

Spoilers: New Ground, Maternal Instinct and Crystal Skull for the most part. Probably a few others that I'm forgetting at the moment

Warnings: Lots. Junior reminds us that he's a little shithead. If you can't handle the symbiote making his views known, you should probably get out of here now.

Disclaimer: These lovely people don't belong to me even though I wish they did. If you think I'm making money on this, then I've got a bridge in Brooklyn I'm willing to give you if you give me Michael Shanks and Chris Judge.

Feedback: Please, please, please

Archiving: Fire and Ice, Penemuel's Nest, Area 52, anyone else just ask first.

Summary: Life continues with Daniel and Teal'c in the SGC while crap goes on around them.

## A Single Star - Medley by Leviathan

-----*New Ground*-----

I never liked the infirmary. It smelled of sickness, despite all of the cleaners employed to mitigate its stench. Its odor also reminded me of long vigils at the sides of my teammates, long hours of hope that had, so far, not proven to be in vain. But I understood that at some time a battle would be lost and that hope would die. Other hope had died in this room, but not mine. Not yet.

I especially did not like being the one incarcerated in this room. Its ambience did not lend itself to Kel-no-reem, which I had to begin in order to finish repairing the damage wrought. My symbiote was quiet now, but I knew that soon I would feel its restlessness. Even at this late hour there was noise as the staff completed chores assigned to them - quiet to them, loud to a Jaffa in need of meditation.

I was also driven awake by the young man in the bed beside mine. Nyan attempted to sleep, but with the activities of the day and with the novelty of finding himself on a new world, he could not rest. He shifted on his bed again, turning his body towards me. His eyes were wet with tears.

"Nyan?" I inquired quietly, testing to see if he was truly asleep.

"Teal'c? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to disturb you."

He reached up to his face to blot away the tears, clearly embarrassed to be caught in an emotional display. He attempted to smile, but the lie could not reach his eyes. He started to turn away from me.

"Nyan, I understand how you feel. I, too, have left my home and family to live on this world."

He looked startled. He drew his knees up and leaned upon them, radiating a curiosity so similar to Daniel's that I wondered if all archeologists were the same, no matter from which world they

came. "You came to Earth from another world, like me? I mean, everyone seems so comfortable around you that I had begun to assume you were from here, but a separate species."

"I came from Chulak. It is one of the homeworlds of the Goa'uld Apophis. I am certain that Daniel Jackson will inform you of all the particulars concerning the Goa'uld when you begin your work with him. Your own god, Nefertum, was a Goa'uld. Earth is actually the home of your race, as it was to the Jaffa. A long time ago we were humans, but the Goa'uld manipulated our genetics and made us into the race we are at present."

Nyan's eyes were bright, tears forgotten in his fascination. "So, you were born on Chulak? You lived there all your life until you came here?"

"No, I was born on Triton, a planet ruled by the Goa'uld Chronos. My father was his Prime until he displeased Chronos, who murdered him. My mother and I escaped to Chulak."

"It must have been so lonely there."

"For a time," I told him, "my mother and I struggled to survive there at first. Then I began to make friends."

"Oh?" He leaned towards me, encouraging me to explain myself further.

"Yes, Master Bra'tac, Fro'tak, Joky'c, Shan'Auc..." I felt a thrill speaking her name. It had been so long since we had spoken and still she had the power to distract me. I found myself caught in the memory of our first meeting - a cool summer forest, she in a tree, throwing rotten punteci fruits at me as I attempted to gather wood for our poor dwelling's fire. I had clambered up the tree to find who was assaulting me, only to find myself stunned by hazel, almost fearful, eyes. She had been surprised by how quickly I climbed. Then she had giggled, calling me a tree frog and we then spent a pleasant afternoon in the tree talking about everything important at that moment in our young lives. Even then, she had known she would become a priestess. It was what she spoke of most while I listened to her raptly, truly ensnared in her presence, her words, her beauty. I had wanted right then to marry her, but a poor child of a disgraced Prime did not tell young women of rich families who wanted to become priestesses that they wanted them for his wife. Over the course of the next 10 years, we continued to meet in those woods, sometimes bringing friends, sometimes alone. But I never spoke my heart to her. It was destined not to be.

"Shan'Auc? Was he...?"

"She," I corrected, still not completely free of my reverie.

"Oh. Is she your wife?"

"No," I said sadly, "she is not. She is a high priestess. They do not marry."

Nyan's mouth twisted up. "I'm sorry. It sounds like you liked her very much."

I looked into his guileless face. There was sorrow in his eyes for me. So strange that a person I had known for less than a day could be so sympathetic. He reminded me so much of Daniel. "I did. However, the past cannot be changed. My life is here now."

He lay on his back, staring at the ceiling. Then he said quietly, "Did you feel like a coward when you came here?"

His question surprised me. "Not for a moment. What I did, I did to help my people. I did it to inspire them to usurp the Goa'uld - to teach them that the Goa'uld were not infallible or omniscient. Every Goa'uld who has died at the hands of the Tau'ri is a victory for the Jaffa. The farther the word spreads of their deaths at the hands of those believed to be slaves, the more they will rally to our cause and rid the universe of the Goa'uld."

"It must be nice to have so noble a cause to fight for." The tears threatened his equanimity. "I wish my reasons had been such."

"Perhaps you are here to find your cause, Nyan. Here you would fight against a great evil. Your government is much like those of the Tau'ri, blind to anything save their own avarice and ideology, but at least here at the SGC, they recognize that there is a far larger evil that needs to be obliterated. If you have the courage to join this fight, then you cannot consider yourself a coward."

Nyan turned on his side, staring hard at me. "I left my home and my family because I didn't want to die. I know my government; they'll disgrace my parents and take my sisters from them because they'll be deemed unfit to raise them. Nama and Petra aren't old enough to be without them. And here I will be on this alien world with a good job and a noble fight to win. What about them?" The tears began to fall again; his questions riddled with guilt.

"I am sorry for the fate of your family, Nyan. If I could return and rescue them from that fate, I would. But what would it serve if you returned to die? They will kill you. You know that; therefore, you must feel that you had a reason to be here. If it is only for self-preservation that you are here, then you must let the SGC know now. They would be willing to place you with a family from the SGC who could teach you the ways of the Tau'ri so that you could blend in if it is possible. Then you would be free to pursue your own agenda. Or, you could go to a world allied with the Tau'ri if you wished."

Nyan's eyebrows drew together as he considered my words. "Did they offer this to you when

you came here?"

"I am not the same. Since I carry a symbiote, I cannot live on this world out among its citizens. When the larva matured, it would be a danger to any human who would be near. You, however, look like them and carry nothing that would endanger them or this project."

"This is a secret project?" He glanced around everywhere, his eyes finally settling on the camera over in the corner. "They are watching us even now?" Suddenly he looked suspicious, as if expecting authorities to seize him for some inappropriate behaviour.

"They watch most of the base, but they would remove any cameras from your personal quarters if you requested it. Although they were suspicious of me for a long time, they did remove the cameras eventually when I requested it. You will need to earn their trust, but I believe it would not take them long to ascertain that you are not here to disrupt this facility."

Nyan continued his surveillance upon the surveillance. "I guess I'm just a little paranoid. My government regularly keeps its citizens under watch. 'For the good of the people', they always tell us. Order and adherence to law are the greatest virtues. What do they value here?"

"Many different things, each according to the individual. However, you will find people in the SGC of a like mind. They wish to destroy the Goa'uld and have given much to that cause."

"Did the Goa'uld do something to them? Is that why they fight? I mean, I can see that your reason to fight them is righteous - the freedom of your people. But what about Colonel O'Neill, Major Carter and Daniel Jackson? Why do they fight the Goa'uld?"

I stared at the camera as he did for long moments before I spoke. "Colonel O'Neill fights the Goa'uld because he is a righteous man. He fights because he cannot abide with the Goa'ulds' idea that his people are less than animals, to be used and thrown away when they have served the Goa'ulds' purpose. Major Carter fights them for much the same reason. She is also appalled by their use of science, which she feels is a perversion of the purpose of technology - to enrich life, to enhance life, to free people to reach farther with their minds, unencumbered by the petty needs of the flesh. Daniel..."

"He fights for the same reason?" he queried as I paused.

I almost lied. For some reason I felt that I would be intruding on Daniel telling this young stranger of his feelings. However, Nyan would soon learn from the people he worked with why Daniel was here. I vowed I would tell Daniel when I saw him that I had spoken these words to Nyan. "Daniel fights for grief. Apophis stole his wife from him and implanted her with his own mate. Daniel is fire to our ice - passion to our purpose. He has endured much in this war and still he will not relent. However, he is also much like you in his desire to learn, as well. To him

the universe is a mystery to be learned and taught to any with the desire to know. You will discover he is a kindred spirit to yourself. I have no doubt that you will enjoy working with him, learning what he knows because he will enjoy teaching you." I could feel my lips turning up into a smile, thinking of many times that Daniel had been allowed to disseminate information, including my lessons in English. His eyes would be light and carefree and his voice would move into soothing, gentle rhythms that would carry his words into my brain. He made love to me as he taught - with fire and passion and a gentleness that moved me to treasure him like the gift he was to me.

Nyan blinked sleepily, the thoughts in his head obviously giving way to his exhaustion. He bid me good night and fell promptly to sleep. The night staff continued their rounds, but for some strange reason, I could finally achieve a light state of Kel-no-reem.

-----*Maternal Instinct*-----

Usually, it was a pleasant surprise when Master Bra'tac came to the SGC. However, on this occasion, he carried with him his wounded student, Moac, informing us that Apophis had attacked Chulak. The Jaffa of Sokar, now loyal to him, had taken great pleasure in levelling villages and killing as many as they could, the able and helpless alike. Bra'tac was slightly burned himself, but already his symbiote was taking away his pain, though it could not take away his memory of the carnage that Apophis had wrought.

We laid the young man on the gurney, though it seemed more than obvious to myself and Master Bra'tac that he would soon leave us. It was unfair that he should have to die so young, his potential never realized. It also angered me that he would die at the hand of the one who he probably worshipped as a child - his god until Bra'tac taught him the truth. Bra'tac shared my rage, especially since he did not know why Apophis would turn on them in such a manner.

After our brief meeting with General Hammond and the rest of my team, Dr. Frazier sent word that Bra'tac should attend Moac immediately. "We have been his people for so long, Teal'c," he said quietly while we waited for Dr. Frazier to admit us. "What possible reason could he have to haphazardly destroy loyal soldiers who could further his cause? Has Sokar left him so much that he could not use more battle-trained warriors?"

"I do not know, my friend. Perhaps he judged us all to be shol'va and, therefore, unworthy of further existence."

"I lost the last of my kin, Teal'c. The village of Tel'hut was the first to be destroyed."

"My condolences to you. Were there no survivors at all?"

He leaned heavily against the nearest wall. His face was pale, tight with pain and anger that he

controlled with great effort. His eyes were full of sorrow. I clasped his shoulder, offering him strength and sympathy. "I do not know if there were survivors. We lost contact with them so abruptly, then the attack came upon us so swiftly." He shook his head, banishing the images that haunted him still.

"Perhaps you should come to my quarters, meditate."

A gentle smile banished some of his agitation. "I cannot leave Moac alone. I need to be at my student's side to ease his way into the next world."

"Understood." A nurse chose that moment to admit us into Moac's room.

"We've done everything we can," Dr. Frazier said quietly. Both us understood immediately what she did not say. Just before she left us alone, I could see the desolation in her eyes that she should lose this battle.

Gently, Bra'tac lay a hand against Moac's cheek. The young man stirred, then turned his eyes to his teacher as Bra'tac seated himself on the bed. "I have failed you," he said quietly.

"No," Bra'tac corrected, "it is I who have failed you. You are the bravest Jaffa I have ever trained."

Moac turned away, his eyes tight with pain. "I am scared," he whispered. I felt like an intruder, seeing such infirmity. The young man did not deserve to have anyone other than his trusted teacher see his vulnerability at this time.

"Kla mel kalach," were the last words the young man heard. Bra'tac's benediction. "His body is to be burned."

"I will see to it personally," I promised him.

"I am an old man, Teal'c. One day I wish to spread Moac's ashes on the grave of Apophis, but I do not know if I have the strength to fight any more."

"Many have died, old friend," I reminded him. It disturbed me to hear him speak this way. "But their deaths must not go in vain. Word of this must spread to all Jaffa."

"Yes," he agreed, turning to me with eyes drowning in despair and weariness, "but maybe it is for someone younger and stronger than I to spread that word."

"You are the strongest Jaffa I have ever known."

He chose not to refute me or comment on my words, his eyes riveted on the dead man's face. He then rose to meet my gaze. "In my 135 years, I have never seen a Goa'uld turn on those that carry its kind this way. He massacred so many that have worshipped him for so long."

"Perhaps he has done this to show the System Lords how truly powerful he has become."

"You know well Apophis has weapons that could have been used from space. There had to be some other purpose. His armies swept through Chulak as if..." His face became thoughtful, even as I suddenly realized why such actions disturbed me.

"...they were searching for something. Bra'tac, you must come with me. I think I know for what Apophis may have been searching, but I wish a second opinion." With one last look at the young man lying in the bed, we departed for Daniel's lab.

As we walked down the hallway to reach the elevator, Bra'tac watched me discerningly. "What has transpired since last I saw you, Teal'c? You are happy, almost joyous."

"I am, old friend. I have found my kalach pat ryn."

He clasped my shoulder, congratulating me. "Do I know this person?" At my nod he asked, "Is he or she someone on your team?"

"Daniel."

His dark eyes widened. "Truly? He is the star of your soul? An interesting choice, Teal'c."

I felt so young, again his student. "I wish your approval, old friend. I may wish you to perform kalach tal'syba for us."

The hand tightened as his smile broadened. "I would be honored to perform it for you. Has he given his consent?"

My eyes could not meet his. "I have not yet asked him."

"We have so little time in this life. Do not hesitate. If he is truly your kalach pat ryn, then you must let him know what is in your heart."

"He knows what is in my heart, but I am unsure of how he will react to such a binding. Such a union is frowned upon on this world, with a few exceptions. We are forced to keep it secret from everyone around us."

"You should not, Teal'c, especially not to those closest to you. It will only serve to bring disharmony amongst you should it be discovered."

We resumed walking to the labs, Bra'tac's words echoing in my mind. I knew I should tell O'Neill and Major Carter about myself and Daniel, but Daniel seemed not to like that idea. Even now, the military attitude disturbed him. He did not like the way homosexuals were treated, but he could find no way to protest it without losing his job. I knew the anger he felt at what he called his own hypocrisy. Even I could see no way around it at this time. It was a dilemma. But Bra'tac was right. Too often, such secrets only served to sow discord where it need not be.

But for some reason, I still hesitated to tell them. Perhaps the time was just not auspicious.

Daniel was in his office, perusing some document when we arrived. He turned to us, a small smile gracing his face, though it faded quickly at our urgent expressions. I described what Bra'tac had related to me. His eyes became thoughtful.

In two words he confirmed what I feared, "The Harcesis."

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Kheb, though a beautiful world, made me uneasy, especially after we reached the temple. Unexplained deaths, a missing child and Daniel's strange distance from us. From the moment we stepped into the temple proper, Daniel became distracted. He seemed oddly in tune with this place - his voice hushed, respectful. O'Neill entered the temple with Master Bra'tac and Daniel, but came out only a few minutes later, frustrated, but resigned that the situation would not be resolved quickly. He sat heavily down on the stairs, awaiting either Daniel's or Bra'tac's reappearance.

I would, however, admit that I was overjoyed to see the fire in Bra'tac's eyes when he returned to us. Whatever the monk had told him, it had shattered the burden his student's death had laid upon his shoulders. I was glad not to have to return to Chulak at this time. It was something that had weighed heavily on my mind, especially since Bra'tac and Moac had come through the Stargate. I knew that Bra'tac expected me to return to Chulak to continue the rebellion once he died. And until recently, I would have been more than ready to accept the responsibility, but the change in my relationship with Daniel made me a little apprehensive about leaving Earth. Would Daniel remain on Earth? Would Daniel ever feel comfortable in the presence of Jaffa, a lone human? I was not especially inclined to find this out at the moment. It was part of the reason I had not asked Daniel to join his soul with mine. I was not sure if his ties to Earth were stronger than his feelings for me. In my world, he was seen as valueless, a luxury of the false gods; whereas on Earth he was seen as a vital part of the SGC.

Bra'tac took a guard stance at the entrance to the temple, lost in his thoughts. I felt no desire to



disturb him. I still felt uneasy, especially after seeing the strange mist that had played over the water. This was a place of superstition, a place where gods, false and true, walked without the scientific dissection they would have received on Earth. After 3 years with the Tau'ri, I felt uncomfortable with that aspect of my old world. Science explained everything, they told me. Here, science did not seem to exist.

Bra'tac finally came to me when the sun began to fall in the sky. His eyes still held ghosts, but they were pushed far behind his easy smile. "You are very thoughtful, Teal'c."

"Yes, old friend. Our people are mired in old beliefs, passed down through the generations of gods and demons. The Tau'ri consider themselves above such superstitions. Yet, I cannot help but feel the presence of those spirits here."

My teacher looked around. His eyes still looked far away, though I could tell he weighed my words. "There *are* spirits here. The Tau'ri may scorn their existence, but spirits exist. We have seen much, you and I. You cannot deny that some of what we have seen can only be explained by the presence of spirits. These days, I have seen many. They know I will soon join them." At my dismayed expression, he added quickly, "Not today, Teal'c. It will not be today."

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The battle ended quickly with the appearance of Oma Desala. Both Bra'tac and I felt a great honor to behold such a being even as O'Neill and Major Carter seemed uneasy. Daniel's reaction was...unnerving. He appeared so calm, so contemplative, but he was so absent-minded that he forgot his boots until O'Neill pointed it out to him. He pulled them on quickly and joined us outside the temple. As I watched, his expression became more and more closed. He would not meet our eyes. As we walked slowly in the dark back to the gate, he said absolutely nothing. Night creatures grew as silent as we approached, but Bra'tac and I slowed our pace for our friends who could not see as well in the dark. A swath of stars filled the sky, marking our position in the cosmos as being close to the edge of the galaxy.

Daniel stumbled, falling to one knee. O'Neill assisted him, chiding him to watch where he was stepping. However, beyond thanking him for the help, Daniel said nothing, slowing down even more to be sure of his footing. Many hours later, we reached the Stargate. The contingent we had left at the gate breathed a sigh of relief at our arrival, even though O'Neill had been in contact with them. Without a word, Daniel went directly to the DHD and began to dial Earth's address. Major Coburn sent the signal to open the iris and all of us departed.

Still silent, Daniel walked directly to the infirmary for our usual exam. With sad eyes, O'Neill watched him go, then turned to the General to make his initial report. "We came, we saw and Mother Nature kicked their butts," he quipped.

"Where's the child?" the General asked, looking around at the personnel milling around the Embarkation room.

"Um, we don't really know now," O'Neill said. "The alien took off with him for parts unknown."

"Why don't *you* have him?"

O'Neill shifted uneasily from foot to foot. "Well, we weren't in a position to argue, General. She'd just blasted the entire contingent of Jaffa to smithereens and I just don't think it would have done us any good to try and snatch the kid from her. You'll really need to talk to Daniel about it. If he's not busy lighting fires or grabbing weapons and pointing them at you."

The General stared at him. "Long story, Sir," O'Neill finally said. "It's been a very long day."

"Report to the infirmary, Colonel."

We arrived in the infirmary to find Daniel in the middle of his examination. He looked up at us, but quickly glanced away. He said nothing. I could not fathom why he remained so silent. Why he seemed almost ashamed. It could only have stemmed from his time alone with Oma Desala or with the monk. Since he had arrived first, he departed first, leaving us all with some apprehension. As usual, I was given only a cursory examination which allowed me to search for where Daniel had hidden himself.

His office, the labs and the commissary had not been visited by him. I checked with both O'Neill and Major Carter, but he had not spoken to them since leaving us in the infirmary. The guard at the front desk said he had not left the mountain. I could not find him. I proceeded to my room to find the door had been unlocked and candles were already lit. Daniel sat on my floor mat, already deep in meditation on a single candle he had placed before him. I sat on the bed.

"I honestly thought it was me doing all that stuff," he said self-deprecatingly. "I honestly thought I'd learn to protect the boy. How stupid."

"How were you to know that you had not achieved all these feats, Daniel? How were you to know that she operated *through* you as opposed to handing you a key to achieve this higher realm?"

He snorted unelegantly. "C'mon, Teal'c, who am I? I'm no one, nothing, just another person taking up space in the universe."

I moved to stand before him, staring into eyes that were troubled, confused and angry. "You are not 'nothing', Daniel. And you are hardly here just to take up space. Already you have achieved much and you are only a third of my years." I placed the candle to one side and sat before him,

our knees touching. It was a comfortable position for both of us - distance to focus our minds onto what task we bent them, yet touch that let each be aware that he was not alone. "I know that you are not appreciated as much as you should be. This planet should be grateful to you for what you have done, but it ignores you and belittles you."

"It's not that, Teal'c," he sighed. "I just...Do you think I'd be a good father?"

Ah. I understood some of it now. "Yes, Daniel. I believe you would be."

He stared at me skeptically. "The quality that makes a true teacher is the love of learning. How much you love to learn and how much you love to help others learn. You have to have that before you can be a good teacher. But what makes a parent? I mean, having the kid isn't hard, but what makes a father a good father as opposed to just being the other person who contributed the DNA?"

"I believe you are asking the wrong person, Daniel. I do not consider myself to be a good parent. Rya'c has been raised almost exclusively by his mother. And, though I believe it not to be the sole trait to being a good parent, it certainly is important for the child to have the contributions of all those who are part of his life. Rya'c never met my mother - she died a few years after we escaped to Chulak - which I greatly regret. My mother was a very wise woman, a very strong woman. She told me that the life of a Prime would be difficult, but that it would be rewarding, if for no other reason than the sense of accomplishment it would bring. When Bra'tac told me the truth of the false gods, I saw the position as a means to achieving freedom for my people, which still made it an ambition to fulfill. I never had time for Rya'c. At times, I thought of him as only a means to continue my family legacy."

"That can't be true, Teal'c," Daniel said quietly. "I've seen how much you love him."

I sighed gently. "I do love him. He is my son. But my life has been spent in the service of my people and I have had little time for him. I listen to the people here speaking of their children's lives, the daily interaction they have with their children - good and bad. Even Dr. Frazier speaks of Cassandra's 'day' in great detail. I do not know what Rya'c does every day, in what routines he may participate. I do not even know who his friends are in the Land of Light; he always stays home when I am there. I do not know anything of when he performed his 'firsts' - his first walk, his first words, his first pains. All of these things your people speak of with great delight when they speak of their children. I have not even participated in his training. Such things are important to Jaffa society, but, in my zeal to serve my people, I have been unable to be with him. Most Jaffa have many children, since so many are lost in battle, but I only had time to have one."

"So, how many did Bra'tac have?"

"Fourteen. All sons. But most of them died in various battles. However, they, too, had many children. He may have lost them all, however, in the attack on Chulak. The town they lived in was the first to be destroyed. It was the town closest to the gate."

"I hope he hasn't lost them all," Daniel murmured. "That would be a tragedy, to lose your family all at once."

I took his hands. "One you know well."

Daniel grimaced. "But to lose that many at once..."

"Two or twenty. It makes no difference. Such a loss is hard to bear."

Daniel always shied from reminders of his past. He did not wish to dwell on it now. I gently stroked his cheek to distract him, but his eyes remained troubled. I leaned forward and kissed him softly, let him make the decision as to whether or not we would continue. With a small cry of near pain, he deepened our embrace, pulling himself into my lap. With desperate fingers, he tore off my shirt as well as his own. I cupped his face in my hands as I gentled what had started desperately, hoping that he would understand that I wished him to slow down and let his feelings move from the near anger I could feel in his embrace to peace.

With a sigh, I felt his body relax against mine as he accepted my tranquility. He trembled a little as the anger slipped away from him, as I knew it would. He could never stay angry long when he knew it was foolish to hang onto it; however, I knew that he would hoard this anger deep within himself - a further self-criticism. He was so complex, my Daniel. I stroked his cheek, drawing his attention to me, not to his musings. He gave me a small smile.

I kissed him hungrily, letting my needs banish the last of Daniel's musings. Never would he let me feel that he was anything other than attentive to my desires, which, at the moment, I used to distract him. He nibbled on one of my ears. My fingers plucked at his nipples, eliciting a hiss and a sharper nip. I smiled as I could feel him melting into my embrace, today's events seemingly forgotten.

I picked him up easily, tossing him onto the bed as if he weighed nothing. He bounced, laughing. He rolled forward enough to grab one of my arms, pulling me onto the bed with him when he rolled back. I controlled the fall enough to not crush him, stiffening my arms to either side of his waist so that I did not even touch his supine body. Blue eyes nearly black with desire, Daniel drew me to him, until I was settled atop him comfortably. I had worried before that my weight was too much for him to bear, but he never complained and had, on occasion, commented that he liked the solidity of my body pinning him to the mattress. He had said I felt like security - a blanket to keep him warm and safe.

Daniel became restless beneath me, desiring intensity. I could feel from the playfulness with which he nipped and licked me that the shadows had left. I rolled us over giving him the freedom to do whatever he wished. His hands stroked my chest, brushing my nipples. My hands stroked his thighs. Staring deeply into my eyes so that I could see his pleasure mounting, his hands began to move down slowly, teasingly.

The symbiote peeked out as his fingers brushed the pouch. Daniel froze. He began shivering, the light in his eyes dying as they unfocused. Fear rose in me. The last time I had observed such a reaction had been when he was incarcerated in the white padded room during the infestation of Machello's device.

"Daniel?" I queried softly, not wishing to panic him.

His eyes shifted down to my pouch, a dark, fierce madness filling them. "I hate you," he hissed at the symbiote, even as it disappeared back into its home as if it could feel the animosity Daniel projected at it. "I hate everything you stand for. I hate everything you could ever possibly be. I hate all of your kind and, right now, I'd love to see every last one of you dead! If you weren't keeping Teal'c alive, I'd..." he choked, unable to finish his outburst. He fell heavily on me, trapping it so he would not have to look upon it.

A single tear fell on my chest. Looking down, I saw only one track, as if it had escaped his iron control. "I'm sorry, Teal'c. I'm sorry. I...I can't...Not now. All their fault. Poor baby, hunted like an animal by those..."

"Daniel."

He stared at my chest, his eyes once again losing focus. "If it wasn't for them, I-I...you wouldn't be a slave to that *thing*, that worm. I know you accepted it a long time ago that your life was entwined with theirs, but sometimes it's hard for me to accept. It's the worst kind of slavery - owing your existence to that...that... I-I j-j-just want to r-reach in there and free you. B-but I can't. I c-can't. I would kill you and I..." He was running out of energy.

I drew him up so that his head rested on my shoulder. He lay on me heavily, becoming boneless as he sagged in defeat. "I wanted a family, Teal'c," he finally said in a dull voice. "Sha're and I wanted kids, but 5000 years of change on an alien planet made us just incompatible enough that we probably would've only had kids if Sha're had taken fertility drugs. And yet Apophis had absolutely no problem. When I saw her pregnant, I didn't see that she'd been raped by that monster, only that she'd gotten the child we had wanted from someone else. I was so angry, Teal'c. If you hadn't been there...if you hadn't showed me what an idiot I was, I would have hurt her more than Apophis probably did. Then I...lost her. I wanted the baby. Some part of her. I was so stupid, Teal'c. If I hadn't been so greedy to grab him, I would probably have figured out much faster that it couldn't possibly have been me who was doing all those things. I

just wanted something."

"I understand, my love. Children are the manifestation of the love of a man and woman. I believe this, even after beholding all the difficulty the Tau'ri have holding their families together. It is the simple truth of my world that parents love their children and that the love of children for their parents is one of the greatest joys in life. I know this joy whenever I see Rya'c. I sorrow that you have not felt this joy, Daniel."

Daniel's face rubbed over my shoulder, a comforting gesture. "Thank you, Teal'c. Thank you for just being here. I love you."

I gently stroked his cheek with my thumb as his eyes slowly closed. Soon he slept. "I love you, my Daniel, my kalach pat ryn," I said to his sleeping face.

-----*Crystal Skull*-----

My symbiote moved restlessly. It had not been affected by the radiation, but my skin still prickled from its effects. I could not ascertain the source of its discomfort since it had healed far worse dosages of radiation from various campaigns in which I had participated as a soldier in Apophis' service. Perhaps this particular type of radiation disturbed it more than the kinds I had been exposed to prior to this mission.

Of course, it could also be assumed that it was merely reflecting my own mood. Daniel was gone and it was my fault. Our mission to P7X-377 to study a crystal skull had gone awry when I fired at the skull to prevent it from doing...what? Both O'Neill and Major Carter had been paying attention to other matters when Daniel went to the skull to stare into its eyes. As he had stood there, some type of effect manifested, the nature of which I could not ascertain. I had reacted instinctively. My zat'n'tkel blast had stopped the effect, but Daniel had vanished.

I had done something harmful to the one I wished to protect most. I could not forgive myself.

Major Carter had suffered the worst of the radiation. After we fell across the event horizon, Dr. Frazier's medical personnel, dressed in what they called Level 4 hazmat suits, had taken us to the decontamination area where we were all scrubbed mercilessly. Major Carter had not woken at all as O'Neill had wavered in and out of hallucinations and consciousness. We had had an interesting conversation concerning the appearance of god and whether or not he would choose to have a second coming in the infirmary. I believe that O'Neill would have no memory of this conversation when he awoke. A pity. I wished to further argue with him that I did not believe the Christian god looked like George Burns.

Kel-no-reem was out of the question. My symbiote refused to settle and I felt too much anger at myself for sending Daniel to oblivion. He'd been flung away by the force of my blast but as he

had started to fall, he'd vanished from my sight. I would feel sick tomorrow, but I could not meditate.

I had to return to the planet. I had to bring the instrument of Daniel's disappearance here to be studied. Neither O'Neill nor Major Carter could endure a second exposure to the radiation at this time. I could only hope that whatever had happened to Daniel gave him some immunity to the radiation or he was already dead. I would go to General Hammond to propose a retrieval of the device. Determined to complete this mission, I forced myself to settle into meditation, to the initial antagonism of my symbiote, and let it repair the last of the radiation effects.

The next morning, I found the General in the control room, engaged in a search of the cavern via the MALP. I made my request and, though he initially was concerned about my health, I assured him that I was physically able to complete the task. I would not be exposed to the radiation for very long. The General gave his permission and I went to ready myself.

Keeping in mind that the retrieval should be as brief as possible, I jogged to the pyramid and across the narrow causeway. I spent a moment searching for Daniel, but he was still not to be seen. I picked up the skull, which had been knocked to one side, from its pedestal, storing it in the container I had been given to protect it. I ran back across the narrow ledge, then turned back to see if, perhaps, by removing the skull, Daniel would reappear. He was not there.

But something disturbed my symbiote though I could see nothing.

I reported back to the General that I had completed my mission and still not seen Daniel. As directed, I took the skull to Dr. Rothman who babbled incessantly about its similarity to the skull retrieved by Daniel's grandfather. I wondered about Nicholas Ballard. If he were still alive, why had he not taken responsibility for Daniel's care when he was a child? If he was dead, when had it happened? I recalled our conversation about parents, my remarks concerning my regret that Rya'c had never met his grandmother. From our briefing prior to this mission, I knew he must have known his grandfather - the fact that the man had insisted he be called "Nick" as opposed to his proper title. I truly wondered what kind of man he had been.

Dr. Rothman's initial analysis did not earn my trust. He thought it had been created on Earth. The General was just as displeased as I. As he made his way to his office, I decided that it would behoove me to rest.

With deliberate ritual, I slowly lit the candles and lowered myself to the mat. My symbiote seemed to have calmed, perhaps feeling the strain of the protracted delay in tending to our needs. Time slipped away as I drew myself into meditation. I could step away from the fear of losing Daniel to recall clearly the sequence of events that led to his disappearance. Daniel had said it was a teleportation device. Perhaps he had been teleported to another place on the planet. I could not believe that the skull would take him to another planet - it simply did not

contain enough power that I could ascertain to move Daniel light-years away. Perhaps it had teleported him to the Stargate - to some coordinates pre-set by the skull. I would relate this theory to Major Carter when I went to her lab. A course of action decided, I went deeper into Kel-no-reem. Many hours passed.

Suddenly my symbiote shifted uneasily. The same feeling it had on the planet. I could feel no effects from the radiation at this time.

"Is there someone present?" I called, though I saw no one. My symbiote grew even more agitated. I rose to my feet and went to my door to see if anyone had just passed. The hall was empty.

But I did not feel alone.

My symbiote was still restless. No one was in the hall, but the presence would not fade. I returned my quarters. It was strange that I no longer felt that unusual sensation as I closed the door. My symbiote had settled down and I easily returned to meditation.

The next morning, I found O'Neill in the hall outside my door. "Let's go get something to eat, big guy." He and I proceeded to the commissary. I told him of the feeling I had while in meditation.

"Weird," he said, but commented no further.

Several hours later no progress had been made. Major Carter had been unable to find any properties of the skull that could have teleported Daniel. They decided to send a UAV to check the area around the pyramid to see if perhaps he had been sent outside. As its search began, Major Carter offered an interesting suggestion.

"But what about Daniel's grandfather?"

"Nick?" Colonel O'Neill said.

"Well, he claimed that the skull teleported him somewhere. He may be the only person who actually knows where Daniel is."

Dr. Frazier shifted uneasily. "I'm not so sure, Major. I've already taken the liberty of looking him up. His current address is a psychiatric institution in Oregon."

"Psychiatric?" O'Neill queried.

"Apparently, his failure to prove the crystal skull was more than just a curiosity caused a severe mental breakdown from which he's never been able to fully recover. Nick checked himself in."



"Why wouldn't Daniel have told us that?" Major Carter asked.

"Daniel was a regular visitor there up until 4 years ago - right before he joined the Stargate program. Apparently, Nick still talks about him all the time. The doctor I spoke to says any friends of Dr. Jackson's are welcome."

Major Carter looked at the General. "We don't have much else to go on."

The General apparently agreed with her. "Find out what you can. But I needn't remind you the details of this matter will have to remain classified. That means you won't be able to tell him what's happened to Dr. Jackson or where the skull was found."

A flight was quickly arranged to the state of Oregon. After receiving directions, we drove from the airport to a building on a large piece of property. Several people were outside, but their demeanor was not relaxed, despite the tasteful gardening and landscaping. Some ran around making strange noises or screaming. Some of them appeared to be trying to hide themselves. I could not comprehend this behavior. Both Major Carter and O'Neill seemed extremely uncomfortable - their heads kept low, but watchful, their eyes full of pity. We were directed to a waiting room where the people stared at us curiously, in some cases fearfully. A nurse finally came in, asking what we wanted. She went to inform the doctor of our presence and soon we were taken to him.

An old man with wild white hair and bushy eyebrows looked curiously up at us when the doctor introduced us as Daniel's friends. He spoke with a thick accent I did not recognize as being a familiar one. I have heard many different American accents from the many personnel on the base, but I had never heard this one. He glanced at O'Neill's proffered hand as if had no idea what to do with it.

Again, my symbiote felt uneasy. I stepped back and let O'Neill and Major Carter speak to him. As they questioned him, his eyes kept drifting over to the corner near me. At first he seemed eager to answer their queries, even though he spoke somewhat bitterly about his disbelief in Daniel's theories, even as Daniel had apparently not believed his. It was strange to me that he would be so ready to not trust his grandson's theories. He should have been the first to support him, especially since Daniel had been right.

It struck me how much Daniel resembled him in demeanor. Nicholas Ballard had a fire in his eyes similar to Daniel's. He spoke with similar conviction. He could still defy O'Neill's wishes, even though he was in no real position to argue with him. He refused to divulge any information until he could see the skull. He would not be moved.

After several minutes of silence from the old man, O'Neill muttered, "I guess we're going to need

another ticket to Colorado."

Since Nicholas Ballard had checked himself into the institution, he was able to discharge himself. It took many papers and assurances from Colonel O'Neill to release him, but soon we were back on a plane heading to the mountain. We placed him in a VIP room while Colonel O'Neill went to explain to the General why he had brought Daniel's grandfather to the base. I stationed myself with the assigned guard outside of the room in case he desired something. He peered out of the room once, looking at me.

"Young man," he said quietly. "May I have some water?" I inclined my head and went to the nearest water cooler to get him some. He took the paper cup from me.

"They call you...Teal'c?"

"That is my name, Nicholas Ballard."

"Just call me Nick," he smiled. The smile was small, a smile I had seen on Daniel's face often. He sipped at the cool water. "That is an interesting symbol you wear. Since you are a friend of Daniel's I would assume it to be a symbol of Apophis - the serpent god of ancient Egypt."

"You are correct," I informed him. Oddly, he said nothing further, simply drinking his water.

Soon we were summoned to the lab where the crystal skull had been put on display. Immediately, Nicholas Ballard went to it, eyes lighting up in delight to see it. Dr. Rothman attempted to introduce himself, but he was ignored as the old man's eyes beheld the artifact. Daniel. Although Daniel might be a little more diplomatic if the situation necessitated his social skills, his grandfather acted just as he would in a similar situation. The presence of the skull gave him a reason to finally tell us his tale. It was a fantastic tale, worthy of a movie like the ones O'Neill rented for me. Were I not a Jaffa and 100 years old, I might be skeptical. However, even Dr. Rothman recognized the ancient words Nicholas Ballard quoted.

"That's Mayan," Dr Rothman translated. "'The enemy of my enemy is my friend'."

O'Neill thanked Nicholas Ballard, then asked me to escort him back to his quarters. All the way up, he watched me carefully, though he said nothing. When we reached his room, I informed him that the airman would be willing to see to his needs.

"When you see Daniel, will you tell him I...? Oh, never, never, never mind. It's something I should tell him myself." Strange that my symbiote was once again uneasy, even as Nicholas Ballard was taking off his coat and moving to sit upon the bed.

"Very well," I said to him, leaving him to his own thoughts.

The next morning, I reported to O'Neill and the General in the conference room. "Well, I have to say that it was kinda wild," O'Neill was saying as I took my seat. "Carter's right. He described the cavern exactly. He's been there."

"Just how did he get there, Colonel? As far as we know there's only 2 Stargates on Earth."

"The skull?"

"But how, Colonel? We've had that thing here for a few days now and no one that we know of has disappeared. And you told me, Major Carter, that Dr. Rothman stared directly into its eyes. He's still here."

O'Neill shrugged. "I'm not the expert in these things, Sir. I'm just tossing out a possible theory. I mean, Nick's pretty sure about these giants and he's very obviously been to that planet. Either that or it took him to someplace so similar it's virtually indistinguishable from this one and where on Earth do we have anything like that? Weird as it sounds, I think he's actually more sane than he realizes."

"Be that as it may, Colonel, it still doesn't really help us locate Dr. Jackson."

"Well, General," Major Carter said, "if Nick has been to that planet, he must have somehow triggered something in the skull that allowed him to travel there. Perhaps there is something about his and Daniel's brainwaves or genes that makes them more susceptible to its effect. Perhaps we should have him..."

"No," the General said sternly. "I won't authorize using him to attempt to locate Dr. Jackson. It's enough of a problem that he's here in the first place. Secondly, he's older than I am. How do we know a second trip through the device won't kill him - cause a heart attack or something similar?"

Dr. Frazier agreed. "We also know that the device emits muon radiation. Do you really think that a man that old could deal with that kind of strain? Think about how long it took you two, two extremely healthy and considerably younger people, to recover. He's a spry old guy, from what you've said, and probably in great shape for his age, but he's not as resilient as you two are."

As the room grew silent, I moved to the observation window to look down at the Chappa'ai. Major Carter joined me, a very discerning look on her face. Her eyes held a question that I would have answered had we not been in such a public setting. Suddenly, the sound of footsteps descending the metal staircase drew our attention. Two young airmen and Daniel's grandfather came down the stairs. My symbiote became anxious once again.

"Sirs, Mr. Ballard insisted on seeing both of you immediately" she said to the General as she saluted.

The older man looked excited, his eyes shining brightly. "Forgive me. *He* insisted. Daniel is here."

"Here?" the General asked incredulously, looking around.

"Standing right beside me."

"He's lost a few pounds," O'Neill quipped.

"Jack, don't be an ass," he said in a manner so similar to Daniel's that none of us could deny that he knew something he should not.

"Daniel?"

"We must go back to the planet," Nicholas Ballard said, his voice filled with a conviction I found strange from one who could not know of what he spoke.

"Planet?" the General said angrily as he looked at O'Neill.

"Not a word, Sir. I swear," O'Neill denied, shaking his head.

"Daniel told me all about the Stargate. We must replace the skull on the pedestal so that the giant aliens will come." He looked a little confused as he continued, "Something must have interrupted this process."

"Uh, Teal'c fired a zat. That's all I can imagine it would be, Sir," O'Neill said.

"Why didn't you say something sooner?" General Hammond asked Nicholas Ballard.

"Well, I thought I...I was hearing voices," the old man said quietly. "It wouldn't have been for the first time."

Dr. Frazier looked skeptical. "Forgive me, but why are you the only person who can see him?"

"Perhaps because I went through the same experience." He paused for a moment, his head cocked in a manner of attending instruction. "General Hammond, if you let us go now, you may be able to see your granddaughter's play."

The General looked startled. "I was alone in my office when Kayla called," he told O'Neill. He looked around as if Daniel might suddenly appear now that he had acknowledged his existence. "Dr. Jackson, are you absolutely certain you and SG-1 can safely return to the planet?"

"Yes," Nicholas Ballard said decisively after a small pause.

"It's good enough for me, Sir," O'Neill smiled.

The General still looked around. "You have a go, SG-1."

O'Neill took Nicholas Ballard's arm gently. "I guess we're off to see the giant aliens." For some reason I could not fathom, he very much wished to meet these aliens.

While we readied ourselves to depart for P7X-377, Daniel's grandfather continued to speak to the invisible presence of Daniel. It was as if one were listening to a phone conversation. After a few minutes, I ignored his monologue. It was not my place to eavesdrop on even half a conversation. If Daniel wished Nicholas Ballard to relay a message to me, he would have had no compunctions in doing so. I nearly smiled. Now that Daniel could communicate with someone, his scientific curiosity had taken over. Major Carter and I left the gear-up room before O'Neill and Nicholas Ballard so that she could check the ambient radiation levels before our departure.

A few minutes later, O'Neill and Daniel's grandfather entered. When Nicholas Ballard saw the Stargate, his eyes lit with a familiar gleam. As the event horizon lashed out, he jerked backwards with a gasp. "So, this is what you have been doing these past few years?"

General Hammond's voice rang down from the control booth, "SG-1, you have a go. Maintain radio silence." "Then, behind *that* there is another world? You must tell me everything," he said, I hoped, to Daniel. His eyes did not waver from the event horizon as both Major Carter and O'Neill walked through.

"After you, Nicholas Ballard," I said graciously. He paused, as so many who travelled their first time through the Stargate have, at the threshold. Then his courage carried him into the unknown.

As quickly as possible, we walked to the pyramid, Daniel's grandfather looking around as much as he could. When we reached the cavern, his eyes widened, "It's just as I remembered. This is where they live."

We traversed the narrow causeway to the pedestal. I extracted the skull from the case, handing it to Nicholas Ballard. With great reverence he placed it on the platform. "Now we must wait for the giant aliens," he instructed.

"That has a nice ring to it," O'Neill said cheerfully. Truly, I did not understand his exuberance to meet these aliens. He leaned towards his shoulder, speaking into his radio. "General Hammond, we are in position."

"Understood, Colonel. Proceed."

For several moments nothing happened. Then the skull began to glow. Major Carter consulted her meter.

"Colonel, radiation is climbing again." The effect I had observed while Daniel had stared into the skull's eyes had begun. It took much control to curb my instincts to stop it. A hot wind blew, tossing the hair of my companions.

"This is incredible," Nicholas Ballard muttered.

"Daniel said to let this happen," O'Neill said, his voice rising. The chamber began to turn intolerably bright. It grew to a near blinding intensity, then suddenly died.

They were gone. I called their names, but could see none of them.

Daniel had not reappeared.

My heart heavy, I could only hope that they had found each other; that the others were now with Daniel, wherever he was. I informed General Hammond, who told me to return to the SGC. Slowly, I made my way back to the Stargate, each step away from where I had left them harder than the last. I entered the coordinates for Earth.

"Teal'c?" was the first thing General Hammond said when I reached the other side.

"Colonel O'Neill, Major Carter and Nicholas Ballard vanished, General Hammond. The same effect initiated and they disappeared. I am sorry, General Hammond."

"That's ok, son," he said kindly. "All we can do now is wait."

Less than an hour later, they returned without Nicholas Ballard. Daniel stared forlornly at the gate as it shut down. I saw O'Neill reach to comfort him, even as Daniel told him that he'd be fine. I felt some anger that Daniel's grandfather had chosen again to leave Daniel behind while he pursued his own interests, but I knew that Daniel would not appreciate my ire. I swallowed it down as I walked with him to the infirmary.

"It's a pity you didn't get to meet them," Daniel said as he sat on the bed, waiting for his tests to

begin.

"I am more concerned about your health, Daniel Jackson," I said formally, all too aware of our location. "How do you feel after your travails?"

As I spoke, Dr. Frazier entered, pulling on a pair of latex gloves. "You can go ahead and tell him, Daniel. I'm interested in that myself."

Daniel gave her a lopsided smile. "I'd be a bit worried if you weren't. It was so weird, being here and not being here. I tried talking to everyone, but the only one who knew I was here besides Nick was you, Teal'c."

"Me?"

He nodded. "Remember when you were in your quarters, doing Kel-no-reem, and you suddenly asked 'is there someone present?' It was me. Well, you knew I was there, sorta. You walked through me to go look out in the hall, but you knew I was there." As he spoke, Dr. Frazier carried out several tests, checking his blood pressure, reflexes.

"My symbiote grew agitated."

"*Junior* knew I was there?!" he cried aghast. Dr. Frazier shined her little flashlight into his eyes.

I could see that the idea did not appeal to him. He stared at my midsection as if he expected my symbiote to suddenly pop out and demand something from him.

"Well, that's interesting," Dr. Frazier observed. "I wonder if the symbiote's senses allows him to perceive other dimensions? I assume that's what happened."

Daniel rubbed his head as if he were experiencing a headache. "I don't really think so. I think I was 'out of phase' somehow. Sam would probably be the better one to figure out what happened. So, I guess *Junior* feels other 'states' somehow?"

"So, what happened in this other 'state'?" she asked. She attached electrodes to his temples and chest.

"Well, I could walk through anything, couldn't touch a thing, didn't feel hungry, thirsty or tired. I felt like I was a ghost."

She gave him an assessing gaze. "How do you feel now?"

"Hungry, thirsty and exhausted."

"Well, a few more tests and we'll be done here. Teal'c, would you get him some water? We can at least take care of that right now." She checked his ears.

Daniel accepted the paper cup from me and slowly drank the water. Years in desert climates had taught him to take water slowly lest he agitate his system. He held the cup back out to me in a mute request for more. After a look to Dr. Frazier for permission, her nod allowed me to get more for him. He drank it just as slowly then Dr. Frazier proceeded to lay her stethoscope on him to measure his breathing.

"Well, on the surface, you appear to be all right, Daniel, but I still want to check you out on the MRI and I will be taking more blood. Both the Colonel and Major Carter came back sick with muon radiation and I just want to make sure it didn't affect you. Teal'c, could you get one of the VIP rooms ready for Daniel and make sure that there's a meal for him? Ahh, no protest, Dr. Jackson. I want you nearby just in case something shows up. You need sleep, you need nourishment and I'm not letting you off-base until I'm certain that you're not adversely affected by your experience."

Daniel frowned at her. "I'm just hungry and tired."

She gave him a look that no one liked to be the recipient of. "Let me be the judge of that. If it wasn't for the fact that you're not exhibiting any symptoms of radiation poisoning, I'd make you stay here. But I'll compromise with the VIP room."

I left them as Dr. Frazier prepared him for the MRI. In the hall I found O'Neill and Major Carter. "How's he doing?" she asked.

"He is hungry and tired," I informed her. "Dr. Frazier will allow him to stay in a VIP room rather than the infirmary, but he will not be allowed to leave the base tonight."

"Our Doc Frazier is a wise woman," O'Neill said solemnly.

"Did he say anything?" Major Carter asked me, giving O'Neill a strange look. Both fell in step with me as I proceeded to the coordinator of the billets.

"Yes, he said that he could not touch anything and that he was in some kind of altered state. He did not appear to exhibit any substantially detrimental effects from this state, but Dr. Frazier wishes to be certain."

"Thanks, Teal'c," Major Carter said, laying a hand on my arm. She patted me affectionately, then left with Colonel O'Neill. The coordinator was most helpful in procuring the room for Daniel.



It was not often that the rooms were used since very few VIPs came to the project. If my memory served me correctly, the last time they were employed was when Major Davis stayed after the foothold incident.

After ensuring the room was ready for Daniel's use, I returned to the infirmary to check on the progress of Dr. Frazier's tests. One of the nurses told me she would be finished soon, so I decided to wait. When Daniel arrived, he was yawning widely. We went to the cafeteria, but had our food packed so we could eat in the room. Daniel ate heartily, obviously hungry. I had not allowed him to bring coffee as he needed to sleep and in his depleted state the caffeine might not allow him to achieve this.

He was chewing thoughtfully on his pie when he said, "So it was Junior who felt me, huh?"

"Apparently. Were you in Nicholas Ballard's room when he began to request that I convey a message to you?" At Daniel's nod, I continued, "My symbiote felt you then as well."

Daniel's eyes began to droop. He opened his mouth to request that I stay, but his eyes drifted over to the camera in the corner of the room. He bid me goodnight and prepared to sleep.

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We were given a week's leave. The General wished to make certain that neither O'Neill nor Major Carter were infirm and that Daniel had time to recuperate from his ordeal. At first I had planned to spend the week with Daniel until I considered that now might be the best time to inform Drey'Auc of our relationship. She and I had agreed when I took her to the Land of Light that we would remain cordial for Rya'c's sake. If she found another she could love and wished to marry, I would not deny her.

Daniel lay on my bed, still tired, still sleeping, even after 13 hours of sleep the previous night. His ghostly state had obviously taken a toll on him. I stroked his hair, smiling a little as he sighed softly, appreciating my touch. His head lay on my thigh, nuzzling as he unconsciously approved my demonstration of affection. The hand that lay atop my thigh moved around it to hug it close to him. For another hour he slept in this manner.

Then he began to twitch. I waited to see where his dreams led him, soon to discern from his furrowed brow and hard clutching hand that he had fallen into a nightmare. I shook him gently. For a moment, the hand dug painfully into my flesh as he woke suddenly.

"Teal'c?" he queried softly, voice still sleep-laden.

I lay my hand on his head, smoothing his hair. "I am here."

He sat up quickly, running a hand through his hair nervously. His face was a little flushed and his breathing a little erratic. "I hate nightmares," he mumbled.

I tried to draw him to me, but he was still upset and wanted no comfort. "What did you dream?"

"That I was a ghost and no one could help me." His hands rubbed absently up and down his arms as if he could brush away the remnants of the nightmare. "I dreamed it was many, many years in the future and you were all dead and I was still wandering the halls of the SGC. No one could see me." He shuddered.

"It was a mere dream, beloved," I soothed, slipping into Chular. He relaxed a little and let my arms surround his waist, letting my heat take the chill of the dream from him. "You are here and you are visible to us. I apologize for..."

"Apologize?"

"Had I not fired you would have transported to the giants as the device was designed to do. This mission..."

"...would have gone differently, but it doesn't matter, Teal'c. I don't blame you for firing. I didn't know what to expect. I only knew what Nick had told me, so I reacted accordingly. I had no idea what it would really do. I didn't really believe him. I guess I was testing it in my own mind to prove that he was as crazy as everyone said he was. Maybe I shouldn't have been so quick to..." He shuddered again, this time in memory. "I hated that place."

So, still it bothered him to be thought insane. Of course, now that we understood that his grandfather had thought himself to be the same, it became clearer as to why Daniel had been so afraid to be seen in the same light. He looked up at me with haunted eyes. I gently brushed unruly hair from his forehead, earning a small smile, then a kiss on my shoulder as he peered at me from under his long lashes. I kissed his temple and the smile blossomed. He pushed me onto my back.

For several minutes he lay atop me, kissing me, biting my neck, my earlobes. Then slowly, he began to inch down, caressing my skin with his fingertips, tongue and teeth. My nipples were lovingly tortured. His tongue skimmed down one of the seams of the symbiote's pouch, then up another. I groaned loudly.

Suddenly, all of my nerves fired, even as I felt Daniel stiffen. Wantonly, I spread my legs as waves of lust filled my member, as warmth spread from the pouch to my balls, drawing them tightly against my body. What was Daniel doing? I glanced down and froze.

Daniel stared at me in nearly blind panic. My symbiote had grabbed onto his tongue and was,

as far as I could tell, using it as a sex device. It thrashed in me, sending such an intense surge of sensation through me that I could not help Daniel, only lie helplessly as it used him to seek its own satisfaction. Daniel, for his part, did not move, afraid of what it may try to do if he withdrew. Its mouth was not mature, but it was still powerful. It clamped onto him tighter, pulling him closer to me. His chest rubbed my member, wringing another groan from me. Friction drove me over the edge, splattering my come against his chest and my belly.

My release made it let go of Daniel. Daniel backed away, sitting on the end of the bed, his eyes wild. I reached for him. He didn't shrink away, but he remained where he sat, eyes rivetted to the pouch. He shivered. I moved closer to him and still he did not retreat.

"What was *that* about?" he rasped. He had lost his fear, now moving to anger.

"I do not know, beloved," I whispered. "It has never done that before."

Daniel's fingers moved onto his tongue, prodding, poking, rubbing. He looked down at them, relieved to see no blood upon them from the symbiote's abuse. It breached my pouch again, its mouth part moving as if tasting the air, as if savoring Daniel's disquietude. He stared it angrily.

"Don't push your luck, buddy," he growled.

His fingers gripped his arms punishingly, turning the skin beneath them white and red with the strength of his grip. He attempted to keep his instinct for violence under control. I gently pushed the symbiote back in, watching Daniel relax slowly as it disappeared. I lay my palm flat on the pouch to prevent its reappearance as Daniel slid towards me. He bent down, kissing the back of my hand, then slowly pushed me onto my back.

"Now, as I was planning to do in the first place..." His lips kissed the head of my member, his tongue gently cleansing it of my prior release. The tongue swirled down, savoring every inch of my rapidly hardening penis. I ran my fingers through his silky hair. The tongue slipped around my scrotum, still lapping my seed. It travelled to my anus, tiny strokes that teased. The symbiote butted against my restraining hand, then quieted as it realized that it would not be participating. I closed my eyes to relish the sensations of Daniel's ministrations as he investigated every millimeter of my skin, softly moaning as he did so. Fingers moved down my sides, stroking gently down to my thighs, then his left hand cupped my balls as his right joined the tongue, then pushed into me. Like humans, I, too, have a prostate, which the questing digit found with uncanny accuracy.

"Daniel." I moaned his name. His mouth descended on my member, sucking hard. He let it go, then licked it as his fingers continued to tease, stroking the organ inside me. My hand spasmed in his hair as I felt the orgasm slide through my balls to my penis. Daniel sucked me hard, drained me.

I reached again for him as I crashed back to reality, but he backed a little away from me. Fixing his eyes to mine, he knelt onto the bed, displaying himself to me. His hands drifted aimlessly over his torso, drawing my attention to them as he brushed himself with feather strokes. His member, already engorged, rose to tap his stomach as he continued his play. Fingertips traced, pet, then pinched his nipples, making him groan as he broke his hypnotic gaze from mine. The tiny buds swelled with his teasing, red with the blush of desire as his breath hitched in delight. He moaned, then caught his bottom lip with his teeth to prevent any more from slipping.

His left hand remained at his chest while the right slid into his brown-gold pubic hair, the soft curls twining around his digits as he gently began to pant. His knees spread wider, displaying his genitals wantonly. His right hand slipped under his member to his balls, first gently stroking, then rolling them in their sack of flesh.

"Teal'c," he moaned, as his member became even more red, precum leaking. With a gentle swipe, I took his offering and sucked my fingers. "You are so sexy," he panted as his left hand drifted downward. It replaced his right, as he took himself with a hard pull, groaning luxuriously. With a soft growl, he jerked his organ until his essence began to spill across his fingers. Echoing his feral paean, I rolled upright, devouring his penis swiftly and taking the rest of his offering. Daniel moaned, then smothered his scream with his hand.

He reeled drunkenly and would have fallen off the bed had I not been attentive. Loose-limbed, tractable, he let me guide him onto his back. I knew we would have to wait until we returned from the Land of Light to make love, but I felt peace watching him drift back into sleep.

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The Stargate of the Land of Light dwelled in the dark regions of their planet. Daniel hid his agitation well, but tiny tremors and wary eyes betrayed him. During our second trip to this world, he'd been captured by the diseased members of their society. He had either forgotten what had happened or felt unable to relieve himself of the burden of the memory of his capture, but either way, he was always apprehensive until we broke into the perpetual sunlight that named this planet to myself and my family. Drey'Auc and Rya'c waited on the threshold of their dwelling. Upon seeing me, Rya'c ran up.

I picked him up easily, hugging him hard to my chest. My son will probably be built much more like my father than myself - a wiry, lean-muscled man. He was nowhere near as large as I was when I was his age, but I was not concerned that it would make him less effective. The arms that grabbed me were strong. Bra'tac had been drilling him well. I gave him a another squeeze, then set him back to his feet.

Drey'Auc walked slowly up to us, her eyes full of questions as she looked at Daniel. She gave him a brief nod as she gently kissed my cheek. "We are happy you are here, husband. Dr.

Jackson, you grace our home."

Daniel bowed a little to her. "Thanks for your hospitality, Drey'Auc. We've brought some things for you that you might need and might like." He handed her the large box we had packed that morning. Rya'c tried to peer into it, but she wouldn't lower it. Smiling indulgently, she turned back towards the house. I could see that the repairs I had noted the last time I was here had been completed expertly. Obviously either she alone or some of her neighbors had worked to make certain that the dwelling remained intact. I knew that many of the women liked her. Drey'Auc had a great deal of dignity and poise that the Minoans found admirable. Rya'c, too, had made friends, though I never saw any of them when I came here. He always stayed home. He knew that we would not have much time together, so he wished not to waste any of it.

By Minoan standards, the house was small, though I felt very comfortable in it. It was nowhere near as small as the one my mother and I had dwelt when we first came to Chulak. Drey'Auc had furnished it with attractive works of Minoan art and afghans of her own design. I know that she had traded goods for her covers. With the soft, silky yarn that came from Earth, her afghans were in much demand with the Minoans. Part of what we had brought in the box was to help further her barter. Daniel had found some particularly beautiful skeins of yarn that had been spun from the fur of some creature from South America. She would definitely profit from these creations.

I felt so strange thinking of my wife having to work to receive goods that we had once taken for granted on Chulak. I would have compensated the Minoans to help her, but she had quickly refused such help. She wished to contribute - to be a part of the culture I had left her and my son to adjust to. I had thought to bring them to Earth, but I was far more afraid that they would never acclimate to the strangeness of the Tau'ri, despite Rya'c's youth. He would never have been allowed off base except in the company of base personnel. It was not right for a child to live in a perpetual prison. He needed to be outside and playing and training. I could not have bound him to the confines of Cheyenne Mountain.

Not many of my people would adjust well to the Tau'ri. The contempt Jaffa held for them already would only be compounded by the seemingly frivolous nature of American life. I do not know what allowed me to see beyond these traits. Perhaps my early abandonment of Chronos' court imbued me with more flexibility than a Jaffa would naturally have. Perhaps it was that flexibility that had allowed me to consider Bra'tac's words when he told me that the Goa'uld were not gods.

I heard a pleased gasp from Drey'Auc as she found the yarn we had provided. Her fingers stroked the soft wool. "Oh, husband, it is magnificent! There are no creatures here that have fur this soft. I will be the envy of all when they feel this. And the colors are beautiful! Mayra will be especially pleased with this lovely green."

Daniel smiled, happy with her endorsement of his choices. Under the yarn, she found the candy

bars he'd stashed for Rya'c which she handed to my son with a small moue of disapproval. Rya'c promised he wouldn't eat them all at once and ran to his room to store them before she could say anything else.

Rya'c returned and sat on the floor near Drey'Auc's feet. He looked at Daniel uncomfortably, despite Daniel's attempts to be reassuring. Drey'Auc had not noticed our son's discomfiture as she continued to root through the goods we had brought - spices she had requested the last time I had been here, needles, thread, Tau'ri knitting needles which were much more suited to handle the yarn we had given her. Rya'c dutifully put things away as she found them, though, upon each return, he continued to stare at Daniel. Daniel could obviously think of nothing to say that would break the mood.

"How long will you be here, husband?" she asked as Rya'c carried the last of the supplies into the kitchen.

"A week," I informed her.

"And for what reason were you allowed leave this time?"

"That was...um, my fault," Daniel quietly told her. "We had a problem with an artifact that left me on another plane of existence." Drey'Auc's eyebrows knit in confusion as she stared between us. "Um, I...was sort of a ghost."

"A ghost? But would you not have to be dead to be a ghost?"

"Well, I wasn't really a ghost, I just wasn't here. No one could see me."

She looked confused, but asked nothing further. "Rya'c," she summoned. "Why do you not show Dr. Jackson our garden? Or perhaps introduce him to your friends?" Both understood instantly that she wished to speak to me alone, so they dutifully rose from their respective positions and left the house. Rya'c continued to stare at Daniel.

"I am happy to see you, Teal'c, but why did you bring the scholar with you? Does he have some business with Tupelo?"

"No, Drey'Auc; however, we did come for a reason. You are the mother of my son and my former wife. I still care very much for you, but my heart has been given to another."

She stared at me levelly. "Your heart has always belonged to another. For very little time in the 45 years that we have been wed did your heart ever belong to me."

I sat beside her. "I know, Drey'Auc. It was never your fault that my heart had been taken before

we ever met by ones who I could not have, at least not permanently." I took her hands between mine. "Believe me that I never had a desire to hurt you. Believe me that I would have let you have another had you wished it." She frowned at that, no doubt remembering Fro'tak. It still hurt me that she had chosen my best friend to remarry. It hurt me that she had chosen to keep our son further enslaved under Apophis until we freed him of the effects of Apophis' brainwashing. "Have you found another?"

"No," she said abruptly. "The men here respect me, but they are unsure of having a wife with a Prim'ta. They are concerned that should the Goa'uld return that they may be punished for taking a Jaffa woman for a wife. They are also unsure of how to deal with my actual age. I am far older than I appear to them and they do not understand this, especially since the Tau'ri keep reminding them that the Goa'uld are not gods."

She turned to me, her eyes full of questions. "Who have you found, Teal'c? Is this the reason why you have had so little time for us?"

"The one I have chosen is Daniel," I told her carefully.

At first she stared at me like I had lost my mind, then she began to laugh. "You almost had me believing that!"

"It is the truth."

For a few moments she stared at me, her mouth flapping much like one of Daniel's fish. Without another word, she spun around, fled into her bedroom and bolted the door behind her. I did not even attempt to lure her back out. For an hour I sat, watching the door until Daniel and Rya'c returned.

Things had not gone well for them. Daniel looked embarrassed while Rya'c's mouth was twisted in adolescent fury. Rya'c took one look at his mother's bedroom and then proceeded to lock himself in his own. Daniel sat beside me. He began to speak several times, but no words would come out.

We sat in this manner for a few hours until Drey'Auc came out of the room. She gave both of us a cold glance and then proceeded to the kitchen to prepare dinner. At first I did not think that she would wish us there, but Drey'Auc was an attentive hostess. I could tell from the amount of food she was making that she intended us to eat with her, but I suspected that dinner would be very uncomfortably silent. Rya'c had come to the table when called, but went directly back to his room as soon as we had finished without a single word to any of us, including his mother. Drey'Auc cleaned the dishes and followed his example.

Daniel and I moved outside, to sit on a low bench to stare at the stars.

"You told her," he said quietly. He did not need to see my nod to confirm his statement. "She's pissed, right?"

"She is within her rights to be angry, but she has no right to..."

"She's your wife, Teal'c."

I looked at him as he continued to stare at the stars. "Not truly, Daniel. She divorced me. We did not reinstate our vows after the divorce. She calls me 'husband' because she feels she needs to remind Rya'c that I am his father, to establish that I have certain rights, especially in the area of discipline, in his life. Also, since I am still somewhat in control of their lives, she acknowledges my place in their life. Even if I am not technically her spouse, I still hold that position in their lives. Until either she or I release each other, I am still honor-bound to act as her husband, her procurer, her protector."

"So, she's free to look for another husband?" Daniel queried gently.

"Indeed, though she has told me that it is difficult here."

Daniel's fingers twisted around each other. "And it's not like she can just run back to Chulak to find a 'suitable' husband. When did you get married?"

"She came of marrying age when I was one of Bratac's lieutenants. I was considered to be quite a 'catch', as the Tau'ri would say. Due to my potential, her family approved the match, even though I had no family history on Chulak. Once Apophis gave his blessing, we were wed. Her family was quite happy when I became the First Prime."

"And now...?"

"Many of her family members were lost in an earthquake in the Red Hills about 20 cycles ago. Only her eldest brother and 2 of his children survived. I do not think they have had much contact with each other in many years, even before I left Apophis' service."

He remained silent, staring at the stars. The situation would remain unbearable until Drey'Auc was willing to hear me. I could not fault her, but I could not change my heart.

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The next morning, Daniel left early to speak to Tupelo. He had not travelled here to speak to the leader of the Minoans, but he sensed that my discussion with Drey'Auc would proceed in a more civil manner if he were not at the house to remind her of his participation in this matter. I



did not agree, but I respected his polite gesture.

Drey'Auc tended her garden while I sat on the bench outside, watching her work. Diligently she pulled weeds and watered the beds. She would have a rich harvest this year. Rya'c remained at her side, though he constantly sought me out with his eyes, asking questions I could not answer. After she finished with her garden, she proceeded to feed the small fowl the Minoans had domesticated for eggs and meat. Rya'c half-heartedly chased them around to corral them into a smaller enclosure, but I could see no spark of enjoyment in the task and he continued the same darting glances.

Finally she sat down on the bench at my side while Rya'c swept the house.

"Why him, husband?"

I thought a long time before I spoke. "I am not completely sure. He is a remarkable individual and a true friend."

"That sounds like a reason for him to be on your team, not a reason to bed him."

"It is complicated, Drey'Auc."

She regarded me with a cold, slit-eyed glare. "Is he that exotic, Teal'c? I know you have a taste for unusual people - you always have. And, many times, the unobtainable. Was that the attraction?"

"I...don't know," I told her honestly.

She leaned back, letting the sun warm her face. I could never have denied that Drey'Auc was a beautiful woman - especially when she held herself aloof. She had the poise of a queen, the face of a goddess. When her face was set in a mask, it shone with a delicate porcelain light. Many Jaffa women are hearty, strong-limbed women of obvious strength. Drey'Auc's power hid under her delicate features. She did not have the same ethereal quality as Shan'auc, nor Daniel's strange grace. But she was undeniably beautiful.

"Where did you see him first?"

"In the prison on Chulak. After Apophis implanted Amaunet in Daniel's wife."

She stared at me appraisingly. "That strange face, blue-eyed and innocent. That drew you, did it not?" I nodded, intrigued by her perception. "A child in a man's body. And, even worse, you felt guilty about choosing his wife to receive Amaunet. Is that why you chose her?"

"No, I had not even met him when I took his Sha're to Apophis."

"But you still felt an obligation to him, did you not?"

I nodded again. "I vowed that I would return her to him, no matter what the cost to myself. I vowed that I would protect him while he searched for her."

"And he took this service willingly?"

I stood up and looked down upon her, feeling an unexplainable urge to establish some kind of control over her. She had to squint up at me uncomfortably. "I have never told him this in words. He would never have accepted such service; it is not the way of the Tau'ri."

"So, what has changed? Why pursue him if he is searching for a wife for whom he may leave you?"

"She is dead." The words fell from my mouth and lay ugly and honest between us.

Drey'Auc stared at me a long time; the mask firmly in place, giving me no idea as to her thoughts. "*You* killed her," she finally said.

I turned my back to her attempting to school my features. The statement had been filled with accusation and not a little rancor. "That is it!" she cried. "Teal'c, do not bind yourself to this one simply out of some misguided guilt. He cannot be that angry with you if he can accept your advances toward him. Comfort him, cherish him as your friend, but you have no need to become his lover just because he is grieving or is, perhaps, a little lonely! Teal'c, he is a child, little older than our Rya'c. He is no warrior, bound by the ties you would have with other Jaffa or perhaps to O'Neill or Hammond of Texas."

"My ties to O'Neill and General Hammond have nothing to do with my feelings for Daniel."

She grabbed my arm and spun me around. "Teal'c! Stop this foolishness. That *boy* does not understand our ways and does not understand his own place. If he was on Chulak, he would be someone's pretty bed slave - pampered and spoiled and certainly not *worth* the love of a Prime. Oh, he would be a heart-breaker, but only for the most foolish of courtiers and Jaffa. You are so much more than that! A man like O'Neill, a man like Hammond would be far more worthy of the affection you obviously hold for the Tau'ri."

"He is not a child," I growled.

"He is many years your junior, Teal'c! What does he know of your world? He does not know who you are and what you have been. He has been a coddled child, shielded from the realities

of the universe! What does such a boy know of love and obligation?"

I grew increasingly angry at her words. "You know nothing, Drey'Auc. He may not be a warrior, but his heart is full of love and he is capable of being far more than a mere slave. His mind is keen and full of knowledge. Even though he has lived so many less years than myself, he knows far more than I ever will."

"Teal'c!" she cried. "He is a *child*! Unproven, uninitiated! You should let him go before he grows beyond you! He will never love you as much as you love him - he cannot understand the passion of a Jaffa, a Prime! This fancy of yours is not worth breaking your heart!"

Her eyes grew wide as she stared past me to the house, even as my own were drawn down the road to the Minoan city. Daniel stared at me with large eyes that gave credence to her words. Drey'Auc and I then glanced at each other and changed views to what the other had seen. In the doorway of the house, Rya'c stood, fury evident in his ramrod straight posture, his twisted mouth. I looked back to Daniel. He held himself stiffly. For a moment, I saw what Drey'Auc saw - a child pretending to be an adult, an callow youth thrust into a battle for which he was ill-prepared.

I regretted that moment. Daniel's eyes widened fractionally as he understood instantly what had passed my mind. He drew himself up to his full height. He said nothing as he walked past us into the house to retrieve his things. Rya'c sneered at him as he passed him on the way out, but the young man said nothing as he trudged down the trail leading back to the Chappa'ai.

Angrily I left all I brought behind and caught up with him on the trail. Daniel said nothing, but he relaxed a little when I drew alongside. Damning with faint praise. I had not told Drey'Auc that he had fought at my side, that he had proven himself in battles of many types. We traversed to the Stargate in silence. When we reached the DHD, Daniel told me to return to Drey'Auc and make my peace with her.

"I have no reason to do so, Daniel."

"She was your wife, Teal'c, and she's Rya'c's mother. You need to make peace with her to ensure your place with him, if nothing else. If she's that angry, she may..."

I put my hand on his shoulder to stop something I would not hear. "She will do nothing of the sort, Daniel. She has more honor than to turn Rya'c against his father for so petty a reason. I worry, though, what poison she will spread about you. Our son should not believe that you are a weakling, unworthy of a Jaffa's love."

Daniel shook his head. "I know I'm no warrior, Teal'c. I...never wanted to be. It's hard, y'know, to hold your head up high when everyone around you is one."

"Not all people can be warriors. War would never cease and peace would be for naught."

Daniel nodded solemnly, then began to press the glyphs for Earth. As the Stargate came to life, he said quietly, "But without the warriors, sometimes there would be no peace." As one we walked up the ramp to return home.

The End

To be continued in "A Single Star - A Disaster in the Making"