

Title: Saying Thanks

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Spoilers: Slight for Singularity.

Summary: A special evening for Cassie.

Warnings: None.

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Notes: 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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"But, mom." I know she's only trying to do what's right, but I really need her to understand how important this is.

"Please?" The evening just won't be the same otherwise.

Mom thinks for a few moments and I can't tell which way she's going to go. Please, please, please, please, please.

"OK then, but you know you've got to be very careful. He might not even be awake and, if not, you're not to disturb him."

I grab her around the waist, not able to hide the grin on my face. I've just turned thirteen, but I can still hug her, can't I? It's not too childish, is it? It's not as though I don't understand how precious life is and how easily you can lose people, but sometimes I have to remember not to do this when my friends are around.

"I'll be very careful, honest. Can we go now?"

I've already got everything packed and I'm out of the door as mom's laughing behind me. I feel slightly guilty as I realise she's still checking if Colonel is OK in the kitchen before we shut him in. He's getting old now, but I'm far too excited to see if he's got enough chews and dog toys to keep him company.

“Are Sam, Daniel and Teal’c going to meet us there?” The arrangements have been a little last minute, but after their last mission there’s been a lot to take care of. Mom’s not said much, but I know it was a near thing again. It always seems that way with SG-1 and I get so frightened when I know they’re off planet. One of these days I’m sure one or more of them aren’t going to come back and I don’t know how I’ll cope with that.

I mean, I’m not stupid and I didn’t really come from ‘Toronto’, no matter what my records say.

I know I’m still young compared to them, especially Jack and Teal’c, but what they do *is* dangerous. They always joke about it, but I’ve seen them in the infirmary after something’s gone wrong and I can see they all know it. One day someone’s going to get killed and I don’t know how any of us will cope with that. I’ve lost so much already, I really don’t want to lose my second family too.

“Sam and Daniel will be,” Mom replies, as she reverses the car out of the drive and onto the road. “but Teal’c’s taking care of the Colonel, so he won’t be able to come tonight either.”

“That’s a shame, but I understand.”

I’m going to miss Teal’c, or Murray as we sometimes call him. He’s also an alien on Earth, trying to understand what’s going on around him to fit in better. I suppose I’ve got a big advantage over him. People still think I’m a kid and the ‘I didn’t grow up around here’ covers a lot of mistakes. Plus, I guess being younger means I learn a lot quicker. Teal’c’s really old, the oldest person I know, so it’s natural that it’s going to be a lot harder for him to pick up new ideas.

I’m going to miss Jack tonight the most. He’s got this huge grin when he’s pleased about something and he’s so cute when he smiles like that. You can tell when he means it. Cute? Geesh, he’s old enough to be my dad and part of me wishes my mom and him had got together so that he *could* be my dad. When I get a boyfriend, I hope he turns out to be as great a man as Jack is. Although that might take a few more years yet.

“And just what are you sniggering about?” Mom asks me as she heads off down the road.

“Nothing. Just thinking.” I can hardly tell her *that*, can I?

I miss having a dad, but Jack’s as near as I suppose I’m going to get and it’ll have to do. I can hardly picture my real family anymore. I dream about them and the pictures are really clear, but it all disappears again once I’m awake and it makes me want to cry. I can’t though, because that would upset my new family and they care for me so much. As Sam always says, I have to be brave. She was, when she refused to leave when I had that bomb inside me. I don’t think I’ll ever forget that. Sam and Daniel are like the brainy elder sister and brother that everyone wishes they had, especially when the homework’s due in. And Teal’c’s like some rich foreign student friend, who tells you all sorts of strange stories at night time. Even General Hammond makes sure I’m well taken care of, sorting out any paperwork that needs to be done to make sure I’m OK.

Jack though? Jack’s special. He’s always the one who comes running when any of us are in trouble. It doesn’t matter what the problem is. It’s almost as though he doesn’t have a life away from the rest of us. I sometimes wonder if he sees me as a way of giving out all the love he would have given to Charlie, if he’d still been alive, and it makes me sad. Daniel lost his parents when he was little, just as I did, but I still can’t cuddle him the same way I can Jack. He just seems to make everything feel better, without even having to try very hard. If I have a problem, he makes me tell him all about it

and then he breaks it down into all kinds of little pieces and helps me solve each one in turn. He says it's talking tactics. Study the enemy, find their weaknesses and neutralise them. The others joke about him supposedly not being very intelligent and he always winks at me when they do that. Like it's our little secret. I know he's clever, perhaps not like Sam and Danny, but in a different way.

He takes me ice skating and bowling, or to the gym and he's made sure I know all kinds of stuff. Like how to pivot on one foot and kick out with the other at a certain angle so that you can put someone's kneecap out. It's supposed to be one of the most painful things you can do. Or how, if someone grabs you from behind, to fall back onto them, make them take *your* weight and use it against them. Ignore their arms around your neck and go for their eyes, or nose instead. Or how, if someone strikes out at your face, to use your arms to redirect the force, to knock it to one side and put them off balance. He's also told me where else to kick a man to stop him doing anything 'too personal', even over keen boyfriends. It's not a move he's let me try out on him for some reason, even though he laughed when I begged him. He goes through these routines with me all the time, making sure I'll do them automatically if I need to. He says if you have to think about it, then the opportunity's probably passed, so he keeps working on them with me. None of my friends have a Colonel teaching them self-defence.

I can't help thinking about all these things as we drive along, and all the fun I've had with my mom and SG-1, until we arrive at Jack's house. I love his house. It's always neat and tidy, not at all like you'd expect, but it's full of all sorts of interesting things. He has lots of wonderfully old smelly books, which Daniel loves reading, and expensive sports memorabilia. I don't think there's anything he doesn't know about ice hockey, or can't get us tickets for if we want. And he's spent hours teaching me about astronomy and has promised to replace my old telescope with a better one for my next birthday. Knowing Jack, I'll probably get it early and then still get something else on the day. I try to tell him off, but I think spoiling me helps him to remember Charlie in some way. I wish I could understand better, but sometimes his eyes tell you so much more than words would do anyway.

Teal'c's already opening the door as we pull up and mom tuts as I jump out before the car's stopped properly. However, we've not got a lot of time and I'm so frightened I'll not get to do this.

"Cassandra Fraiser." Teal'c greets in his usual quiet way. "It is good to see you."

"Good to see you too, Teal'c."

"I regret not being able to accompany you to your presentation this evening. Please accept my apologies."

It's hard sometimes to hug the big man, but I love trying anyway.

"It's OK Teal'c. I'd much rather have someone looking after Jack. Is he awake?"

He steps back to let us both pass by, now mom's caught up, and gently shuts the door behind us.

"He was sleeping an hour ago when I last checked upon him."

"Thanks. I'll just go and see if he's awake now."

"No, Cassie." Mom stops me. "Let me go first. I may as well check up on him whilst I'm here."

She grins as I sulk at her. Please don't stop me now we're here. Teal'c gives his usual funny little bow, as mom strides past and up the stairs towards the master bedroom. We've both been here so many times that we could find our way around blindfolded.

I can't help but follow her up the stairs, even though she shuts the bedroom door behind her. Eventually I can hear muted conversations, mom doing her doctor speak and Jack answering her in a very quiet, sleepy sounding voice. Great – he's awake!

A few minutes later she comes out again.

“Just five minutes Cassie and *don't* wear him out. He needs to get back to sleep.”

She's got her stern doctor expression on, but I can see the glint in her eyes. I know she woke him up for me.

Tiptoeing past her into the room, I get my first look at Jack. His face is generally pale, although his cheeks are still slightly flushed from the fever mom said he had. He got stung by some plants, or something, pushing Sam out of the way when he saw them reaching towards her. Weird. I know mom was worried, she didn't come home for two days and I had to stop at Linda's again. Jack always looks good in dark blue and the cotton sheets are half way down his bare chest. Normally he goes to sleep in boxers and a tee-shirt. I know because I've brought him breakfast in bed some days. But now it looks like he's still too hot for that and he's far too still, just lying there. It's not like him to be so quiet like this.

His right arm is in a plaster cast up to his elbow and I know mom feels really guilty about that. She said in the middle of his fever he got all confused. When the nurses tried to calm him down he fought them, flinging his arm out to one side. She said they all heard the bone break against the bed rails. Then he passed out a few moments later. I told mom it wasn't her fault and I'm sure Jack's told her the same thing, but mom still cried about it when she came home. I'm not sure if she wasn't just very tired though and glad Jack was starting to get better.

It looks like he's gone back to asleep. What am I going to do now?

He's lying on his right side with his casted arm stretched out in front of him. There's a whole heap of pillows that have been thrown on the floor and he's almost flat on the bed. I think this may be mom's way of 'encouraging' him to lie back down and rest properly. Do I creep back out again, like I should do, or wake him up like I want to? However, he opens his eyes as I walk towards the bed and grins up at me.

“Hey, Cassie. Watcha doin here? I thought it was presentation night tonight?”

His eyes are only half open and I don't think it'll be long before he does fall asleep again.

“It is, but I wanted to see you first.”

“I really wish I could be there. I mean the science competition prize of all things, it's great. Not that I'm surprised though, with your mom, Sam and Danny to help you learn all that stuff. Stuff that I can't help you with anyway. Three geniuses, huh? The other kids didn't stand a chance against you with that kinda backup.”

“I'm sorry you can't be there too. I'm going to miss you.”

“Yeah. I’m sorry, but I’ve got this horrible doctor who won’t let me out of bed.”

I can’t help but laugh at that. His voice is unusually quiet, but I know he won’t be like this for long. He’ll be out of bed and annoying my mom again long before she’s ready for it.

“Sit.” He pats the bed with his left hand and I ease myself down beside him, trying not to move his arm. “Now why are you here, visiting sickly old Colonels, when you should be on your way to knocking them all dead in the aisles?”

“That wouldn’t do my mom any good, a hall full of dead parents to deal with.”

Jack grins. “I guess not. Think of all the paperwork!” Then he tries to hide a yawn, which makes him look even more cute than he did before. That’s something I’ll not tell him though.

Instead, I just smile and tell him why I’m really here, before he’s too tired to listen.

“I’ve got my speech ready, but I wanted you to hear it too, if that’s alright?”

“You betcha, fire away. Getting the science award! I’m so proud of you. I just wish I coulda helped you more, but with the others around, you certainly don’t need my brain for that.”

Getting the sheet out that I’ve worked on all day, I try to calm down. Now, take a deep breath, just like mom told me and try not to let the hands shake.

“Dear teachers and parents.

You’ve no idea how grateful I am for this award, for the science competition, but I am. I love science and I love looking at how the world around me works. I think it’s a beautiful planet and not enough people take the time to stop and see that anymore.

I do, because I know how easy everything can disappear.

Some of you already know that my first family is dead, that my mum over there is not my real mum, but my foster mum. I love her with all my heart and I know she’s very proud of me today. I’d lost everything I ever had before I came here, but I now have a new family and these people have taken care of me, treated me as though I was important to them. I love them for that. They’ve helped me to settle in, something I found very hard to do when I first came.

*It was difficult to study in the beginning, to forget everything that I’d been through. I’d look at the other kids with their families and wonder ‘why me?’. I didn’t always know what to do, or why I had to bother, but my new family have always been there for me and been patient with me. Some of my new family are very clever, I mean **really** intelligent, and they’ve helped me with my studies, explaining things I couldn’t understand before, even though I’ve never persuaded them to actually **do** my homework for me. They’re also going to be really proud of me tonight. Without all their help, I wouldn’t be here now, able to get this award to say thank you to them for caring for me.”*

My hands are shaking again, knowing I’m going to be saying all this in front of a hall full of strangers later on. Jack reaches over and rubs my arm slightly.

“You’re doing fine, Cassie, and we **are** all proud of you.” It’s all he needs to say and I can carry on again.

“However, not all my family are here tonight and it’s not quite the same because of that. I feel like part of me is missing, perhaps the most important part for this award.

Someone very close to me once told me not to get too hung up on the composition, or the temperatures needed to make a snowflake. He said take time out to see how unique and beautiful it is too. He said look at the snow around you on a crisp morning, grab a handful and have fun throwing snowballs. You’re only a child once. Don’t spend too long analysing how the sun’s rays filter through the edge of a rain cloud, to make the rainbow. Remember to look at the spectacle too, how colourful and magnificent it is as well. Don’t spend all day working out how much stored solar energy is needed to raise a single chick, without hearing its cheep, or seeing it flap its wings for the first time. Life is fragile, but magical.

I know science is going to play a big part of whatever I do in the future, although I haven’t made my mind up yet what that will be. However, I know I’m always going to remember the lessons this project has taught me and the people who’ve helped me with it.

*If the scientists of the future are going to protect this planet, they have to remember *why* we’re doing it – *why* it’s a special place and worth protecting.*

So thank you everyone for this award, but I’m not accepting it for working out any complex chemical equations, but for making snowballs, looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow and for the flights of birds in the evening.

Thank you.”

Three hours later, I step back from the microphone, slightly stunned when I hear a huge round of applause go through the hall. I can see my mom, Sam and Danny sat a few rows back and they’re all clapping too. Mom even looks like she’s crying and I don’t think Sam’s far behind. But the best sight was when I saw a glimmer of tears in Jack’s eyes before I left him behind. He was nearly asleep again, but I heard him say “Thank you” as I left the room.

The End