

Title: Menacing Turns

Author: Elizabeth

Email: elizabeth@starwarriors.net

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Summary: Feelings get out of hand after Menace and the Colonel pays the price.

Warnings: None.

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Notes: Many thanks to my trusty beta's Sandra G and Euph for their help with this. It's been ages since I've written anything, as life's been a bit of a struggle recently, but they've stuck with me through it all. As always, feedback is appreciated and will be replied to. However, no flames please. I can burn my own toast without any help, thank you.

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<<< "*You stupid son of a bitch.*" >>>

<<< "*This is the way this had to go down.*" >>>

He stopped just outside the gateroom, leaning heavily against the concrete wall. His heart was beating a fast tempo and the adrenaline was still pumping, but that wasn't the only reason he had a buzz on. His best friend had just called him a stupid son of a bitch. Sure, he'd been called worse things before, actually a helluva worse, he acknowledged with a grimace, but not usually by his best friend, especially when he'd just been trying to save said best friend's life. God, would he ever understand Daniel?

Pushing himself upright again, he realised he really didn't have time for this. Even with Reese destroyed; there was still no guarantee that all the replicators would have crumbled into scattered piles of metal shavings. Carter's warning buzzed through his mind.

<<< “Colonel, I think Reese is losing control. At least one of the replicators down here started to act on its own.” >>>

All it would take would be one still functioning metal monster to spell doom and gloom for planet Earth. After all, other replicators they’d met beyond the gate had been able to function and destroy without Reese being activated, or in the vicinity. No, there were just too many risks and not enough answers to leave anything to chance right now. Daniel and his outburst would have to wait until after the cleanup had finished.

There was the whole freakin’ complex to check for those mechanical mobsters. Daniel was special, but Daniel would have to wait. It wasn’t the first time Jack had put his own desires and wants on the backburner for the greater good and this ‘stupid son of a bitch’ would have to sort out his personal problems later. The safety of the base came first and friendship second. As per usual.

Damn.

Checking into his radio for an update with the teams scouring the base, he turned his mind to other priorities and set out to coordinate the sweep.

Even so, something was nagging him as he walked away, something about Daniel’s posture that he couldn’t quite put a finger on. Daniel hadn’t said anything to indicate he wasn’t OK, but then he wouldn’t, would he? Especially if he was wound up tighter than a transformer. Spotting Sgt Davis half way up the steps to the control room, he brought the junior officer up short.

“Hey, Davis?”

“Yes, Sir.” The other man came to attention instantly, bypassing the normally relaxed attitude of the base. Everyone was tense and hyper alert during this emergency, aware that even the slightest slip in protocol could mean the end of the base and, ergo, everything outside it too.

“Do me a favour and check on Doctor Jackson, will you? He’s in the gateroom.”

Davis frowned, perplexed as to why the Colonel, usually so close to his team, wasn’t looking out for his friend himself, but he supposed the base’s 2IC had a lot more on his plate at the moment.

“Yes, Sir.” Came the instant acknowledgement, as the junior officer watched the Colonel stride away.

Several hours later, Jack found himself wandering back towards Daniel’s office, not knowing what kind of reception to expect. The first sweep hadn’t found any **live** replicators, but more thorough searches would be carried out for several days yet. Power systems throughout the base were going down, due to damage caused by the metal bugs and Carter was heavily involved in getting some of the priority systems back on line. There was still a lot to do, but Hammond had ordered him to get a few hours rest and now was as good a time as any to try and make good with Daniel.

He couldn't help thinking about Daniel's parting shot of earlier.

<<< "You stupid son of a bitch." >>>

Just what had Daniel meant by that? The words themselves didn't hurt, sticks and stones and all that, but why exactly was Daniel so angry with him? Daniel didn't get angry without reason and the reasons were usually deeper than the Mariana Trench when he did. He couldn't put things right without knowing where Daniel was coming from first. Their friendship meant a lot to him. A whole heap in fact. It always had, ever since their first mission to Abydos, where the academic had taken a fall for him. He saw things in a way the other military members didn't always catch first time round and Jack needed him for that, in the strange new worlds they kept finding themselves.

Having arrived at Daniel's office, he stopped just in the doorway, taking in the scene. Daniel was sat at his desk, facing away from him. He was cradling one arm to his chest as it sported a new plaster cast over his wrist, trying to type one-handed. The scene would have been funny, and there were plenty of quips that came to Jack's mind as he propped up the doorframe, but now was definitely not the time. There was an air of quiet desolation about the younger man. Whatever had got him so upset was still there, permeating the air around him.

"Hey." Jack greeted, not wanting to enter a possible battle zone unless he was invited.

"Not now Jack." Came the blunt reply. He hadn't even turned around.

"Whad'ya do to the arm?" He nodded his head towards the arm in question, even though its owner couldn't see him.

"Broke it." Daniel muttered into his keyboard, and then almost too quietly for the other man to hear, "Not that you'd care."

"Look, Daniel." Jack began, wanting to make amends, but he was cut off.

"Just go, Jack. Please." The head turned half way around towards him, but the eyes were downcast and didn't look up to meet his gaze. "We can talk later."

Jack didn't know what to do, but figured pushing things now, whilst everything was still too raw, probably wasn't a good idea.

"OK, I'll catch you later. Go home and get some rest Daniel. You should be taking it easy on that arm for a bit. Do you wanna lift?"

"I'll sort something."

"OK." He tried hard not to take the rebuttal too personally. He hung around for a moment longer, not really wanting to go, but seeing no other choice being offered. "You'll let me know if you need anything?"

Daniel sighed, a quiet "Yes" being exhaled as he turned back towards his computer, effectively dismissing his CO.

Pushing himself up off the doorframe and sticking his hands in his pants pockets, Jack turned away and headed off down the corridor, trying to act as though he wasn't bothered by his friend's rejection. Seeing Teal'c striding confidently towards him, he stopped the Jaffa by placing a hand on his arm.

"Did you know Daniel had broken his arm?"

"I did, O'Neill."

"Why did no one tell me?" He was their CO and should have been informed if a member of his team was hurt.

"You had more serious matters to attend to at the time. I am sure other people were also aware of that." There was no condemnation in Teal'c's eyes. He was simply stating the truth as he saw it.

"Yeah, well. Do me a favour and take him home, will you?"

"I will."

"And, you know, take care of him. Whatever he needs, ya know, anything at all. I'd be there myself, but I don't think I'm flavour of the month right now."

Teal'c bowed his head. "I will attend to all of his needs, as you would yourself, O'Neill."

"Thanks. I appreciate it."

With that, the Colonel walked away, confident that even though Daniel might not be speaking to him, at least he'd be OK with Teal'c for company. Perhaps he could go round to his place later on and see if he could straighten out this problem, whatever it was. So they didn't always see eye to eye, and he knew Daniel was upset over the robot, but still, he was sure it was more than just that.

<<< "You just killed the only chance we'll ever have of stopping them." >>>

Yes, Daniel was pissed and he could understand that. He wanted to help Thor and his buddies too, Thor was a mate. But they'd run out of time and Daniel **had** to understand that, didn't he? What help could they be if they were all dead?

<<< "She was shutting them down." >>>

<<< "I had no way of knowing that and neither do you." >>>

They'd got over their differences before, they were friends, and he was sure this time would be no different. All they needed was a little time. He didn't see the concerned face of the Jaffa, as Teal'c watched his commander leave, nor the distraught face of Daniel, alone in his office, as he laid his head on his good arm on his desk, misery written all over his features.

Daniel stood in his kitchen, swaying slightly as he searched through the various bottles in the cupboard, his injured arm cradled against his chest. He was sure Janet would have a fit if she found him drinking on top of his painkillers from earlier. He was already drunk, more than drunk, he admitted to himself. The word sozzled came to mind as he looked down at his beer stained jumper.

“I do not understand that expression.” Teal’c said, as he approached his teammate from behind.

Huh? Guess he must have said that one out loud.

“I said I’m sozzled, plastered, pissed, wrecked, blotto, under the influence, inebriated, drunk as a skunk, intoxicated.”

“And does this help?” Teal’c knew the young man was highly distressed and saw no reason to pretend the situation didn’t exist. He didn’t even understand why Daniel was drinking beer. He thought that particular refreshment was only enjoyed by O’Neill and MajorCarter. In fact, he was sure the brand that Daniel had was one that O’Neill had purchased and stored at the younger man’s abode for his own consumption.

“Can’t hurt to try.”

“To try what?” Even without O’Neill’s request to take care of Daniel, Teal’c would have tried to alleviate his friend of his troubles.

“To make it all go away. You should try it.”

<<< “*It’s a machine.*” >>>

Teal’c merely looked puzzled. “Nothing will go away by the consumption of alcohol.”

“Have you ever tried it?” Daniel turned around to face him. It occurred to him that they’d never seen Teal’c drinking anything in copious amounts, other than water. He didn’t recall seeing the Jaffa ever drink alcohol at all. He always seemed to have a reason, often some Chulakian custom that required him to do something else, but they’d never actually discussed it with him.

“No, I have not. As a Jaffa you are taught to keep your body pure, out of respect for the god you carry within you.”

“Well, that makes sense, but you no longer have those same beliefs.”

“I do not. However, I have never desired to relinquish control of my mental functions, as I have witnessed with human behaviour after partaking of these liquids. I also have reason to believe that my symbiote would negate a large portion of the effect of consuming such beverages.”

“But you’re not sure?”

“I am not, however I believe it to be true.”

“Well Teal’c, I think it’s time I introduced you to another Earth custom.”

“And this would be?”

“Helping me get rid of this.” Daniel scowled as he found the two large bottles of whisky in the cupboard, Jack Daniels. He cringed when he saw the labels, remembering Jack’s laughter when Sam had presented the bottles to Daniel on his last birthday. She couldn’t resist it she’d said, commenting that they always seemed to be together.

Teal’c looked at the bottles and then back at Daniel. The young man was looking for a clean, small glass to give him, but not finding one, grabbed a tall tumbler instead. He placed both bottles on the worktop and struggled to take the top off one, virtually single handedly. Teal’c considered offering to help, but allowed his friend to vent some of his anger on the bottle instead. He watched intently as the normally in control man struggled to pour the amber liquid without spilling it. Perhaps he might soon be able to discuss what exactly was disturbing the younger man so much.

Daniel smiled as he passed the glass over. “Bottoms up.”

Teal’c didn’t know how to respond to that, but O’Neill had instructed him to assist DanielJackson in any way their friend wished, and he was fiercely loyal to the man who had saved him from slavery. Warily, he took the proffered glass and Daniel watched as the alien sniffed the contents carefully. He had never smelled the liquid so closely before, except on other people’s breath. It was not an unpleasant aroma. Taking a cautious sip, he swished it around his mouth before swallowing, surprised that he liked the taste. There was also a strange sensation of heat as it travelled down his throat and entered his stomach. He was surprised to find he enjoyed it. Shedding his earlier caution, he took another few mouthfuls, gulping them down, relishing the strong taste, and he’d soon finished the glass.

“Good, huh?” Daniel asked, as he shakily took the empty glass back and refilled it, before handing it back. Then taking his own drink, he raised his glass in a toast. “To the military and all who do their bidding, no matter what the price.”

Teal’c didn’t quite understand the toast, but he had more than an inkling of it’s meaning. He took several more mouthfuls of the strong drink, aware that his symbiote was trying to extract the alcohol from his system. But the brew was strong and Teal’c intended to drink as much as DanielJackson requested, just as his commander would want.

“To Reese and misunderstood kids everywhere.” Daniel toasted again, his beer sloshing out of his glass as he waved both arms about.

Teal’c began to understand why the younger man was so agitated and decided he would talk to him as soon as they’d finished drinking. Finishing off his second tumbler of whisky, he decided to refill his own glass this time. Daniel was decidedly shaky on his legs and it was Teal’c’s duty to take care of him, not the other way round. He thought that the younger man might have had a lot of unpleasant memories disturbed by today’s events and Teal’c would keep him company and help him through this ordeal as much as he was able to. He started drinking his third glass.

It was midnight when Jack knocked on the apartment door and he shivered in his civilian clothing in the hallway. He'd been in such a rush to get away from the mountain that he'd clean forgotten to pick up his jacket. He knew it was late to call round, but Daniel rarely went to bed before the following day and Jack had frequently found him still up at this late hour. The crews were still busy at the base, but Hammond had ordered him to go home and get a few hours rest. He'd had a hectic day leading the battle against the replicators, but now they appeared to be vanquished, he was tired. He was getting older and each fight took more out of him. He was still a ways off retiring from the field, but each conflict took longer to recover from. It was a sad fact of life.

There'd still be plenty of work for him to do back at the base tomorrow, or would that be later on today now? He knocked on the door again. No one answered and there was no light showing underneath it, but he could hear loud music coming from the other side. Deciding that no one could actually hear him and knowing Daniel's tendency for forgetting to lock his door, he tried the handle and it opened easily. At least no one would try anything with Teal'c here, but he was going to have to have **that** talk with Daniel again about security. The loud rock and roll nearly deafened him and looking around the poorly lit room, Jack soon saw his teammates sitting on the couch, facing away from him, both with a bottle of something in their hands. He closed the door behind him, hoping the neighbours hadn't been woken up by the noise. The last thing he wanted was for the cops to turn up too. This night was probably going to be difficult enough as it was.

Well this was different he thought, as he stepped into the room. You didn't normally see Teal'c drinking, although in the dim light, illuminated only by the flickering TV screen in the corner, he couldn't make out the label on the bottle. The sound was turned down on the TV, leaving him to wonder why they'd even bothered with it, considering the music was playing too. Both heads swivelled around to look at him.

"Hiya guys. A bit dark in here, isn't it?" He asked as he switched on the ceiling light from the panel by the door. He then moved over to the nearby stereo and turned the music down to a more acceptable level. He could cope with the rock and roll, but he really didn't want a headache on top of today's aches and pains. He wanted to talk.

"Well, what have we got here?" Daniel snapped, as his drunken eyes viewed the new arrival. "Mr High And Mighty Military's here. Come to order me around in my own apartment now, have you?"

Teal'c just sat there, watching, the almost empty bottle resting on a broad leg.

"No." He took a cautious step forward. "I thought we could talk about things, that's all." He could tell Daniel was still upset by the day's events, although he couldn't fathom the real reason why. He knew there was something more going on than he could see. Daniel was an intense person and sometimes you had to dig deep to figure out where the younger man was coming from, but it was always worth the effort.

"Talk, huh? Pity you didn't give me enough time to do that earlier, isn't it?" The beer sloshed around the bottle as his uninjured arm swayed, an odd drop being shaken out of the top.

"Look, I'm sorry. What else can I do?"

<<< "Why do you want to do this again?" >>>

"Well, you can start by switching that light back off. This is **my** place, not yours. Did I say you could touch it?"

"Um, no. I'm sorry. I'll just switch it off again then." He took the couple of necessary steps backwards and knocked the light back off before venturing any further into the hostile room. He noticed Teal'c's quiet perusal of the situation, but that wasn't unusual for the Jaffa when his friends had disagreements. The alien had a tendency to sit on the fence until he'd figured out what the argument was about and then calmly state the facts as he saw them. He rarely actively joined in, so Jack wasn't worried about his behaviour.

"Anyway, I don't want to talk. I didn't invite you here, so you can just go away again. Go on, buzz off little flyboy." Daniel took another gulp from his bottle, before deciding it was now empty and dropping it carelessly to the carpet.

Jack decided to risk a few steps in the dark towards the couch, carefully stepping around the new glass topped coffee table that had recently appeared. He remembered helping to carry it up to the apartment and then joking as Daniel left it behind the couch. 'Aren't you going to put it in front of the TV?' He'd asked, only to have Daniel sigh in mock annoyance. 'To do that, I'd have to move the couch, then to do that I'd have to move the sideboard and as I really don't know where I want everything to go yet it can wait. I need a chance to reorganise the room properly first.' That had been a few weeks ago and the table still remained where it was, where no one could use it. Funny how Daniel's office always looked disorganised too.

"Can't we just talk about this?" He tried again hopefully, as he rounded the couch and finally faced his teammates, standing near to where Teal'c was sitting at one end. He was really tired and feeling every one of his forty odd years. All he wanted was a warm bath, a cold beer, and a clean fresh bed, but only after putting things right with Daniel.

"You just can't take no for an answer, can you?" Daniel shouted back. "I say give me more time, but no you can't. I say don't come in, but you do anyway. What is it with you guys? What we civilians want just isn't good enough for you military types, is that it?" He stood up swaying, facing Jack, the anger in his eyes visible even in the poor light. For a moment it looked as though he was going to take a swing at him, but then he stood back, clutching his arm back to his chest.

In that moment Jack had a brief look at the couch and noticed all the empty bottles of spirits and beer lying beside it and resting on the cushions. No wonder Daniel looked drunk. There was no way he could have drunk all of them and still be in control. If he had, he was going to be seriously ill in the morning with one hell of a hangover. At least Teal'c would be staying overnight to take care of him. Jack was just debating heading for the kitchen to put some coffee on and almost missed the next few words hissed from the archaeologist's mouth.

"If it wasn't for this arm, I'd... I'd... Hit him for me Teal'c."

<<< "I never meant to hurt anyone." >>>

The large Jaffa was up instantly, swinging a large fist as he rose, aiming for his unprepared friend. Teal'c did something he would never have considered under normal

circumstances, but the Jaffa was far too drunk to know that. The only clear thought still permeating through his confused mind was that O'Neill had asked him to do anything Jackson wanted. He'd never been drunk before and had no way of knowing what to expect, or how to deal with it. The alcohol dimmed his thoughts, sublimating his character, as surely as any Goa'uld possession would have done.

The Colonel felt the impact on his jaw, barely aware of being knocked clear over the couch before landing in the middle of the coffee table. The glass shattered around him, cutting through the thin shirt on his back and arms, slicing through the skin. However the pain that exploded in his head as it connected with the wooden frame drowned everything else out as darkness, deeper than the poor light around them, settled on him.

"Huh. Good shot Teal'c." Daniel said as he fell back down on the couch. Teal'c continued to stand, stunned by what he had done, looking over the back of the couch as though mesmerised by something.

"Damn." Daniel cursed as he stood up, pulling an empty bottle from underneath him. He noticed the strange look on his friend and followed his gaze beyond the couch.

"O'Neill has not moved." The Jaffa said with his head on one side. "Should he not have moved by now?"

Looking on the floor in the dim light, Daniel could see that Jack hadn't made any attempt to raise himself.

"Jack?" Annoyed and drunk as he was, he felt a frisson of fear run through him.

There was no reply and Daniel struggled to wander around the stunned Jaffa to where the Colonel lay in the dark. Hearing the crunch of broken glass under his shoes as he stood by the prone man, his brain cleared somewhat with the shock. What had he done? He needed light to see what had happened and cutting himself open on broken glass wasn't going to help Jack. Striding past, adrenaline now pumping itself through his system, he quickly had all the lights switched on and gasped when he saw the scene.

"Teal'c. Ring Janet quickly, she's at home. The speed dial number's on the list by the phone."

The Jaffa continued to stare down at where the Colonel lay, uncharacteristically unable to move.

"Now Teal'c. Ring Janet **now**."

Teal'c started to move on autopilot, but seemed to gain more awareness as he reached the phone and started to dial, whilst Daniel crouched down carefully by his friend. Using trembling fingers, he reached out towards Jack. He was still breathing and had a pulse, thank God, but he was definitely hurt.

The Colonel had crashed through the centre of the table, the force of his landing having shattered the wooden frame and the glass panel insert. He was laying on his back, his head tilted to the right side, unconscious. Blood seeped from several small cuts along his

arms, the red stains slowly spreading the length of the sleeves. What Daniel couldn't see was what damage might be underneath and he didn't want to move Jack to find out. The fact that he was unconscious meant he'd probably got a head injury and, if Janet was on her way over, he really didn't want to risk making things worse. It might be a simple concussion, but then again, it might not. If they'd been off world on a mission they might not have had any choice, but at home, with a Doctor on the way, it was safer to wait for professional help.

He could hear Teal'c's halting voice speaking over the phone, explaining to Janet, that they'd had an accident and needed urgent medical help. Leaving Teal'c to arrange for the Doctor, Daniel concentrated on what he could do for Jack in the meantime. Thinking through normal first aid practices, he tried to clean up all the broken glass around the floor so that no one else got hurt, or that Jack didn't hurt himself any more should he wake up confused. He reached over for the nearby wastebasket and carefully picked up as much glass as he could and dropped it in, out of the way. Then he started pulling on the broken bits of wooden frame, gently sliding them out from underneath Jack without moving him. He threw those to one side, out of the way.

Next he dashed off to the bathroom for his first aid kit, desperate to do anything to help until Janet arrived. She'd only be about ten minutes at this time of night, without the daytime traffic to hold her up, but he couldn't just sit there and not do anything. The fog of drink was temporarily shattered by the shock of what had happened and he needed to help as much as he could.

Reaching inside the kit for some scissors, he started to cut away the Colonel's shirt. He couldn't see any signs of blood on his friend's pants, only around his upper half, so he carefully cut up the sleeves and down the sides until the fabric fell away beside the unconscious man. Daniel studied the bare flesh of the man beneath him, checking for any serious bleeds. There were many tiny cuts that didn't worry him, however there were two lengthy slices along his right arm, one above the elbow and one below. They were dripping steadily onto his carpet and his hands shook as he ripped open a couple of wound dressings and bandaged them into place. He could just see one more badly bleeding area behind the right shoulder, but it was difficult to reach without moving him and a large sliver of glass was still embedded. He knew not to remove the glass, in case it caused more damage on the way out, so he concentrated on padding as much around the wound as he could without disturbing the site.

Jack didn't react during any of this and Daniel was barely aware of Teal'c coming to look over his shoulder after he'd finished the call. Somewhere along the way, the Jaffa had turned the music off too, and the silence weighed heavily on him. It seemed he'd only just finished packing the wound on the shoulder before Janet rushed in through the still unlocked door, carrying a more substantial medical bag in her hands.

She quickly pushed Daniel out of the way and, taking the scene in at a glance, including the broken glass panel, carefully knelt on the cleared carpet beside her patient.

"What happened?" She questioned as she started a standard response and vitals test, not taking her eyes off her patient.

Daniel told her haltingly, as he watched her work. Teal'c still seemed to be in some shock about events, unable to contribute anything further.

“I rang for an ambulance from the base as soon as Teal’c called.” She told them after hearing the sorry tale. “It should be here in five minutes.” She’d noticed the drink stains down Daniel’s front and the smell of alcohol hung thickly in the air. Obviously he wasn’t fit to drive back to the base. She couldn’t be certain about Teal’c, but his behaviour over the phone and now in person convinced her he was probably also unreliable. It was a puzzle that would have to wait until later. “I’ll ring for a driver to come and collect you once I’ve got the Colonel settled in the ambulance. Are either of you hurt?”

“No.” Daniel answered for them both.

“OK. Has the Colonel shown any signs of consciousness since this happened?”

“No.” He again replied from beside her, where he continued to watch everything she did.

She continued her examination, noticing the bruise already forming on the Colonel’s jaw. She ran her hands around his body, feeling for any give where there shouldn’t be. Luckily, there didn’t seem to be any broken bones where she could access, but x-rays would be taken back at the base. Feeling gently over his scalp, she was angry that she couldn’t check him further without more assistance. She preferred to wait for a few minutes for her staff and equipment that would turn up with the ambulance. There wasn’t any way she was going to ask Daniel or Teal’c to help her rolling him over. Despite the fact that Daniel had done a good job of bandaging what he had, he was obviously not in a fit state to do anything else more intensive. He was shaking slightly and Teal’c seemed glued to the spot in a trance.

However, she didn’t have to wait long before a team of medics arrived and she was soon able to get a cervical collar on him and help to log roll him, so she could check behind him for other damage. He was instantly put on oxygen to counteract any possible constriction from the collar. One more gash down his back needed dressing, but that wasn’t what worried her most. Her biggest concern was a cut along the right side of his head, complete with a nasty lump that she could feel forming already. It definitely seemed as though his right side had taken the brunt of the impact.

Gently, they rolled him onto a backboard and strapped him onto it for the trip down to the ambulance, placing blankets underneath and around him to keep him warm. Janet hardly spoke to the other men as she left, far too involved with her patient and his immediate care to spare them much attention.

“I’ll see you later.” Was all she said as she flew after the stretcher, leaving them alone.

“I did not mean for this to happen.” Teal’c finally said, looking towards the still open door.

<<<” *No one will hurt you. We may be able to fix you.*” >>>

“Me neither.” Daniel murmured as he started to clean the mess up, trying to ignore the bloodstains on the carpet. He just needed something to do until their driver arrived. Teal’c helped him after a couple of minutes and they soon had the broken table frame moved to a far corner and all the remaining glass swept up. Then they waited. Neither were fit to drive, or they’d have followed the ambulance straight away. Now they were reduced to waiting and worrying.

By the time the driver arrived, thirty minutes later, Daniel had managed to change out of his drink stained clothes and they were both waiting by the door. The Airman got them back to the base without any fuss, not wanting to talk to the two highly placed civilians and they soon made their way through security and back down to level 21 and the infirmary. Sam had still been working on base, heading the repairs to the various computer systems, but she met up with them outside the trauma room.

“What happened?” She asked, her tired face looking shocked over events. One minute she’d been busy with the maintenance crews and the next she’d been alerted that the Colonel was being taken into the infirmary. She couldn’t understand what had happened.

Gradually Daniel told her, noticing how her lips thinned out as the tale unfolded. Anger and pity were both reflected on her face, as she struggled to come to terms with what she’d heard. She was too stunned to be able to say anything, obviously trying to process it all in her mind. Teal’c continued to appear dazed by it all, his symbiote still trying to filter out the large quantity of alcohol in his system.

One of the SFs turned up just as another nurse rushed into the closed off area.

“Doctor Jackson, Teal’c. The General would like to see you in his office, now.” The airman waited for them, making no effort to leave, which spoke volumes for the seriousness of the request. It might have well been an order, for all the choice they were being given. They might be important to the project, but they were still on a military base and they were implicated in an attack on one of their own.

Sam stared at them in sympathy this time.

“Janet would have had to report on the incident.”

There wasn’t anything else she could say. There wasn’t anything else she knew to say. The situation was terrible, that it had come to this. How could the team possibly survive now, she worried? The General would want to know why his 2IC was undergoing emergency treatment, when he should have been safely resting at home.

The General was waiting for them as the airman escorted the two men to his office. He stood before his desk, perfectly controlled, but his hands were curled by his side, a look of concentration on his face. He’d been unable to leave the base himself, having chosen to give the weary Colonel a chance to go home and rest instead. Now he wished he’d never made that fateful decision.

“By rights, you should both be in the brig by now. Do you have any idea what you’ve just done?”

Daniel took a step forward.

“I’m sorry General. I would explain, if I could...” His hand reached into his hair, sweeping back and forth as though it didn’t know the reason it was there.

“If you were both Airmen, you’d be instantly charged with assaulting a senior officer. This is a very serious matter.”

Teal’c looked confused. The unusual expression was a stark contrast to his normal appearance. He was having a hard time trying to understand what had happened, as his high alcohol level was gradually filtered out.

“How did this happen? How did my Second In Command, your CO, your supposed friend, get into this position? Can you tell me that, because I’m having problems understanding this.”

“It was I.” Teal’c answered, speaking for the first time in a long while. “I struck out at O’Neill whilst under the influence of alcohol.”

“**You** were drinking?” Hammond queried, shock showing on his face. “I thought you didn’t drink?”

Teal’c stood up straight before him, starting to see his way through the confusion in his mind.

“I do not normally partake of such beverages and my symbiote has struggled to combat the effects.”

“Why don’t you normally drink?”

“Jaffa are discouraged from allowing such substances to enter into their bodies, for fear it would taint the god within.”

“So what happened last night?” The General shook his head slightly, still puzzled by how this had happened. Fraiser had told him what she knew, but it was unbelievable. Even now, she was still putting the Colonel through tests, checking the extent of his injuries.

“I drank too quickly of too powerful a stimulus for my symbiote to purge the substance from my system. I did not understand how strong this alcohol would be, nor how it would affect me, for which I am truly regretful.”

“It’s Colonel O’Neill you’ll have to apologise to, providing his injuries aren’t too serious. Doctor Fraiser tells me he’s yet to regain consciousness.” Both men flinched from the comment. “But why, Teal’c? I don’t understand. You’re supposed to be his friends.”

“Colonel O’Neill gave me specific instructions to keep Daniel Jackson company and do whatever was needed to take care of him. I think he believed his own presence would be detrimental to Daniel Jackson’s state of mind and charged me to take over his care in his stead.”

“So you got drunk?” The General was puzzled.

“I consumed two bottles of a liquid known as Jack Daniels. I do not remember much else about the evening.”

“Whisky? Two bottles?” Hammond reiterated, holding his hands out in a visual aid to represent a full litre bottle.

“Jack Daniels.” Daniel repeated quietly. “The name annoyed me.” The younger man had his head hung in shame, his arms now clasped in front of him. “It was stupid. I was angry. You can’t berate me any more than I’m already doing myself.”

Hammond shook his head in despair, but let the archaeologist continue.

“I was mad at Jack and had already had a few drinks myself. I just saw the bottles and saw red. I wanted rid of them and passed them to Teal’c, telling him to have a drink, that I didn’t want to see them anymore. I wasn’t really paying much attention. I just wanted to drown my own sorrows and I didn’t watch what was happening. It was stupid, stupid, stupid.”

“It certainly was.” The General couldn’t believe this. He strolled around his desk and sat down in his seat, heavily. “What about if something had happened to Teal’c with you both being compromised? If you’d both been too intoxicated to get back to the SGC? What if Teal’c had ended up with the authorities, or in a public hospital? What then? Did you stop for one moment to consider that?”

He clasped his hands in front of him, thinking of the possibilities and how disastrous it could have been to the program. “What if someone found out about him, leaked the story to the press, possibly causing mass panic? If, because of this, the program was shut down, leaving the Goa’uld free to invade?”

He scrubbed his hand across his face. “I’m not saying this isn’t all stretching the bounds of possibility, but that’s what we do here each day, fight desperately against that risk, and none more than the man lying in the infirmary right now.” The General tried to control his anger, seeing the sorry expressions on the men in front of him. Even Teal’c’s normally stoic expression was missing tonight. “Every day he risks his heart and soul to protect you, Dr Jackson, you, his team, the SGC and the planet. Do you have any idea how important he is to this endeavour? How he puts his feelings on hold each day, each and every mission, so that you can be free with yours, to do your job?”

He placed his hands back down on the desk, his face turning soft at last. “What made you so angry with him, son?” He knew in his heart that, no matter what, this team would never knowingly hurt each other.

Daniel looked up at him, his eyes sad with worry and guilt.

“Reese. She was an orphan, like me. She’d lost everything. I just wanted her to have someone, like I’d found. I wanted her to be something good. I wanted to help the Asgard. I wanted to win a battle without having to resort to weapons for a change.”

“Son, you were running out of time. The self-destruct was counting down. Two more minutes and nothing would have mattered to anyone down here. Now and again we’ve no option but to think of the greater good. Reese was flawed. Colonel O’Neill was only doing his job, as distasteful as you might find it. It’s his job to protect us, *us* Dr Jackson, this planet and its people, and you. Not for one moment would he have put a facsimile before real flesh and blood.”

Daniel shuddered with an awareness he shouldn't have had on so much alcohol.

"I've made a real mess of things, haven't I?"

"No more than I." Teal'c answered him, placing a large hand on the younger man's shoulder.

There was silence in the room for a long moment, before Daniel looked towards the General again.

"Can we go and wait for Jack now, General? I don't mind whatever punishment you think *I* deserve, but I take all the blame for Teal'c. He didn't know what he was doing. I'll wait outside the infirmary if that's OK, I won't leave the base."

"You cannot accept my blame." Teal'c told him. "As I have not relinquished responsibility for my actions. It was my error in not studying the phenomena of intoxication before risking entering that state. We are both to blame for O'Neill's current condition." He studied the General's face. "I also ask to be allowed to wait for O'Neill outside the infirmary."

Hammond merely nodded to them and watched the pair walk dejectedly out of his office. It wasn't something you often saw with the Jaffa, but there was no denying the droop of the large man's shoulders. Why did SG-1 always manage to get themselves into these difficulties? What the heck was he supposed to put in a report so it didn't get every pen pusher in Washington, with a grudge about civilians and aliens, on their backs?

As they made their way up to the infirmary level, they couldn't help but feel the waves of disapproval being sent their way. There weren't many people about at this time of night and most of those were busy with the continuing repairs. However, they were aware of every look and every whisper of the officers they passed on the way.

If the Jaffa's extra sensitive hearing could pick up the muttered comments being spoken behind their backs, then Teal'c chose not to repeat them. How had word managed to get around so quickly?

Daniel knew long ago he'd been accepted into a close-knit community when he joined the SGC, but now he seemed to feel the ranks close against them as they progressed through the base. Jack was one of them; he was their leader and, undoubtedly, their hero. He was an uncommon man who'd put his own life on the line to protect theirs and their loyalty was unquestionable. Now his people voiced their concern in the very silence that descended on the outsiders as they walked through the corridors.

As soon as they felt the first waves of disapproval, Teal'c raised his head, as certain now of his abilities as he was in any hostile environment. The only person whose opinion mattered in this situation to him was O'Neill. However, Daniel slouched, feeling every bit of worried animosity aimed their way. He had no doubt that if Jack didn't survive, or was disabled out of service, or merely couldn't forgive them, then their own days as viable members of the program were numbered. His sense of guilt weighed him down, and he felt sure that no one else here would forgive them until Jack did so first.

It was with some relief that they finally rejoined Sam outside the infirmary.

A couple of hours later, Janet emerged into the corridor to face the remaining team members. None needed to ask the question she knew they were waiting for an answer to.

“He’s comfortable at the moment, but he’s had a bad knock to the head which needed stitches and we’ll have to wait until he wakes up to judge the level of concussion. Luckily, considering the force of the impact, there wasn’t any fracture. I had to take him into surgery to clean out some tiny bone and glass shards from his shoulder where they’d chipped his shoulder blade, but it wasn’t as bad as I expected. I’ve also had to stitch up areas on his right arm and back, most of which was minor, but some still required lengthy stitching. He’s going to be extremely sore for a while, with restricted movement, but dependent on the head injury, I think he’s going to be OK.”

All three sighed in relief.

“He’s this way.” She sighed, grateful that the damage hadn’t been a lot worse and she led them off to a private wardroom. “We’re still monitoring him until he comes round. Head injuries can be tricky, so until he wakes up we really don’t know if we have anything to worry about.”

She led them through corridors, more dimly lit than normal due to the night time hours, until they reached the specific room where their CO lay silent and still. Bandages covered his right arm from wrist to shoulder, currently resting in a sling, and they could just make out more padding around the shoulder under the infirmary smock. There was a small dressing on the right side of his head and the bruise on his jaw was becoming more prominent. He was attached to the usual gamut of machinery they’d come to expect on a postoperative patient. They’d all been here far too often to not recognise the various monitors by now. They all knew he’d hate the smock and it was going to earn the nurses a lot of trouble once he was awake again. The Colonel was notoriously antagonistic about them and had no problems letting his feelings known on the matter.

“Most of this equipment will probably be removed once he’s aware again.” Fraiser told them, indicating at least the heart monitor and the pulse ox clip. The IV continued to drip clear fluids into his system, but he hadn’t lost too much blood from the accident and that would likely soon be removed too. A nurse hovered in the background, keeping an eye on the patient until the sedation wore off. “I don’t mind you staying here, but you could probably all do with some rest. It’s been a long day for all of you. When’s the last time any of you got any sleep?”

It was true that during the emergency with Reese they’d all been running on adrenaline.

“I’ve still got some repairs to oversee.” Sam said as she took another look at the sleeping Colonel. “Some of the computers still aren’t up properly. I’ll take a break after that.”

“I’ll stay here with him.” Daniel offered quietly and no one wanted to refuse him.

“Then I shall return to my quarters for Kel’no’reem.” Teal’c said. “I need to purge myself fully of all contaminants before I can ask for O’Neill’s forgiveness.”

With that the two team-members left him, leaving Daniel to snag the lone plastic chair the nurse was obviously not using. Fraiser watched as he settled himself and sharing a quick look with the nurse, exited the room. Silently Daniel studied the lax face on the bed before him. Only a few hours ago he'd been so enamoured with the discovery of the lifelike robot. How had things managed to get so messed up so quickly?

He'd been sat there for about three hours when the lights started flickering around him. The nurse looked over at him and smiled. They'd said very little to each other as she worked around him, trying to wake the Colonel every other hour for neurological checks. So far, he was unresponsive, but Daniel hoped that situation would improve soon.

"Guess they're still having problems sorting out the damage to the systems." She said, shrugging her shoulders. They'd exchanged very few words whilst they'd both kept a constant watch on the patient.

Daniel hadn't really considered before now just how much damage the replicators might have done. It must have been quite significant if the repairs still weren't complete and other systems were still being affected. Just as he'd got used to the strobing effect the lights went out altogether, leaving the room lit by nothing more than the pale light from the equipment over the Colonel's bed. Then they began to flicker too. The nurse was quick to react, grabbing a couple of emergency torches from a nearby cupboard and passing one over to him. Taking a quick look at the man in the bed before leaving, she turned for the door.

"I need to get some backup equipment in here in case the monitors fail over the Colonel. We have some old battery powered units I can set up instead. I'll only be five minutes."

With that she hurried out of the room, the torchlight disappearing down the corridor, as her footsteps retreated, leaving him feeling very alone in the dark. Daniel turned back round to his friend, just as the equipment switched off all together, leaving him with only the torch to light up his injured friend. That was when he saw the Colonel start to stir in the bed. Slowly the brown eyes opened up to the darkness around him and he turned his face towards the only light available. Daniel was about to welcome him awake again, jittery with the apology he knew he had to make, when Jack's face screwed up in pain and shock, fear evident in the widening dark orbs.

"I'll tell you nothing." He hissed, then struggled to get out of the bed, hampered by his injuries, the sling and the wires attached to him. Panic stricken, Daniel tried to keep him in the bed, holding onto the struggling Colonel, fully aware of his head injury and the many stitches he had. It was difficult to keep a hold on the writhing man with a torch in one hand and the cast on the other, and he silently cursed the nurse for choosing that moment to disappear. The torch dropped out of his hands, making a loud crash as the metal case hit the floor, the meagre light rolling away as the Colonel continued to fight him. Only Jack's weakened condition allowed Daniel to pin him down and the younger man held on, hoping he wasn't doing more harm than good until help arrived.

He didn't know where he was. He'd been asleep, of that he was sure, but everything was so dark. The dark could be your friend, concealing you from your enemies, keeping you safe while you moved along dangerous ground. But it could also be your enemy, hiding those from you who wanted to do you harm. There'd been a lot of people in his life wanting to do him harm.

He tried to remember where he was and what he'd been doing. He'd been in a dark room, something had happened, something had upset him, and he hurt. His back felt like it was on fire and he couldn't move properly, everything was sluggish. He vaguely remembered a dark face coming towards him and a dark fist thrusting his way, but he couldn't remember whose. The images started to blur and get confused. He was in the dark and it was many years ago. Other dark skinned people were reaching for him, mocking him, hurting him, and he had to get away. His head hurt.

"I'll tell you nothing." He cursed at them, struggling to get out of the way of the arms and restraints that held him in front of the lamp, hiding the men behind it. It was useless of course. His battered and starved body couldn't keep up the protest for long and he kicked out at the hands that held him down. He couldn't see their faces, the damned light kept them from his sight, but he still recognised them. They'd questioned him before, beat him, punished him for his continued defiance until he'd been dragged away unconscious once more. At least it gave him some brief respite, until the next time.

The light disappeared and he managed to scramble down and get away for once. He scurried away into a darkened corner, where he curled up into a ball, hiding, hoping they'd leave him alone this time. Sometimes they did. They laughed while they enjoyed a cigarette break, giving him enough of a rest to get his breathing and the pain back under control. Sometimes they merely dragged him back straight away for more, depending on their moods. He had little say in the matter. To them he was less than a person and didn't deserve any consideration.

He rocked back and forth, holding his head in his hands. It hurt so much and one of his arms screamed in pain as he bent it. Each time he pressed into the wall his back flared in agony. He was so cold. Where was his uniform?

This time the person came and sat nearby, shining the torch up towards his own face, not Jack's, speaking softly and gently to him. His tormentor came no further, but he couldn't make out the words he was saying beyond the noise in his ears. He too, looked familiar. Was this some new trick of his captors? The pain was too much from the damage they'd done this time to concentrate. The tiny slices they'd made with the razor blade were dirty and full of infection. His head pounded and he knew from familiarity that he couldn't stay awake much longer. Would he wake up back in his cell, dropped in the far corner of the disgusting room that was now his home, like so much refuse, or would he wake up strapped to that goddamn table again? It was more than his exhausted body could cope with and he let the blessed darkness steal in and give him some peace.

As Jack slumped to his side on the floor, Daniel lunged forward to catch him before his head hit the concrete. He took the limp body in his arms, cradling his friend to his chest, raising him at least part way off the cold flooring. The whole ordeal had been frightening, seeing Jack cower away from him in fear, unrecognising. He realised that

Jack hadn't been aware of where he was and could only guess at what had been going on in his traumatised mind.

He didn't want to risk trying to get him back in the bed on his own. He didn't want to cause further damage to the head injury by struggling with the heavier man, so he settled for cradling him in his arms until someone came to help. He thought about shouting out for a nurse, but he didn't want to shock Jack awake with the noise and he knew the previous nurse would be back in a few minutes anyway. All he could do was sit there in the dark with his friend, straightening the smock around him and covering him with his jacket to help keep him warm. Luckily it was only a couple of minutes before Janet came back with the nurse, pushing a trolley of equipment with them. Both reacted quickly to the situation and helped Daniel carry the unconscious man back to the bed.

"What happened?" Janet asked as she worked by torchlight, starting to hook up her patient to the portable monitors.

"He woke up and didn't know where he was. I think the dark confused him, he seemed to be reliving something from his past. He was frightened and tried to get away."

"Did he hurt himself?" The Doctor asked, checking out her patient as much as she could in the poor light. She undid his smock and started on the task of removing all his bandages to check his stitches, beginning with his back. The nurse helped her to roll him over onto his side first for that. Jack didn't respond to their handling of him and didn't wake up. "Did he knock his head at all?"

"I don't think so." He answered, watching as the nurse took a moment to settle the replacement equipment about the bed, attaching the various leads, before going back to assist Fraiser. He looked on as the ugly long cut on Jack's back was revealed. Nothing had given way, for which Daniel was grateful. The damage looked painful enough as it was, increasing his feelings of guilt.

"I'll send him for another MRI as soon as the power's back up. Apparently systems are still fluctuating all over the base. The repair crews get one thing working, but the problems are cascading and taking other systems out too, in some sort of domino effect. I've asked that medical become a priority as we have a patient in here, but I know they're having to concentrate on the gate and security systems as well."

It was a good half hour before Fraiser had finished checking over her patient, finally resettling the sling around his arm and shoulder. He'd been lucky and hadn't pulled any stitches, for which she was grateful. She pulled the sheets back up over him, taking another look at the readings on the monitors and checking they were working all right. "Normally we have backup power for medical, but the replicators got in there too. Let's hope it's not too long before everything's back on line."

"Sam knows Jack's in here, I'm sure she's working on it." Daniel offered as the Doctor carefully straightened the Colonel's head out on the pillow, making those final touches to his body to help him rest more comfortably.

"I know Daniel." She replied, and then turned to the nurse. "I'm OK here now for a while, Tracy. Why don't you go and take a break?" She politely dismissed the nurse, preferring to watch over her friend herself for now, in case he had another episode.

Tracy nodded her head and got another torch out of the cupboard to replace the one she left with Janet, before exiting the room.

“Don’t you want a break yet, Daniel?” Janet took a quick trip to the opposite ward room and dragged a second chair in to settle on.

“No, I couldn’t leave, not now.” He sighed. “This is all my fault. First back in my apartment and now here.”

She patted his arm, before turning her attention back to the man in the bed. “I’m sure the Colonel will understand once he wakes up properly.”

“We’ll see.” Was all he could say as he mentally berated himself for everything that had happened.

Teal’c rejoined them a few hours later, now looking fully back in control of himself. It was still very early in the working day, but more officers had been wandering the corridors, giving him strange looks that he’d ignored. They did not concern him. He took up his usual place, standing by the foot of the bed. Daniel gave him a quick look, but nothing was said between them. Shortly thereafter, the power came back on and Carter joined them.

“All the primary systems are back on line now.” She told them, looking for another chair to sit on, finally leaving for a brief moment to find one in another room. “Crews are still working on secondary and backup systems, but my help isn’t needed any more.” She settled wearily into the unforgiving plastic, checking over her CO and the readings the monitors were giving. They seemed to be within normal parameters to her, and Janet didn’t seem too worried, so she supposed that was good news.

Fraiser had already reattached the Colonel back to the main monitors again, but kept the battery powered ones on the trolley in the corner, just in case. Then the lights came back on with full power as they entered the normal working day, which made her checks on him easier to carry out. Unfortunately he still wasn’t responding to her, much to everyone’s disappointment. Daniel told the rest of his team what had happened when Jack **had** woken up, and then had to repeat the incident again to the tired General when he called in later. Each time he told the story, he felt his guilt increasing. Finally, he pushed his chair a little further away from the bed and the focus of his unease, indicating for Carter to take the nearer position instead.

“Thanks.” She said as she moved the chair over. As she settled next to Janet, the Doctor took the opportunity to take a good look at her.

“You look worn out, Sam. When’s the last time you rested?”

“Probably the last time you did.” She smiled back at her sadly.

Janet sighed. “Go and get some sleep. No arguing.”

Sam looked back at the Doctor. She wanted to stay here with the Colonel, but Janet had that look on her face, the one that brooked no argument.

“What about you?”

“I **was** at home, resting when all this happened. I’ll be fine until the Colonel wakes up and then I’ll rest up in my office. Honest.”

Sam figured that if she didn’t go for at least a small amount of sleep in her quarters, then the good Doctor would probably ban her from the infirmary for a lot longer. So she meekly got out of the chair she’d just sat down in and slunk out, but with a promise to return soon.

Teal’c remained where he was at the foot of the bed, ignoring the suddenly spare chair. He found them discomfiting for his larger frame and preferred to stand anyway, so he could look down on events and be ready to take action. He waited as eagerly as Daniel and Fraiser for the Colonel to awake, though each of them for differing reasons.

Teal’c had had time to consider his actions of earlier and had now come to terms with his behaviour. Although it had taken many hours for Junior to counteract the effects of the alcohol and many glasses of water, he was now fully in control of his mind again. Having lived for so many more years than his teammates, he had long ago learned to be pragmatic when events went wrong. He understood that he’d been under the influence of a substantial amount of intoxicant. He also realised that it probably took the Tau’ri many experiences with the substance to learn how to control themselves, an advantage he had not had. Due to his complete lack of familiarity with the condition, he had not been in charge of his faculties and not to be held responsible. A Goa’uld might not have been so understanding, but he wasn’t working for the false Gods now, he worked for O’Neill and the Tau’ri.

He felt sure that after apologising in a suitable manner to his friend, O’Neill would understand and forgive him. O’Neill had always made allowances for his naiveté, seeming to enjoy it, whilst encouraging him to expand his knowledge. Teal’c had no reason to believe the Colonel would hold a grudge over the incident, once he explained himself and showed he was repentant.

For all her intentions to wait until the Colonel had woken up before she left, Fraiser had to admit defeat and go for a sleep early in the afternoon. Daniel fell asleep in his chair and everyone left him there, not wanting to intrude on his deep mood. Teal’c placed a blanket around his shoulders, offering him a little comfort, even though he was unaware of it until he woke up a couple of hours later.

It was late evening when O’Neill began to stir again. Fraiser had been carrying out some routine checks on him when he began to moan and open his eyes, possibly in a reaction to her touches. For all the machinery at her command, she was still very much a ‘hands on’ practitioner. It was clear, even in the nighttime’s subdued lighting, that he was not fully cognisant of his surroundings. His eyes tracked around as they opened, settling on Teal’c as the Jaffa moved nearer to lean over past the diminutive Doctor.

His eyes went wide as he saw the larger man looming over him in the dim light. In his semi aware state he was unable to separate out images of Teal’c attacking him in the dark of the apartment, with others of his tormentors of Iraq. His head still hurt and his

eyes were unable to focus properly straight away. Instinct took over and all he knew was that he had to get out of the way of flying fists, so he struggled away from the blurred images above him. Using his one free hand to ward them off, as the sling hampered his other arm, he shuffled away from them. Soon he was pressed up against the rails at the far side of the bed, looking as though he was about to bail over the edge again.

Fraiser wished she'd overridden the default lighting controls and turned them up to normal daytime levels. However, the Colonel was photosensitive and notorious in his dislike of strong light in his eyes, particularly if he was under par. It was also a common complaint from people with concussion, but she still wished she'd considered that they were likely to have a repeat of the previous night.

However, at least she was on hand to deal with the situation rapidly and the Doctor soon had a tiny amount of sedative injected into his IV. No doctor liked to administer sedatives to patients with head injuries, but she needed to take the edge off his agitation before he hurt himself. The last thing she wanted was for him to get out of bed again, feeling confused and threatened, for both physical and psychological reasons. As the substance entered his system, the Colonel quickly settled back into the bed and stopped pushing away from them.

"Colonel, can you hear me?" She asked in a gentle voice, as she rubbed one hand up and down his nearest arm, luckily his uninjured left one. She needed to encourage him back from wherever his mind had taken him. She could feel that Teal'c had taken a step back from the bed and Daniel was also keeping well out of the line of sight.

It took a couple of moments for Jack to seem to collect himself and turn to look at her, blinking the sleep away from his eyes.

"Doc?" He asked cautiously, his voice tired and dry as he took in the room around him.

"Yes, Colonel." She smiled in relief as she checked his responses. "You're in the infirmary, but you're going to be OK. Would you like a drink?" She stopped the tactile touch, now that he seemed aware of where he was again.

He nodded and took a couple of deep breaths, uncurling his free hand where he'd briefly fisted it into the sheets. Opening his mouth, he allowed her to spoon a few ice chips into it, letting the liquid melt inside his mouth and down his parched throat. She waited a few moments, as he seemed to be in thought. When he finally looked back at her, he looked more like the Colonel again.

"Why am I here **this** time?" His memory was too confused at the moment to be of much help. He only seemed to be able to remember his time as a POW and he'd no idea why, but it had seemed to be so real again. It was weeks since he'd last had a dream about that time and that was only thanks to the wonderful Bedrosians and their cute little wire boxes.

Fraiser took a brief look behind her at the two standing member of SG1 and decided that they could tell him the full details later. It might all be a little bit too much too soon right now. Her main concern for the moment was for the Colonel to get some decent rest so his physical healing could begin.

“You had an accident at Daniel’s, but they can tell you all about that later on. I don’t want you moving too much. You’ve got stitches in your arm and back, not to mention a concussion, so I want you to go back to sleep now. You can talk about it all next time you wake up. OK, Sir?” She watched his eyes drooping again, as he noticed his position in the bed. Carefully, she helped him away from the edge and into a more comfortable position. “Go back to sleep.” She encouraged again.

There wasn’t a lot he could do to argue about it. Even if he’d wanted to take it further, his eyes were telling him quite clearly they weren’t going to stay open long enough. Hoping his headache would have receded more by the next time he woke up, he gave in to the inevitable darkness and allowed himself to drift off. He’d never even noticed Daniel and Teal’c beside the bed, or the expressions on their faces, or he wouldn’t have given in so easily.

Daniel turned away from the bed, an empty feeling starting in the pit of his stomach. Sure, he’d wanted Reese to survive, but look at what his hasty comments and hurt feelings had done. He was sure that if he’d had just a few more minutes he could have got through to her, but that was the crux of the problem, wasn’t it? By all accounts they didn’t have a couple more minutes and because of his feelings of inadequacy, his friend was now in the infirmary, injured and caught up in terrible nightmares from his past.

Jack didn’t deserve this and if Daniel was any kind of friend, he wouldn’t have put him through it. Feeling dejected, he turned away and walked silently out of the room, heading back towards his office. He’d stay on base, just in case Jack needed him, but he didn’t expect him to. His CO had Teal’c and Sam to look after him now. It wasn’t Teal’c’s fault he’d done what he’d done. It was his, Daniel’s, and his alone.

“I’m sorry about that, Teal’c.” Fraiser said, after Daniel had quietly left, behind them. “He didn’t seem to know where he was again for a moment.”

“I am not concerned by his behaviour.” The Jaffa replied. “I believe I understand how this event has transpired. Do you believe though that O’Neill will be of sound mind when he next awakens?”

“Well, there’s always a certain percentage of risk with head injuries, but he seemed to come out of it alright at the end just now, so I’m hopeful.”

“Then I will continue to maintain my vigil by his bedside until such time as it is no longer required.” He replied, before turning his attention back to the Colonel. Already, some of the furrows in his brow that had characterised his earlier unconscious state, seemed to have smoothed out in more restful sleep.

“I’m sure he’ll appreciate that Teal’c. Next time he wakes up I might even be able to take some of this equipment away.”

Teal’c merely nodded as the Doctor left. He knew she would not wander far and there were always other medical personnel within shouting distance, or at the end of a call button if he saw a problem developing. He switched his eyes back to the bed.

The Colonel slept for several more hours and it was mid-morning before he woke again. Carter had rejoined Teal'c at his bedside and two happy faces greeted him when he stirred. Well, one certainly looked happy, you just had to know where to look with the other. Luckily, the Colonel did know where to look.

"Hey." He greeted as his eyes slowly focussed on them.

"Hey, Sir." Carter greeted back. "It's great to see you awake again."

He studied the pair of them, seeing something he wasn't used to seeing on the Jaffa's face. He could have sworn it was apprehension, but he'd never known Teal'c to be nervous of anything. Perhaps he was still out of it, on Doc's happy juice? Now if only he could remember what he'd done to land himself back in the infirmary. He remembered the replicators and Daniel's outburst in the gateroom, but then only vague images of going round to see his teammate. There was nothing concrete after getting into his truck.

His friends watched as his thoughts seemed to drift for a while, before his eyes concentrated on them once more.

"So what happened?" He asked, giving up and knowing they'd tell him.

"What do you remember?" Fraiser asked as she approached from the doorway, her heels clicking on the concrete floor. The voices had disturbed her and she was pleased to see the Colonel aware of his surroundings once more. At least that was one less worry about her patient. Now after hearing his question, she had to determine the extent of any trauma induced amnesia and whether it was anything out of the ordinary for a concussed patient. If all went well, she should be able to leave his care to the nurses and go home for a proper rest.

"Everything up to going over to Daniel's. I don't even remember getting there."

Fraiser looked towards Teal'c, satisfied with the Colonel's response, but deciding it was better that he found out about the event off his teammate, directly. She took the opportunity to run a few tests whilst they talked, removing his IV and the monitoring equipment, whilst surreptitiously studying him. It also left her free to act, in case he didn't take the news well. Teal'c moved nearer the bed, mentally steeling himself for any rejection off his friend.

"I must ask for your forgiveness, O'Neill, as the reason you are in the infirmary is a direct result of my actions." He never lost eye contact with his CO, fully prepared to face whatever the man might say.

"Come on Teal'c. I'm sure it wasn't all your fault. I've been getting into trouble since I was a rug-rat." Jack was tired, but not that tired that he wasn't determined to piece together the fractured images in his head. At least the headache had dimmed into only a minor annoyance.

A puzzled look came over the large man, but he refrained from enquiring over the odd description until another time.

"But it **was** O'Neill. Remember your instructions to me, to undertake DanielJackson's care and see to his needs?"

“Yeah?” Jack’s forehead creased up in puzzlement. He’d noticed both the Doctor and Carter watching him intently, an uncomfortable look on their faces. He felt like he was starring in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

“Daniel Jackson felt the need to consume a large quantity of intoxicating substances and asked me to assist in that task.”

The Colonel was even more confused. Maybe it was *The Outer Limits*?

“I thought you didn’t drink?”

“It is not something I have ever indulged in before, as Jaffa are not allowed to taint the body that holds the young Gods with such substances. However, as you know, I no longer hold those beliefs and I followed Daniel Jackson’s instructions to drink some of his store of intoxicants. I regret that I was not able to remain in control of myself afterwards.”

“How much did you have?” He sighed, not liking where this conversation was going. Fraiser noticed, but said nothing, waiting to see what happened next before assuming her patient needed a rest.

“I drank two bottles of what is called Jack Daniels.”

“Sheesh!” Jack replied, thinking no wonder the Jaffa had ended up drunk. It must have knocked Junior for a six, coming as it did in such a large volume for the first time. However, he still didn’t know how he’d ended up in the infirmary, or why Daniel wasn’t there. He mentally kicked himself for not noticing earlier that the younger man wasn’t present, although he obviously wasn’t firing on all cylinders. It wasn’t like Daniel to be absent when one of them was hurt, even if they’d had an argument. Had he been injured too?

“Where’s Daniel?” He had to ask, starting to sit up. Not even finding out what had happened to him was as important as the health of his team.

“He’s around here somewhere.” Fraiser assured him, gently pushing him back down again. “He’s been keeping you company since you were admitted. I think he’s just having a rest.” In truth, Fraiser wasn’t sure why the civilian had suddenly disappeared, but she had a good idea. However, he’d have to sort out his own problems with the Colonel. She couldn’t really bully him into doing it for her, unless it started to affect the health of her patient of course.

The Colonel nodded. That made sense, but he was still picking up vibes that something else was going on. However, it would do for now and he’d come back to that problem again later.

“So whad’ya do?” He encouraged. Teal’c wasn’t usually so reticent in speaking his mind, even if he did use a minimum of words when he did.

“When you appeared at his apartment, Daniel Jackson was still disturbed over the earlier events concerning Reese and was highly vexed at you. You approached us and he wished to physically attack you, however his injury prevented him from such a manoeuvre.

Whilst I do not believe that he truly wished you physical harm, he asked me to hit you on his behalf and, to my regret, I did.” Teal’c bowed his head. “I ask for your forgiveness, O’Neill. Although my memories of that time are somewhat vague, I do remember enough to know I am recounting the actual events. What I did was without honour, attacking you when we had no quarrel, without warning, in a non-combat situation. You had no reason to think you were in danger and made no move to defend yourself.”

The Jaffa acknowledged that he had had an unfair advantage. Under other circumstances, even whilst on Earth, O’Neill would have been far more difficult to overcome. He raised his eyes again once more and looked back at his friend, ready to face any rejection, as a warrior should. “However, I hope that you will take into account my inability to understand what I was doing. If I could take back my actions, I would, but I will endeavour to make amends for my behaviour if you will allow me.”

Jack found it hard to believe what he was hearing, but Teal’c obviously believed what he was saying and by the looks on both Doc’s and Carter’s faces, they believed it too. Wow. His reputation as a hard-ass would be sunk once this got round the base. Taken out by his own team. Not something he really wanted on his résumé.

A drunk Jaffa though. He bet that was a sight! However, someone ought to make sure the fella had a better indoctrination into the joys and perils of drink - and very soon. And he was just the man for the job – once he got out of Fraiser’s clutches.

“So what exactly did ya do to me?” He knew he ached in several areas and his back was incredibly sore. His head still hurt, though not too much to risk mentioning it to Fraiser, and he hadn’t failed to notice the heavily bandaged arm in the sling. He had vague recollections of bad dreams of the dark and being back in Iraq, but no idea how they fitted into the present scenario.

Fraiser put her hand on Teal’c’s arm and took over, as the Jaffa uncharacteristically hesitated.

“Actually, Sir, he knocked you clean over the couch and through the coffee table.” She said with a hint of admiration in her voice.

“Ow!” That must have been quite a punch. Whilst Teal’c was solid muscle, Jack was hardly a featherweight himself.

“Yes, Ow, Sir. Exactly.” She couldn’t help but agree, with a smile on her face. “You smashed clean through it, so it came off a lot worse than you did. You’ve got the mandatory concussion, but no permanent damage luckily, and you do have several stitches from where the glass panel cut into you, mainly down your arm, back and shoulder.”

Well, that wasn’t too bad, considering. “So nothing I still have to wait in here for then?” He asked eagerly, looking around and seeing Carter smile at his comment. Although he’d only woken up a few minutes ago, the anaesthetic and sedative were now out of his system and he was keen to go, literally. The absence of his archaeologist and a more likely reason for his disappearance had taken residence in his mind and he wanted to track him down. He was still concerned about Daniel’s outburst in the gateroom, but he knew the man hadn’t meant to hurt him. It was just a ghastly accident and they had to sort it out.

“Now Colonel, you know better than that with a head injury. I want you to stay here for another twenty-four hours for observation.” After the earlier incident, there wasn’t any way she was letting him out of her sight just yet.

“Aaawww.” Which made Carter smile again. She hadn’t joined in the conversation so far, as she’d nothing to add, but she was glad he seemed to be his normal self once more.

“Come on Colonel. If you lie back and rest, the day will go by a whole lot quicker.” Fraiser tried to encourage.

“On one condition.” He bartered, never wanting to be seen to give in.

“What’s that?” The Doctor sighed. Why couldn’t he just do as he was told, like other patients did?

“No needles.” He raised his other arm until both were crossed over his chest.

“Well, don’t give me a reason to need them then.” She gave a quick nod of the head and walked off, satisfied with her patient’s physical and mental recovery. He’d given her a scare, but it was understandable that he’d been confused, waking up in the dark and with a compromised mental state. She wondered if he even remembered the incidents, not that she was going to remind him if he didn’t. She was very familiar with his medical records and he had enough nightmares from his past to cope with, without adding embarrassment over another one.

Carter continued to smile down at her CO. “So is there anything I can get you, Sir?”

“Do you have to get back to anything? I mean how’s the base security? Did I miss anything?”

“The base is fine Sir. We had problems with the power yesterday; as one system powered back up, another one crashed. Maintenance only have to sort out the backup systems now and the General’s released me from that, so I’m all yours if you want the company.”

“All mine huh? Now there’s an offer.” He joked.

“Now Sir, I’m sure Janet doesn’t want you doing anything strenuous.” She smiled at his humour.

“How about a deck of cards then, or a laptop and some DVDs?” He had a stash of films in his office, which they were all aware of. They’d often stayed in there to watch something when he should have been doing paperwork. He only hoped Hammond never found out.

“You’ve got it, Sir. I’ll be back in five.”

With that, she did a swift about turn and left the room. She knew he’d want to spend a few minutes alone with Teal’c and she wanted to find wherever Daniel had disappeared to. Hiding away wasn’t going to change anything and if the Colonel could forgive Teal’c, she was sure he’d forgive their favourite civilian. The Colonel and Daniel had

always had a special relationship and she was sure once the two were back together, they would soon have things patched up. At least the elevators were working again now, which made traversing the base a lot quicker.

Jack sat up a little straighter, using his legs to help push himself upwards, pulling at the hated smock in disgust once he'd finished. "So Teal'c." He began after a minute's silence.

"Yes, O'Neill."

"Straight over the couch?" He arced his uninjured arm in an upward slicing movement for emphasis.

"Yes, O'Neill."

"Through the coffee table?" His fingertips dived into the sheets as his arm came down.

"Yes, O'Neill."

"That JD packs quite a punch. Doesn't it?" He tried to fold his arms, but the bandaged one objected and it pulled on his shoulder too, adding to the pain, which he ignored. The levels were quite manageable by his standards, although he guessed there was still some residual painkiller in his system from whatever Doc had been doing.

"Yes, O'Neill."

"But not as good as yours." He almost laughed. The whole situation was actually quite funny if you looked at it one way. Possibly the fact that he couldn't remember any of it helped though. Seeing Teal'c opening his mouth again, he interrupted.

"Naaaaaaa. Don't you 'Yes O'Neill' me again."

The Jaffa quirked his eyebrow in response to the lighter mood of his CO. "No, O'Neill."

The Colonel hated playing straight man to the Jaffa, even though it was breaking down Teal'c's current stoic 'on parade' stance. There was another moment's silence whilst he figured out what to say to his teammate.

"Look Teal'c. I know you didn't do it on purpose and I don't blame you. Two bottles of whisky for your first ever binge wasn't actually the smartest of moves. It would have sent anyone over the top. I'm surprised you could still stand up to lay one on me."

"My symbiote was able to negate some of the effects of the alcohol, but was still unable to prevent my mental impairment." He hesitated briefly for thought. "If you could tell me what reparation you require for my actions, I would be grateful to atone for my behaviour."

"Nah. It's not necessary Teal'c. I've goofed up so many times, you wouldn't believe it. Just take it as another lesson in Tau'ri customs."

“I have learned many lessons whilst by your side, O’Neill, but I fail to see how this one has benefited me.” He looked genuinely mystified. Either that, Jack thought, or his eyebrows were learning to fly.

“How about ‘welcome to the human race’ then.” The Colonel slowly settled back down into the bed, making himself comfy once more, as he favoured his injured side. “You know, you really should let your hair down more often.” He belatedly realised what he’d said and grinned at the error.

Teal’c merely cocked his head to one side as O’Neill used the bed controls to raise the head end until he was in a more upright position, and then attempted to reposition the pillows behind him. Unfortunately, he couldn’t reach round properly and his back and shoulder objected to the manoeuvres.

Teal’c stepped nearer and reached both arms behind the struggling man.

“I will assist you O’Neill. Lay still, so I may work around you.”

The Colonel did as he was told, trying not to get swamped as the huge Jaffa reached large muscled arms to both sides of him, where he then proceeded to move and fluff the pillows up like a huge nanny.

Carter chose just that moment to reappear with several goodies from his office, to keep the bed-bound Colonel happy for the day. She was angry with Daniel, as she’d just found out he’d taken a day’s holiday, which was almost unheard of. She wasn’t going to mention **that** to her CO. Thinking over what she could say if he did ask, she wasn’t prepared for the sight that greeted her.

“Ummm, guys, have I interrupted something? I could come back later, if you want?” She opened her eyes wide in pretend shock.

Teal’c looked unconcerned as he moved away, but the Colonel turned a wonderful shade of pink.

Afternoon came and Fraiser shooed Sam and Teal’c out so that she could check on her patient. The Doctor still hadn’t managed to get off the base, but intended to within the hour. After completing her tests, she was pleased with his results and said so.

“Keep this up, Colonel, and you can go home in the morning.”

“I could go now if you’d let me. Keep out of your way and all that.” He asked eagerly, never one to miss an opportunity.

“In the morning, or I could keep you here longer if you misbehave.” She tried to keep a straight face, but it was difficult not to be swept up by his childish behaviour.

Hammond chose that moment to appear, stopping Jack with his mouth half opened, cutting off any chance for a quick comeback.

“How’re you doing?” He asked as Fraiser moved out of the way.

“Fine, Sir.” Jack replied. “The Doc’s said I can get out of here in the morning. Don’t know why she won’t let me out now, other than they can’t bear to be parted from my scintillating company.” His voice rose louder, shouting after the CMO as she left the room.

“As if, Colonel.” She called back from the corridor as her footsteps receded.

“So you’re really feeling all right?” It was the first time the General had been able to come and visit his second, now the emergency was well and truly over. He moved close to the side of the bed, but remained standing.

“A few aches and bruises.” Jack raised his left hand up to feel across his bruised jaw – now gloriously multicoloured. “But nothing that won’t heal with a few beers and my feet up.”

Hammond nodded his head, thinking he’d probably visit in a day or two to share a couple of those beers.

“And what about what happened? How do you feel about that?”

The Colonel grimaced.

“A bit strange to tell the truth. Daniel’s been hiding since I woke up, despite what they tell me, but I’ve had a chat with Teal’c and it was just an accident. A stupid accident, granted. It was just one of those things, Sir. It won’t happen again.”

“It had better not. We can’t afford to have you laid up by one of your own team. We have enough of the Goa’uld for that.”

“Sorry.” He couldn’t help but offer. He’d never want to ever let the General down.

“You have nothing to be sorry for. I had a chat with Doctor Jackson and Teal’c when you were brought in. Told them I ought to throw them in the brig.”

“You did?” Jack’s eyebrows nearly rose into his fringe, making the General smile.

“I most certainly did. Everything you and your team do is watched and seen as an example to the lower ranks. You **are** the 2IC of this base and we can’t afford to forget that. Don’t go undervaluing yourself Jack, or your importance.”

“No, Sir.” There wasn’t anything else he felt he could say to that. He just felt embarrassed.

“I take it you don’t want to press charges for assault?”

“That’d be a no.”

“I didn’t think so. Well, now the base is fully up and running again, I’m going to take the evening off and visit my grandchildren.”

“Have fun, Sir, and say ‘hi’ for me.”

“I will.” The General nodded once more at his second and turned to leave. “You rest up and take care of yourself.”

Once he'd left, Jack laid back down into the pillows. He really needed to track down Daniel, but he didn't think he'd be able to do it until Fraiser released him. That woman was one very determined lady and when she said 'stay put', you did. Unless you happened to like honkin big needles of course.

Daniel returned to the SGC in the evening. He'd had to get away from the base earlier. He'd wanted to stay there for Jack, but everywhere he went it felt as if people were looking at him with accusatory eyes. It was probably only his imagination, but he couldn't help feeling the centre of attention and not in a pleasant way. He had the impression that everyone was watching him. It seemed like everyone he'd passed had been whispering about him, about how he'd attacked their hero. There could be no doubt that everyone looked up to the Colonel and held him in great esteem. They'd follow the man anywhere, because they knew he'd do the same for them.

He really was their unsung hero, though Daniel doubted the older man would ever realise that, and he'd punched him out. Well technically Teal'c had done the punching, but it was still **his** fault, **his** doing. What on Earth (or any other planet) could he do now to put things right? He'd decided to go back to the base after the evening change of shift. Even if he was only imagining the looks, it made him feel easier. He wasn't a coward; no one could accuse him of that. He could empty a hall-room full of his peers and carry on talking, ignoring the looks, but this was different. He realised he was running away from himself more than anything else and it was time to stop. Perhaps he could visit Jack now in the quiet of the evening and try to sort it all out, to apologise for what he'd done.

Silently he drifted through the base. Even though they were operational 24/7, there still seemed to be a lull in business, when most of the support staff went home for the night. It seemed quieter and less intense. He made his way into the infirmary and towards Jack's wardroom. Being a Colonel and the base's 2IC meant he usually got his own room away from the general ward. Plus Janet was sensitive to the fact that Jack often suffered from nightmares when he was sick or injured, memories coming back to his mind whilst he was troubled with whatever injuries or mission he'd just suffered from.

Peering past the part opened door, he saw Jack in the subdued lighting. Sam and Teal'c weren't there and all the medical equipment had now been removed, which was a very good sign. It meant he wasn't seriously injured and everyone felt safe to leave him on his own. He was sleeping, lying on his left side, keeping his injured right side uppermost. As he approached the bed, he could make out Jack murmuring to himself, twitching in his sleep. Damn, another bad dream. His arms were moving, stilted jerky movements up and down his body, although both limbs were restricted; one by the weight of his form laying on it and the other by the sling.

“Bugs everywhere...” Jack was murmuring. “Teal'c... No way off... damn sub... Crawling... Get eaten alive... Aaaagggg...”

He was obviously reliving his encounter with the replicators on the Russian submarine and his hands clutched desperately at the sheets on the bed, pushing them away. Daniel

reached over towards him, about to soothe him in his sleep, but halted at the man's next words.

"Gateroom with Danny... No... Please not Danny... Bugs over Danny... Can't get Danny... No..."

His movements became more desperate and he twisted on the bed, his face screwing up as his back rubbed along the mattress.

"Shhhhhh." Daniel soothed him, stroking the man's fringe across his forehead. "I'm here, they didn't get me. I'm safe."

Normally, he approached Jack carefully when the other man was having a nightmare. But normally Jack was dreaming about someone attacking him personally and would lash out in his sleep to defend himself. This time he was dreaming about someone else being attacked and Daniel felt safe enough to gently hold him down. Gradually the Colonel settled and his breathing evened out into peaceful sleep again, so Daniel moved back out of the way. He watched as the Colonel started to wake up, his eyes fluttering, but Daniel felt guilty again about the pain he'd caused, brought back to mind by the nightmare, and quickly left the room.

Jack opened his eyes to the near dark and looked around him, the fog of his nightmare dissipating. He was sure he'd heard Daniel talking to him, calming him down, like he often did. The sheets were also tufted up around him, a sure sign of a bad dream. He looked up just in time to see a shadow disappearing past the opened door of his room. Clutching the sheets to pull them back up over his chest, he tried to slow his thumping heart.

"Daniel?" He asked quietly, but no one answered him and he rolled back onto his side, confused and somehow lonely. Sighing deeply, he closed his eyes and went back to sleep.

The following morning Fraiser gave in to his scowls and puppy dog eyes and let the Colonel go home.

"On the strict instructions that someone goes home with you for the first day and you **rest.**" Had been her admonishment.

Not that he wouldn't have agreed to do anything for her to get out, and follow her instructions, or at least until she was out of sight. Which was probably why he was going home with company. Company the Doctor trusted to make sure he did as he was told.

Teal'c had grabbed his clothes out of his locker and helped him get dressed, when his injuries proved uncooperative.

"I'll call in to see you tomorrow." Janet said as she handed over the ubiquitous packet of painkillers.

Not that he intended to take those either.

Carter drove the three of them home in his truck, as Teal'c was going to stay with him for the first night, just to make sure he could cope. They padded out the back of his seat with a car blanket, but even so his back was screaming in agony by the time they finally pulled up on his driveway.

"Sheesh, who needs the Goa'uld when you've got Fraiser's handiwork?" He grumbled as Teal'c helped him out.

"I'll be sure to let her know how much you appreciate all her efforts." Carter teased, but it was obvious their CO was too tired to join in their usual bantering. Possibly, he hadn't had a good night's sleep, but then he often didn't in the infirmary. "Let's get you inside, Sir." She said instead as she rushed up ahead of the slowly walking man. Teal'c stayed just behind him in case he needed help going up the steps, much to the Colonel's chagrin, but he said nothing.

Sam opened the door with her own spare key and quickly punched the code on his alarm system before reaching down to pick up the last few days' mail. There wasn't anything there other than a couple of utility bills and advertising, so she put the mail on the nearby table and wandered down to the lounge. It was warm enough in the house, so she didn't bother lighting the fire. Instead, she headed for the stairs, and the cupboard on the landing, which held all the spare bedding. Grabbing a couple of pillows and a blanket, she managed to make it back just in time to see the Colonel settle carefully on the couch. He leaned his side against the arm of the couch, obviously wary of pressing his sore back into the seat.

"I think you'll probably be more comfy laid down." She suggested and he looked at the pile of bedding in her arms.

"I've only just got outta bed." He moaned, but seeing the concerned look on her face, he relented. He knew the minute he got horizontal he'd be out like a light again. "OK, but I gotta take a leak first." At least here he didn't have to worry about Fraiser chasing round after him with a sample bottle!

Teal'c had joined her by this time and they tried not to watch, as he slowly hauled himself up again and wandered to the stairs. He hated to be seen as incapacitated, but the drive over some of the bumpier roads had been difficult for him. Carter took the opportunity to place the pillows at one end of the couch and the blankets at the other, whilst Teal'c busied himself with the TV. He flicked through the channels until he found a sports programme, and then left the remote near enough so O'Neill could reach it afterwards.

It only took a couple of minutes until the Colonel wandered back. He saw how the couch was made up and sat down with a sigh, hating the inevitable. He leaned down to undo his boots first, but couldn't help the groan as the movement pulled on his back and shoulder. His team didn't need to hear the noise, as they'd seen the grimace on his face, so they wordlessly took over. Teal'c knelt down to remove his boots and Sam helped him out of his jacket, neither of them wanting to add to his misery, but unable to ignore it.

"You should rest, O'Neill. You will feel much better when you awaken." Teal'c told him gently as he took both the boots and the jacket to the hallway.

"Do you need anything?" Carter asked as he carefully lay down on his left side.

“Nah. I’m fine here.” He told her quietly, as she pulled the blanket up over him.

“I’ll just go and make myself a coffee then.”

She moved out of the way, watching as his eyes tracked the baseball game on the TV, indicating with her head for Teal’c to follow her into the kitchen. Within five minutes, he was fast asleep.

Daniel hesitated for just a moment before ringing the doorbell, but his car had been seen pulling up and Teal’c opened the door for him before the sound could wake up the still sleeping Colonel.

“It is good to see you DanielJackson.” Teal’c greeted him in his usual unflappable manner.

“Hi. Yes.” He replied as he moved around the Jaffa into the lounge. The room was peacefully quiet, with the sound turned low on the TV. Sam was sitting in one of the chairs, quietly reading a science magazine, but she smiled as Daniel walked in.

“Shhhhh.” She warned, with a finger over her lips as she pointed to the couch.

“How long has he been asleep?” He whispered, as he looked down at the tousled head tucked into the pillows.

“A couple of hours now.”

“That’s good. He didn’t sleep well last night.” Glances passed between Sam and Teal’c, but neither of them asked how he knew, as a silent message was exchanged.

Daniel moved over to the other chair and sat down, watching as Teal’c came to stand by Sam.

“Do you mind if MajorCarter and I take a walk? It is a beautiful day and I wish to spend some time outdoors.”

“No, of course not.”

“That’s a good idea, Teal’c.” Sam agreed hastily, still keeping the volume down. “We can get a cab to the base afterwards to collect my car. We’ll bring some take-out for dinner, if that’s OK?”

“Sounds like a good idea to me.” Daniel agreed, wondering if he’d just been had. The team were as close as family to each other and both Sam and Teal’c would want him to sort out this business with Jack. Otherwise it would start to affect them all.

He watched as they left, quietly shutting the front door and then returned his attention to the man on the couch. He must have pulled the blankets up too far at some point, because his feet were poking out of the bottom. Had he had another bad dream? It was entirely possible, he thought guiltily, but Sam hadn’t said so. Standing up, he wandered

over to the couch and carefully straightened the blankets back down again, pulling them over the sock covered feet. When he looked back up, he found sleepy brown eyes staring at him.

“Hey.” He greeted Jack, hesitantly.

“Hey.” Jack answered back, his voice still drowsy. “They gone?”

“Yes. I think they left so that we could talk. I think they thought they were being subtle about it.”

“Do you wanna talk?” Jack asked, sounding uncertain, but hopeful, as he pushed himself into a more upright position.

“Yes I do.” Daniel replied. “What I said was so wrong and I’m sorry. It just hurt so much to see her killed like that. If I’m being truthful, I think it sort of stunned me, I guess. I know you saw only the machine, but I saw a living being, someone looking for a friend, for a place to belong. I saw someone who reminded me of... well I know the comparisons aren’t exactly the same... but in a way... she was so much like...” His eyes dipped down to stare at the floor.

“You?” Came the soft voice.

<<< “I’m like you.” >>>

“Yes me.” Daniel sighed. “I guess that sounds crazy, doesn’t it?”

“No Daniel. It’s hardly rocket science we’re talking here.” He shuffled slightly further into the back of the couch and patted the space by his stomach in an invite to sit with him.

With only the slightest hesitation to move this conversation from the verbal into Jack’s physical space too, he moved over.

Jack sighed, reaching up with his good arm to rub his hand over his eyes. “She was young, smart, lonely, looking for affection. What’s not to connect with a young Daniel Jackson?”

“All she was really trying to do was to impress me, to make me her friend. She had no one left Jack, no one.”

“She was also flawed though. That’s **why** she was alone. Even children can be dangerous.” The soldier thought of all the children involved in war, gun-toting toddlers used as killing machines and he shuddered. “Age is no guarantee of innocence, in this world or any other. Whether programmed by software, or circumstances, we sometimes have to protect ourselves from them.”

<<< “Has it occurred to anyone that that thing may have been lying around that planet for, oh, quite some time and that maybe it’s broken? Or perhaps it never worked right in the first place?” >>>

“I just thought of all those times as a child that I’d tried to say or do something and no one listened. No one ever listened Jack, even when I knew I was right and they were wrong. I was the outsider, just like she was. She was so eager to please. I wanted her to be something special and to do the right thing. I wanted to give her something no one had ever given me – a second chance.”

“I know Danny, but it wasn’t likely to happen. She was damaged. She didn’t even stop when her whole world was dead, including her own father.”

“I know. I just thought if I had a few more minutes, just a couple more, I could have made her understand.” He wrung his hands in agitation. “Maybe we could have helped the Asgard and all those other planets out there. I felt there was a chance I could get close to her, maybe the closest anyone else had ever been.”

“And maybe you could have.” Jack slipped his bandaged arm out of its support and reached over to place a hand on his friend’s shoulder. The damn sling was in the way and he’d had enough of it. “If anyone could have gotten through to her, you could have, but we were out of time. One day, maybe we’ll get another chance to wipe out the bugs, but this wasn’t it. Time was just too damned close. I had to make a decision and maybe it **was** the wrong one, but you don’t always get second chances in life and that’s what I have to consider each time I make a choice like that. If I’d got it wrong, Earth might not have had a second chance and though I’m sorry you lost your chance with Reese, I’m not sorry everyone else here still has one.” He squeezed gently with his hand, trying not to wince at the slight pain, and then removed it back to his lap.

“I know Jack, believe me I know. It might have taken a while for it all to have sunk in. It was just so intense, you know? I couldn’t see past what **I** was doing.”

“You were also hurt and in pain at the time.” Jack said indicating the plaster cast, reminding the other man of his own injuries.

“I just wanted to help another orphan, give someone else something I’d never had.”

<<< “*I want to be your friend.*” >>>

“You did, Daniel. You did. It’s not your fault she couldn’t see that. Sometimes children don’t understand what’s going on around them, or appreciate what they’ve got. No matter how much it hurts us.”

Daniel took a long look at his friend, his best friend. Bruised, battered and bed ridden, but still the best. The big brother he’d never had before the SGC. A member of his surrogate family, and he’d always be there.

“Sometimes adults don’t either.” He murmured quietly, but knowing that Jack could hear him anyway, their faces only inches apart as they were.

“No they don’t.” Jack agreed, smiling slightly. “But at least we know to look for those second chances and make the most of them.”

Daniel just nodded and smiled back. There was nothing else that needed to be said.

The End