

Title: Time To Sleep In

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Category: POV, Angst, Hurt/Comfort.

Pairing: None.

Rating: 13+

Season: Two

Spoilers: A Matter Of Time

Summary: Jack suffers from guilt, whilst recovering in the infirmary.

Warnings: None.

Status: Complete March 2002.

Notes: I'm still new to fanfic writing, but I am trying harder, honest! Feedback would be appreciated. However, no flames please. I can burn my own toast without any help, thank you.

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There's heat, a tremendous heat to my legs, followed by brief moments of intense pain and I'm being flung towards the blown out windows of the control room.

Then nothing.

Beep-beep.

What's that?

Beep-beep.

There it is again. Strange, comforting, familiar somehow. I just can't remember what it is.

Beep-beep.

Shouldn't I know that sound? I'm sure I've heard it before.

Beep-beep.

Voices. Whose?

Beep-beep.

OK. Now it's getting annoying. Listen to the voices instead. Maybe figure out what's going on here.

Voices, female, doctor-speak. Doc Fraiser. Sounds far off. Wish I could hear more. Are they whispering? Why can't I feel anything?

Beep-beep.

Damn, that's really going to piss me off soon.

Footsteps, nearby. Gentle breath on my face. Cool fingers on my cheek.

"Colonel. Can you hear me?"

Fingers prizing my eyelids open. Damn searchlight in my eyes again. Then everything melts away, even the damn beep-beep road-runner goes.

Peace.

Doesn't last long.

Beep-beep's still there, but I manage to ignore it this time. Voices and movements get my scattered attention though. Trying to pay more attention now. The Infirmary. Why? Remembered pain of the bomb going off. Shockwave, shrapnel. Flying without due care and attention. Wow, what a blast.

Bad pun that O'Neill, even for you.

The light clip-clip of Fraiser's heels coming to stop nearby. She's saying something, but the words are like mist and evaporate around me.

Heavy air-force boots approaching. My team, it has to be. Doc wouldn't let anyone else near. I've gotta make an effort for them. OK, operation 'open eyes' about to commence.

Damn. Turn that light off will ya?

My, what a sight for sore eyes. My team. All of them. Daniel too. Space-monkey home safe and sound. This is worth waking up for.

We did it. No wonder Hammond looks so pleased. Saved the whole planet again did we? A medal will look good on Carter. I hope she gets one. She deserves it, she's done well. I'm proud of her. There're bound to be repercussions though, some sort of safety protocol initiated. Don't think getting hitched to black holes is in the manifest.

What? Two weeks? Daniel must have been frantic about us. Wonder how long he was trying to get back? Wonder if he's slept OK? Wish I could say something to him, but I'm suddenly very tired. Never knew keeping your eyes open was so hard. Hammond's giving me permission to sleep. Couldn't do anything else right now, George. Bye.....

Pain, this time. Guess Doc's cutting back on the sedatives. A distinct lack of 'beep-beep', which is good. Guess wily coyote got him at long last. A nurse notices I'm awake again and calls for her.

Fraiser's over in an instant. She sees the slight grimace on my face and plays with something on the IV line. Wonder what they're putting into me now? The pain soon dims again.

"Welcome back, Sir." She's already giving me the once over. "I'm reducing the sedatives slowly, so you can wake up more. Guess you want to know how you're doing?"

Good woman, the Doc. Knows I need to know what's going on. I nod, as my throat's a little dry. Instinctively, she's there with a glass and straw and, as I drink the glass dry, she fills me in.

"The worst trauma was to your legs, which suffered burns and shrapnel from the bomb blast. Nothing that won't heal with time and patience." She gives me a sardonic glare. "You dislocated your left shoulder from hitting the window frame of the control room, which in turn tore muscles. Concussion was to be expected and you've got glass cuts over a large portion of your arms and neck."

I'm feeling a lot better, now I know there's nothing too drastic to keep me down for long. Burns and shrapnel I know are going to hurt, but not stop me.

"How bad are the burns?" I don't feel any pain anymore, from anything, and its release helps me concentrate on what Doc is saying.

"Some second degree to your lower legs, mostly first degree up to your thighs. Your boots did a good job of protecting your feet. However, you'll have to stay here a while, so we can keep an eye on the dressings and make sure you don't get any infections while your skin heals. The shrapnel caused us a bit of worry in regard to that, but we got it all out and it doesn't seem to have exacerbated the problem. All in all, you were very lucky."

Yup. Good luck charm O'Neill, that's me.

"Can I sit up then?"

She appraises me for a moment. I know I'm always rushing ahead, faster than she'd like, but I'm damned if I'm going to stare at the far corner of the ceiling, if I can sit up and read, or something, instead. My team will be here again soon, I know it, she knows it, and I can think of more appealing sights than staring up their noses from down here.

Doc raises the bed head more and I close my eyes as dizziness swamps me. She's instantly there with a hand on my shoulder, steadying me.

"It's OK, Sir. Take your time."

Time, that's a laugh. Time wasn't anything Frank or I had, back in the gate-room.

Frank! Oh God! How the hell could I forget, even for an instant?

I start to tremble with guilt and anguish as I remember my former friend and colleague. Fraiser misinterprets my actions and quickly starts checking my vitals.

"Colonel?" her voice is urgent and demanding, but I can't speak. Not yet.

I hold up a hand to ward her off. Unfortunately, she just grabs at my wrist to take my pulse. I pull sharply out of her grasp, unmindful of the fact I'm lucky it's my right arm I'm jerking and not my

left, and struggle to turn away. It's damned uncomfy, trying to turn onto my left shoulder, but I need whatever bit of privacy I can get at the moment.

"Colonel? Sir?" she's not giving in and I know I have to tell her something, or she'll go into overdrive.

I turn cold eyes towards her, shutting out anything that might give my emotions away to the surface.

"I'm OK. Just leave me alone, will ya?" I almost shout.

She startles at the harsh tone of my voice, not understanding what's going on with her patient. However, she's learned when to give me some slack and she backs off at my angry stare.

"I'll be back in a little while, Colonel." She finally states, giving me an equally determined glare and walks away. She's obviously confused and just a little hurt by my attitude, but I need to be alone for a time.

Time. There it is again. Time can mean so much and yet last so little. Four months of hell to build up hate. Five minutes to break down the barriers. A few seconds to lose a friend. Time. How does time work where Frank and SG10 are? Is Frank still flying out the wormhole on P3W 451 in slow motion? Is Hank still running to the gate?

Those are friends and colleagues of mine and I've sent each of them to their deaths. Not just a quick death, either. Oh no, O'Neill. I couldn't even give them that! They're going to get pulled apart, atom by atom, in slow motion. Protracted death, that's my legacy to them.

At least when Frank left me behind, I had a chance. I got out. What did I leave him? I can feel bile rising up from my stomach. How could I have possibly thought myself better than him? What I've done is truly unforgivable! I want to throw up, but I'm stuck in this bed and just shooed the Doc away.

God. I don't think I'll be able to keep this all together if I think about it. Someone, anyone, please tell me this is some dream and I'm going to wake up soon, drenched in sweat, but not in this god-awful nightmare.

I can feel Daniel approaching. Looks like Fraiser's called in the troops. I don't even need to turn around, to recognise his footsteps. Not that it isn't difficult moving about on top of this shoulder anyway. Please make him go away. I don't want to lose it with anyone about, especially my friends.

"Jack?" he asks hesitatingly.

"Leave!" I spit out, not turning round. Daniel didn't even meet Cromwell, hasn't any connection to my pain, or a right to help me with it.

"Why Jack?"

I don't turn around, or reply. Daniel was probably still building sand castles whilst I was rotting away in the Iraqi version of weight-watchers. Still dreaming of sex and dates whilst my life was slipping away. Still enthusing with his professors, whilst I gradually shut down every door to my soul, withdrawing to a place where what they did didn't register any more. Whilst he was translating hieroglyphs, I was picturing Frank and letting hate fuel my resolve to live. No, Daniel doesn't belong with those images.

“Damnit Daniel. JUST GO!”

He knows I mean every syllable. I can tell by his hesitancy that he knows he’s treading on shaky ground, yet still he persists.

“I don’t understand Jack. Tell me what’s wrong.”

I can’t stand it any longer. My head is pounding with the need to vent at something, anything. Daniel, as usual, is right in the firing line. Standing like the proverbial rabbit, caught in the headlights of the oncoming truck. Oblivious to his impending doom.

“What’s wrong, Daniel? WHAT’S WRONG?” My voice is carefully controlled fury, as I turn to face him. Every inch of me begging to be able to turn the clock back and change events.

“Why should anything be wrong, Daniel?” My legs are out of the bed now and I see him staring at bandages that I haven’t even looked at myself yet.

“Those people are dead. D.E.A.D. Dead. Why shouldn’t that bother me, eh?” I’ve ripped the IV out by this time and Danny takes a step backwards, unconsciously, as my feet hit the floor.

“But that’s not your fault.” he’s quick to reassure, realising this can’t be all that’s bothering me. He knows I’ve lost people before. He knows me too well.

“It’s not as though this type of thing doesn’t happen to us, is it?” I’m struggling to stay upright now, clinging onto the bed for support. I’ve just gotta move. If I don’t move, I’ll go right out of my mind. “I mean. We’re military. That’s what we’re here for, isn’t it? To do, or die, so others might live?”

Daniel’s getting concerned now and makes a move towards me. He’s looking back out into the corridor, not sure if he should go for help, or stay with me instead. For a linguist, his body language is pretty darned easy to read too. No wonder everyone trusts him so quickly, he’s so open and honest. Unlike battle-hardened Colonel’s, who’ve spent so long bottling their feelings, they don’t know what to do when one smacks them in the gut.

“No, Jack. I mean that’s part of what you do, yes, but only part. No one wants you to die.” See, it’s not so simple, is it Daniel, and simplicity won’t do here. Things are getting way too complicated for me to handle. Everything’s happened so quick. Where’s the time to process everything, to compartmentalise, to note, label and file away? Time to forgive and forget?

Why hadn’t I forgiven him? Why didn’t I tell him he was forgiven? Why did he give me that look just before he was torn away? Why did he give himself up for me? Why? I didn’t deserve it!

The room is suddenly spinning and my legs are shaking with the effort of supporting me, but Daniel’s arm is quickly around my waist. God, I hope I never lose him the same way.

“Come on Jack.” His voice is calm and entreating. “Let’s get you back into bed and then we can talk. If you want.”

He helps me back into the bed and pulls the sheets up over me. He refrains from calling for Fraiser to deal with the IV, at least for the moment. He can be so damned perceptive some times. I just lie there and stare at the wall. I can’t look anyone in the face right now.

“Tell me how you knew Colonel Cromwell.” See? Perceptive.

“I can’t Danny, not now.” What happened to ‘if you want’? Typical Daniel, always trying to help, but the anger is dissipating now, as quickly as it arose, leaving me drained and tired.

“But you did know him and it goes way back?” I guess he may have heard something in the grapevine about Frank being special ops and he’s put two and two together. I just nod an answer.

“From what Sam said, he volunteered to stay with you and help detonate the bomb. I guess he thought a lot about you.”

I can’t answer that. the answer’s far more complicated than a singular ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

“It’s hard to lose friends, wondering if they blame you for what’s happened.” Ouch! That one hurt and I can see Daniel’s noticed my reaction, even though it’s probably not for the reason he thinks.

“Friendships are funny things, aren’t they? One minute they’re up and the next they’re down, like a roller-coaster.” He’s rabbiting on and I’ve no idea where he’s going with this, but I’m along for the ride now, whether I want off, or not.

“Take you and I.” Take us where, Danny-boy? I’m not shifting from here for a while. “We both know that it’s a complete unknown on the other side of that gate.” You said it. “Every time we go through, we take our lives in our hands. Henry Boyd and his team knew it, just like we do. Henry may be dead yet, or he may not, I don’t know, I’m not that type of scientist. However, I do know SG10 went out doing what they enjoyed doing.” Daniel’s on a roll now. “You and I are friends, Jack, and I know if one of us died tomorrow, then no matter what we might have said to each other in the interim, you’d still be my friend. I’d hope you’d remember that.”

He might not have all the pieces to this puzzle, but he still makes sense in a strange kind of way. I cut Frank out of the loop, yet couldn’t help but respond to him towards the end. I guess that means I didn’t hate him as much as I thought I did. Frank probably knew that too, at least at the end. I still feel guilty as hell that we’ve lost some good people today, people that could have still contributed a lot to the program. Plus a friend that I thought I’d lost, but hadn’t, and now really have. It was just luck that his rope got cut and not mine. He couldn’t have saved me, anymore than I could save him and I guess I’ve got to accept that if I’m to move on.

Daniel’s studying my face and he’s no doubt itching to know what I’m thinking, wondering whether he’s helped at all. He can’t remove the guilt I feel for everything we, and I, have lost here, but he can help me accept it. If we can learn anything from what’s happened, it’ll help me protect the others that I care about. Stop it happening again. Stop me from losing anymore good people. People like Daniel, Carter and Teal’c. If only time will allow me to do that.

Time flies.

Only time will tell.

There’s a time and a place for everything.

I see the Doctor standing in the doorway. Her face is pensive, as she walks quietly over to reattach a fresh IV needle to me. Both she and Daniel are quiet, as I close my eyes and drift off.

Time also heals.

*****The End*****