

Title: Tangential Healing

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Summary: Taking care of Jack after their last minute rescue.

Warnings: Language.

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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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The thoughts of the two men were vastly different as they drifted together, alone in the inky blackness of cold, dark space.

Thought processes had slowed, in line with their bodily functions. A lesser-evolved creature might have hibernated the state away, slept through the discomfort, not been affected by the lack of awareness. Not these two. Unaccustomed to the conditions, as their functions slowed, they were dying; bit-by-bit, cell-by-cell, thought process-by-process. Still they were different, as different in the way they perceived the universe around them, as the way their bodies had evolved. One an independent spirit, a loner, a tester of all that nature could throw at him. The other, a conjoined being, a slave to the despised life form who ruled his life's path from within. One meditated, a calmness washing through his body, as his God controlled the peaceful state of his slowing, stilling functions. The other, agitated in his mind as though his body was still

vital, chaos ruling over his exhausted systems as they continued to spiral down into death. Different beings, yet cocooned together as close as the brothers they felt themselves to be. They shared their last dying moments as they'd shared so much in life, as the metal shell of their salvation nosed the coffin back to a brief awareness.

Whaaaa?

He'd spoken. He knew he had, only a brief moment ago. He'd tried to get up too, to raise himself, only to have his arms refuse. He'd seen Jacob, talked to him, tried to get up again, but nothing worked any more.

Cold. He was so cold, the sudden severe shivers catching his dulled senses by surprise. His fingers so frozen that he couldn't move them. Arms so sluggish that he couldn't even raise them to remove his helmet.

Crap.

Why could he move a moment ago, but not now? His brain, which was usually so sharp when he was in trouble, refused to co-operate and explain things. He could hear a whooshing sound, so loudly in his ears, that it almost overwhelmed everything else. His stomach, empty after so long without food or water, roiled as he tried desperately to roll over, but there was nothing inside to come out. He gave up trying to sit up. Gave up trying to keep his eyes open. Gave up on trying to stay conscious. He couldn't make his body do what he couldn't even remember the words for. There were vague voices in the shadows descending around him and he felt strong arms raise him and rest him against a firm chest. Teal'c. Smaller, gentler hands fumbled around his head and neck, finally removing the cumbersome helmet. Daniel.

"Hold his head back a moment." Jacob's voice.

Soft hands tilted his head back against the broad shoulders and he felt a container held to his lips. He swallowed, a reflex action, as the liquid touched the back of his throat. A bitter taste, nothing he recognised, and nothing he had the energy to enquire over.

"I was expecting this, but I didn't expect it to be this bad." Jacob's voice again, receding into the darkness. "A few more minutes and we'd have been too late. Let's get him somewhere more comfortable and out of that getup."

Arms supported him under his shoulders and legs. He felt himself lifted and moved, but it was all fading peacefully away. It was disappearing like a mist over the mountains. The shivering, the abominable headache, the agonising pins and needles, they were all leaving him. Leaving him with a pleasant dark numbness, free from everything.

His kids had found them and they were safe once more. He let go.

Daniel watched Jack as he slept the sleep of the almost dead on one of the hard surfaces that passed for a bed on the Tok'ra ship. Teal'c entered the chamber and allowed himself a brief smile, as he looked down at the younger man who refused to leave their CO's side. O'Neill had been divested of his flight suit and now rested clad only in his underwear, but swaddled in as many blankets as the younger man could find from the ship's stores. The Tok'ra medicine ensured that O'Neill would rest for many hours. His system was suffering from the effects of oxygen deprivation, near freezing conditions and muscle abusing inactivity. Teal'c's symbiote had ensured none of these conditions affected the tall Jaffa and he found his body able to respond to his wishes almost immediately, despite how near to death they'd been upon rescue. O'Neill was not so lucky and was without doubt due for some infirmity time upon their return to the SGC.

"How is O'Neill?" Teal'c asked, knowing the answer already, but wishing to initiate some form of contact with his younger team-mate.

"Sleeping. At least he's stopped shaking now." Daniel's eyes hardly left the face of the sleeping man.

Teal'c nodded slightly. He remembered the younger man asking if getting into bed to share his body heat would help O'Neill recover any quicker. Jacob had assured them though that he should be fine in the heated quarters, with all the blankets that had been placed around him. Nevertheless, the Tok'ra had hidden a smile when he'd suggested it was still wise to leave someone to watch over the Colonel and Daniel had quickly volunteered. Now, several hours later, they were approaching a planet with a stargate and would soon be able to gate home and get their friend back to more intense medical care.

Both Sam and Jacob had popped in a couple of times to make sure O'Neill was still holding up, so shocking was the discovery of how closely timed their rescue had been. Teal'c was aware of the frequent tiny glances sent his way and took no small satisfaction in knowing how much he was valued. However, although he was already returned to full health, he would need to meditate further upon their arrival at the SGC, to enable his symbiote to recover its strength. He also knew his two younger team-mates were exhausted from their ordeals, but they were all remarkably unscathed considering how nearly disastrous this last mission had been. Even O'Neill would show no physical wounds from his current state. Doctor Fraiser would be relieved at so little trauma to meet upon their return.

He didn't want to move from where he was. He felt remarkably peaceful, languid, clean and comfy. However, he knew from experience that these states rarely lasted long. There was always something to do, something to get in the way of lying peacefully asleep, always something to harass him before he could relax again. The trouble was, he didn't know what it was this time.

The pillow underneath him crinkled with the feeling that only came from freshly laundered and starched infirmity care. The sheets rustled over his chest as he moved in the bed, automatically testing for bodily damage before he was fully awake. No

breakages this time, just soreness and tenderness. No monitors to disturb his hearing, or sticky pads to cling to his chest hairs when they were removed. If there had been any IVs attached, they were gone now, along with any catheters to disturb his privacy. This was getting a lot better. He finally roused enough to open his eyes and take in the tiled infirmary ceiling above him. Yup, he was definitely back at the SGC, but he still needed a few moments to organise his thoughts and remember WHY he was there.

Oh, yes. He and Teal'c had been playing pin the tail on the donkey, missile style; only the whole thing went ballistic as the recall device kicked in. Then they played at head-butting the spent missile with the canopy, swiftly followed by brass monkey weather as everything shut down, waiting for a rescue that couldn't possibly reach them in time. Guess his kids had managed it after all, although he couldn't really remember much of that. He had some vague images of Jacob through the cockpit windows and voices as he was forced to swallow something and then nothing till now. Guess his nuts had been pulled out of the fire once more. Well actually not the fire, more like the freezer. God, it was good to be warm again, but where was his team? No one ever woke up alone in this place, unless there was something wrong with them too.

Craning his neck round to look at the rest of the room, he could see Teal'c sat on a chair against the far wall. He looked as though he was sleeping, so he was probably in some sort of meditative state, although he usually did that cross-legged on the floor. Well at least **he** was OK. But how long had they been back? Perhaps Teal'c had already done the full Kel'no'reeming bit and was merely resting now, waiting for him to wake up? Looking along the row of beds, he mentally jumped as he recognised the forms of Carter and Daniel, also asleep. What had happened? What were they doing here? He couldn't see any monitoring equipment, but his mind whirled at what he didn't understand. They should have been fine! Had there been a further accident on the way home, whilst he was snoozing his sorry lazy ass off?

Swinging his aching legs out of the bed, he took a moment to notice he was in scrubs rather than a damned smock, which was a big relief for his modesty. Even if he didn't have much left after a life in the military. He stood up and took a first step to go over and check on his team. Big mistake. His legs collapsed like mincemeat beneath him and he caught a nearby treatment trolley with a flailing arm, causing it to topple and crash loudly to the floor as he sprawled beside it.

"O'Neill!" Teal'c called in his deep voice as the Jaffa woke instantly, rushing over to his fallen friend. "Are you injured?"

The Colonel turned his face away from the floor and looked up into the eyes of his friend, as Teal'c gently helped to roll him over onto his back.

"Carter? Daniel?" he asked, surprised at how weak his voice sounded.

"They are fine, O'Neill." Teal'c answered, as a flurry of white swept into the room on noisy heels.

"They're only sleeping, as they were exhausted." Fraiser told him as she crouched down beside him. "Which is what **you** should be doing too. What are you doing out of bed?"

He didn't have the energy to answer her. Any strength he might have had seemed to have disappeared with his frantic pin wheeling before he'd fallen to the floor. He was barely able to shrug his shoulders at her stern expression.

"Did you hurt yourself anywhere?" She asked, giving him a quick visual once-over, although she seemed satisfied with the small shake of his head. "Well, let's get you back in the bed then, shall we, Sir?"

She turned to Teal'c, who immediately reached his arms under the Colonel's and slowly levered him up to his feet. Then, before O'Neill's strength left him, quickly swung one arm under his knees and lifted him up, before placing him back on the bed.

Fraiser tut-tutted as she arranged the bedding back around her friend and breathed a sigh of relief that everything was all right again. She'd had quite a scare when they'd brought his unconscious body back through the gate, but Jacob had explained about the sedative and how close a call the rescue had been. They were all exhausted. Sam and Daniel were running on fumes, the stress of the past couple of days finally getting to them, so she'd ordered them to stay in the infirmary overnight. It's not as though she would be able to keep them away from the Colonel's bedside anyway, so she might as well kill two birds with one stone. Teal'c had gone to his quarters for a few hours of quality Kel'no'reem, but had then immediately returned to keep watch over his team-mates. The Colonel had been quietly sleeping away the stress his body had endured, saving him from suffering any further side effects from his experience.

He would have been feeling very ill for some time before their rescue, with nothing in even basic first aid to take for it. General Hammond had reported O'Neill's comments about Aspirin and she could only imagine how extreme the headache would have been, for him to have mentioned it. Daniel had said he'd seemed nauseous when they'd rescued him, which was also par for the course and very unpleasant, as they'd had absolutely no food or water with them. Then the lengthy forced inactivity would have led to lost muscle tone, maybe cramps and pins and needles. The turning off of so many of the craft's advanced life support systems, to conserve power, had done nothing but exacerbate the situation. As for the cold, he would have been suffering from hypothermia for some time, his body lacking the energy to shiver a long time before he was rescued. Yes, he might not have any physical scars from his latest brush with death, but his body had still been through an extreme trauma and, like it or not, he'd be feeling the effects for a few days now, whilst his metabolic system settled back down to normal.

Fraiser noticed Sam and Daniel had both been woken by the disturbance and had wandered over to stand behind her, watching what was happening.

"How is the Colonel?" Sam asked for both of them.

"He **will** be fine." She replied, looking back down into the sleepy brown eyes that looked back up at her, petulantly, "Provided he stays in bed and lets himself recover adequately."

“Ummm, hi Jack.” Daniel greeted over her shoulders, trying to take the sting out of her words. “Nice to see you back with us again. You slept away the whole return journey. Jacob thought you were deliberately ignoring him.” Actually, Jacob had laughed about it being the quietest he’d ever had the Colonel, but he’d had to return to try and continue his interrupted mission as soon as they got back to the base.

“Remind me not to take drinks off strange Tok’ra.” Came the sleepy response as he grinned at them. “Thanks for the pickup.”

“You know me.” Daniel replied. “I’m just a sucker for hitchhikers and strays.”

Sam giggled as the Colonel rolled his eyes in their direction.

“See you later, Sir. I’m going to get dressed now, if that’s OK Janet.”

The Doctor nodded at her and returned her gaze to the man in the bed. He waved a lazy hand in her direction as his eyes closed again. He couldn’t believe how tired he was. He’d only just woken up and been told he’d slept the whole way back after the rescue. He was getting too old for this shit.

“You go back to sleep, Sir.” Fraiser encouraged. “You’ll feel a lot more with it next time you wake up.”

“Yes, see you later, Jack. I’ll just ummm, go get dressed too.”

“I will stay here and keep you company O’Neill.” Teal’c spoke as the other two left the ward.

“Wouldn’t have it any other way Teal’c.” Came the quiet response as the Colonel’s breathing settled down, almost into sleep again. Although he didn’t open his eyes, he could almost see the quirk of the Jaffa’s lip as his large friend nodded back to him.

Fraiser stayed with him a moment longer, enjoying the sight as their friend finally slipped back into sleep, then left the Jaffa to his watch. It had been a frighteningly close call, but they’d all made it back in one piece and any mission they did that on was a good one in her book.

“OK, OK, OK.” She finally gave in. “If you take it easy you can go home. But **only** if you take it easy and take one of your team home with you. You might feel fine at the moment, but you had a rough ride there and your body’s still dealing with it, even if **you’re** not.”

He raised his hands in mock surrender.

“You know me, Doc. I’ll be a good boy. Take all my pills. Keep out of trouble.”

“Yes, and pigs will fly, Colonel.” She stared into his face, pleased to note the colour had come back after a further day’s rest under her care.

“Yeah? Sheesh, they’ll take in anyone these days!” He grinned at her and swung his legs out of bed, jumping to the floor with as much enthusiasm as his still tired body would allow. Nothing gave way though this time and snapping off a quick salute to the Doctor, he strode off towards the showers and his locker.

“And you’re **not** to drive!” Fraiser shouted after him, sighing at the small parcel of medicines he seemed to have already forgotten by his bedside.

Deciding if she didn’t find one of his team herself to pass on her instructions and meds to that he’d forget, she swiftly left after him.

Daniel took each turn in the road carefully, taking a quick look at his passenger, fast asleep beside him. It had been a tiring exit, getting out of the mountain. Many people had wanted to greet Jack to share their congratulations on his safe return and spend a few moments with him, now he was safely back home. Jack was never easy being the centre of so much emotional attention. He could command a room merely by raising an eyebrow whilst in Colonel mode, that sort of observation coming to him naturally. But asking him to deal with so much personal attention was something else. He felt ill at ease, embarrassed, and unsure what to say, or how to respond, barring his stand by quips for each occasion. It seemed nearly everyone from the General to the canteen staff had wanted to pat his shoulder, or shake his hand, or snap off a quick salute. For someone who was uneasy handling his feelings, he sure seemed to generate a lot from those around him.

A walk that should have taken five minutes took thirty and by the time they’d made it to his car, Jack was almost out on his feet. Wrung out. Daniel had quietly helped him in and fastened the seat belt around him, before shutting the door on an unusually quiescent Colonel. Then he’d silently jumped into the driver’s seat and taken them home. Sam and Teal’c would already be at his house, sorting out anything that hadn’t been taken care of over the past few days they’d been away.

Although bills were paid for by direct debit and fresh food was rarely stocked before any sort of mission, there were always things to sort out after a few days away. Rooms needed airing, heating turning on if necessary, mail to be processed, laundry to be washed and food to be purchased. They always took care of each other like this, if any one of them was away for any length of time. Door keys had been exchanged years ago. When your lives depended on each other, when you’d been stripped to the bone, both physically and mentally, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, face to face, there was no longer even an awareness of modesty. They were, in some ways closer than family, knowing things about each other that no one else did. Shyness didn’t exist when care was needed, and wandering through each other’s belongings was almost as natural as going through their own. Though the boundaries of privacy were never crossed lightly.

“Hey, sleepy head, we’re here.” Daniel gently shook Jack awake and grinned, as a smile plastered itself over his friend’s face. He watched as Jack almost jumped out of

the car and sauntered up his drive. Obviously, the sleep on the journey had revived him somewhat.

“Hey, Carter.” Jack greeted, as his 2IC opened the front door for them. Daniel quickly caught up, after locking up the car behind him.

“Hi, Sir.” She replied, as she followed them both back into the house.

“Been a bit busy, I see.” Jack commented as he looked round his house. “Don’t tell me Teal’c’s been playing with the hoover again.”

“Indeed I have attempted to remove the past few day’s amount of dust from your abode.” The Jaffa answered as he walked sedately down the stairs. “I have readied your sleeping chamber for you, should you wish to retire for the day.”

“Trying to get rid of me already are you, big guy?” Jack looked up at him, placing his hands on his hips in an unconscious gesture of defiance.

“Doctor Fraiser did say that you would still require a significant amount of rest to aid your body in recovering from our recent ordeal.”

“Teal’c, I’ve only just got **out** of bed. I’ve no intention of getting straight back into one.”

Teal’c merely looked confused as Sam and Daniel exchanged resigned glances.

“So what are we all up to then, kids?” Jack asked as he looked around him.

“You **are** supposed to be resting, Sir.” Carter sighed, trying to suppress the giggle that formed at his scowl.

“Yes, Jack. Rest. Promise. Little Doctor with big needles. Remember?”

“Awww, you’re no fun, the lot of you.” He vaulted over the side of the couch and having thumped down in an untidy sprawl, reached over for the TV remote and started flipping through the channels. “I’m just gonna stay here awhile then. I can rest here. Rest’s good here, while you lot get on with whatever it is you were gonna get on with.”

With that it was as though he’d suddenly switched off to them, the current game on the TV absorbing all his attention. His three team-mates shared amused glances and drifted off into whatever else they wanted to do to pass the time. Jack didn’t really need three baby-sitters, but the team always enjoyed time together like this after something had gone wrong. Some time to be close to each other, until they didn’t feel the constant need to check the other person was still alive and well.

Whilst they slipped away, Jack risked expressing a tiny little smile that they couldn’t see.

Three hours later he was bored. The game had finished long ago and his team had lost. There wasn't anything else on any channel interesting enough to keep his attention and he was not a happy camper. A small headache was forming at the back of his mind, telling him he was tired, but he was also tired of being tired. Daniel caught him pinching the top of his nose, screwing his forehead up in a typical Jack gesture.

"Headache?" He asked from the seat opposite, putting his book on mummifying techniques down on the coffee table.

"Nah. Just bored. Whaddya doing?"

Typical Jack, thought Daniel. Deny and deflect tactics.

"Come on, you know what Janet said. I'll get you something for it." He passed Teal'c on the way, who'd just been out chopping more wood for the fire and met Sam in the kitchen.

"How's he doing?" she asked, noting the volume on the TV had been turned down.

"Headache, but he won't admit it. Where are the meds Janet gave us?"

"Over here." She reached over to the back of the window-ledge and pulled the paper bag over. Reaching inside, she took out a packet and handed it over, reading the instructions. "It says to take a couple with water, but to wait four hours between doses."

"Well it has to be that long since he had anything in the infirmary." He popped a couple of small white pills out of their foil and looked in the bag. "What else is in there?"

"Just something for nausea in case it comes back. Nothing to make him sleep, but I guess we don't have to worry about that."

"Well there's no sign of that. I'll give him these and see if I can't get him up to bed."

"I'm surprised he's lasted this long." She half filled a glass of water and handed that over too.

"Yes, stubborn isn't he? You don't think it's our scintillating company then?" he grinned as he turned away.

Sam just laughed as he headed back into the lounge.

"Here you go." He handed over the pills and the water, which Jack just looked at, but made no move to swallow.

"I'll tell Janet." Daniel sing-songed at him.

“Traitor.” Jack groused, as he quickly downed the offending items and drank the water in one swallow.

“The thanks we get for saving your sorry ass.” Daniel commented as he resettled himself back in the chair.

“Yeah.” Jack grinned. “How is the life of the great Oz these days? How’s that working out for ya?”

“OK, who told you?” Daniel spluttered, face going red as he knew he was heading for weeks of merciless teasing until it was forgotten – which would probably be never.

Teal’c suddenly jerked, from where he was now playing a gameboy in the other chair, gaining both of their attentions.

“My apologies, I seem to have erred.”

Daniel wasn’t sure just what the Jaffa was apologising for. Jacob wouldn’t have, would he? Having suddenly lost track of the conversation, he reached for his book once more. Teal’c caught his commander’s eye and the pair exchanged a brief smile before he resumed his game.

“What ya reading?” Jack tried again, sitting upright, trying to push the encroaching lethargy away. Whatever the book was, there certainly didn’t seem to be a lot of pictures in it.

“How they used to wrap up their nearest and dearest to keep their immobile forms from getting into any trouble in the future.” Came the reply, as blue eyes bored into brown, with an edge that made it almost a threat. “Or at least I would be reading it if someone would leave me in peace and quiet.”

“Hey, I can do quiet.” Came the hurt reply. “I can do quiet, can’t I Carter?” He shouted loudly towards the kitchen.

“Yes, Sir.” Came the patient reply.

“See.”

“Jack, Sam’s your second in command. Of course she’s going to say whatever you want her to.”

“Oi!” Came an indignant reply from behind, as a kitchen towel hit the archaeologist on the neck. Jack grinned, then getting up sauntered over to the Jaffa.

“Need any help?” he asked hopefully.

“I do not.” Came the even reply as Teal’c’s fingers moved with precision over the controls. “I have managed to decimate a large portion of the advancing enemy, but I need to concentrate if I am not to lose this advantage. Please do not disturb me any further.”

“Geesh.” Jack huffed. “Don’t get between a pissy Jaffa and his toys.”

He shrugged his shoulders in defeat and, grabbing the tea towel which Daniel had put on the coffee table, headed into the kitchen, missing the look which transpired between his friends behind him.

“What ya doing, Carter?” He asked hopefully.

“Well, it started off as lamb roast, but everything sort of fell apart, so it’s more like a casserole now. Thought I’d do home-made soup for starters too.”

Jack was impressed. Sam was no more a natural cook than the rest of them. Heaven protect anyone who assumed that because she was a woman, she’d be at home in the kitchen too. She might be able to disassemble any gadget found there, but knowing how to **use** it was another matter.

“Need any help?” He offered, not sure if an ulterior motive was just to protect his kitchen appliances.

“No, that’s fine, Sir.” She started the mixer up and began dropping a few vegetables into the whirling blades. “I’m actually quite enjoying myself.” She shouted back over the unwelcome noise. His headache was suddenly making its presence felt just a little bit more forcefully.

Finding nothing to do in the kitchen and looking out at the rain running down the kitchen windows, Jack stuck his hands in his pants pockets and walked back out into the lounge. At least it was quiet out here. Or at least it had been. What **was** that noise?

Daniel?

“Daniel?”

“Oh, sorry Jack. Janet’s got me on some new allergy treatment, but it’s playing havoc with my sinuses. I have to keep clearing them out.”

Jack winced in sympathy as Daniel ‘cleared’ his sinuses again.

“She says if it doesn’t improve, she’ll try something else in a couple of days.”

This was just getting ridiculous. His kitchen sounded like a building site, Teal’s was buzzing and pinging at whatever level he’d now reached in his game and Daniel sounded like a bullfrog in heat. Juuuuust great. He’d be better off upstairs on his own. At least he and his headache could enjoy some peace and quiet up there.

Silently, so as not to disturb anyone, or get them concerned, he crept up the stairs and to his bedroom. Something still stopped him from shutting the door on his team, even in the safety of his own home, so he just pushed it close to and walked to his bed. He stripped off his shirt and tee-shirt, kicked off his shoes and left the whole mess where they landed on the floor. Pulling off his pants, he draped them over the chair, before

dragging off his socks and dropping them in the same pile. Finally, he climbed wearily into the freshly made bed.

Peace. Just what he needed. It didn't even register that everything had gone quiet downstairs. He just drifted away, letting the pills and the clean, cool cotton soothe his tired body and soon he knew no more.

Ten minutes later, three pairs of stockinged feet crept up the stairs and quietly pushed the bedroom door back opened. Three pairs of eyes took in the sight of their friend, as he lay fast asleep on his back, one hand laid above his head, as his face nestled into the crook of his arm, whilst the other laid across his bare chest, rising and falling with each slumbering breath.

Daniel looked up at Teal'c, noting the look of satisfaction on his placid features, then shared a brief smile with Sam. They'd come so close to losing the pair of them this time. Only adrenaline and desperation had brought them home, but they **were** home. Safe and sound.

Safe beside them and **sound** asleep in the bed.

They couldn't ask for anything more.

The End