks,” Jack said, getting grins from Sam and Teal’c.

Second Wind

“Will you guys be able to see everything?” Daniel asked Jacob.

“Yes, thanks to the cameras Anise set up,” Jacob nodded.

“Right. So ...” Daniel picked up his tablet and looked around.

“What’s the matter?” Jacob asked.

“I’m not going in without the offerings.”

“Oh.”

They waited around for a few minutes.

Jack frowned at him. “Are you really gonna sit there and wait for who knows how long? You’re not missing meals or sleep, Daniel. I won’t allow it.”

“Well, no,” Daniel said, and blushed slightly. “But I can sleep there. And you can bring me stuff.” Jack stared flatly at him. Daniel smiled broadly. “Please?”

Second Wind

“For cryin’ out loud,” Jack groaned. “Eat and sleep? No. You eat with us. You sleep with us. And you’ll leave at sundown. You’re not sitting here in the dark.”

“Jack.”

“Not in an unknown situation. That’s my compromise, Daniel.”

Daniel knew that look Jack was giving him. “Okay.”

“Good man. Besides, you’re also gonna have to get up and leave in order to take a ...” He cleared his throat and looked around them. “You get the point.”

“Yes,” Daniel snickered. “I think so.”

A Tok’ra arrived carrying a wooden tray, upon which were four small bowls and a cup. Daniel nodded, placed his tablet over it, and took the tray.

“Thanks. Wish me luck.”

“Luck,” Jack said.

“Good luck,” said Jacob, Sam, and Teal’c.

Second Wind

He went toward the knoll, walked up the shallow side and stopped at the top. He couldn't see anyone, and given that the creatures wore camouflage, he wasn't surprised. But he wanted to give them time to look at him. He moved down the short slope and once on level ground, he set the tray down, then set the bowls side by side near the edge of the grass where it stopped at several wet stones, and placed the cup to the left of them. He then sat down a few feet directly behind and picked up his tablet and stylus. He then began to draw.

Daniel kept an eye on his surroundings and saw twitches of leaf movement now and again, but that was all for a while. As he sketched, he finally realized where he had gotten the idea of the offerings and it had nothing whatsoever to do intelligent beings and hospitality. At the age of twelve, it was how he had made friends with a family of feral kittens and their mom. He had been visiting a junkpile by the local creek near his foster home, fantasizing about discovering treasure, when he'd found a different sort of treasure.

Day after day, hour after hour, he'd coaxed the mom and her kittens, earning scratches and bites just for

Second Wind

holding the food. But over time, he'd been able to socialize them enough to get them taken to a home where a woman fostered them for adoption. His foster mother had told him he ought to go into zoology or veterinary science, but Daniel had had his heart set on archaeology. He hadn't thought of that childhood event in over twenty years. Embarrassingly, it misted up his eyes and he blinked them rapidly to keep from having to wipe at them. The last thing he needed was for Jack to come over the rise and ask what was wrong.

Three and a half hours passed and it began to grow dark. Daniel sighed. Crappy timing, and it appeared the daylight hours here were rather short at nine and a half hours. He gathered his tablet and got up, then turned to the waterfall display garden and for no reason he could think of, gave it a little bow. He then turned and walked over the hill. When he reached the courtyard, Jack was walking toward him, puzzled.

"What was that?"

Daniel shrugged. "Seemed like a thing. I did it. Sue me."

Second Wind

Jack barked out a laugh, then stifled it. “Okay, smart ass. Let’s go eat dinner and get some sleep.”

“How long are the nights on this planet?” Daniel asked.

Up ahead, Jacob said, “Eight hours.”

“Damn,” Jack said. “Seventeen and a half hours? That’s one helluva short day.”

“Tell me about it,” Jacob said, waiting for them. “Well, Daniel?”

“I saw movement. But this is just a few hours. Maybe we’ll get better luck tomorrow. And Anise should join me, because if this doesn’t work in a few days, her presence, if she wants to keep trying it this way, shouldn’t be a surprise.”

..

Second Wind

After breakfast the next morning, Daniel headed for his next watch, tablet in hand.

“Doctor Jackson,” came a woman’s voice from behind.

He paused and looked over his shoulder. “Freya,” he said. “Good morning.” She was wearing a leaf-green tunic and shorts, and she was barefoot. “We will join you, if that’s okay.”

“I suggested you should,” Daniel said as she caught up to him and they continued on.

“Yes, I know.”

As they came down the other side of the small knoll, they found the bowls empty. He grinned. “C’mon,” he said, gathering them up and putting them on the tray he’d set aside. “Refills.”

“Did you know they would do that?”

He nodded.

“How?”

Second Wind

“You speculate.”

She sighed. “Because we weren’t there.”

“We just need to build trust, that’s all. Then you can build on that. Depending on how distrustful they are will depend on whether this works at all.”

“Do you think it won’t?”

“It has to be considered. But hope for the best, expect the worst.”

“That’s an odd sentiment.”

“Keeps disappointments low.”

“I see.”

They gathered the food and returned and Daniel set them in exactly the same order they were before. He sat down to the left of where he had before and Freya, without Anise having said a word, sat to his right. Over three hours, they observed in silence, then Daniel found his nerves twinged, just for a second, when Anise finally decided to greet him in her resonant tone.

Second Wind

“Doctor Jackson?”

He stared at his tablet, stylus stopping. He schooled his features and looked up, giving her a mild look. “Good morning, Anise.”

She blinked a few times. “Yes, good morning. I apologize for not greeting you earlier.”

Daniel looked back down at his tablet, continuing to sketch. “I’m sure you had your reasons.” Which he didn’t care about, one way or the other. He found that unprofessional but he couldn’t help it.

“Freya and I have been having a long conversation and I believe I owe you another apology for not taking your suggestions to begin with.”

Daniel shook his head. “It’s not necessary, but thank you anyway.”

“You’re very kind.”

And he wanted her to shut up now, proving he wasn’t kind. He didn’t understand why her voice was annoying

Second Wind

the shit out of him, either. All he did was nod in response, hoping that was the end of it, but it wasn't.

"I was hoping that you would return again at a later date so that I may make it up to you. For my mistreatment."

He was reminded of that creepiness. He hoped her invitation wasn't romantic. It would be awkward. And unnerving. He'd like more time to study these creatures who lived here under the dome, but could he do it while tolerating her voice? Or, god forbid, flirting?

"There's no mistreatment. As for the invite, if the occasion and time permits, we'll see," he said, hyper-focusing on a flower he was drawing. He desperately wanted her to shut up now, and thankfully, she did. It wasn't until mid-afternoon, when Daniel had set aside his tablet to write in his field journal, when Anise started talking again.

"May I call you Daniel?"

"Sure. It's my name." He winced inwardly at adding the last part because it sounded a little snippy, even though

Second Wind

he'd kept his tone mild. He didn't *want* to alienate the woman, but something in his nerves just wouldn't stop twinging. There was no alarm. There was no stress. But it was as if he was hearing a mosquito buzz in the ear and he had this huge urge to slap his hand over her mouth to shut her up, but the idea of touching her made his skin crawl. Until the Goa'uld, Daniel had never before experienced racism, and he wondered if there was something similar going on with the Tok'ra, or if it was just Anise. But since he didn't feel the same way when talking to Selmak, he decided it wasn't prejudice.

There *was* something in him reacting to her. It might be her, or it might be the voice reminding him of Frazier. If it was the latter, then he would have to ride it out. If necessary, he'd have to do some prime number counting and take a break. And for him, that meant failing the goddamn test. In his own mind. He knew what Jack would say. That not everyone they'd encounter would sound like Anise. Or Frazier. Still.

She gave Daniel a slow blink, and *Freya* asked, "Are you or Colonel O'Neill romantically attached?"

Second Wind

Daniel looked at her, then slowly nodded. “We both are.”

“I see,” she said, sighing. “I apologize for the unprofessionalism.”

“Not a problem. I’m flattered that you asked, but we’re both taken.” *With each other.* He wondered if the Tok’ra had known that about them before, then thought that no, probably not. His other self and Jack wouldn’t have made that at all public off the base or offworld. First and foremost, it wasn’t professional. And secondly, it wasn’t the Tok’ra’s business, not even Jacob’s. Not even Sam would have said anything to her Dad.

“You seem troubled,” Freya said.

“Where do you get that idea?” Daniel asked, looking at her in surprise.

She nodded. “It’s a study of mine. Body language. Helps in negotiations.”

Second Wind

Daniel gave her a small grin. “Yeah, I can see how it would be. And you think you see that I’m troubled by something?” He remembered that the site wasn’t just on video, but audio as well. He had to be careful how he worded his answers. And it also occurred to him that there might be a fact-finding point to her questions. Ah, paranoia. Because why should all the conspiracy people have all the fun?

“I believe it is the voice of the symbiote,” she said.

He frowned at her. “What makes you say that?”

She sighed and gave him a sheepish look. “The symbiote doesn’t just increase our lifespan or help free us from disease. It also enhances my eyesight, hearing, and taste.” She paused. “I’ve observed that there seems to be a minute hesitation in your body language whenever Anise speaks. Is it the symbiote or Anise herself?”

Daniel didn’t answer right away. He stared straight ahead, watching the water cascade over the rocks, trying to figure out whether or not to be honest. He

glanced at her, then asked, “What do you know about me?”

“That you arrived from another universe and that you have taken the place of the late Daniel Jackson. That you are, in effect, the same person.”

Daniel nodded. “Anything else?” She shook her head. He studied her very carefully and detected that while she wasn’t precisely lying, she was leaving something out. It was just her bearing that told him so, but he could be completely off base, too. “You’re, uh, sure?” he asked, looking down, then up again into her eyes. Suddenly her eyes flashed and he reared back, but only by an inch, stopping himself from going further.

“What is it about my voice that distresses you?” Anise asked.

“That was direct,” Daniel said dryly, severely controlling himself and his tone.

“Would you answer the question?”

Second Wind

“Would you try to be less confrontational in your tone?” Daniel shot back.

She blinked and Freya appeared, frowning in obvious anger. “Please excuse me,” she said, rising and leaving.

He didn’t bother to stop her and upon her absence, he felt a significant amount of tension leave his body. He hadn’t even realized it had been there, building, and building. It explained the twinging. It didn’t explain the reason. If he was truly paranoid, he’d tell Jacob to put her under a Zatarc machine. And now that the thought entered his head, it wouldn’t go away. He sighed and returned to his vigil and his field notes, and Freya and Anise didn’t return for the rest of the day.

..

That evening after dinner, as SG-1 retired to their quarters, and right as Sam was saying goodnight to her Dad, Daniel stopped him from leaving.

Second Wind

“Jacob, can I have a word?”

“Is this about Anise?”

He nodded.

“Don’t worry. She won’t be returning. The council members and I have decided that she’s been under too much stress, so she’s been asked to do some research elsewhere in the city.”

“Ah huh,” Daniel said, nodding. “Is there a reason she’s under stress? Was she on a mission near the Goa’uld lately?”

“No, why?” Jacob asked.

“Cause I’d suggest giving her a Zatarc scan. Maybe.”

“What makes you suggest that?” Jacob frowned, concerned.

Daniel shook his head. “It’s probably nothing. My nerves, maybe. I don’t have a problem listening to Selmak or Malek. It took me a while to get used to the resonance, but I think I’ve got a handle on it, but for

Second Wind

some reason, listening to Anise just rubs me the wrong way. And maybe it's her tone. I don't know."

"Maybe it's because she's behaving a like a royal—" Jack began.

"Jack," Jacob said.

Jack sighed.

Jacob patted Daniel's arm. "Selmak doesn't think there's anything wrong, if that helps."

"It does," Daniel said, giving obvious relief. "It means it's just me."

"Can I help?"

"No," Daniel said. "Just some ..." He frowned. "Did General Hammond say anything to you about where I came from?"

"Only that you went through a rough patch. He didn't explain." He gave Daniel a long look. "Can you? Explain, I mean?"

Second Wind

Daniel considered quickly. “It’s Goa’uld PTSD,” he said. “It’s all I’m comfortable with sharing. Generally speaking, it’s a tone of voice, combined with the resonant sound a symbiote uses. For some reason, Anise sets off my alarm bells.”

Jacob grinned. “She sets off a lot of people’s alarm bells.” Jack snorted and Jacob gave him a look. “If you want to see her, talk to her, we can try this again tomorrow. Work it out or leave it alone. Entirely up to you.”

Daniel nodded. “Thanks, Jacob.”

He nodded. “Goodnight, all.”

“Night, Jacob,” Jack said as the man disappeared. The entryway outside the cottage house went dark. “So, wanna talk to us about it?” he asked as Daniel walked toward their bedrooms.

He paused. “No, because I don’t know exactly how to explain.” He thought it over. “You know that saying about balancing on the edge of a knife?” Jack nodded. “It’s my nerves that are on that edge. At first it was

Second Wind

mild, but the longer she was in my presence, the worse it got. I was really glad when she left.”

“Think it has something to do with you know who?”
Jack asked.

“The psycho?” Jack nodded, and Daniel nodded back, slowly. “I’m gonna write it down. Can’t work out more than that until we get home.” He paused at his small bedroom. “I hope.”

..

The next morning, Jack decided he’d had enough with watching. “Think I can join you out there?” he asked as Daniel started for the knoll.

Daniel gave him a sideways grin. “And do what? Be bored to death?”

“As opposed to being bored to death back here? Why not?”

Second Wind

Daniel chuckled. “C’mon, then. They don’t seem to have paid any attention so far, anyway.” Jack started to follow but Daniel stopped. “Boots. Field vest.”

“Oh. Right.” After removing them, he handed Teal’s boots and Carter his vest.

“Have fun,” she said, grinning.

“Yasureyoubetcha.”

After setting up the bowls again, Daniel didn’t sketch or write this time. He just watched the garden, feeling more at ease with Jack sitting next to him.

“Any thoughts on the Anise thing?” Jack asked after half an hour.

“Shh,” Daniel said, only without the sound. “Just lower the tone a bit. So there’s no sudden or sharp sounds.”

“Sure.”

“And yes. I thought about it when I went to bed and I think it’s a delayed reaction after close proximity to someone whose voice I don’t like. It’s the clipped way

she talks, combined with that symbiote's voice. It's not exactly like you know who, but I remembered the sounds of her speech when I woke up. I don't remember dreaming about her but I think I did. So my nerves are getting a little frayed. I'm not in any danger of losing my temper or anything, but I'm pretty sure that if I stayed here long enough, it would happen. Especially if she were to touch me. It's not her fault and I don't blame Anise in any way. I don't mean her any harm and wish her nothing but the best, but ..."

"It is what it is?" Jack suggested.

"That's it exactly."

"You write all this down?"

Daniel rolled his eyes. "Yes, Jack. I wrote it down." He smiled at him. "Sometimes, you're worse than—"

"Sst," Jack warned, holding up a hand. "We have an audience."

Daniel's eyes widened. "Crap. I forgot about the cameras." He winced.

Second Wind

“Never mind the cameras.”

“Yeah, well, if Anise is recording sound ...?” he asked pointedly.

Jack frowned. “Okay, later.” He pointed at the vines.

Daniel raised his brows as he found faces staring back at them. “I think we can keep talking because apparently, it’s what they’re responding to.”

“You sure?”

“No, I’m theorizing,” Daniel said.

“What if it’s just because we’re speaking quietly?”

“I don’t know. Maybe.”

Daniel gestured at the bowls in front of them as he looked at the brown faces that had appeared between the heavy vines to the right and left of the waterfall. They didn’t come forward, but they moved down, using the vines as ropes.

“Cute little buggers,” Jack said.

Second Wind

“Seriously?” Daniel asked. “I thought you’d say something else.”

“Like what?”

“I dunno.”

“Daniel.”

“Well, just ... some wise crack.”

“Oh.” Jack tried to think of one but nothing came to mind. “Yeah, got nothing.”

Daniel snorted laughter through his nose. “Okay. Well, they seem content to just watch, so we’ll do the same.”

“Hmm,” Jack said. As they waited, he thought about leaving the next day. And what would happen when they got home. It was inevitable, getting together, but exactly how it should happen was making him consider doing something to make themselves delay. Like some sort of extended foreplay. But the longer he thought that through, the more he thought that they’d already had two and half days of foreplay. Wasn’t waiting a

Second Wind

kind of foreplay? When they got home, there would be the debrief, tests, and the mission report. Hell, that was even longer a wait, wasn't it? But then there was something to be said for teasing. And still—

“What’s on your mind?” Daniel asked.

Jack looked up, realizing he’d been staring at a stone.

“What happens when we get home.”

“Oh,” Daniel said, mouthing the word, and blushed a bit afterward as a smile spread across his face. “Yeah.”

Jack cleared his throat. “I’ve been thinking about installing a barbecue pit.”

Daniel’s brows shot up. “Wow. That’s out of left field.”

“It’s necessary,” Jack said slowly, eyeing behind him. His comments were for the other audience.

Daniel nodded, getting it. “But you have a barbecue grill in the house.”

“In the house.”

Second Wind

“And the hibachi on the deck.”

“It’s a hibachi. We need a barbecue outdoors. So a circular one with some pea gravel or something similar in an extended circle to protect the grass from random spits.”

“You’d use wood, not charcoal?” Daniel asked.

“I think sometimes, yeah. Add hickory chips, too.”

Daniel nodded. “You’re making me hungry for something else we’re not getting until we get home.” Jack raised both brows at him. “Steak.”

“Oh.”

Daniel laughed almost silently and picked a few leaf blades and threw them at him. “How long would it take to thaw a prime rib?”

“Twenty-four hours, if I take it out after we get home, depending on what time it is. Regardless, that pit’s only getting done if we get the weekend. If not, then it gets put off for another time.”

Second Wind

Daniel sighed. “The weekend,” he said wistfully. “I need decompressing.”

“Me, too.”

“No offense intended to our honored hosts,” Daniel said, primarily for the audio.

Jack jogged his brows. “I think they’re content to remain where they are,” he said, nodding at their curious-but-cautious audience.

“I think you’re right.”

“You wanna continue this vigil?”

Daniel gave him a sheepish look. “If you don’t mind? You go ahead, though. I’ll be good.”

Jack got up slowly and patted him on the back. “Don’t know how you do it, Daniel.”

Daniel just grinned and crossed his arms over his raised knees, watching the little brown faces in the leaves.

Second Wind

*I want a man with a slow hand
I want a lover with an easy touch
I want somebody who will spend some time
Not come and go in a heated rush
I want somebody who will understand
When it comes to love, I want a slow hand*

Chapter 8: Home Fires

Daniel was disappointed that he'd made no headway with the little folk before it was time to leave, but he felt sure that sooner or later, the Tok'ra would get somewhere. After the storm passed, Jacob and Per'sus, instead of Malek, escorted SG-1 back to the gate. After dialing home, Jack turned on the video on the FRED and Hammond appeared on the small screen.

"How'd it go, Jacob?"

"Just fine, George. Things are good here, and I think Doctor Jackson passed his test just fine."

"That's good to know," Hammond said. *"Councilor Per'sus?"*

"I would say he did fine, General," said the Tok'ra.

"I appreciate your patience. You're welcome to visit us anytime."

"Another time, George. We have to get back."

Second Wind

“Another time. Thank you, Jacob. Councilor.”

“Goodbye, George.” Per’sus only nodded.

“Bye, Dad,” Sam said, hugging her father.

Jack shook Jacob’s hand. “Always a pleasure.” He did the same with Per’sus. “Nice digs you have.” With more emphasis, he said, *“Have fun with the natives.”*

“Jack,” Daniel frowned. “Let me know how it goes?” he asked Jacob.

“Will do.”

The team turned and entered the event horizon.

..

“Well that was a colossal waste of time,” Jack began when they sat down in the Briefing Room to give Hammond a run-down on their visit.

Second Wind

“Well not completely,” Daniel argued.

“How’s that, Doctor?” Hammond asked. Daniel described the little folk and the efforts he’d made. “I see,” Hammond said, then looked at him more seriously. “Aside from that, how’d it go, son?”

Daniel was deeply touched by the personal address. “I think it went well.”

“Nary a blink,” Jack said, waving a hand at Daniel.

“Jack,” Hammond said, and the man subsided with a look of apology.

“I was a bit unnerved by the sound of their voices,” Daniel admitted, “which was the whole point of the test, I think.” Hammond nodded. “But it wasn’t too bad. I managed it easily. Any problems were internal and I can go over them with Doctor Palmer.”

“Excellent,” Hammond nodded. “Anything else to report?”

“You’ll have all the boring details in writing,” Jack said.

Second Wind

Hammond grinned knowingly. “I look forward to it. Give your reports to Walter, then go home for a few days of downtime.” Jack and Daniel grinned at each other as Hammond looked at his watch and pursed his lips. “I have to be in Washington tomorrow.” He stared off, thinking. “Tell you what,” he said, looking magnanimous. “Take a three-day weekend and report 0900 Monday.”

Jack’s eyebrows went up. “Well ... thank you, sir. I can get chores done.”

“My thoughts precisely. I know you all have households, apart from you, Teal’c, and things get set aside all the time. While it’s hot as hell out there, it’s still a good time to clean house, so to speak. Have a good weekend.”

“Thank you, sir,” Jack said as the General went back into his office and closed the door.

Jack saw him pick up the phone. “I do not envy that man.” He blew out a breath and looked at his teammates. “Guess we’ve got some well-needed down

Second Wind

time and I'm stoked." He clapped his hands together and rubbed them. "Well, kids, let's go get this business end done and get out of here."

The team left the Briefing Room and headed down the corridor. First stop would be Supply, then Security, then the Infirmary, their offices for report writing, and finally, the locker room and home. Just thinking about it all made Daniel lean against the wall beside the elevator and groan. He looked at his watch. It was a little after two in the afternoon. "It'll be five o'clock by the time we get out of here," he complained. "On the bright side, we have three and a half days off. Mind if I sleep through one of them?" he asked Jack.

Sam groaned with him. "That sounds like a plan."

"Time to build a barbecue pit," Jack said. "You guys wanna make it a team thing?" he asked Sam and Teal'c.

"Oh, I can't," Sam said.

"You sure?" Jack asked as they headed down the corridor. "You could bring Joe." Jack grinned over his

Second Wind

shoulder, expecting and getting a quick shake of the head. “Ah well.”

“Joe?” Daniel began, as it sank in. “You mean Ambassador Faxon?”

“Yep,” Sam said before Jack could.

“He didn’t die with the Aschen?”

“No, he came through the wormhole with me,” Sam said, horrified.

“Flew, more like,” Jack said, whistling with his bottom teeth as he shot a flat hand forward sideways.

“You’re kidding?” Daniel asked, alarmed. “In my old universe, you rolled down the ramp and hurt your shoulder.”

“No, they shot through it,” Jack said, “Carter got a dislocated shoulder and a bum knee and Faxon got a concussion.”

“I would have held him had you not rolled into my legs, O’Neill.”

Second Wind

“What?” Daniel asked, half-laughing.

“It was me, Teal’c, Daniel, and Hammond standing there waiting to hear from Carter and Faxon, and the gate dials in.”

“Yes, I know all that, Jack. What happened was that Faxon fought with one of the Aschen, giving Sam a chance to get away. She cut the rope and fell.”

“That happened,” Sam said, “except I told Joe to ditch him and jump over the rail, then I cut the rope. We both plunged through the gate at the same time.”

Jack whistled again. “As I said, like a shot. And unfortunately, Daniel and I ducked, not realizing it was them, but Teal’c reached up, caught Carter’s shoulder, grabbed Faxon’s pant leg. Daniel and I, after ducking, jumped up to grab, but we kinda lost our balance and fell into Teal’c.”

“While I was attempting to slow their momentum,” Teal’c went on. “The three of us tumbled into the wall.”

“The *concrete* wall,” Sam said.

Second Wind

Teal'c said sheepishly, "I inadvertently dislocated her shoulder."

"I keep telling you, Teal'c," Sam objected. "It was the momentum that did it. If you hadn't caught us, the damage could've included broken bones. Or killed us."

Teal'c bowed his head at her. "Perhaps."

"Oh. Wow," Daniel said, pleased. He'd liked the man. "So, you've been seeing him since then?"

"Yes," she said, looking embarrassed.

Daniel grinned at her. "The Sam from my old universe didn't like talking about her personal life, either."

Jack tapped Daniel's leg. "So, guess it's us three."

"I have plans," Teal'c said.

Jack raised his brows. "Do tell."

"I will be visiting with Master Bra'tac."

Second Wind

“Oh,” Jack said, hiding his delight. “It’s just us then, Daniel.”

Daniel shrugged, containing his own enthusiasm. “Okay by me.”

“Cool.” He rubbed his hands together again. “This’ll be great for the prime rib steaks.”

“Prime rib?” Sam asked.

Jack grinned. “Barbecue style.”

Sam groaned again. “I’m hungry now.”

“You are always hungry,” Teal’c said with a small grin.

Sam rolled her eyes. “Says the guy who eats enough for three people in one sitting.”

..

Second Wind

“How’re you doing?” Doctor Fraiser asked Daniel as she came into the Infirmary after the tests had been cleared.

Jack, Sam, and Teal’c looked between the doctor and Daniel because she didn’t ask everyone, just Daniel. “Doc?” Jack asked. “Something wrong?” He was also a little worried about a one-on-one, but mostly because he knew that Daniel’s nerves were still a little frayed around her.

She shook her head. “He looks tired,” she told the Colonel. She stopped at the foot of Daniel’s bed. “Did you get any sleep?”

“The same as everyone,” Daniel said.

“In other words, Doc, not much,” Jack said. “The beds were this dense foam that sat on the floor like you see with Japanese beds.”

“Like memory foam?” Janet asked.

Second Wind

Daniel snorted. “Without the memory. They were spongy, but they were a bit too soft. Otherwise, the mission was okay.”

“Apart from questions and Anise,” Jack corrected.

Daniel was too tired to debate, so he simply shrugged and asked Fraiser, “Did you read my report about the CT scans?”

“I did, and it’s a good idea. I have yet to discuss it with General Hammond.”

“What’re you two talking about?” Jack asked.

“Replacing the CT scans with ultrasound imaging,” Daniel said. “Those scans put out enough radiation for two *hundred* chest x-rays.”

Jack’s brows went up. “They do?”

“Think about how many missions we’ve had since the beginning,” Daniel said, and the look on Sam’s and Jack’s faces matched his own. “Exactly. I don’t want another.”

Second Wind

“I agree,” Fraiser said. “So I’ll talk to him next week. And I’ll see you all next week. You’re good to go. Have a good break.”

“Thanks, doc,” Jack said, getting on his feet as he threw his fatigue shirt over a shoulder. “What do you want to have for dinner?” he asked Daniel.

Daniel groaned loudly. “A big, huge, honkin’ prime rib.”

“Not till tomorrow.”

“Is there a restaurant that’ll deliver?”

“There is,” Jack nodded. “But it cools off too much by the time it gets to the house. Unless I splurge and have it delivered in a stoneware dish.”

“Please splurge,” Daniel said, then yawned so hugely his jaw cracked. “Wow,” he said, raising and lowering his eyebrows. “I have no idea where that came from.”

“Gee, I wonder,” Jack said, then yawned even wider.

..

Jack got out of his truck as Daniel pulled the bike in behind him and looked over his shoulder just in time to get that whole sexy image one more time: Daniel taking off the helmet, shaking his head and messing his hair with his fingers to remove the *helmet hair*. The first time had only happened nearly four days before, but it felt more like a week. As Jack watched, his fingers itched, just like before.

There was a problem, however.

Daniel had been just a little too chatty in the elevator on the way up to the parking garage, talking about, of all things, the Asgard building design. Jack recognized the behavior. The constant talking meant that Daniel was very tired, no matter what he said about eating, and if his new Daniel followed the same pattern as the old Daniel, then what would happen right now was that he'd say he needed a shower, and afterward, he'd take a moment to lie down off the side of the bed, aiming for

Second Wind

just a rest, then promptly fall asleep. He'd sleep through the night, wake up with messed up hair because he'd gone to bed with it wet, then get up and take another shower. He'd then be either ravenous for food or ravenous for ...

"What?" Daniel asked, stopping at the walkway.

Jack shook himself. "Nothing. I'm punchy. Probably need a shower." It was a bait. He shouldn't have, but he couldn't help himself.

"That actually sounds great!" Daniel said as he unlocked the door and entered the house. "Mind if I go first?"

"Knock yourself out," Jack said, torn between amusement and disappointment that he'd guessed correctly what Daniel would do so far. He, too, was tired, but he thought that maybe they could've shared some intimacy first. Still, he told himself that it was best not rush things. It didn't matter that they'd already kissed. He had to let Daniel lead until the man was clearly back to mental health.

Second Wind

Daniel headed into the bedroom, stripping as he went, but had the presence of mind to keep it decent until he was in his bedroom. It didn't feel normal to do that, and primarily because it was supposed to be *their* home. He *could* have stripped but this Jack had never seen him naked and he didn't want it happening in a casual way and from the backside. He swallowed at the idea that it gave him and pushed away the images as he grabbed the robe off the hook by the closet door, slipped it on, and went in to shower.

The hot water was a godsend. The shower at the Tok'ra base had been a weak *rain*, never mind lukewarm, despite their supposed hot spring source. He groaned and leaned his hands against the wall under the shower head and let his head drop. Muscles began to relax, and they were real muscles now, not the barebones he'd been a few months ago. Going it easy in the gym had slowly built up his body, and though he felt he was still too thin, at least his ribs didn't show and his hipbones weren't so angular. Pretty soon, he'd have to start watching his weight to make sure he didn't *gain* too

Second Wind

much. How nice that would be. A sign that life could normalize again so he could move on.

He stepped out of the shower sooner than he wanted to leave enough hot water for Jack. He toweled his hair, ran a brush through it, then dried off well enough to slip the robe on and return to the bedroom. He was clean, he thought, as he sat on the edge of the bed. He ran a hand over it, then fell backward. A lovely, soft bed to sleep in. Heaven. His thoughts skated over the desire to eat and he fell into a deep, peaceful sleep.

..

Jack stood in the kitchen, waiting for the coffee to get done, when he heard the water shut off. He nodded to himself, then went to the freezer that was kept on the deck and grabbed a roast plus two porterhouse. These would do for tomorrow. Tonight, dinner would be soup and a sandwich because he had to admit that he too was very tired and Daniel would likely agree that

Second Wind

ordering a steak was too much. Fifteen minutes later, he had two sandwiches made and on the kitchen table. The minestrone soup was just about ready. He went down the hall, saw the bathroom door open and Daniel's bedroom door closed. He knocked lightly while wondering whether Daniel would prefer chips instead of soup.

"Daniel?" No answer. He knocked again. "Daniel?" Still nothing.

Jack opened the door and sure enough, there he was, lying crosswise on the side of the bed with his feet on the floor, hands folded over his stomach, and completely, utterly asleep. The *déjà vu* was intense. Jack wanted to go over and rouse him in a time-honored way that led to fun things, but that had been the past, with another man in another life. He walked over and stared down at him, tempted to reach down to run his fingers through the damp hair.

Jack studied the thickness of the covers, still amazed at the amount Daniel still felt he needed: two sheets and three blankets. Having no muscle or fat had made him

Second Wind

sensitive to cold, but as Jack looked him over, even though he was covered by a plush robe, it was clear that he didn't need the double bed covers. He had filled out nicely. The thought made things stir below his belly and Jack swallowed with embarrassment. He bent over and kissed him on the forehead. "Love you." He wished Daniel was awake to hear the pronouncement, but maybe it was better that he wasn't because Jack would prefer to say it an intimate embrace. Tomorrow, he hoped. It couldn't come soon enough.

..

Daniel woke up in the dark, feeling a sense of anxiety, and out of habit, looked at the clock on the nightstand. 1 a.m. He frowned. He'd slept for almost eight hours. He moved under the covers and realized he was nude. He frowned again as he tried to focus. He barely remembered dropping his robe and climbing under the covers. He got up, pulled on the pale red and white

Second Wind

plaid pajama bottoms he liked, and crawled back into bed. A minute later, he found that for once, he was too warm. He pushed off all but one of the blankets and wasn't happy until he'd pulled up everything from its tucked-in corners so he could have his feet freed.

He stared at the ceiling, trying to find why he filled with anxiety. Eventually, he closed his eyes and let his mind wander. He fell back to sleep, but it was fitful. He found himself walking through an empty house he didn't recognize. *Jack is gone*, said his own voice from within the house, as if through speakers. Alarm spread through his body, his heart racing, and he ran through the house, searching every room many times. *Jack is gone*.

The certainty was so strong it reached his conscious mind and he sat up, half-awake, pulling the covers off, he ran for the door, threw it open, and saw that Jack had his door open and his lights on. Panic spread through him. Jack never stayed up that late. Something was wrong! *Jack is gone*. He dashed into his friend's bedroom, hand on the door frame, and came to a halt, blinking against the golden brightness in the room. Jack

Second Wind

was sitting up in bed, reading. He stared at Daniel and took off the reading glasses he'd adopted recently.

"Daniel?" he said, sitting forward, frowning. He threw aside the covers and got out of bed. "What's wrong?"

"You're here," Daniel said, then felt stupid for stating the obvious. "You're here," he said again, sagging with relief.

"Of course I am," Jack said, coming over. He put a hand on Daniel's shoulder. "Nightmare?"

His touch was electric and Daniel fought off the urge to move into his arms. "Not exactly. It was just a dream." He ran his hand through his hair.

"About?" Jack asked, removing his hand, then regretted it. When Daniel hesitated, he took a risk and touched his shoulder again. "Come on. Get in bed. Tell me what happened."

Daniel started to turn back to his own bedroom, but Jack was climbing back into his own bed. He threw the covers back on the opposite side of the bed.

Second Wind

“C’mon.”

Daniel’s brows rose, and though he thought he should refuse, he couldn’t think of a reason why. He rounded the bed and hesitated at the side. “Are you sure? Maybe we shouldn’t be—”

“It’s comfort, Daniel. Get in, tell me about the dream.”

Daniel threw caution to the wind and climbed in. Instead of lying down, however, he crawled over the covers and when he got to the middle of the bed, he sat facing Jack and crossed his legs. “I thought you were gone. I was in an empty house and there was just this feeling that got stronger and stronger. You were gone. And in my sleep, my conscious mind thought it was true.” He looked chagrined. “Sorry for spooking you.”

“Meh,” Jack said, deeply touched that Daniel would get so upset by a dream like that. He was sorry it had scared him, but not why. “You slept pretty good otherwise?”

Second Wind

“Yeah,” Daniel said, unfolding and lying on his side, a hand propping his head up. “Now my sleep pattern’s all screwed up.”

“It’ll even itself out and eventually you’ll go to bed at nine, like always.” He leaned forward and pulled out a third pillow. “Here.”

“No, I’m fine.” Jack stared at him. Daniel rolled his eyes and put the pillow under his arm. “Thank you.”

“Better.” Jack sighed, making up his mind to speak a bit of truth. “Listen. I have a confession to make.”

“About?”

Jack cleared his throat. “I could have told you to sit on the edge of the bed and tell me what was wrong, but I wanted you next to me. So it wasn’t just to listen to your dream. It’s a selfish invite.” As Daniel’s brows rose, he put up a hand. “I’m not asking that something happen. What I’m asking is that maybe you could consider accepting my offer. Sleep here. See how your sleep goes.”

Second Wind

Daniel made a face, then smoothed it out. “Okay, one, not that I’m against that, because I’d be lying if I said that didn’t sound great, but it feels clingy for me to accept. And two, I don’t need to sleep with you to, you know, go back to sleep.”

Jack swallowed. “Okay, second truth. I’d like you to be here. I think it’ll be okay. But this is your ball game, Daniel. You’re in the driver’s seat.”

Daniel snorted. “You combined metaphors.”

Jack pulled out the second pillow and shoved it on Daniel’s face, making him giggle underneath it. He lifted it. “You giggled.”

Daniel sighed. “Sue me.”

“Maybe later,” Jack grinned. He set the pillow next to him. “And truth three, I’m tired. I just kept reading and reading, fighting the impulse to go crawl in *your* bed, and the only reason I didn’t was because I didn’t want to freak you out.”

Second Wind

Daniel set the pillow he'd been leaning on next to the other one and moved up to lie in the middle, still on his side. "You wouldn't have," he said, convinced of it. "And I accept your invite. Providing I can go back to sleep."

Jack grinned and turned off the light. He scooted down and lay on his back, his normal position. He tended to wake up on his belly, which was a habit he had to break. It wasn't good for his neck. "Let's see what happens," he said, then yawned widely.

Daniel copied him, then threw more caution to the wind and scooted closer. He put an arm over Jack's waist. The man's brows went up and he turned to face him.

"Goodnight, Daniel."

"Goodnight, Jack." Daniel closed his eyes and something in his mind clicked and said, *Home*. Not long after, he was fast asleep again, and Jack followed.

...

Daniel woke up facing the window, and squinted at the sunlight in his eyes. He was then aware of a pain that wasn't exactly a pain and groaned to himself. He had an erection that *wasn't* morning wood, caused by the dream that had woken him up. Jack had been between his legs, inside him, and they had simply swayed forward and back, as if riding an ocean wave. There hadn't been any fear, and instead, there had been a comfortable completion. Giving it some thought, he believed he was more than ready, in mind as well as body, and he wanted that feeling of completion to continue to its logical conclusion. He just wasn't in the mood for doing that without getting up, shaving, brushing his teeth, having breakfast, then going for the long burn of foreplay that didn't include touching. It was his way. His *old* way. He now decided that it needed changing.

Looking at the clock, it was a little past eight in the morning. He rolled onto his back and spread his hand over the place Jack *had been* and found it cold. It annoyed him. Jack had no business getting up early on

Second Wind

a day off. He was supposed to wake up with him, mid-morning at the earliest. It was a silly thought, he decided, but he couldn't get rid of it. What should've happened was waking up to make love because he was ready. Maybe not anal sex quite yet, but *something*. He had to feel his body, his weight, and that glorious tongue in his mouth, and his body and mind didn't give a shit about morning breath.

There was movement in the hall, then Jack opened the door and came in bearing a coffee mug. He was dressed in his own pajama bottoms, looking for all the world like sex on legs. Daniel wasn't surprised at all that he had no interest in the coffee delivery. He watched Jack set the mug on the nightstand and cleared his throat.

"Jack."

"Daniel," Jack grinned. "Good morning."

"Maybe," Daniel said, and patted Jack's side of the bed. "Come back to bed."

Jack's brows rose. "You're in a mood."

Second Wind

“You have no idea. Come back to bed and kiss me awake.”

“You’re already awake,” Jack teased. “Besides, you always hated morning breath.”

Daniel sighed, then reached over to take the coffee mug. He grimaced and picked it up, sipped a little, swallowed, then put it down. He grimaced again.

“You in pain?” Jack asked, concerned.

“Not exactly,” Daniel said, and he held up a hand.

“Please? I’m not saying I want full sex, but I seriously need you right now.”

Jack felt his banked excitement rise and he climbed in next to him. “What’s up?”

Daniel swallowed. “I am,” he whispered, and he pulled him on top and brought their lips together.

Lust and need and love slammed through Jack like a piledriver as he felt Daniel’s erection against him. He threaded his fingers through his messy hair and

Second Wind

tightened them as he intensified the kiss, consuming his tongue while he pressed him into the pillow. It was only seconds before his breathing quickened and his heart began to race.

Daniel's need skyrocketed and he spread his legs, thrusting upward to grind against him, his body demanding sensation. It didn't take long for Jack to match him, and the moment that their body heat and weight combined, a surge of need ripped through him so fast it scared him. He deepened the kiss with a hunger he'd long missed and abruptly locked a leg around one of Jack's. "Oh my god," he whispered between mashed, hungry kisses. Jack began to move hard against him, rubbing expertly. It was bliss, and urgency, and impatience, and an even deeper hunger.

"I need you," Daniel whispered against his lips as he frantically pushed his pajamas down enough to expose his cock. He took it in hand and stroked awkwardly given the pressing weight making movement difficult.

Jack rolled them on their sides. "Let me," he whispered, and pushed Daniel's hand away, wrapping his own

Second Wind

around the shaft. Daniel inhaled sharply and thrust desperately into his hand. He clapped his hand over Jack's as he thrust through his fist and the friction was exhilarating. The pleasure spiked and he broke the kiss to throw his head back and arch his back.

Jack attacked his throat, biting and kissing, knowing exactly how he was feeling and he shoved his own pajamas down, then matched the rhythmic insistence of his hips, his body, his words. He captured his mouth again and after a minute, whispered seductively into his ear. "Come for me, baby." Daniel grabbed hold of his now-exposed cock to rapidly match his strokes and Jack growled and kissed him into the mattress.

Suddenly Daniel whispered, "Jack," in a choked sob as emotions flooded through his heart and mind. He felt the insane pleasure rocket through him and clutched at him as he came, thrusting madly even as his body needed to go still. "I love you," he managed as a few tears fell down his temples and he also realized that Jack's eyes were just as wet. "Oh my god." He kissed him hard as he pushed Jack onto his back, hand flying with the need to bring him to orgasm.

Second Wind

“I love you,” Jack said around a distracted kiss as his body hit the exquisite release. He let go of Daniel’s cock and grabbed his ass, then pulled their bodies together so he could hump against his crotch, the pleasure maddening.

Time slowed as they held each other, drifting in the afterglow. Daniel wiped at his eyes and then the smell of coffee hit his nose, and right after that, his stomach complained audibly.

Jack smiled. “I think that means it’s time to get up. No pun intended.”

Daniel snuffled into Jack’s neck and groaned. “Do we have to?”

“Not really, no, but let’s get some food, a shower, and then we’ll see.”

Daniel started to move, then a different pain made him wince. “Ow. This time I really do need to take a leak.”

..

After the shower and breakfast, Daniel was tempted to lounge around all day in his pajama bottoms. Jack was out back, doing something in the tool shed in the back left corner of the yard. He leaned against the counter, sipping at his fourth cup of coffee and shook his head slightly at the man's plan to build a barbecue pit.

The amusement was cut off when he registered the beeping of a truck backing up. He realized he'd been hearing it for the last ten seconds, and it was getting louder. At first, he'd ignored it as standard background noise but it was *too* loud to be across the street or next door. He walked to the back door and peered out the window. Jack was in jeans and a t-shirt, barefoot, walking backward, hands up, directing a panel truck from the local garden center, judging by the logo on the side. Jack made a fist when the truck was fully on the grass and it came to a stop. Two men got out and after the rear doors were opened, one operated a mechanical winch to drop a pallet on the ground. It

Second Wind

held sacks of pea gravel, sand, and gravel, stacked on top of a large wooden crate with a label slapped on the side that read: *Bluestone Fire Pit with Iron Ring*. It was circular.

At first he thought the crate held the barbecue already assembled until he noticed another label that had pictures of the contents. Unassembled. It didn't look at all complicated. One of the delivery men set a few tools on top of the pallet of material and another handed Jack a clipboard. They were talking about the heat and how they barbecued after eight at night because of it, then one of the men got into the truck while the other went in front to guide him back onto the driveway and presumably back to the garden center. Once they were gone, Daniel opened the door and stepped onto the deck.

"Wow," he said, amused. "You were serious."

Jack turned, surprised, then held out his arms as if revealing a secret. "Ta da. Of course I was serious."

Second Wind

Daniel wanted to jump off the deck and tackle Jack into the damp grass. Instead, he just grinned. “Why all the bags?”

“Typically, after digging the foundation, gravel and water get set down, then the stones get laid, then more gravel gets poured inside for the fire base. But I want to lay down a bigger circle of foundation pea stones. More attractive that way.”

Daniel nodded. It suddenly occurred to him that this might be, partly, for his benefit. He’d mentioned to Jack a few days ago how he needed something more to do than to just work out in the gym. To build muscle, he’d said. This project would certainly do that, although it was more likely to just work up a sweat. When Jack came up the deck, work gloves in hand, Daniel gave him a look and pointed at the pallet.

“Is that for me? The exercise I wanted?”

“Busted,” Jack said, smirking. “But I’ve also been planning this for a while. Now I have a good reason. I

Second Wind

never did it before because, as you said, I already have barbecue grills.”

“That’ll take a roast,” Daniel pointed out, gesturing with his coffee mug at the side of the crate.

“I’d like a pit big enough for a luau, but exactly how often would I be able to have those?” Jack asked coming up on the deck. He surprised Daniel by sliding a hand around his waist and yanking him against his body. “Hey you,” he said, and gave him a light kiss.

“Hey, you,” Daniel wrapped an arm around Jack’s neck to fix him in place while he brushed his lips teasingly over Jack’s. He did a few times and Jack growled and slid his fingers up the back of his skull, gripping his hair in order to return the favor with a little teasing of his own for about five seconds before he opened and went searching for his tongue. Daniel moaned softly as they kissed and he felt a warmth of renewed interest down below. He laughed into Jack’s mouth and tried to pull away, because if he didn’t stop ...

Second Wind

Jack moaned in frustration and broke off. “You’re so tempting.”

“You’re a tease,” Daniel said, voice a little shaky. He pushed Jack away and turned around to go back inside, earning a slap on the ass with the gloves as Jack followed him in. “Hey now,” he warned.

“Hey now yourself. Go get dressed. It’s time to get sweaty.”

It only made Daniel’s lips curve up at the ends in satisfaction.

..

Daniel was annoyed, and felt guilty for being annoyed. He wanted the day to be stress free. Just exercise, the promise of good food, and hopefully, something intimate. But once the plan for the round fire pit had been laid out, the execution barely needed brain power,

Second Wind

which left room for Jack to think of things to talk about. Unfortunately, he'd settled on Daniel's therapy, which only reminded Daniel that he hadn't called Doctor Palmer. He had also avoided making the last entry in his log. The only thing on his mind, when he got right down to it, was sex with Jack, and he didn't want to interrupt the positive energy with negative shit. What he really wanted was to reenact the dream he'd had. He wanted that sway, to feel Jack inside as they moved.

Taking a break, Daniel got up and headed for the bathroom, but he stopped by the house phone and stared at it. He tapped it, thinking, then picked it up and dialed the doctor's phone number.

"Doctor Palmer."

"Hi, it's Daniel Jackson."

"Daniel, how're you doing?"

"I'm good, Doc. I'm calling to make appointments for next week because we don't have any."

Second Wind

“Okay, one second.” Daniel pictured him opening his planner. *“Tuesday at ten, and Thursday at noon.”*

“Sounds good,” Daniel nodded, writing it down. “I could’ve come by today but I slept in. I was pretty damn tired. We got back late yesterday and we have a three day weekend. I just ... I just ...”

“Need time away from the therapy chair?”

Daniel smiled guiltily. “You’ve heard this before.”

“It’s common after Phase 6. How’s your logging?”

“It went okay. But I think I’m avoiding doing more.”

“We’ll talk about it on Tuesday. Any problems on your mission?”

“Um ... no. Not really. I’ll fill you in Tuesday. There wasn’t anything that needed some serious de-stressing, so that’s good.”

“Excellent. I’ll see you Tuesday.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

Second Wind

They hung up and Daniel sighed, staring at the phone. He knew there was still a lot of work to do because every time he thought of spooning there was still a huge amount of fear. Every time he thought of *her*, there was a great deal of anger that could easily transform into a blinding rage. There was just this ever-present need for a revenge he couldn't have.

After going to the bathroom, he grabbed a hard lemonade and a beer from the fridge, removed the caps, and went out back. Jack was staring at their completed task, hands on hips. Daniel offered him the beer as he came up beside him.

"Thanks," Jack said.

Daniel nodded, not saying anything. In fact, he had barely said a word over the last hour. Too much thinking. *Thank you, Jack, for asking questions I didn't want to answer.*

"You're quiet," Jack commented before taking a sip.

Daniel only nodded and took a sip of his own bottle as he eyed the fire pit. Not bad, if he said so himself. Only

Second Wind

three rows high with a metal sleeve inside and a lot of gravel and sand in the center to hold the fire. It was now time to test the thing, he supposed. He *was* hungry.

“Okay,” Daniel said, pointing with his bottle, “So, kindling, fire starters, and wood to make coals for a base or do you want just throw in a bunch of charcoal?”

“Hmm. Think we’ll do the coals, and then set the charcoal on top. That should give a decent fire without scorching the meat.”

Daniel nodded. “Might take a bit longer if it’s not hot enough.”

“I’m not in a hurry,” Jack said, convincing himself. “Are you?”

“Sort of.” His annoyance with Jack faded when he was gathered in his arms for a long kiss. “Definitely in a hurry,” Daniel said, rubbing against him. “But it’ll wait.” Jack grinned, kissed him again, then they set to work on the fire.

Second Wind

They gathered up the material from the fireplace inside and grabbed the charcoal from the shed. Jack also brought over the wooden chaise loungers and set them up around the pit, and thankfully, the pit had been placed in such a spot that the house kept it shaded. After Jack arranged everything to his satisfaction, he turned to go in and get the grill he had in mind but his smile faded as he took in Daniel's faraway look as the man stared into the pit.

"Hey," he asked. "What's wrong?"

"Hmm?" Daniel asked, blinking and focusing on Jack.

"You look ... I don't know. Not upset, exactly, but something's on your mind." He wanted to put his arms around him but he had charcoal all over his hands.

Daniel swallowed and started to answer, but the words bottlenecked in his throat.

"C'mon," Jack said. "Talk to me while I wash my hands."

Daniel followed him, trying to figure out a way to talk about the contradiction of his desires without going into detail. The more he'd thought about sex, the more he worried if everything was okay downstairs. And the more he worried about being okay, the more he worried that he wouldn't be. By the time he rested against the counter beside the sink while Jack washed away the black dust, he found that there was really no choice: either stop worrying and find out, or forget about ever having anal sex. Maybe Jack understood the physical injuries caused by repetitive rape, maybe he didn't, but it was becoming difficult to actually say the words. Daniel watched as Jack had to wash three times to get all that black dust.

"I knew I should've worn gloves," Jack growled.

Daniel grabbed some paper towels from the marble holder and handed them over, then looked into his eyes. But he quickly looked away from the caring, loving way the man was looking back. He tightly crossed his arms. "I was thinking about sex with you." He paused as Jack's brows went up. "Anal sex." Jack nodded as he dried his hands. "Um ... you know what

Second Wind

happened to me in rough terms, but not specifically, because I won't talk about it." Jack nodded again and he was now straightening the wet towels and laying them over the sink. Not one to waste something perfectly usable again; that was Jack. It sort of applied to him, in a sick way, and he groaned at the idiotic way his mind was working—in more ways than one—as a delaying tactic. "So I'm wondering if it's something we should discuss before anything happens, or if we should just wing it. Uh, no, that's not quite accurate. I mean, we need to talk, but ..."

"But?"

Daniel choked up and couldn't answer, stupidly enough.

"I don't need details. If talking is what you need, then we talk," Jack said, and smirked. "And yes, that's me saying that."

Daniel nodded. "Okay. So. I'm afraid that I won't be able to have you inside me. I've been too chicken to test it." His cheeks reddened. "And what if I can't? Physically, I mean?"

Second Wind

“What if there’s pain?”

Daniel shook his head. “I don’t mean the burn, or the kind of pain that lasts a little while and goes away. That’s not pain. That’s discomfort. I mean, *pain* pain. If I’m too torn up or ...”

Jack’s eyes grew wide with horror and realization. “It’s one thing to guess. It’s another to know. Jesus, Daniel, no wonder ...”

“I’m afraid that if there’s *pain* pain, I’ll have a relapse, and that would ...” He slammed his fist on the counter. “Goddammit, I was *fine* this morning! Now I’m all twisted up and worried!”

Jack pulled him into his arms and Daniel tried to pull away but Jack wouldn’t let him. He just held him. “You do this all the time. You work yourself up, putting pressure on yourself. So ...” He pushed them apart and let go. “Take a deep breath.” Daniel did. “Take another. And one more if you want. Now just give me the facts without specifics.”

Daniel nodded and took a few long deep breaths. “Here goes. I’ve never experienced pain. Ever. There was that burn during the first time, and there’s been a little burn now and again, when I’ve gone without. But when I got together with my late husband, there wasn’t any pain. At all. You two are the same. I mean, the *same*.”

Jack’s brows rose. “I should hope so.”

Daniel let out a sick laugh. “Going by that ...” He cleared his throat. “Going by that, it tells me that I most likely won’t have any pain with you, either. So, *if* ...” His words stuck in his throat. He hated it.

“If there’s pain, it’ll be because you’re damaged and can’t ever have anal sex?”

Daniel nodded. “I wouldn’t let Janet or any male doctor give me an exam. I wasn’t ready. I’m okay with you ... uh ... you know, because ... sex.” Jack grinned. “Yeah, so, um ...” He cleared his throat again. “Maybe keep that in mind, so when we finally get in bed and ...”

Jack pulled him back into his arms and brushed a few strands of hair off Daniel’s forehead. “It’ll be fine.” He

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then brought their lips together and he spent the next five minutes calming Daniel down. It was easy. In his mind.

But Daniel had to work hard to force himself to calm down. To remind himself where he was. In Jack's house. In Jack's arms. No enemies. No horror. It was gone, done. It would never return. Lastly, he had to remind himself that there was no pain when he moved his bowels. So if there was any pain, it would all be in his head and that would be horrifying. How long would it take to get past something that bad?

"Thanks," he told Jack when their kiss ended.

"Just tell yourself it'll be fine."

"I am. I'm worried anyway."

"Then do me a favor?" Jack asked as he stroked his back.

"Anything." Daniel was serious.

Second Wind

“Let me take care of it.” Daniel raised his brows, making Jack grin. “I’m pretty sure I can make it more than pain free. You’ll forget all about it. But if there’s a problem, at any time, don’t worry. We can stop and focus on what’s wrong.”

“That’ll suck. No pun intended.”

Jack grinned. “C’mon. Put it aside for now, and stop pressuring yourself. Let’s go fix dinner.”

Daniel’s stomach growled and they both laughed. “Sounds like a plan,” Daniel said.

He grabbed the foil-wrapped spuds and followed Jack out the back door as the man carried the plates of meat. Over the next hour, they made sure the potatoes were done before the fire was increased to finish the steaks. Standing by the pit, Jack sipped his beer and watched as Daniel reclined on the chaise lounge, wearing his sunglasses. It was a little annoying because he couldn’t tell if Daniel was watching him right back.

Jack decided to sit, figuring he could still see the fire under the meat, watching carefully as the fat sizzled

Second Wind

along the edges. There was something sizzling in the air, too. Anticipation. They were both hungry, in more than one sense, and it seemed as if building the fire pit and grilling their dinner was a sort of prolonged foreplay. Even though he'd shared his fear as they'd spoken about having sex, it still felt like a joining between them, simply for trusting him with that hard truth. And outside that fear, the electricity was building.

That morning had left a lot of questions answered for Jack. Such as what Daniel sounded like when he moaned. What his breath sounded like when he was excited. And like with Daniel's admission, he and his late lover were also *exactly* the same, down to the roundness of the head. Other answers were how his hands felt, what his body looked like aroused, what he'd look like orgasming. In that, he was the same but different, because he was a different person. And now, Jack looked forward to more. He couldn't wait to ease his fears.

After all this time and effort, and a lot of pain, Daniel had become his own person again, and someone that

Second Wind

Jack deeply loved. No matter what happened at the mountain, Jack was nearly certain of one thing: come Christmas, he was proposing. That would be a decent period of time. Just five more months. To hell with homophobia. He wanted this man to be his husband. But, in the meantime ...

“Jack?” Daniel asked.

“Yeah?” Jack replied, sipping on his second beer. There wasn’t going to be a third. He wasn’t willing to risk anything getting in the way. Apart from resting after dinner. Then ...

“What if we ...” Daniel paused. “Nothing,” he said, sitting up. He grimaced. “I’ll be right back.”

“Okay,” Jack said, following him with his eyes as Daniel went inside. He looked back at the fire, wondering what he’d been about to say. Then he heard the distinct sound of the bathroom shower. He sat forward and looked over his shoulder at the frosted bathroom window. Was Daniel taking a shower? He flexed his fingers and made fists as the thrumming in his body told

Second Wind

him to run in there and get him out of that shower, then throw him on the bed, all wet, and ...

He got up and went to the grill, picked up the tongs, and turned the steaks. He impatiently stabbed the potatoes. Done. Steaks weren't. Not unless they wanted them uncooked on one side. Nope. Medium rare for them both, so ten more minutes. Then they'd eat. They couldn't just head to the bedroom and let the food go cold. While there was something to be said for cold steak, this stuff was getting eaten. His stomach growled concurrence. His cock said to hell with the steaks. Two body parts at war with each other. It made him snort. The shower shut off, and when Daniel came back out, Jack looked over. The cutoff jeans and t-shirt he wore were *wet*. Jack's mouth fell open. He was going to ask him to strip so he could ...

"Did you traipse water back through the house?" Jack asked instead.

"Not a lot," Daniel said, clearing his throat.

"Why didn't you take them off first?"

Second Wind

“I was in a hurry,” Daniel said, clearing his throat again as he sat down. There was a little squelching sound and it made Jack grin and Daniel wince.

“Did it help?” he asked, hoping it didn’t.

“I can walk,” Daniel drawled, then picked up his hard lemonade and sipped.

Jack wrenched his gaze away, swallowing. It was so difficult, but in order to calm himself down, he took the logical approach. If they covered the steaks on plates and took off to the bedroom, their amped up desires might make things go too fast. That was something he didn’t want. On further thought, he also didn’t want to take *too much* time. That was for round three, four, eight. Twelve. Thirty. He closed his eyes for a two-count, cursing at himself for thinking too much about sex. “Yeah, shower sounds good.” He disappeared.

Daniel heard the shower go on. He sighed. He had a feeling that dinner wasn’t going to be allowed to settle. When Jack returned, his clothes were dry, so he at least had more sense than Daniel did.

Second Wind

Jack prodded the steaks with the tongs and sighed. Minutes stretched interminably, then finally, the food was done. Jack turned and found Daniel bringing the plates over. With a grin, he placed the steaks on the plates, then the potatoes. He set the tongs down on the stone and took his plate. “Where’re my sunglasses?” he asked as they went back inside.

“You didn’t see them? They’re in the bathroom sink. I just set them there *after* getting into the shower. I forgot I still had them on.”

Jack snorted. “As long as they’re not broken.”

“No, Jack, they’re not broken,” Daniel said with a snort.

Sitting down at the table, having already set down the salt, pepper, butter, and steak sauce, they tested the first bite together, and as one, they both groaned with happiness as the meat satisfied one particular craving.

“Uhhnnn,” Daniel said around a mouthful.

Jack agreed.

Second Wind

As they ate, Daniel likened the barbecue building and eventual eating of steak to anticipated sex, where things began with an urgent desire then leveled out to enjoy the fruits of the labor. However, unlike sex, there wasn't a frenzied ending. He pictured the two of them acting like animals devouring steaks and snorted.

"What's funny?"

Daniel shook his head. "My mind is in a weird place. I was comparing hungers." He waved the tip of his knife between their plates, then between each other. "It's different in how it ends."

Jack started laughing. "I can't picture that or I'll end up choking."

"Right?" Daniel asked, grinning with his mouth closed as he chewed.

"Okay," Jack said, pausing to take some beer. "Listen, let's talk about something else because we need a breather after we're done. While I'm all for jumping each other as soon as dinner's over, the more I've

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thought about it, the more I remember that sex right after a meal is a bad idea.”

“Says who?” Daniel asked, eyeing him.

Jack couldn’t answer and he frowned. “Somebody. Somewhere.”

“Running, swimming, playing football, things like that. That’s what you shouldn’t do after eating.”

Jack frowned. “Sex is just as strenuous, isn’t it?”

“Sure, when you get close to the end. But we’re supposed to be taking our time, aren’t we?”

Jack sighed. “Let’s talk about something else. I’d like to finish dinner.”

Daniel grinned and cast about for something else.

“After what happened with the Tok’ra, do you think I’m ready for the field?”

“Yes,” Jack said, eyeing him back as he drank more beer.

“Any idiot can see that you are. But what’s more important is do *you* think you’re ready?”

Second Wind

Daniel shrugged. “I’m wondering if I’m feeling a bit *too* eager.” Jack gave him a puzzled frown. “I mean, I ask myself if I want to go just to prove I can, or am I ready to jump right back into the deep end of the pool. And we’ll skip the part about my phobias.”

“You sure? Maybe that has to be included.”

“Maybe,” Daniel disagreed. “Where gate travel is concerned, I don’t have any in that direction. I’m ready for whatever comes at me. I’m only worried about being benched for no reason.”

“I can see that,” Jack allowed.

“My only reservation is wondering if I’m wanting to go through the gate just to avoid therapy. I don’t know the answer.”

“Those’re definitely questions for Doctor Palmer, not me,” Jack said thoughtfully.

Daniel tipped his head in acknowledgement. “Probably. Isn’t it okay to talk to you about them?”

Second Wind

“Yes. I’m glad you do. It feels like ...” Jack paused as he finished chewing and swallowing it with beer. “Like if you don’t, it’s like keeping it secret.”

“Keeping what secret? All I’m going through?” Jack nodded. “Oh. Aside from the fact that you’re a witness to everything I’m going through, I can see how it could become secretive. But just so you know, when I *don’t* talk about it, it’s like with the sex fear. I’m not sure how to say it without ... well ... blushing.” He grimaced. “I’m so fucking sick of doing that.”

Jack started to say something, but stopped himself. It felt inappropriate and he searched for something else to say.

“What?” Daniel asked.

Jack shook his head. “Too many crossed thoughts.”

Daniel shook his in return, frowning in concern. “I don’t think so. You had something specific in mind, then censored it. How come?”

Second Wind

Jack's brows went up and he shuddered a bit. "Damn. It's freakin' scary how ..."

"Much I think like your late Daniel? You keep being amazed by that while at the same time telling people I'm no different than the other one. Like we're the same person, with just a few differences." He raised his left hand, then pointed to his eyes.

Jack sighed. "Yeah."

"I did that with you," Daniel said with a crooked smile. "Down below." He paused to get up and grab some iced water from the fridge dispenser. "Want some?"

"Yeah, thanks." He paused, then turned and said, "That's another place where you're both exactly alike." Daniel stutter-stepped, making him grin. Daniel threw him a mock-glare as he filled two glasses and returned to the table.

"Do—"

"Do—"

Second Wind

“You first,” Daniel said.

Jack chewed at his lip. “Do you ever feel like you’re invading his space?”

Daniel’s eyes widened, but he sat back and thought about it. “I did at first. And truthfully, I sometimes still do, but only because I’m sad that you lost him.” He paused. “Is it the same for you?”

“I think so.”

Daniel nodded, looking down at his plate as the two continued eating. Then suddenly, Jack reached over and grabbed his left hand.

“At first, I saw him when I saw you. It went on like that for about two days. Then all I saw was you. I saw him, but only because you *are* him.” He sat back. “It sounds weird but I just accepted. Accepted you. Maybe it’s because I had you back. Doesn’t sound right, ya know?”

Daniel did and he nodded. “With my feelings for you, there were times when I felt like I was cheating.”

“Huh?” Jack asked, taken off guard.

“It doesn’t make sense, I know. He was in another universe, and we were married. And now I’m in this universe, with you, and ...” Daniel grimaced. “It doesn’t make sense. But it’s not how I feel now. What I feel now is that I have you back.”

“We *are* cheating, but cheating fate.”

Daniel tipped his head. “That was deep.”

Jack threw a wadded up napkin at him. They were quiet for a few more minutes as they finished their dinner, dealing with whirling thoughts about desires and acceptance.

“I think we’re okay,” Jack said finally. “I mean in every sense. I don’t include the physical part. So, to bring this conversation full circle, I think you’re ready to go back to work.”

“We’ll see what Doc Palmer has to say to Hammond about that,” Daniel shrugged. He got up, picking up his

Second Wind

plate, and looked to find his butt had completely wet the chair cushion. “Oops.”

Jack looked as he picked up his own plate. “Meh.”

Daniel grinned as he followed him to the kitchen garbage, eyes on Jack’s rear end to check for wet shorts until he remembered Jack hadn’t done the same thing. Then abruptly, as if the lust that had been doused temporarily had never left, it flooded his mind. He swallowed hard as he reached around him to swipe the remainder of the baked potato into the trash. They set their plates in the sink and Jack then leaned over and kissed him, lightly. Daniel took his hand and pulled him into his arms.

“Okay, so maybe you’re right about digestion?” Jack half-asked.

Daniel was hyper-aware of their groins touching. He’d heard Jack’s question, but he was focusing on his lips, not what he was saying. He wrapped his arms around Jack’s neck and touched the tips of their noses together. “I remember something about that.”

Second Wind

Jack slightly moved his nose back and forth, keeping their eyes locked. “Your eyes are very blue.”

Daniel grinned and tilted his head a little as he studied Jack’s eyes. “Yours are very dark. There’s brown there, but it’s getting slowly covered up by dilation.” He swallowed. “If you really want to wait until we’ve digested, then I need to step back and go do something completely unrelated.”

“Like?” Jack asked, not budging.

Daniel cast about for something. “Laundry. I can go get some laundry done.” His breathing was increasing. “Maybe there’s something in the dryer that needs folding.” Jack tightened his arms and moved his hips. Daniel expelled a small moaning sound through his nose. “You’re not playing fair.”

“I don’t want to wait,” Jack said. “I don’t want to let go.”

“Then talk,” Daniel said.

“About?”

Second Wind

“Anything.”

Jack moved his lips over Daniel’s, then to the side, caressing his jaw until he came to his ear. “What positions are you comfortable with at this time in therapy?”

Daniel closed his eyes and groaned. “Jack, that’s not what I meant and you know it.”

Jack kept his lips next to his ear. “Answer the question anyway.”

Jack’s lips, breath, and the sound of his voice was making it difficult for him to think. In the end, he gave up. He grabbed Jack’s hand and pulled him along after him while the man grinned his head off. “Fuck it. We’ll have this conversation in bed. And shut up.”

“I didn’t say anything,” Jack mock-protested down the hall.

“No, your face did,” Daniel said when they arrived in the bedroom. He let go and threw off his shirt, then pushed

off his cutoffs, revealing that he hadn't been wearing underwear.

"You ..." Jack began as he pulled his shirt over his head. "Jesus Christ, Daniel."

"Oh shut up," Daniel repeated, and he came over to help Jack out of his jeans. With them open, he dropped to his knees and pulled them down, then immediately let Jack *try* to do the rest as he leaned in to snuffle against the right side of his groin. Jack's cock bobbed next to his face and it took all of Daniel's will not to turn his head and take it into his mouth. He rubbed his nose against the shaved skin next to the base of his cock and placed his hands on the back of Jack's thighs. "Jesus, you smell good."

"Daniel," Jack warned, instantly hardening. "If you do anything else down there ..." Daniel smiled as he looked up. Temptation extraordinaire, Jack thought, and his fingers itched again, this time with the need to clutch his hair while sliding his ... "Bed. Please," he managed.

Second Wind

Daniel took a moment to move his nose and lips over the base of Jack's cock, though not on the organ itself, and moved to the left side. "Completely the same," he murmured.

Jack stepped back and pulled Daniel to his feet. He led him onto the bed and laid down on his side. Daniel did the same. Jack murmured, "Yes," as he leaned over and brushed his lips over Daniel's.

Daniel had had enough with the teasing. He fell onto his back while pulled Jack on top of him, needing to reacquaint himself with the warm sensation of Jack's skin and the firm muscle underneath. Jack kissed him hard, and when they came up for air, Daniel whispered, "I want you so badly."

"You have me," Jack said with that devastating grin.

"You know what I mean," Daniel said with mock-severity.

"Foreplay?" Jack asked.

Second Wind

“I’m done with teasing, dammit,” Daniel said, and gasped in satisfaction when Jack kissed him again, just as hard as before. But adding to the sensation was Jack moving slightly aside as he reached between them to take hold of his cock. Daniel let him know how good that felt, loudly, repeatedly, and Jack broke the kiss in order to go on a treasure hunt, licking and biting over his throat. It was divine, and his body quivered under his lover’s caresses. When he moved his hand down to gently roll his balls, Daniel dropped his head back, immersing himself in pleasure ... until Jack ran the tips of his fingers firmly over his perineum.

Daniel froze as his body went into a freefall, as if they’d driven over a hill really fast and left their stomachs behind. To Daniel, it was similar to his feeling of claustrophobia, where he felt trapped.

Jack felt the tension as Daniel’s body went rigid and he pulled his hand away. But instead of separating from him entirely, he moved his hand up to rest on Daniel’s abdomen. “Panic,” he said. It wasn’t a question.

Second Wind

Daniel placed a hand over his eyes as emotions of anger, guilt, and sorrow flooded his mind. Wetness filled his eyes and he slammed a fist into the mattress and avoided Jack's gaze. "Fuck."

"Hey," Jack said as he cupped his cheek and turned his face toward him. "Hey."

Reluctantly, Daniel looked into his eyes. "I'm sorry. It's ruined."

"No, it's not. Let's go through it. Right now. See what happened." Jack sat up, folding his left knee while he had to keep the right one straight, thanks to old injuries. "C'mon. Sit up, facing me."

Daniel sat up and crossed his legs, facing him. "How's this going to help?" he asked, dejected and frustrated.

"By going over what you were feeling."

Daniel sighed and leaned forward, dropping his forehead on Jack's shoulder. "I was afraid this would happen."

Second Wind

“And so it did,” Jack said. “And maybe you psyched yourself into the reaction. I mean, subconsciously. Haven’t you been worrying about it, silently, all afternoon?”

“Yeah,” Daniel said, brows forming a knot as he thought about it.

“So, when I touched you—”

“Do it again,” Daniel said abruptly.

“Not until you’re ready.”

“I’m never gonna know until I try!” Daniel argued, voice vehement. “So.” He took Jack’s hand and placed it in his lap, behind his crossed feet. He had a hold of his first two fingers and he rubbed them over the same place as he met Jack’s eyes. The elevation-dropping pit-in-the-stomach feeling came again and he gulped air. Jack tried to pull his hand away but Daniel wouldn’t let him. “Keep doing it. I need you to make me comfortable with your touch there.” He let Jack’s hand go and wrapped an arm around his neck as he kissed him. “Keep going.”

Second Wind

“You’re soft,” Jack said around the kiss, feeling Daniel’s flaccid cock against his arm.

“Keep going,” Daniel said heatedly. “Slowly. Gently. Keep going.” He rested his forehead against Jack’s. “Please.”

Jack’s brows went up and he began to massage his perineum, slowly, with light strokes that became firmer and firmer. He watched Daniel’s face carefully and gently smiled when the man’s eyes darkened. “How’s that?”

“Keep going,” Daniel repeated, surprised when the lust returned. He whispered, “Dammit, I forgot to ask if you have lube.”

Jack reached into the nightstand with his free hand and retrieved a bottle of lube. He handed it to him. “How’s this?”

Daniel’s shaky breath was noticeable when he laughed, “Perfect.” He inhaled sharply and placed his hands on Jack’s shoulders, closing his eyes as he moved his hips.

Second Wind

“You like this?” Jack asked, and he kept his fingers going as he squirted gel onto them.

Daniel moaned and rode his fingers with more force. “Better.”

“I think it was the position. Let’s find out,” Jack said, moving the slick fingertips over his sensitive hole.

Daniel sucked in a breath through his nose as a smaller amount of fear passed over him but when Jack went to move his hand away, Daniel clamped a hand over the forearm. “No, keep going,” he said, wishing the fear away. It took another minute, but as Jack massaged the puckered muscle, Daniel discovered the fear had gone.

“Wow,” he said, sighing with relief.

“Wow?” Jack asked,

“I’m okay,” Daniel said, then wrapped his arms around Jack’s neck and kissed him deeply while he moved his hips in time with Jack’s touch. Abruptly, he broke the kiss and whispered, “Yes. I’m okay.”

“Let’s find out,” Jack said, breathing very slowly as he slid his fingers in circles. Daniel’s eyelids fluttered closed, a sign Jack recognized from his late lover, which meant he’d triggered a flush of pleasure. With his free hand, he aimed the nozzle of the bottle at his caressing fingers. He circled again and again, then pressed with two fingers, just a little, to create the pressure sensation.

“Yes,” Daniel said, eyes still closed. There was a flicker of fear, then it was gone. The relief was palpable.

“Yes.”

“It’ll be easier if you look at me,” Jack said softly. Daniel did, and the blue of his eyes had become a thick outline instead of the fill it normally was. “I’m going to push. Are you sure you want to be sitting?” Daniel frowned, thinking. “Do you want to try lying on your back again?” Daniel nodded. Jack put action to request. “Wrap your legs around my waist,” he said, and with a smooth, slow movement, guided Daniel’s legs around him. “Move back, relax on your elbows.”

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Daniel did so, and just following Jack's lead allowed him to mentally relax as well. It ratcheted the lust upward as he moved. "And?"

"I'll move forward slowly at the same time."

Daniel wasn't paying attention to his own movements now. Only Jack's. The muscles of his anus and buttocks gave in to Jack's intimate touch. He opened his legs, raising his knees, and for a few moments, Jack's hands moved away from his lower body and slid over his abdomen and chest, leaving slightly tacky trails of lube.

"Breathe," Jack said, thumbing Daniel's nipples in the same circles he'd done below.

Daniel took deep breaths as Jack soothed his skin, tracing with fingertips over his hips, his thighs. Then one hand wrapped around Daniel's cock while the other squirted more gel directly over the perineum. Setting the bottle aside, he began again, caressing the space between balls and puckered entrance until he arrived again at his entrance. He circled with a single fingertip while he began to stroke the length of his cock.

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Daniel's lust returned to his cock, filling it once again. Jack kept their eyes locked as he continued his mesmerizing touch, listening to the way Daniel breathed, watching the way his skin turned to gooseflesh, the way it shone with the beginnings of sweat. "How're you feeling?" he asked.

Daniel sighed and his eyelids half-closed. "Now."

Jack pressed his fingertip against his anus and slid forward only half an inch, then back out. In again, just a little more, then back out. Daniel grabbed his wrist and pulled, but inward, sinking Jack's finger inside to the first knuckle. "Oh fuck yes," he said in single breath as he dropped his head back and closed his eyes. There *hadn't* been the expected tightness created by apprehension, and instead, there was just the small, rigid stimulation. "More."

Jack stroked his cock and moved his finger at the same time and Daniel inhaled again, through his nose. "Yes."

"Good?" Jack asked, his body beyond wired.

"Yes."

Jack curled his finger as he moved, then slid both index and middle finger inside. To his relief and delight, Daniel moved his hips toward him, seeking pleasure, and he leaned over to kiss and bite his chin. Daniel raised his head in response, meeting Jack's next kiss with lips and tongue. Jack deepened the kiss, surprised and pleased as Daniel dropped his elbows to lie flat.

"I'm dying to be inside you," he whispered as he moved around his jaw, grazing with his teeth. "Let me in?" he asked over his throat as he removed his fingers.

Daniel tipped his head back, begging for more of the sensation. "No," he said, but he smiled, his eyes closed. "Beg."

Surprised, Jack asked, "You sure you wanna go there?"

"Am I in charge?" Daniel challenged.

Jack smiled. "Damn straight you are."

"Then I'm sure," Daniel panted. "Beg."

Second Wind

Jack growled over his throat and bit down a bit in one spot under the jaw. “I don’t beg,” he said with a shaky whisper. “Let me in.” He continued to caress his prostate, enjoying the way Daniel sucked in breaths.

“No,” Daniel said, smile widening.

Jack growled again and this time grazed his teeth over his earlobe and lightly bit down on the shell and pulled. “Let me in.” He removed his fingers and blindly grabbed the lube, squirting a lot of it in his palm to coat his cock. He rubbed the head over Daniel’s anus and pushed a little, but didn’t breach. “Let me in.”

“No,” Daniel said, and he gripped the sheets in tight fists and spread his knees. He couldn’t help the small moan that escaped as he body quivered with tension and need.

Jack once again moved his grazing teeth over Daniel’s carotid artery, then down to the spot at the curve of the neck. He bit down, hoping for the right response, and was rewarded.

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“Yes,” Daniel said. Jack slid into him without any resistance, and there wasn’t any pain or fear. “Oh god.” He grabbed his cheeks and pulled him in so that he went in deep and didn’t pause for adjustment. “Keep going,” he repeated once again. “Now, please.” Jack began to thrust and Daniel slid his hands up his back and grabbed his biceps. “Oh fuck yeah.”

Jack moved his hands around his back and then wrapped his arms around him, picking him up off the mattress. “Come here.”

“Oh shit,” Daniel said tightly, and wrapped his arms around Jack’s neck and kissed him hard. He then wrapped his legs around Jack’s waist and thrust back as he was pulled onto Jack’s lap.

“That’s it,” Jack growled over his lips and kissed him harder. “Fuck me back.”

Unbidden wetness appeared at the corners of Daniel’s eyes as he broke the kiss and hugged Jack to him while their groins moved together in an eager, needy rhythm. It was a feeling and movement he hadn’t felt in nearly a

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year and a half, when his late husband had initiated sex in a cave offworld during a stop on the run. And now Jack, his love, no matter what universe, was doing it again, only with more force and need, thanks to his eager response.

“You feel so good,” Jack said, cradling his back and the back of his head, then slid both hands down over his ass as he put Daniel onto his back again and kissed him hard. He ground his hips into him and began to rock them back and forth.

“Yes, that’s it!” Daniel cried huskily. The wave came, like in his dream, and in the fantasy it had inspired. “That’s it.” They moved as one, back and forth, the ominous creak in the bed frame threatened an imminent collapse, and it felt and sounded glorious. The sheen of sweat coated their bodies and moved into beads, then droplets, as the wave went on and on.

Eventually, it wasn’t enough. He placed his hands on Jack’s chest and pushed them apart enough to take hold of his cock and balls. He massaged the latter while his other hand stroked hard, slowly increasing in tightness

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and speed. Jack knelt back, keeping his hips moving, and placed both hands behind Daniel's knees and spread him wide while he watched Daniel move his hands.

"Hot." He undulated, moving his hips down and up, aiming for and finding his prostate. It elicited a deep moan on each inward stroke and Daniel's hands moved more urgently. Their eyes met in feverish intensity. "That's it," Jack said, throat going dry. He swallowed against it and it didn't much work, but he wasn't really in the mood to care. "Come for me."

Daniel grabbed the sheet with his left hand and clutched it in white-knuckled desperation. His cock hand tightened. "Fuck me."

Jack gripped his legs harder. "What was that?" he asked, foregoing the prostate massage for fiery friction.

"Fuck me," Daniel repeated, and the tone of his voice rose.

"Say it again," Jack demanded, moving faster.

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“Fuck me,” Daniel said, panting harshly.

“Again,” Jack asked, and his body, his ass, tingled in warning. He pitched forward, hips flying, slapping.

“Fuck me!” Daniel cried out, throwing his head back, body arching, hand squeezing. The pleasure was exquisite and he felt as if his body were melting. Heat spread throughout his anus and rectum, the friction drawing him closer to the edge. He locked his eyes on Jack’s. “Hard!”

Jack pounded into him, fast, and the orgasm hit him with such a powerful force that his eyes widened in alarm and shock. The pleasure kept going and going and he began to thrash as both hands fisted the sheets. Jack lit into him, pulling out a second orgasm, and the sweat poured off them both, making their bodies slick. The pleasure spiked in a feverish pitch, as desperation became wild, chaotic. When Jack came, he fell upon Daniel and wrapped him in his arms as his body screwed into him, leaving no room between their groins.

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Daniel kissed him hard, deeply, drawing the orgasm from Jack's body as hungrily as Jack had pulled it from him. It seemed to last forever, but not nearly long enough. Seconds stretched into minutes while their minds focused on nothing but their breathing and the winding down of lust. They held each other until sweat turned sticky and Jack fell onto his side, bringing Daniel with him.

Half-dozing, he asked, "You know we're not done, right?"

Daniel smiled against his throat and gently bit him. "No. No we're most definitely not done. But I could use a snack. Did we have any dessert in the fridge?"

"I thought we just had dessert," Jack said, lips spreading into a smile against his skin.

Daniel groaned. "Yeah." He licked a stripe up Jack's throat with the tip of his tongue. "Salty dessert. Now I want something sweet down my throat."

Jack began to laugh. "Give me an hour or two."

Chapter 9: Second Wind

Daniel rode into the mountain on the way back from his last bi-weekly appointment with Doctor Palmer feeling good and optimistic, if a bit drained. There had been *five* trauma events to cover, almost all of which were harder to overcome because according to Palmer, they were childhood traumas that had been in the subconscious for much longer. To Daniel's surprise, the drowning event hadn't been the strongest one. Nor had it been the fear of abandonment, created when his parents had died.

What had been the biggest hurdle wasn't even an event. It was avoidance of a simple but hideous word that described what had happened to him, and it didn't matter that it had happened multiple times. There was the alternate two-word name: sexual assault. He had very little problem saying or hearing the term, but there was an internal flinch. In twenty years, it would hopefully be gone. But Doctor Palmer was concerned about Daniel's refusal to say the R word. It mattered

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because it was a form of denial, which was at odds with every progressive step he'd made in recovery.

Daniel shoved it aside, dismissing it from his world. He'd tackle it later. Maybe. Probably. No, maybe. The rest of the session had been productive. He imagined the talk the Doc was having with Doctor Fraiser, since he'd given him permission to share his findings with her, and she should then clear him with General Hammond. It would hopefully go well. As he walked down the long hall toward the base's first check point, his phone rang. It was Jack.

"Hey."

"Hey. Come to the Briefing Room when you get here."

"I'm at the checkpoint now."

"Gotcha. Remember to get in uniform."

"Duh," Daniel said, and hung up on him. He could imagine Jack grinning.

"Hello, Doctor Jackson," said the SF on duty.

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“Hello, Sergeant Maxwell,” Daniel said, placing his hand on the security pad. He couldn’t, and wouldn’t tell the man that he was one of the few SFs he didn’t have doubts about because Maxwell had been shot trying to defend General Hammond. Of course, he had to keep reminding himself of one very simple fact, and something Doctor Palmer kept trying to hammer into his thick skull: whatever one person did in one universe didn’t guarantee they would do the same in another; good or evil, it made no difference.

..

When Daniel walked into the Briefing Room, Jack was alone and leaning against the observation window, and he wasn’t grinning. His arms were crossed and his expression said he was mad, which was surprising because he’d kept it out of his voice. Daniel slowed his steps and came to a stop a few feet away.

“What’s going on?” he asked warily.

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Jack sighed and jerked his head at Hammond's door. "We have visitors who want to see you. I think they want details about a possible attack from Ba'al. Or Ares. Or whomever."

That wouldn't make him angry, Daniel thought. "You know I don't know anything. This world is nothing like the other one. Plus you have ships capable of defending the planet, never mind the solar system. What the hell do they expect me to tell them? I was a prisoner." Jack started to answer but Hammond's door opened and he straightened up, but instead of keeping his arms crossed, he stuffed his hands into his pockets. Insolence could be taken only so far. He sighed and clenched his jaw, which was even more alarming to Daniel. "This is crazy," Daniel said, then his brain went into self-defense mode after Hammond exited the office with the visitors.

They were Major General Harlen Gates and Lieutenant General Malcolm Vidrine. Gates was shorter than Hammond, pale-skinned, with a receding hairline, a paunch, and bags under his eyes that appeared to be a permanent state of affairs instead of an indication of

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insomnia. Vidrine was dark-skinned, tall, slender, almost gaunt, with dark penetrating eyes and a severe mouth. It was partially hidden by a moustache.

Daniel knew of the men in the other reality. He'd never met Gates personally, but had seen the man from a distance. He *had* met Vidrine. The General had the same downturned lines at the corners of the mouth and the intensity of his gaze made a person think they were going to be put in front of a firing squad. The biggest, most useful way to describe the counterpart would've been *avarice*. Before things had gone to hell, Vidrine had only been interested in what the teams could bring back for financial gain, and he hadn't cared how those items had been acquired. If he had to move the inhabitants of a planet, animal or human, just to get the naquada needed for weapons or trinium for ships, then he'd order it done.

Daniel felt completely unprepared and underdressed. Even though Jack wore the same fatigues, he had his tags and badges. While Daniel had both when they'd gone off world, that privilege had been withdrawn after

coming home because his status was still under review. At least he'd gotten his hair cut.

Hammond didn't look any happier than Jack and he gave Daniel a grim look. "Doctor Jackson, these men have come from the Pentagon to meet you. Let's have a seat." He gestured at the conference table. Daniel and Jack sat down to Hammond's left and the two visitors sat to his right. The moment the Generals were seated comfortably, Vidrine flipped open a leather padfolio, inside of which were several sheets of paper.

Daniel recognized the print pattern on the top page. A standard mission report. He glanced at Jack, then cast a quick eye at the report. Jack gave him a quick 'eye' nod, and Daniel understood. The message was clear: their mission reports had been shared with these Generals. Daniel realized he should have expected it, but for some reason, it just rubbed him the wrong way. Maybe in time that would fade. *If* he was allowed to stay.

"Doctor Jackson," Hammond said. "This is General Gates from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Vidrine of the Pentagon, tasked with heading Homeworld

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Security. They're here to evaluate you and determine whether you will be a part of this command."

There was an *or* there that went unspoken and Daniel felt a deep sense of dread fill him. A cold bar snapped into place over his spine. "Or?" he asked Hammond as he glanced at the other two men. "If I'm not?"

"That rests entirely on your answers, Mister Jackson," Vidrine said.

The refusal to use his professional title made Daniel's spine stiffen in a completely different manner and it felt hot between his shoulder blades. As if eyes were boring into him from behind. He ordered himself not to look over his shoulder at the stairs and focused on Vidrine instead. He hazarded a guess why the man had refused to use his title: he hadn't liked the other Daniel Jackson. It seemed a bit petty.

"*Doctor*," Jack corrected crisply. "That's *Doctor* Jackson."

"Colonel," Hammond warned.

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Vidrine frowned at Jack, although Daniel felt there wasn't much difference between a normal look and a frown. His brows just sort of moved slightly. "Colonel, despite who he looks like, this man doesn't exist in this reality. He has no proof that he is who he says he is."

"Apparently you've gone blind," Jack said. Hammond scowled so he added, "Sir."

Vidrine sighed and returned his gaze to transfer back and forth between Daniel and Hammond. "And no proof of education."

"And therefore, no rights," Daniel said coldly.

"To put it bluntly, *Doctor Jackson*," Gates said.

"What do you want to know?" Daniel asked as politely as he could without being confrontational, but he kept a tone of no-nonsense and strength. These men could not bully him.

"Defensive intel," Vidrine said.

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Daniel sighed. “You’ve read everything I’ve told General Hammond. From what I’ve gathered about the security status here, there’s nothing in this universe that hints that an attack is impending. The biggest giveaway is that this world is *not* in parallel with the one I came from. I also don’t know of any new technologies that would be useful to you because it’s not my forte. I’m not a technical engineer nor an astrophysicist. From what I can tell, this world is technologically superior to the world I came from.”

“How so?” Vidrine asked.

“You have ships and an early warning system. They didn’t. I already told Major Carter about a warning system in hyperspace, but I don’t know how it worked. I sketched a diagram for her on Omega, but it was very rough. I doubt she got much from it.”

“Who is *they*?” Gates asked.

“The people in charge in the universe I arrived from,” Daniel repeated. “That world is no longer ‘mine.’” He made air quotes.

“I see,” Vidrine asked. He got up and headed around the table, gesturing at the SF stationed in the corridor just outside the Briefing Room.

Everyone else got to their feet as the sound of something being wheeled entered from the corridor and through the outer hall. It sounded familiar; if Daniel had to guess, it was a free-standing chalkboard. Sure enough, two people in white lab coats appeared and wheeled the blackboard and placed it directly in front of the star map window of Hammond’s office. Its surface was covered by a pull-down sheet, meant for slideshow screenings, and for hiding whatever was written on the blackboard. One of the scientists wore glasses and was short, pudgy, and half-bald. His name tag read *Dr. Lee*. The other was a slender woman slightly shorter than Sam and perhaps ten years older, with her blonde hair held in a French twist. Her tag said *Dr. Andersen*.

Daniel looked at Jack, who shook his head. He didn’t know what they were up to. Daniel sighed and watched as General Vidrine gestured at Doctor Lee, who retracted the sheet.

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“Do you know what this is?” Vidrine asked him. On the blackboard were three chalk-written examples of alien languages.

“Sure,” Daniel answered. He held out his hand to Doctor Lee, gesturing for him to give him the chalk in his hand. Lee did so and Daniel walked over and wrote over the lines in large cursive lettering, and as he did it, he was hit with another sense of déjà vu: the day he’d seen a blackboard with ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. The person who’d written the translation had used Budge, which was a big mistake.

The words he wrote over the three separate lines were *Asgard*, *Goa’uld*, and *Alteran*. He gave Doctor Lee the chalk and returned to Jack’s side. Judging by the look on everyone’s faces, they had no idea the true name of the Ancients.

“What?” he asked.

Lee said, “That last one isn’t Alteran, whoever they are. It’s the language of the Ancients.”

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“Yes, it is,” Daniel said, holding back sarcasm. “Ancients is the name the Asgard gave them because the Alterans wanted it that way.” He looked around. “I’ll assume you’ve run across more of their language.”

“That’s correct, Doctor Jackson,” Hammond said. “But *how* do you know it as Alteran?”

Daniel hesitated, took a breath against the horrible memories the question recalled, and explained. “One of the tasks the Reform had me do was to learn and translate the Ancients’ language. They told me they’d learned it was called Alteran, and I wasn’t in a position to ask questions.” That was all he was going to say about it. He was *not* going to go into detail about *how* he was forced to learn and read the language.

“The Reform,” Vidrine repeated. “That’s ...” He looked at a sheet in his padfolio. “... the Colorado Springs Auxiliary Reform? The organization that replaced Stargate Command?”

“Yes, sir, it is.”

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“Do you know why they wanted you to learn and translate this language?”

“No.”

“Did you ask?” Vidrine said confrontationally.

“Yes,” Daniel said slowly, with a deliberately sarcastic tone. “Once.”

“And what was their response?” Gates asked.

“I was punished,” Daniel said, using the same tone.

“Why?” Vidrine asked.

“For asking,” Daniel said, again with the tone.

“And how were you punished?” Vidrine asked.

Daniel narrowed his eyes, wondering if the General was deliberately being obtuse or if he was goading him. Either wouldn't surprise him. “Badly. It was effective. I did not ask questions again unbidden. If you want examples of the type of punishments they used, then

study up on the methods employed in concentration camps. Or Guantanamo Bay.”

“Guantanamo Bay?” Gates asked.

“It’s a base in Cuba,” Daniel said dryly.

“Doctor,” Hammond said in a quiet scold.

Vidrine’s brows rose and he looked at Hammond, then Gates, then back to Daniel. “You were held at Gitmo?”

Daniel sighed. “No. I was held here. In the mountain facility. Levels sixteen through twenty-one were reserved for torturing ‘detainees’ like me.” He made air quotes again. “I’m sure I don’t need to give you details about what that entailed.”

“That’s insane,” Gates sputtered.

“General Vidrine, exactly what do you want from me?” Daniel asked. “To translate Alteran? You don’t need to ask. I want to be a part of this command, as part of SG-1. To resume a life in this universe that my other self was stopped from continuing.”

Second Wind

“I would like a full accounting of your history after joining Stargate Command up until you appeared in our universe. There is valuable insight that could be gleaned.”

“No,” Daniel said flatly.

Vidrine stared at him hard as the room went quiet. “I beg your pardon?” the General asked in a dangerous tone.

“No, sir.” To Daniel, Vidrine’s tone said, ‘don’t you dare defy me.’ “I will give you *operational* details. If you want to go on witch hunts based on information about people in a different universe, that’s information I won’t give you because I guarantee, you won’t like it.”

“Let me be the judge.”

Daniel took a deep breath and remained stock still, back ramrod straight. He looked at Jack, giving him a warning look the man recognized.

“General Hammond,” Jack said. “It might be better if Daniel doesn’t answer the General’s question.”

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“I disagree,” Vidrine said.

Daniel kept his demeanor under tight control. “Your counterpart was a traitor who order General Hammond’s execution as well as the genocide of six planets.” Vidrine’s eyes widened and he traded looks with Gates.

“I would never do such a thing.”

Daniel shrugged. “As I said, you wouldn’t like the answer. Now, what if I told you that he also arranged the murder of several hundred members of the SGC?”

“Did he?” Vidrine asked, clearly rattled but he kept his voice neutral.

“You have no problem going on a witch hunt when it isn’t you but it’s quite another thing to find out the witch hunt would be on yourself.”

“You’re out of line, Jackson.”

“No, sir, I’m not. I’m making a point. And I lied. Your counterpart didn’t do those things. He was simply

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greedy and didn't care about who he hurt to pad his wallet. And those are facts, General, not personal opinion."

"Facts you can't substantiate."

"I don't need to," Daniel said slowly. "Because the person wasn't *you*. The other General Vidrine told me those things."

"I think that's all, Doctor Jackson," Hammond said. "Malcolm? Harlan? My office." He turned to Daniel and Jack. "You're dismissed. I'll call for you when it's time."

"Yes, sir," Jack said.

He and Daniel waited as Gates and Vidrine went into Hammond's office and muffled angry voices were heard soon after. Daniel angrily headed out of the Briefing Room, Jack right behind him.

"When it's time?" he asked Jack.

"Later."

Second Wind

Daniel sighed, not in the mood to argue. “I can’t believe Hammond fell for that ruse of an ambush,” he said through gritted teeth.

“Ruse?” Jack asked.

“You know damn well that Vidrine came here with an agenda. He had no interest in whether I could read and write Alteran.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Jack said, uncomfortable.

Daniel looked over his shoulder at Jack. “Where’re we going?” he asked eventually.

“Level 2. Admin.”

Daniel frowned. “Why?”

“Hammond’s orders. But we have to stop by my office first. One level up.”

“Yes, Jack,” Daniel said testily. “I know where your office is.” He was quiet as they rode in the elevator, and remained that way until they stepped inside Jack’s office and he shut the door. “So, why are we here?”

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“Have to pick up some paperwork,” Jack said. Then he abruptly turned around, grabbed Daniel’s face, and kissed him. His arms went around him, squeezing him tightly against his body.

“Jack!” Daniel tried to say through the kiss, but Jack was insistent and impossible to ignore. He gave in and kissed him back. When Jack finally broke the kiss himself, Daniel pushed him away and stepped back. “Are you out of y—”

“You were so completely, utterly badass, that I’ve never been prouder of you than I am at this very moment.”

Daniel’s mouth dropped open as he stared at him.

“Who *are* you?” Aside from that question, he was left speechless because he had absolutely no frickin’ clue what his lover was talking about.

Jack hadn’t intended to do what he had just done, but he couldn’t help the pride he felt. Daniel hadn’t just stayed in control, he’d mastered the room and took General Vidrine to task without being an asshole about it. He had respectfully pointed things out and answered

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questions with deft editing. There had been no signs of stress even though Jack knew damn well that there was a fire burning inside him that needed to explode.

He *hadn't* been turned on by Daniel's strength while *in* the Briefing Room, but in the elevator afterward. Just being near him, feeling that power that had helped himself heal, in a relatively short period of time, had reignited the fires of yesterday and the day before and it was damned sexy. He simply couldn't *not* kiss him.

"I'm sorry for ambushing you like that."

"No, you're not," Daniel said with narrowed eyes.

"Okay, no, but, damn, Daniel. You rocked that meeting." Daniel frowned, looking confused. "And hell, I didn't know you knew the Ancients as Alterans, and that was awesome, but I have one question."

"What's that?" Daniel asked, feeling the urge to blush. He wasn't used to this many compliments at a time. Not from Jack. The man made simplification an artform. Why spew a litany of ego strokes when one or

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two words would suffice? For him to say what he said had been, for Jack, a gushing review.

“Why didn’t you *read* the Alteran Lee wrote down?”

“Because it didn’t say anything. It was nonsense. Just the Ancients characters written down in code or abstract or maybe Doctor Lee just copied them from a list of Ancients’ artifacts.”

“And the other lines?”

“Alphabets.”

Jack grinned. “Hang on.” He went to the desk phone and hit the button for Hammond’s secretary. “This is Colonel O’Neill. Could you connect me with General Hammond? I understand. Then would you please give him a message before those gentlemen from DC leave? Okay. Thanks.” He looked at Daniel, who was standing there looking shocked again. “Just a se ...” He turned back to the phone. “Yes, General. In case the Generals were wondering, please let them know that Daniel said there was nothing to translate where the Alteran was concerned. It was scrambled

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garbage, and the other stuff was just alphabets. The Asgardian and Goa'uld, I mean. Yes, sir." He hung up.

"What was the point of that?" Daniel asked, crossing his arms.

"To rub it in," Jack said smugly, and gave Daniel another admiring look. He headed toward him but Daniel darted at the door and opened it. "What's the matter, Daniel?" he said with a Cheshire Cat grin.

"You've gone mad. You're not getting me started here on the base and violate rules you set down. I'll assume you set them down because *he* did. If we ignored those rules, you'd bitch about it in a week or two, complaining how we shouldn't have and I'll want to smack you in the mouth. So let's pretend we did all that and skip to the end."

Jack grinned, coming toward him. "You're no fun."

"Not what you said yesterday!" he said with mock outrage. "So you lied?" Daniel melodramatically placed

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a hand over his heart. “Well, then, I guess I’ll just have skip what I planned this evening since you’re obvious—”

Jack reached for him and Daniel dashed through the door and was down the hall like a shot. Jack snickered and exited, shutting the door behind him.

..

“Doctor Jackson,” said the woman behind a desk on the Administration floor. “Step over here please. Toes on the line. Stare at the red sticker.”

Daniel went up to the toe line and faced the camera. It clicked. No flash, which surprised him. Maybe he wouldn’t look like death warmed over, like every I.D. photo he’d ever taken.

Jack took a step and peered at him before Daniel turned toward him to step away from the photo spot. “You didn’t smile.”

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“You’re kidding right?” Daniel asked.

The moment he’d stepped into the Admin office for the new I.D., his mood had plummeted. It had already been dour, despite Jack’s kiss to lift his spirits, but he wasn’t looking forward to being called by his middle name, *Thomas*, for the rest of his life. Everyone who knew him wouldn’t call him that, but every time he had to go to a civilian doctor, the DMV, or any place else that wasn’t the SGC, he’d hear, “*Thomas?*” He’d see it on his paperwork for his Social Security card, which he didn’t have yet.

The woman behind the tall counter placed a few papers on its surface and set a pen on top. “Please check the information, then sign and date it.”

Daniel stepped up and picked up the pen. He clicked it as he read through the information. It read:

*Daniel T. Jackson | 805-99-9667 | 8 July 1980
7 Sierra Drive
Colorado Springs, CO*

Daniel blinked a few times, staring.

Second Wind

Daniel T. Jackson

He frowned, then turned to Jack and tapped the paper with a forefinger. “What’s this?”

Jack gave him a tiny smile. “Sign. Get your I.D.”

Daniel signed and the woman handed him his new I.D. “Thanks,” he told her, and the two men left. He didn’t get his answer until they were in the elevator.

Jack said, “I made the case that it would be easier to just step into his shoes, and eventually, Hammond agreed. He also has connections, so you get resurrected. It was all mistake. Your death was a clerical error.” He paused, then said, “*He’d* have wanted it this way.”

“This ...” Daniel held up the badge with his real name on it. “This had to have cost him a pretty damn big favor.”

“Maybe, but you earned it,” Jack said.

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“Except my birthday’s wrong,” Daniel sighed, staring at the date on the I.D. “I’m not *him*, but I am *him*. It feels ...”

Jack frowned. “You’re not a replacement. I thought you got over that.”

“I know. At first I felt like that. I don’t feel that way now. But it just feels weird. It’s the 9th, not the 8th.” He made a face a pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’m being an ingrate. I’m sorry.”

Jack pursed his lips. “What time on the 9th?”

Daniel looked at him, puzzled. The knee-jerk reaction was to ask why, but he stepped on it. “Twenty minutes after midnight.”

Jack’s brows went up. “And *his* was twenty minutes *before* midnight. It’s a difference of forty minutes, Daniel. Think you can live with forty minutes?”

Daniel smiled slowly as he shoved the ingratitude in a box and drop-kicked it over a metaphorical cliff. “Yeah. I can. And I’ll have to stop by my grave and thank him.”

Second Wind

Jack winced and Daniel copied him. “Wait.” He pinched the bridge of his nose again. “Let me guess. Cremation. And you were to scatter his ashes over something specific.”

Jack gave him a sad smile when Daniel met his eyes. “I was supposed to take him on a trip over the desert and sprinkle him in the wind.”

Daniel took a deep breath. “Not a desert in the U.S., I’m guessing.”

“No. But I had to compromise,” Jack said quietly.

Daniel winced again. “I take it you couldn’t get the time away.”

“Well, no. Carter, Teal’c, and I were checking out the 302 program at Area 51, so I hopped in a bi-plane they had out on the tarmac.” Daniel gave him a confused look. “There was an Air Show in Reno. One of the pilots worked at Groom Lake. I asked if I could go up and he took first chair. We flew over the Santa Lucia Mountains.”

Second Wind

“Santa Lucia Mountains are my second favorite mountain range,” Daniel said with a sentimental grin.

“That was why. I wasn’t going to spread his ashes over a secret military base, desert or no desert. I considered the Salt Flats, but it just didn’t fit. Then I remembered he liked the California mountain range. We went to Big Sur once.”

Daniel recognized the carefully-checked emotional turmoil on the man’s face and slipped his hand in Jack’s for a brief moment and squeezed. “On his behalf, thanks.”

Jack cleared his throat and smiled at him, then glanced at the read-out as the elevator came to a stop on Level 19. “Your office awaits,” he said, gesturing as the doors opened.

Daniel’s mouth dropped open. “I don’t get it.”

“We have work to do, oddly enough.” He grinned and gently pushed at his back. “See you later. We’ll get two days off, then begins your wonderful new and old identity.”

“But ...” Daniel began as he stepped out. Jack waved at him as the doors closed. With a sigh, Daniel headed to his office with a sense of anti-climax and came to a sudden stop because his office door was open. He took a few cautious steps closer and peered in.

On his desk was a pile of folders, tapes, CDs, and on the lab desk were several boxes. He went in to investigate. As he sifted through reports, studies, research work, books, artifacts, and random odds and ends collected during his five years at the SGC. A touch of melancholy rose within because there was one item missing that his alternate self never had: a framed wedding photo.

Daniel abruptly felt the need to find a place to talk to his late husband and say farewell. A Catholic church was the easiest, and closest, but he could also go to Arizona and ask the Diné for a Blessing Way ceremony. The latter was more his speed. The former was more his late husband's. With either ceremony, perhaps the demons could finally be laid to rest. Jack said that his late lover would have wanted it this way, to take over his name, and Daniel had no problem believing that because he wouldn't have had a problem with it, either.

...

Three days later, late Monday morning, Daniel followed Jack down the corridor as they headed for the Briefing Room. The summons had been odd, with a terse intercom order instead of a phone call in Daniel's office, where Jack had been helping him organize his new bookshelf.

They found Sam and Teal'c waiting, along with two SF from the Groom Lake Facility in Area 51. Daniel traded frowns with Jack and looked at his other teammates. They shook their heads.

"Nothing?" Jack asked Sam and Teal'c.

"No, sir," Sam said. "We were asked to report. No reason given."

"Weren't we told we're on standby?" Daniel asked, referring to their team status. He absently brushed at

the wrinkled flap of his blue utility fatigue pocket, which had been an underlying annoyance all morning. He stared down at it and gave up trying to make it smooth out. He switched his pens to the other side and buttoned the damn thing. He made a mental note to bring a second iron to work. “I mean, there’s been no news or any—”

Hammond’s office door opened and he exited, looking grim. He nodded to the SF by the door, then said to the visiting men. “If you’ll excuse us, gentlemen. Wait outside.”

“Sir,” one of the men said as they left, moving into the outer office and therefore out of earshot.

Jack frowned in alarm. “Security Force officers from Area 51. What’s going on, sir?”

Hammond looked at Daniel specifically before giving Jack his attention. “There’s been a development regarding former members of this command who’ve been incarcerated at Area 51 after being convicted of treason.”

Second Wind

Daniel's body went cold. "They're still alive?"

"They are, Doctor Jackson," Hammond said. "One of them will be executed in one week, now that his appeals are exhausted." Hammond nodded at Daniel. "He's allowed a last request and he's stated that he wants to see Doctor Jackson."

"But I'm not the same guy," Daniel said, intent on refusing.

"Doesn't matter," Hammond sighed. "The boys in charge at Area 51, as well as our own superiors, are allowing it."

"Why?" Daniel asked.

"If I were a betting man, I'd say it's because he has information the Pentagon wants and he would only share that information after seeing Doctor Jackson."

Daniel knew of only one person who fit that bill. "It's Colonel Robert Makepeace, isn't it?"

"Yes, son, it is."

“Did he say why?” Jack asked, looking back and forth between the General and Daniel.

“Yes,” Hammond said, and it was hard to read him now as he looked at Daniel. “He has claimed to know the location of the rogue members of the NID who managed to slip through the security nets. He’s given enough detail to warrant taking him seriously. However, he won’t divulge their last known whereabouts until he sees Doctor Jackson.” Hammond looked at Daniel, visibly working his jaw. It was a clear sign to everyone in the room that the man was *mad*. “He’s also made some statements.”

Daniel groaned and turned away from everyone as he went to the conference table and plopped down in the first chair to the right of Hammond’s. He shaded his eyes, smoothing over his brows. “Shit.”

“My thoughts exactly, son,” Hammond said.

“You know, General,” Jack began, raising his hand and bringing his thumb and forefinger close together, “I’m about this close to losing it if you two don’t—”

Second Wind

“Sit down, Jack,” Hammond said as he waved at the table. “Major, Teal’c.”

“This is no one’s damn business but mine and Robert Makepeace’s,” Daniel complained as everyone sat down.

“I agree,” Hammond said.

“Goddammit,” Jack said under his breath. “What the hell is going on?”

“Jack, calm down,” Hammond ordered. “Doctor Jackson has been named in a conspiracy.”

“That’s insane!” Jack snapped, his emotions going well past anger. “And they can’t possibly believe—”

“I’m aware, Colonel, which is why I’m restricting Doctor Jackson to the base until he sees the man.” Again, his eyes landed on Daniel. “I’m sorry, son, but until this nonsense is straightened out, you’ll be staying on the base for your own protection in order to prevent the NID from performing some sort of rendition.”

Second Wind

“Rendition on me?” Daniel asked for clarification.

“That’s correct, Doctor.”

“Yet I’m allowed to go see Colonel Makepeace?”

“Former Colonel, and yes, Doctor, you are, and you’ll be under heavy guard. Your teammates will join you, but they won’t be allowed in the cell with you. Only in the security room. When you meet with Makepeace, the top brass want you to get information out of him about the remaining rogue agents. You’ll be under observation. However, I’m told the cameras don’t record audio.”

Daniel closed his eyes and heaved a sigh of dread. He didn’t want to bring up that particularly troublesome piece of the past. “Given that I’m not the same man, how am I in trouble?”

Hammond gave him a wan smile. “Catch-22, Doctor. You’ve accepted his name. You accept everything that goes with it, including baseless accusations by a traitor.”

“General,” Jack began. “What in hell has he claimed?”

Second Wind

“That can’t be divulged here,” Hammond said. “I’m sorry, Jack.” He rose and everyone rose with him. “Standard green utility uniform, so go change. We’ll leave in one hour.”

..

The team and Hammond walked down a wide, dark grey corridor that echoed unpleasantly. There were no cells, no doors except at the end of the hall. After going through it, as their last check point, they arrived in a large empty square with two doors at the opposite end. To the direct left was a security station and the group was led inside. There were seven monitors. One watched the entrance corridor they had just walked through, and the other six covered two cells, with three camera angles apiece. Each inmate’s cell was immense, and divided in half by narrow bars three inches apart. The forward half of the cell was apparently for questioners and visitors and the back half was where

Second Wind

the inmate lived: in a long rectangle that contained a bunk bed and a small desk. A folding chair was the only thing that wasn't bolted to the floor.

"This way, sir," an SF said to Daniel.

Daniel looked at his teammates and commanding officer, then followed the man to the cell door. It was opened and the SF gestured for him to go in.

"Do not touch the prisoner nor give him anything. This is your only warning."

Daniel raised a brow before entering the cell. "Aren't you going to tell me not to approach the prisoner?"

"I believe the warning you were given covers all bases."

"Right."

"You have only to look up at the camera and draw your finger across your throat to terminate the visit."

Daniel snorted. "Apropos, if the guillotine were still in operation." The SF actually grinned at him, which Daniel found entirely unpleasant. "Time limit?"

“An hour.”

He went inside, refusing to look into the barred half of the cell. The door closed behind him with a heavy thud followed by a metallic click. It made him flinch. Daniel walked to the center of the room and looked up to find all three cameras, stationed in the corners. No privacy whatsoever, and it made Daniel wonder if the man jerked off on purpose just to make the guards watch. It would have been consistent with the personality of the Robert he knew from the other universe.

He finally allowed himself to look across the room. On the darkened bottom bunk, Makepeace leaned against the back wall while he had his hands clasped over one knee.

“Jackson,” said Makepeace.

The voice held an arrogant, smug tone. It was familiar, yet there was something angry in it. Understandable, given where he was. He decided not to address him as he would have his own Robert Makepeace, but to copy this particular man’s greeting. “Makepeace.” He took a

Second Wind

few steps and stopped slightly less than a yard length away from the bars and crossed his arms. “Why am I here?”

“Why are any of us here?” Makepeace said in a fake thoughtful tone.

Daniel sighed, looking at the floor underneath the bunk. He wasn’t going to look at a man hiding in the shadows and try to discern what expression he held as he talked because, in his opinion, that was a manipulation: *stay in the shadows; force the person to squint or stare*. “Try again. And come into the light or I’m leaving.”

“We’re all in the shadows, Jackson.”

“Okay,” Daniel said, unfolding his arms and looking up at the camera on his left. He raised his hand to draw a line across his throat but Makepeace stopped him.

“Fine,” the former Marine said quickly, sighing as if disappointed that Daniel wasn’t willing to play games.

Daniel returned to where he’d been, re-crossing his arms, and watched Makepeace scoot forward, stand up,

and walk toward him, stopping at the bars. Oddly, he did it slowly, in segments, where he moved to the edge of the bed, paused, stood up, paused, then walked to the bars. Daniel wondered what the hell kind of person did that. Specifically, what was the point? It certainly wasn't the Robert he knew, which only reinforced the fact that this wasn't *Robert*. It was *Makepeace*.

The man he saw now looked almost exactly the same, except for a deep half-moon scar outlining the right cheek, and it was still an angry red, telling Daniel that it was less than three years old—if his own observational experience was anything to go by. He pointed to his own right cheek. “That must’ve hurt.”

“You’d know,” Makepeace grinned maliciously.

Truth or lie? If it was the truth, what exactly had Makepeace done to deserve it? Did he even want to know? And why was Makepeace smiling about it? Maybe it was best not to have either question answered, but ignorance wasn't bliss, it was disadvantage. “No, I don't know,” he said back. “What happened?”

Second Wind

Makepeace frowned at him and crossed his arms.

“What game are you playing, Jackson?”

“That’s funny,” Daniel said, then said nothing else because he realized that Makepeace didn’t know that the Daniel he knew was dead. He looked up at the left corner camera and scowled at it as he held up both hands in a gesture that basically said, *what the fuck?*

“What’s the matter?” Makepeace asked. “Asking your lord and master for guidance? Can’t think for yourself?”

Daniel frowned back as he re-crossed his arms. “Lord and master?”

“O’Neill.”

“It’s odd, you saying that, given that you were a Marine. What happened?”

“I decided that I didn’t like the status quo.”

Daniel debated whether to ask again why he wanted to see him, because he felt it could just be a manipulation

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tactic by Makepeace to force him to ask the same question again and again.

“Cat got your tongue?” the man asked when Daniel didn’t respond, then smiled. “I remember your tongue. Do you remember mine?” He stuck it out and wagged it and it made Daniel clench the cheeks of his buttocks. It was an embarrassing memory. Not quite *bad*, but not exactly great, either.

Daniel reminded himself that he shouldn’t show a reaction to the things Makepeace said, but given the gloating tone, there was something sinister in it that might just make him forget himself. He had to brace for impact, as it were. “You were never with me,” he said, preparing to tell him who he was.

Makepeace rolled his eyes. “Oh please. You’re still claiming rape? We had an agreement, which clearly stated that as long as you submitted to me, I wouldn’t go after Carter and Teal’c. I never raped you. You gave me your consent.”

Daniel focused on the word, *claiming*. No one had said anything to him, especially Jack, that the other Daniel had reported Makepeace for sexual assault. What that meant was that either this man was lying, or the late Daniel Jackson had been a good actor. After several seconds' thought, he knew it wasn't possible to pretend that an assault never happened, so Makepeace was lying. Now the question was 'why?'

"I'm not *him*," Daniel said quietly. "I'm from an alternate reality. The Daniel Jackson of this world died a year ago."

Makepeace scowled and turned to pace as he studied him from head to toe. He stopped in the middle of the cell again, eyes on his hair. "No. I don't believe you. It's more likely that you've chosen to deny what I did to you. *All* the things I did to you." He leaned in and pressed as much of his face as possible between the bars and whispered, "And you loved every rough minute of it, Jackson, or I wouldn't have been able to make you come down my throat."

Second Wind

Daniel ordered himself not to move. He was not going to run away, especially not from this man. “Who’re the rogues who got away?” he asked, pleased at how emotionless he sounded. “What’re their names? Where did they go?”

“Well, there’s Stu. You remember him, don’t you?” He paused, examining Daniel’s expression. Apparently displeased that he hadn’t gotten a reaction, he rubbed his crotch. “He plugged you pretty good.”

Daniel reinforced the internal order to not react. “Who else?”

“Mack, Glenn, Tony. My crew. *You know.*”

He smiled enigmatically, and it sent a lightning bolt of creepy horror down Daniel’s spine and though he stayed perfectly still and kept his expression the same, his heart began to beat faster. He suddenly didn’t trust that he’d remember the names so he pulled the notepad from his back pocket and plucked the pen from its ringed binding to write the names down, including Stu, whoever that was. “Last names?” he asked.

Second Wind

“James, Madison, Carlson, and Matthews. You never did know that, so there’s new info for you.”

“I never knew them period,” Daniel said as he wrote them down. “I think you’re lying about that anyway, just to get a rise out of me.”

“They’re listening, and it’s being recorded, so it’s pointless to write it down.”

Daniel ignored him. “Anyone else?”

Makepeace’s expression changed, and it was clear that he was suddenly entertaining the idea that Daniel was telling the truth. “Another universe, huh? Did I give you the same treatment there as here?”

Daniel eyed him. Here was an opportunity to get more information from this man, albeit not in the traditional way people expected. He decided to provoke him. To turn the tables. It was time to see how this Makepeace handled hearing things he didn’t want to hear.

“Nope,” Daniel said, trying very much not to insert emotion into his words. “That Robert Makepeace and I

Second Wind

were *lovers* for a short time, until he was busted.” At the frown on Makepeace’s face, Daniel knew he’d hit the mark. He took a step forward, back to his original position, and added in a taunting tone of his own, “He loved me. *And*, he bottomed.”

“*Liar!*” Makepeace said, reaching through the bars to grab his shirt, but Daniel was just a few millimeters out of reach.

“No,” Daniel said flatly, refusing to move. Because he knew there was no audio, he added, “And that sort of vehement refusal means you do, too.” There was a cold satisfaction in getting a little of his own back. While he was feeling smug, Makepeace, on the other hand, had gone quite pale.

“No. You’re lying,” Makepeace said.

Daniel stared at him hard. “No, but *you are*. Why would my other self submit to sexual assault, never mind by more than one person? Given what I’ve heard, we were almost identical, and going by that, I know he’d have rather *shot* you in the head than submit to

it—and the only way he'd even *think* about doing *that* would be by blackmail, which you eluded to. But, there were no signs, after the fact. Nothing. And you can't hide something like that. But let's say it *was* true, then he would play along, and the first chance he got ..."

Daniel held up his hands and mimed shooting a gun at Makepeace's forehead. "I'm a peaceful guy, and so was he. But every man has a breaking point and when it's someone like us, that breaking point is epically bad." He was living proof.

Makepeace turned around, facing the bunk. Daniel compared everything that this bastard claimed happened with his own situation, then applied it to what Jack had said about how they got together after the sting. How long after? Wasn't it two or three *days*? It only confirmed his theory that it had never happened and Makepeace was lying.

If this world's Daniel *had* been assaulted, including by a gang, there would have been *no way* that he'd have had sex soon after. There would have been clear signs and Jack hadn't noticed anything—and he would have. No

Second Wind

one could be *that* good an actor and still remain a healthy human being.

Which meant that all Makepeace had truly wanted was to manipulate him. And why him? Was it because his alternate self had told Makepeace to fuck off, daring him to grab Sam and Teal'c? It's what *he* would have done, had his Robert been the same. So this Makepeace wanted some sort of last word on the matter? If so, it was truly stupid. This Makepeace clearly didn't know what would hit home and what wouldn't.

"I think we're done here," Daniel said. "The SFs and others can play your game. I won't." He turned to head to the door.

"No, wait."

Daniel peered at him over his shoulder. "Whatever lies you told them, trying to bring me into your web of bullshit, won't fly, because he's dead." He turned and went to him, staying just out of fingertip reach. "He's *dead*. Whatever did you think to gain, Makepeace?"

“How was I, in the other universe?”

Daniel sighed. “What did you hope to accomplish? If it was to freak me out or have me scream at you, denying being assaulted—”

“*Raped,*” Makepeace said slowly, enunciating the word. There was a hateful light in his eyes. “Say it, you chicken shit cocksucker. *Raped.* Not sexually assaulted. Raped. It was *good*, watching him struggle, watching how he was held down. Say it, Jackson. Rape. I’ll bet he jerked off to thoughts of me *raping* him.”

Daniel’s nerves were wire taut as each use of the word spilled out of Makepeace’s mouth and despite his vow not to react, he abruptly turned and pounded on the door, then looked again over his shoulder. “You know how I know you’re lying, Makepeace? Because I went through far worse than whatever story you crafted. That sort of trauma leaves signs and no one’s that good a liar. And what the hell kind of conspiracy did you concoct to implicate me, or rather, my other self, in? Whatever it is, it’s bullshit.”

Second Wind

“You’ll have to speak louder for the camera.”

“They’re not listening. It’s just you and me.”

Makepeace narrowed his eyes. “I told them you were in on the whole thing.”

Daniel frowned. “The whole rogue operation?”

“Yes.”

Daniel sighed. “You realize that there are so many holes in that claim, it’ll be proven false in an hour?”

“Yeah, but it was enough to get you to come here anyway.”

Daniel ordered himself not to shade his eyes or pinch the bridge of his nose. His hand had twitched with the need to do one of them or both, but he couldn’t show this man any perceived weakness. “So, you just made up shit so you could get me here to goad me about a rape that never happened?”

“Aw, Daniel. You know it didn’t. But it doesn’t matter. They believe it,” and he pointed at the cameras. “And

Second Wind

writing stuff down was a pointless exercise. Was that a manipulation tactic? It didn't work."

Daniel frowned. "What do you mean?"

Makepeace broke out laughing. "They *are* listening, you dumb motherfucker." He abruptly unzipped his trousers and exposed his erection, then began to quickly jerk himself off. "Remember this? Kneel. Let me come down your throat one more time."

An immense heavy weight seemed to come down over Daniel's head. He needed air. He took a step back, hitting the door as it opened. He pushed the guard aside and stepped past him, staring immediately to the right, through the open door of the security room, where the monitors were. He saw Jack, Sam, and Teal'c staring with wide eyes and Sam's face was red from embarrassment. That meant they really had heard. Blood drained from Daniel's face. "I need some air." He took off, knowing how bad it looked.

..

Back in the security office, Jack said, “I need air, too.” Sam and Teal’c agreed and they followed him as he took off after Daniel, heading for the external entrance to the prison wing. It took about a minute, and at the end of the wide corridor, the guard at *Intake* had seen them coming and was holding the door open. Jack nodded at him, then turned left to enter the covered walkway where the six-man trolley cart waited to take them through an underground tunnel to the *official* Groom Lake facility—the one that could be found on a map. He saw Daniel standing under the large, opened skylight window with his face turned up, eyes closed, hands on hips. He wanted to hug him and couldn’t.

“Was what you said to him about the Makepeace in the other universe true?” Jack asked.

Daniel snorted derisively without looking at him. “No. I just said that to bait him. Payback, because what he said wasn’t making sense so it was a clear lie.”

Second Wind

“How do you know what he said isn’t true?” Jack asked, concentrating on his own breathing to keep the emotion from his voice.

Daniel sighed and kept his eyes closed a few more seconds before he met Jack’s gaze, hyper aware of Sam’s and Teal’c’s presence. “You really wanna talk about that right now, here?”

“Yes,” Jack said, and he looked over his shoulder at the Intake guard behind a double-barred and glassed-in office reception desk and mimed shutting the window. The guard did so and Jack gave him a grim grin in thanks. “So, again, how do you know he was lying?” he turned back and asked.

“Because of what happened to me and how long it took for us to get together. If he’d been brutalized, especially by a gang, he wouldn’t have been ...” He looked at Sam and Teal’c and said, “Sorry,” before returning to Jack. “He wouldn’t’ve been able to have sex for a long time without reexperiencing the rapes. I mean, you said you got together right after the sting, so maybe it was days?”

Second Wind

“Four,” Jack said, glancing at Carter and Teal’c and wincing.

“Okay, it’s not possible for Makepeace’s story to be true.”

“You’re sure?” Sam asked, looking stricken at the thought it might be true. “I mean, to think he did that just to protect ...”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Daniel said. “I mean, it’s mathematically *possible* that he could have normal sexual activity after an assault, because there’s a very low percentage of people, in the single digits here, who can just compartmentalize and shake things off quicker. But they become reckless and self-punishing. And if they somehow maintain control for immediate future, eventually, the trauma catches up. My late self wasn’t like that, I’m assuming?” They nodded. “Anything odd that worried you? Things that just felt *off*? Did the three of you ever get that? At any time?”

They shook their heads and Daniel held up his hands. “There you go.” He tipped his face up toward the sun

Second Wind

and air coming through the opening in the ceiling and closed his eyes again. He breathed in deeply, looking for inner stressors that needed blocking by way of prime number counting. There weren't any.

Safe. *At last.* Well, so far.

"If you want to do your own research on the various responses to rape, be my guest," Daniel went on. "You might wanna check with Janet first, since you said they were close, and as a doctor, she'd notice more than you would."

Daniel's brain went somewhere odd and he looked over at them, frowning. "*Be my guest.* Isn't that an odd idiom? I mean, I know where it comes from, and the derivations. The origins of other phrases are equally bizarre. For example, you've heard the catchphrase, 'you can't swing a dead cat without hitting something around here,' and people think it means a literal dead cat, or a cat period, but what it really refers to is not being able to swing a *cat o'nine tails* in a small, enclosed space, so torture reference there. And there're—"

Second Wind

Jack grabbed him into a hug, and Sam and Teal'c joined in. "Okay," Daniel said in a choking voice as he was surrounded. "What'd I say?"

Jack laughed against his neck. "Everything."

"Not helping," Daniel gasped.

"You're back," Sam said, laughing.

"Well, duh," Daniel managed.

"For good," Teal'c said.

"Damn straight," Jack put in.

"Jesus, you people are weird," Daniel said, straining.

"Of course I'm back. And I love you too. Now can I have some air please before we become living fossils?"

...

Chapter 10: P3R-211

Two days later.

“You sure it’s dead?” Jack asked about the Ancients’ device found in the ruins. It was just like the one previously found during a disaster of a mission. A red-stone console with smaller, moveable blocks within. The new set of ruins were surrounded in a courtyard whose walls were covered with writings. Just like the other planet. But there was no long walkway from the gate and no monolithic stones marking the way. These set of ruins were, in fact, half a klick from the stargate.

“I’m sure,” Daniel said rather absently. “The separate tile blocks are frozen, therefore inert. So yeah, it’s dead. Sam said there wasn’t any residual power readings of any kind, either.”

“Good.”

Daniel made a growling sound, disgusted that the new camera he was trying out hadn’t held a charge long enough for one hour of filming. He dug into his pack

Second Wind

and pulled out a roll of rice paper, then tore off a two-foot strip. If he couldn't use the camera, he'd get rubbings. Next time, he'd stash his regular camera. He'd have used the iPhone Jack had given him, but the battery was low. In his peripheral vision, he saw Jack sit down on the steps that led into the courtyard.

"Where's Sam and Teal'c?" Daniel asked, hoping Jack wouldn't end the mission due to boredom.

"Checking out some naquada readings to the south about two hundred yards."

"Right," Daniel said absently and his pencil end snapped the moment he pressed too hard. "Fuck." He put on a blue latex glove and fished an artist's charcoal stick from a baggie, then started again.

"What're you doing?"

"Charcoal rubbings."

"Why?"

"Camera died."

Second Wind

“Then go back and get a new one.”

“No, this’ll do just fine,” Daniel said, distracted.

“Daniel?” Jack began.

“What?” Daniel was preparing counterpoint arguments to using charcoal versus a camera but what Jack asked next threw him off guard.

“What happened between you and the other Makepeace?” Jack had tried for two whole days to keep from asking, but his curiosity was getting the better of him.

Daniel rolled his eyes. “Jealousy doesn’t become you,” he said, wrinkling his nose as he blew away black dust and had to stop to re-tape the paper to the stone surface. The only thing that worked was duct tape, which sometimes didn’t adhere properly, but he didn’t mind. He actually loved making charcoal rubbings. He just had to remember to use the adhering spray before he rolled it up and started a new rubbing. At least it was quick-dry.

Second Wind

As those thoughts had run through his mind, Daniel realized he'd missed whatever Jack had been saying. "Sorry, Jack, what was that?"

"You weren't listening?" Jack asked, turning in place to look over his shoulder. "For cryin' out loud, Daniel."

"No, I wasn't listening." There came a growl and he recognized it as a warning. He scrambled to his feet and blocked the drawing while pointing at his team leader. "Don't touch my drawing. It's not some random sketch on a Sunday afternoon. It's *work*. Now, can't this frickin' wait till we get home?"

"One, I wasn't gonna do anything to your drawings," Jack scowled. "Two, it's not jealousy, it's curiosity, and three, no it can't."

Daniel crossed his arms. "Ah huh. Despite my telling you that what he said wasn't true." Jack threw him a challenging stare and Daniel, in turn, threw up his arms. "I give up." He walked across the courtyard and sat down next to the man. He pulled the bottle of water from his side pocket and drank.

Second Wind

Jack looked at him, watching him. Despite the annoyance in Daniel's tone and body language, he could clearly see what Daniel was ignoring: stress. It was in the little tick of his right pinkie, the flick of the thumb and forefinger, and it was in the extra blinking. Jack wondered then if Daniel knew about the signs he was displaying, or if he was subconsciously ignoring them. It was obvious, probably only to Jack, that the meeting with Makepeace had affected him more than he'd thought. They hadn't had sex since Sunday and while Daniel had claimed he'd been simply tired, Jack suspected there had been more to it than that and he was worried. Daniel was hiding something. Whatever it was, something was just *off*.

He should probably go first, giving Daniel the courage to follow, and Jack would start with admitting that he'd sent Carter and Teal'c off on a walk; they weren't *investigating* anything. On the other hand, that truth might piss the man off and Daniel would use it as a subconscious excuse to avoid talking about the other Makepeace or whatever it was that this world's version had said that had caused the subdued but persistent

Second Wind

stress. If left unchecked, that stress would grow like a cancer. Sometimes Jack wished he was ignorant of these things, but the wish never lasted long.

“There’s something I’ve been wracking my brain about.”

“What’s that?” Daniel asked tiredly.

“Makepeace said a word, and said it several times. And I’ve only ever heard you use that word once and that was back on Omega, if memory serves. And when you heard that word, it affected you, and he caught it. So he said it over and over. It was at that point that you decided to pound on the door instead of looking at the camera and drawing your finger over your throat.” He paused, letting the silence stretch. “It was a *tell*, like in poker. You don’t have to talk to me about it, but you definitely have to talk to Doctor Palmer.”

Daniel heard him but he didn’t want to. He didn’t want to think about it but Jack wouldn’t leave it alone. It meant he had to say something, and he didn’t like that, either. In fact, he hated it. “You’re boxing me in,”

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Daniel told him after a silent minute. "I'm feeling trapped."

"Is it me? Just because I brought it up? You've been nervous for two days." He reached over and grabbed Daniel's hand, making the flicking stop.

Daniel blinked and looked down at his hand in Jack's, realizing what had just happened. He looked over at him, astonished. "I didn't even notice."

"My point exactly." Jack paused again, then said, "You've also slept on the couch for two days straight instead of coming to bed, even just to sleep."

Daniel frowned, thinking there was nothing wrong with going to sleep on the couch with the TV on. "Trouble sleeping, that's all."

"Not what I mean."

"Then what?"

"You're purposely sleeping alone."

Second Wind

“No, I’m not ...” Daniel frowned again, thinking about it. “I was just ...” Jack was right, damn him. Daniel sighed and looked down at Jack’s hand, still clasping his own. He turned his hand over and laced their fingers together as he dropped his head on Jack’s shoulders. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to avoid you. Not consciously.”

“You internalize. So do I. But with you, with the stuff you have to overcome, I don’t think you should. Maybe you’re more comfortable talking to Doc Palmer about it, but I’m here.”

“I know you are,” Daniel said, squeezing his hand. “You always will be.”

“Yes.” More silence, which stretched for several minutes. And still, Jack couldn’t help but wonder. “Daniel, I know I’m beating a dead horse to death but ...”

Daniel sighed and pulled his hand away to cross his arms over raised knees and drop his head down on them. “Jesus, Jack.” After a minute, he looked at him. “I don’t know what this Makepeace did, but the other

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one ...” He shook his head. “I thought you’d left me. It hurt. That acting job fooled me really well and I was mad for a long, long time.”

Jack stared at him.

“Right after you left, and Robert was made head of SG-1, I went home mad as hell. Sam deserved to be head of SG-1, not him.” He laughed sourly. “The dumb sonofabitch came to my apartment. I invited him in. I gave him a beer. He asked about us, you and me, then said he wanted to fuck me. I said no.” Daniel looked away and stared at the reddish landscape and idly wondered why many Alteran planets had that red dirt and clay. Then ordered his mind to stop distracting itself. “At first,” he revealed. He heard Jack sigh. “He ... was persistent, and the whole seduction thing he had going on worked. I’ll spare you the details, but after the fourth time asking if he could be with me, I gave in.”

Jack felt an insane urge to go to Area 51 and beat the shit out of the man. Not out of jealousy. It was the timing. The decency. He’d preyed on Daniel’s grief. Or rather, the other one had. Jack had a feeling that this

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universe's Makepeace wouldn't have bothered with asking.

"I never told you. Him," Daniel said suddenly.

"Why not?" Jack asked, completely surprised.

Daniel looked away from him. "I'm the one who was shit on, so I used someone else to bury my grief in anger for a short while. Didn't help, and then a week later, everything was exposed, except for having sex with Robert."

"Why couldn't you be honest with him and come clean?"

Daniel gave Jack a disgusted look. "Jack, the *only* reason people tell their partners they fucked up is to spread the shame and guilt and anger. They want their partner to feel as shitty as they do, and it's a manipulative, sadistic thing to do to someone you love. People disguise it as telling the truth, but there's nothing to be gained by it. No, I wasn't going to tell him." Daniel gave him a hard look. "I'm going to use

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the impersonal pronoun instead, so there's no misunderstanding here, okay?"

"Okay," Jack said, frowning with guilt. "Doesn't really matter though, does it? I did the same thing. I ditched us with a lie."

"Friendship. You weren't a couple. You weren't married. *You* didn't hurt me. He did. *He* left me instead of telling me the truth about the Asgard and Tollan sting, so any moral high ground was flushed down the toilet when that happened. Didn't make it right, my sleeping with Robert, but lying to your husband no matter the reason wasn't right either. We both lied. Mine was by omission. We eventually made up, of course, but it took a couple of months and I was so mad, we nearly split up." Daniel sighed and closed his eyes. "The only thing that calmed my ass down was the fact that I'd cheated on him. It didn't matter that we'd broken up. We were still married."

"Do you think that this world's Makepeace ...? That Daniel was raped, like he insinuated?"

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Daniel shook his head fervently. “No. I told you before, that never happened. The Daniel Jackson of this world was me, so I can guarantee that you would have known something bad had happened. First and foremost because you wouldn’t have been able to have sex. You got together right afterward, and that couldn’t have happened had he been sexually assaulted.”

“Raped,” Jack said softly.

Daniel winced. “He wasn’t. I ... was, but not by Robert. My abuse was much later and you’ve been witness to what happens to someone who’s been violated repeatedly over a long period of time.”

“So what you told this world’s Makepeace was actually true?”

Daniel winced again. “I’m sorry I told you guys it was a lie. On my part, I mean. It’s just I didn’t want Sam and Teal’c knowing that stuff. Don’t tell them otherwise.”

“I’m not an asshole, Daniel.”

Second Wind

For the third time, Daniel winced. “No. You’re not. Sorry about that. I think that was a knee-jerk reaction of mine.”

Jack nodded and took Daniel’s hand in his one more time. He squeezed gently and raised his hand to his lips and kissed Daniel’s fingers. “You’ve come a long way and I’m very proud of you. I couldn’t love you more, respect you more.”

Daniel gave him a half-smile and leaned over and kissed him lightly. There was a certain light in their eyes, and they kissed again, more passionately. When they broke apart, Daniel sighed and dropped his head on his shoulder again. “When we get home, I’ll call Doctor Palmer. Then I’ll make it up to you for sleeping on the couch.”

“Do what you gotta do, Daniel,” Jack grinned.

“Don’t I always?” Daniel grinned back.

“Not really,” Jack said, half-teasing, half-serious.

Second Wind

More silence stretched, and Jack couldn't help himself. He also knew Daniel well enough that he anticipated the reaction to the next question. "How was he?"

Daniel groaned. "You're worrying this to death. Why are you asking me? Honestly, this need to dick measure is so immature."

"I'm curious, not threatened," Jack countered. Though he thought Daniel was probably right.

Daniel sighed again, more heavily. "Nowhere near as good as you. Either of you."

"Ah," Jack said, eyeing Daniel, who wouldn't look at him. He grinned. "Good."

Daniel half-smiled and finally looked over. "You're such a ..."

"I know," Jack said, and put an arm around him.

"There's still that elephant in the room. The *word*. Even now, you cringe."

Second Wind

“Well, you would too,” Daniel said, and shuddered as a creepiness crawled down his back. “But I take your point. Apparently, I still have some work to do. Given *that word*.”

“I’ll be here, helping any way I can.”

“I know.” Daniel nudged him in the ribs. “I love you, you know.” He nudged again and was squeezed against Jack’s side as the man kissed him hard. When they parted, his lips were red.

“I love you right back.” Jack kissed him again and this time, Daniel made damn sure Jack’s lips matched his own. “Damn.” Jack stood up and helped Daniel to his feet. “C’mon. Let’s get back to work, then we’ll go home and fuck like bunnies.”

Daniel grinned, fighting off the urge to throw him down and straddle him right there. “Deal. Just as long as you don’t get impatient and touch my rubbings.”

“I’m not *touching that* with a ten-foot pole. Now, are you sure that damn thing is turned off, because the last time ...”

Chapter 11: A Farewell to the Dead

Eight Weeks Later

Daniel busied himself with research while Jack was at work. He also waited for the response to the message he'd sent Janet Fraiser that morning. It was now two in the afternoon. He knew she'd be busy, as she always was, but he hadn't expected her to be this busy. He felt for her, not being able to take an hour off to go see an old-new friend. And he was both old and new. The nightmares about Frazier hadn't stopped, but the constant comparisons with Janet had. For that, he wanted a celebration of sorts to go with all the healing he had achieved. He had thought that maybe she might join him, but that hadn't been the case. When he'd invited her, there'd been a silence on the phone.

"Janet?" he'd asked.

Second Wind

“That’s really a very smart, very sweet thing to do, Daniel. But I’m sorry, I’m tied up here. And I’m not really sure this should be a ritual you do with others. I think it needs to be just yourself. Just know that it means a lot. We’ve come a long way. I think that’s enough.”

What could he say after that? It was time to move on with the plan. It was a time for giving thanks. But, while everyone else made their *thanksgiving* on that holiday, Daniel refused to celebrate it. He’d begun that act of defiance when he was twelve and his viewpoint had only strengthened over the years. Just because he was in a different universe, didn’t mean he’d changed his opinion on the full-on rewriting of history, because apparently the United States government hadn’t. It still had its head up its ass.

So instead, Daniel decided on a much-lesser known approach to remembrance, and since he knew about a lot of resurrection-slash-new beginning rituals from various cultures, he had had plenty to pick from. He stared at the web page, nodding to himself as he

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scrolled down, catching up on the rituals he'd picked, trying to put a new spin on them.

It wasn't Thanksgiving, however. It was Halloween. Also known as Samhain, Ancestor's Day, All Hallows' Eve, and several others. In the days before the Gregorian-Roman calendar, this day was marked on the second full moon after the autumnal equinox. Something about the veil separating the living and the dead being at its thinnest between the full moon and the third quarter. Over time, and as a way to find safety from persecution, pagans had converted it to October 31st. Tomorrow was All Hallows'. The day the dead walked the graveyards—marked and unmarked, which meant not all the ghost sightings occurred in cemeteries. All Hallows' was also known as *Diá de los Muertos*, or the Mexican-Aztec Day of the Dead. Both pagan rituals celebrated the same thing: new beginnings and a farewell-honoring to the ancestors.

A few months' back, Daniel had thought about visiting a church, or going to see the Navajo, but he'd decided on something far older, in accordance with the Celtic and Teutonic strains in him, so the Samhain ritual made

Second Wind

sense. He just knew that Jack would find it weird, which was the Catholic upbringing in him. Same as his late husband, whom he intended to say farewell.

As he read through a few pagan sites on the internet, he found something over and over that seemed to mesh with the Navajo: a sage bundle for smudging away the evil or negative spirits and blessing the new space or person. It seemed his ritual list had just been narrowed down to two items, dried and fresh. One additional positive aspect was that at least the sage wouldn't stink up the barbecue pit, the source of his ritual. Daniel left for the stores.

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Daniel went out into the backyard, wishing it wasn't cold out because all he wanted to wear was his jeans. No shirt, no shoes. He would have done this naked if he could've, but it just wasn't possible—weather notwithstanding. Instead, he wore a black Alaskan Inuit

Second Wind

parka over a red plaid flannel shirt, jeans, and tan work boots. He ran his hands over the fake muskrat front trim and the fake wolf fur hood trim of the parka and whispered, “You would’ve loved this coat.” It was new, and not even Jack had seen it. Everything he wore, in fact, was new. The only thing that was old was the subject of the drawing he held and the dried sage bundle. Even the fresh sage was old because he’d bought a plant instead of cuttings.

The barbecue pit’s coal bank was nicely made and ready, and the snow had been cleared away. Daniel threw down the wool blanket to keep his knees warm and dry and knelt in front of the pit. In a clay bowl was the sage and a drawing he’d made of his late husband. It was only a bust, but it was good enough. He was wearing the tux he’d had on when they’d gotten married.

It was nearly dark and Jack would be home soon. He’d give him a hard time for taking the afternoon off without telling him, and he’d be hurt at being excluded, but Daniel just wasn’t interested in getting scoffed at. Jack was a traditionalist. Plus, it was nearly time for the

kids to go out on their rounds for sweets in the dark. Jack had a bowl by the door already ready to go. A few days ago, he said he loved looking at the kids and their costumes. His late husband had too, so while Daniel did his thing out back, Jack could take care of things out front.

Of course, Daniel would be well done with his ritual by the time the kids started their rounds, but he was trying to think of a good reason to avoid helping Jack hand out the treats. He liked kids, and could talk to them very easily, but he just didn't like the tradition of giving out candy to strangers, even kids. There was something creepy about the entire idea of the modern Halloween. It was a holiday meant for scaring people, so what did you do while *trick or treating*? You went to a stranger's house. What the hell would happen when you knocked on the wrong frickin' door? Daniel had come up with this idea when he was eleven, and he'd stopped going *trick or treating*. Telling that to his few friends had made them see him differently. It was a bad thing for a young boy to lose friends because he wouldn't join in a

yearly ritual, but he'd have rather given them up than find out his creeped-out fear was justified.

Daniel smiled to himself as he thought about it, wondering if he should bring it up with Doctor Palmer during one of his now-monthly appointments. Doc would likely be amused by it. In fact, he should make an offering of thanks for the universe bringing that man into his life. He'd made such an impact with his method of treatment and while it had been hard, it had felt like a crucible all on its own. To force himself to talk about every single event that had caused him harm, then to counterbalance them with happy memories—Daniel had discovered that he'd had more happy memories than he'd realized. But he could think back on those memories now without the corresponding physical and mental crippling of his mind, completely damaging his psyche. They were just bad memories. There were a few things he couldn't do yet when it came to sex, and perhaps he never would, but he'd come so far that he had hope that they too would become nothing more than something to be brushed aside as unimportant.

Second Wind

With the hurricane lamp next to him, Daniel pulled out the box of wooden matches from his coat pocket and set them in the bowl. He picked up the sage bundle and began to break it open, muttering the words he'd written down. They weren't from any known ritual. They were simply words he figured suited his need.

"To cleanse this moment, this day, this month, this year, in this world and in the one before."

He began to toss bits of the dried sage into the pit. When each bit caught fire and the smoke rose, he said, "I give thanks for ..." and he spoke of a moment that he'd had with his late husband. He added Janet and Doctor Palmer, and after the twentieth toss of sage, he heard the back door open and Jack walk down the deck.

"Hey, you," Jack said.

It was fully dark now, at nearly six in the evening, so Daniel figured he couldn't see him well enough until he turned on the back porch light. But he didn't. He walked over and stopped beside him and Daniel looked up.

Second Wind

“Hey, you.”

“Whatcha doin’?”

“I’m having a Samhain ritual and saying goodbye to the dead.”

“You couldn’t light a candle in the church?” Jack asked.

Daniel shook his head. “It just doesn’t have the same meaning for me.”

Jack crouched down. “So what’re you doing then?”

“I’m speaking a memory, then tossing a piece of dried sage into the coals. It catches fire and the smoke wafts up, taking the message to the other side.”

“Ah huh,” Jack said.

Daniel gave him a sad grin. “Yeah, I know how it sounds. But I’m saying goodbye, Jack. It’s the right time.”

“Halloween.”

Second Wind

“Yep. If there was a grave, I’d visit it tomorrow.”

“Ah. All Hallows.”

“Also known as Día de los Muertos.”

“Day of the Dead.”

Daniel raised a brow. “Yes, that’s right. You give thanks or remembrance, whichever. For me, anyway, as a non-Latino. For them, it’s totally different and I won’t go into it to spare you.”

“Gee, thanks,” Jack said dryly.

Daniel grinned. “It’s about time to hand out candy, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, you coming in?”

“No, I’ll pass on that.”

“Huh?”

Daniel quickly explained. “And no, I don’t expect you to agree with me. But come on, does it make any sense to

scare yourself while going to a stranger's house? I mean, does it? It's mad."

Jack started laughing. "You are weird. And I love you." He got up and started to kiss Daniel on the head but the parka got in the way. He moved the hood back and kissed him. "Love the coat." He then gently slapped Daniel upside the head and started to go back inside. "Don't stay out too long. You get frostbite and we'll have words."

"It's not cold enough for frostbite," Daniel smiled, staring at the pit.

"Don't ruin a perfectly good Grumpy Jack."

"Oh, my mistake." He heard the door close and missed his presence already. With a sigh, Daniel returned to business. He finished his ritual by burning the sage plant in the pit with the drawing stuck between its little branches. "I love you," he murmured. "I hope that wherever your spirit is now, you are happy." Daniel let the tears fall for a few minutes as he mourned, then sniffed them back and went inside.

Second Wind

He found Jack waiting in the living room with a mug of hideous pumpkin-spice coffee. “What in the hell ...” Daniel asked, taking it. They moved toward the sofa while he sniffed the brew and made a face. “Jack, pumpkin belongs either in the pumpkin, in cookies, in bread, or in a pie. But this nonsense stuff you see in the stores lately ...”

“Just try it, Grumpy Daniel,” Jack grinned, sitting down, pulling Daniel with him.

Daniel pretended to be offended. “Grumpy? I’m stating an opinion. How can that be grumpy?”

“I’ve fixed you a special mug and you’re complaining,” Jack told him, and he slapped Daniel’s knee. “Try it.”

Daniel sighed and took a sip. Alcohol. Chocolate overtones. He took another sip and grimaced. “Did you put Kahlua in this?”

“Sure,” Jack said, affecting his own fake outrage. “It’s really good, Daniel! Stop being a pain.”

Daniel sputtered and got up. “No. Just ... no.”

Second Wind

“Where’re you going?” Jack asked, remaining on the couch.

“To make a cup of coffee with Kahlua in it. I don’t know what this crap is, but you wasted money on it.”

“Party pooper,” Jack called after him, grinning his head off.

“And you call *me* weird,” Daniel said, looking over his shoulder. He tried to keep up the scowl, but it was impossible. Jack’s smile was just too infectious. Daniel also relented to help in Jack’s candy giving and eventually had to admit that wasn’t that bad an activity after all. The only drawback, according to the kids, was that they should’ve been in costume. Daniel responded to the polite criticism by bending over, hands on his knees, and telling the lead complainer: “But I’m *wearing* my disguise. You should see my *real* face.”

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Second Wind

Retiring later, Jack hugged Daniel against his body just before giving him a Halloween present. “Told you handing out candy was fun.”

“Jesus, you can’t keep from doing that, can you?” Daniel asked, reaching back and slapping Jack’s ass cheek.

“Hey now!” Jack grinned. “Doing what?”

“You know. That ‘told you so’ crap. You just love doing that.” He turned in place and slid his hand over Jack’s chest, running his fingers through the fine hair.

Jack was too busy with the tactile distraction to continue the teasing argument. He moved his hand down and wrapping his fingers around Daniel’s growing hardness. “I love doing this more.”

Daniel groaned. “Yeah? Show me how much.”

Jack grinned and leaned over him, grazing his teeth over his nipples before he brushed his lips over the warm skin of his abdomen. “Happy to oblige,” he said, and moved lower.

Chapter 12: A Winter Beginning

Daniel knew Jack was up to something, but damn him, he couldn't figure out what. He'd become quite the astute observer of the man's behavior patterns, but this time, he had nothing. Whatever it was, Jack was as happy as a clam about it. He'd also left the mountain before Daniel did, which was a rarity. Jack had more responsibilities and was thus almost always the last member of the team to leave—except for Teal'c, who was still stuck on the mountain. As Daniel straddled his Triumph, he made a mental note to lobby the General for Teal'c to have his own apartment.

The snow was falling again, just as the roads had almost cleared up, so it was looking to be another white week. At least they'd be home for the next seven days. Daniel sighed happily as he rode out of the mountain. Seven whole days. If Jack even thought about getting up early, Daniel would have to tie him to the bed.

Second Wind

There was a stutter-step to his thoughts the moment that image had come to him. Once upon a time, bondage had been a kink of Daniel's. Could he ever get that back? It had been such a turn-on for the both of them, with all sorts of variations and role playing. Daniel knew he couldn't do it, not for a while. He still had one more hurdle to jump through and he'd included it in his ritual: to have sex laying on his stomach. The thought no longer sent a nauseous wave through him, and that was major progress. Perhaps this week was a time for making magical things happen.

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Daniel entered the house, slipped out of his parka, turned, and shook it off over the porch landing. He closed the door and hung it on its special wooden hook in the wall; the coat was much too heavy to hang on the coat tree. He took off his boots and set them under the parka, then padded into the kitchen.

Second Wind

“Coffee fresh?” he asked, but Jack wasn’t there. He looked around, peered out back through the French doors, then shrugged and went to the coffee maker. He lifted the carafe and peered at its contents. The amber color told him it was fresh and he happily poured himself a mug. He turned around and headed into the living room. “Jack?” He looked at the back door, saw that it was locked, and turned back to head down the hall. “Jack?”

“Here,” Jack called, from the other side of the kitchen, where the stairs led down to the basement.

“What’ve you been doing?” Daniel asked, going around to meet him. He stopped, finding Jack holding a large box. It had a black label written on the side: *Xmas*. “You said you didn’t want to decorate.”

“Yeah, well, I figured we could get a little tree and decorate that. Then put up a few lights around the window.”

Daniel nodded. “Want any help?”

Second Wind

“Nope,” Jack said. “But there’s something very important for you in the living room.”

“Mail?” Daniel asked, turning around to head that way.

Jack followed him and set the box down by the coat tree. “No.”

Daniel gave him a look over his shoulder, then went around the couch and came to a halt. There was a small, square cake sitting there. It was piped elegantly with white frosting and red roses. There was also a tripod of toothpicks sitting in the center. He drew closer, realizing the toothpicks were holding something.

Daniel’s heart began to hammer as he sat down on the couch and stared at the cake’s additional decoration. It was a ring. He reached over and plucked it free from its holder. It was beautiful and unique. His mouth went dry. What he held was a white gold wedding band, etched on the outside in the telltale lines of Irish Ogham script: *Gra go deo*, which meant *Love forever*. On the inside of the band was an engraving, in English: *To Daniel. My love Forever, Jack.*

Second Wind

Daniel was speechless. He blinked rapidly, trying to stave off the tears that wanted to fall. He felt the emotional blush start in his ears and travel over his cheeks, which wasn't helping to hold off the waterworks. He was about to die of embarrassment if he didn't get a hold of himself. Weeping. For crying out loud. Wasn't that strictly a thing that blushing brides and men much less hardened than him did?

Jack took the ring from his fingers and held it up. "Daniel Jackson, will you marry me?"

Daniel stared at the ring, then looked up into Jack deep brown eyes, filled with worry and love and expectation. "Yes," he nodded, but hardly a sound came out. He cleared his throat. "Yes," he tried again, but again, it sounded as if he'd lost his voice. It was just that he was so overcome by the linguistic design of the ring that all the words of appreciation and love that filled his head couldn't find their way to be properly expressed. And then the damn tears began to drop, like tiny jewels, sticking to his lashes and skating over his cheeks.

Jack smiled, his own eyes glistening, and he grabbed Daniel's face and mashed their lips together in a feverish kiss. He pulled Daniel forward, arms around his back, then turned him, pressing him into the back cushions of the couch. Finally Daniel made noise, a deep groan, and it was enough to make Jack hard. He broke the kiss. "I love you."

"I love you," Daniel murmured.

"Wanna get naked and go to bed?" Jack asked, grinning.

Daniel groaned. "You took the words right out of—"

Their cellphones rang with a specific text message sound.

"Oh, no, no, no, no, *shit!*" Jack said grabbing his phone. 911, the message read. "Fuck!" He tapped and swiped and put the phone to his ear, waiting for Hammond's phone to ring.

"Hammond," said the General.

Second Wind

“This is a joke, right?” Jack asked. “Please, *please*, tell me this is a joke.”

“I’m sorry, Jack. SG teams 6 and 13 are trapped and need back-up and rescue.”

Jack sighed and rubbed his brows. “Gotcha. We’ll be right in.”

“As soon as,” Hammond said.

They hung up at the same time. Jack told Daniel what the General said and Daniel’s eyes widened. “Shit.” They started to get up but Jack halted them. “Give me your finger,” he said.

“Huh?” Daniel asked, mind already on what they had to do when they got to the mountain.

“Ring finger?” Jack asked. The ring was still in his hand.

“No,” Daniel said. “It’s not an engagement ring. It’s a wedding band. I’m not wearing it now. It’s bad luck.”

Jack blinked at him. “Okay, that’s weird, since you don’t believe in luck, bad, good, or otherwise.”

Second Wind

“Well ...” Daniel said, a confused frown forming between his brows. “Let’s talk about it later, okay? Right now, we have to—”

“Skedaddle,” Jack finished, interrupting. “I know.” When they got to their feet, he grabbed him around the waist and pulled Daniel against him. He kissed him deeply, arms winding around him to hold him fast.

Daniel moaned into his mouth, earning one back from Jack, and then pushed out of the embrace. “You are *such* a damn tease.” He hurriedly stepped away and grabbed his phone, coat, and headed for the door. Jack was right behind him. As he opened the door, he paused and looked him. “Happy solstice, Jack. And yes, I will marry you. Now, let’s get our guys and hurry the hell back home.”

“Solstice?” Jack asked.

“It’s the 21st of December,” Daniel told him. “The winter solstice.”

Jack frowned. “Huh. Eight months to the day.”

Second Wind

Daniel blinked. “What?”

“It was the 21st of April when you came into my life,” Jack told him.

“It was?” Daniel asked.

Jack grinned. “Then two and a half months later, back at the SGC, and it’s suddenly your birthday. And I have a confession to make.”

“Uh oh,” Daniel said with a tentative grin.

“A month later, or somewhere around there, I decided that I would ask you to marry me.”

Daniel grabbed the front of Jack’s shirt and pulled him forward to give him as passionate a kiss as Jack had given him before. “I love you.”

“Love you back,” Jack said, and ran a hand over Daniel’s long hair. “It’s been a long, hard road. And now we’re here.”

Second Wind

Daniel sighed and backed out of the house and onto the darkened porch. "I couldn't have come this far without you."

"Nonsense," Jack said, turning the porch light on. "You're the strongest person I know, Daniel. And you're a survivor."

Daniel shook his head in wonder as snowflakes fell over and around him. He held out his hand and Jack took it. The porch light cast an ethereal glow over them. "If not for you, I'd have packed it in already." Jack opened his mouth to argue but Daniel put a few fingers over his lips. "I'm sorry, but it's true. I lost you. I found you. I'll be damned if I lose you again."

"Right backatcha," Jack murmured. He led him out of the porch's illumination and into the dark of the driveway. "Just don't do anything squirrely while we're offworld. I want a lovely Christmas to remember."

"It already is," Daniel said, leaning over with a soft grin to give Jack a quick kiss before they rushed to the base.

The End