Make Peace, Not War by Merlin7

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This is about Sheppard doing his part to make Peace with the Genii. But it won't be the way he hoped.  
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Index  
Chapter 1: Part 1  
Chapter 2: Part 2  
Chapter 3: Part 3  
Chapter 4: Part 4  
Chapter 5: Part 5  
Chapter 6: Part 6  
Chapter 7: Part 7  
Chapter 8: Part 8  
Chapter 9: Part 9  
Chapter 10: Part 10  
Chapter 11: Part 11  
Chapter 12: Part 12  
Chapter 13: Part 13  
Chapter 14: Part 14  
Chapter 15: Part 15  
Chapter 16: Part 16/end
"I don't like this, sir." Ford stated, as he moved to stand next to his CO.

John turned to the Lt. and grinned. "I'll be fine, Ford. Cowen wants peace between us and so do I. As enemies we're only hurting each other. As allies with the Genii, we stand a much better chance against the Wraith."

Ford nodded. "I realize that, sir. But to agree to meet with him alone...bad idea."

"I'm not thrilled with it myself, but it was one of his conditions. In a way I can't blame him." John shrugged. "Besides...this is neutral ground for us both. Teyla said so and Weir agreed. And diplomacy is her forte. I'll be okay. Head back with Stackhouse and I'll see you in three days."

"I'm not happy about that either, sir. Why three days? Why no radio contact." Ford ticked off the list of complaints.

John cocked an eyebrow at him. "We both agreed to three days to work things out. And the 'no radio contact' was my idea. Neither one of us can call for back up. We need to work this out between us one on one."

Ford sighed. "I guess. But you can't even take a weapon with you."

"Neither can he," John pointed out.

"What if he lies again?"

John smirked. "I can lie pretty well when I have to," he reminded the Lt.

Ford nodded. "Yes, sir. Well...I guess this is it then. I'll see you in three days."

"See you then." John patted Ford on the shoulder then watched him walk back into the Jumper, where Stackhouse was waiting to fly them back through the gate to Atlantis. Once they were gone, John turned back to the path before him. Cowen had given him explicit instructions. Follow the marked path until he reached the village. Then he would be taken to where Cowen awaited. So John began walking.

Two hours later he reached the village. An hour after that he jumped off the back of a wagon and waved goodbye to the villager who had given him the ride to the top of a small mountain. Before John was a small structure. It someone resembled a stone hut. John took a step towards the door only to find it swinging open.

Cowen stepped out. "You made it, Major."

"I'm a man of my word, Cowen." John smirked as he spoke. They had both been forced to lie in the past.

"Come in. Let's get down to business, shall we?" Cowen gestured for Sheppard to precede him.
John entered and found himself standing in a surprisingly spacious room. There looked to be two other areas sectioned off. John was guessing, or rather hoping, that one was a bathroom. The room he was in now contained a table with two chairs in one corner, and the other half of the area contained a huge bed. One bed. John quirked an eyebrow at that but said nothing as the door closed behind him and he turned to face Cowen. "So...let's put all our cards down on the table." John decided to be direct. "This is about deciding whether we should be allies or enemies, right?"

Cowen moved to the table and sat down in one of the chairs. "More or less," he allowed.

"So which do you prefer? I'm leaning toward allies myself." John moved to sit in the other chair as he spoke.

"The true issue before us is trust, major," Cowen countered. "If we cannot trust each other, then we have no hope of becoming allies."

John had to concede the truth in that. "Okay...so what do you suggest we do to work out the trust issue?"

Cowen smiled. "I have learned something that would be of great 'value' to you, major."

"Really?" John had his doubts about that but decided to play along. "And what would that be?"

"Information." Cowen leaned back in his chair and smirked. "You see...I happen to know, for a fact, that there is a traitor among your people. And I can prove it to you. But it will cost you, major."

John shook his head. No way in hell would he believe one of his people on Atlantis was a traitor. He glared at Cowen. "You're full of shit!"

Cowen shrugged. "Sora learned who it was and it was confirmed by one of the Athosian's...who you also trust."

"Who is it?" John didn't want to believe it but a niggle of doubt made him ask.

"Like I said...that information will cost you."

John narrowed his gaze at Cowen. He sensed he was not going to like the terms. "Okay...so what's the deal?"

Cowen leaned forward, his eyes locked on Sheppard's face. "It's quite simple really. You give yourself to me for one full day...then I will give you the name of your traitor. And I will stay with you until it is confirmed. If I'm lying, I will be your prisoner."

"Sounds like an interesting deal...but I'm a little confused by the 'give myself to you' bit." John did not like the way Cowen was looking at him. "Exactly what does that mean?"

"It means you share my bed for a full day, on my terms, and then you get what you want." Cowen's eyes swept over John as he spoke, leaving no doubt as to his meaning.

John was on his feet in an instant, the chair falling back to hit the floor with a bang. "Are you out of your fucking mind?"

Cowen chuckled. "Not at all, major. That is the deal...take it or leave it."

"Fuck," John whispered to himself. Then he headed for the door.
THE END...of part one
Once he reached the door, John gripped the knob with the intention of flinging it open and getting the hell out of Dodge. Only there was a bit of a problem. The door would not budge. John tried again then he whirled to glare at Cowen who was sitting there, smirking at him. "Open the damn door!" John snarled.

Cowen shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't do that, major. It is locked from the outside and we will not be freed until the end of the three days. That was the deal, remember?"

"The deal is I spend three days here negotiating for peace with you," John shot back. "You're already changing things."

"I'm making you an offer that, realistically, you cannot refuse," Cowen countered.

John stared at him in disbelief. "I'm sorry...you think I'm just going to agree to sleep...to jump...share...fuck!" John broke off, feeling his face flush red. He began to pace, running one hand through his hair until it stood completely on end. "You listen to me, Cowen. I don't know what the hell you're up too, but you can forget this! I'm not sleeping in your bed!"

A wicked smile curved Cowen's thin lips. "Who said anything about sleeping, major?" Cowen rose to his feet and moved around the table. He watched falter in his pacing. "It's interesting to see that I've off balanced you with my proposal."

"You've confused me. I'll give you that," John allowed. No way in hell was he going to admit to the other man how shaken he was by the offer. "What the hell are you playing at, Cowen? What's the real deal?" John was convinced it had to be something else. First off, he found it hard to swallow that someone at Atlantis was a traitor. Secondly, he found it impossible to believe that Cowen would have any interest - whatsoever - in sleeping with him.

"The deal is exactly what I've laid out, major." Cowen leaned against the table, folded his arms over his chest, then shrugged. "I am not playing a game here. The information I have is genuine. What I want from you is pretty simplistic."

Sheppard shook his head, then shook a finger at Cowen. "Come on. You don't honestly expect me to believe that you're willing to trade such - so called - valuable information in exchange for...sleeping with me?" John almost stumbled over the last three words.

Cowen chuckled. "I believe the more explicit terminology would be that I am willing to give you said information in exchange for being allowed to fuck you."

"How the hell..." John began, only to fade to silence. The only way Cowen would know that slang would be from someone who came from Earth. Which meant the other man was letting him know that he was telling the truth about a traitor in Atlantis. But John still had no intention of agreeing to the deal. The terms were ridiculous. So he moved to stand before Cowen, locked eyes with him and demanded, "What do you really want from me?"

"Is it so hard to imagine that I want to fuck you?" Cowen replied.

John winced then nodded. "As a matter of fact...it is. You're not the type to want...that."
Cowen cocked one eyebrow. "How would you know? You know nothing about me, major. But allow me to assure you that I am very interested in fucking you. I've dreamed about it since the first day we met."

"Why?" John hadn't really meant to ask, but there it was.

"Because you're beautiful." Cowen replied without hesitation. "Beautiful, intelligent and intriguing."

John felt his face heat up again and he dropped eye contact and went back to pacing. "This is insane," he muttered beneath his breath. "If the information is real as you say it is, you could ask for anything. I find it hard to believe that you're willing to part with it in exchange for fucking me." John managed to say the words without stumbling over them, but he knew his cheeks were flame red.

Cowen sighed. "You underestimate your own value, major. I am a simple man by nature. Despite what you may think, I am not particularly greedy. This meeting is about negotiating peace between our peoples. But it is about more than that. Still...to achieve peace we must form a mutual trust. If you are willing to give yourself to me in this manner, then I will know that you are worthy of my trust."

"And how the hell am I supposed to know that you're worthy of mine?" John's voice crackled with anger. "This deal seems awfully one sided, don'tcha think?"

"You're afraid." Cowen said the words softly. "That is understandable."

John reacted as if he had been struck. "What did you say?"

Cowen closed the distance between them and for a moment let his gaze lock in on Sheppard's face. "You've never been with a man before," he whispered.

"You don't know that!" John reacted like a petulant child and he knew it. But just when he thought Cowen couldn't shock him any further, the man proved him wrong.

"I know." Cowen lifted one hand and let his fingertips brush over the major's cheek.

John batted his hand away. He wanted to back up and run but instead he held his ground. He knew the mantra. Never let the enemy see your fear. "You don't know jack shit!"

Cowen smiled and his eyes crinkled. "Tell me then, major. Have you ever been fucked before?"

"None of your damn business!" John did turn away now, pacing over to the other corner. It had been on the tip of his tongue to lie about it, but he couldn't make himself do it. But that didn't mean he had to tell the truth either. Not that it mattered. Cowen already knew the truth.

"I won't hurt you."

John jumped and whirled around to find Cowen standing beside him. He had been so distracted he hadn't heard the other man approaching. That bothered him. "You can't hurt me!" John hissed at him. "No deal!"

Cowen shrugged. "As you wish. I regret that we must remain enemies, major. I would have preferred to be...friends. And I will regret what will come to pass."

"What is that supposed to mean?" John did not like the way Cowen was talking.

"Your traitor is impatient. And they have every intention of selling out Atlantis...to the Wraith." Cowen spoke with quiet conviction.
John had always been one to trust his gut instinct, and it was telling him that Cowen was telling him the truth. That shook him to the core. John paced a few more steps then made his decision. "You have a deal, so long as we negotiate the terms."


"I won't make this easy on you." John was being blunt. "I'm not just going to let you...you know." He flushed again and cursed at himself.

"Fair enough," Cowen allowed. "Part of your appeal, major...is your fiery passion. So...shall we begin?"

John shook his head. "You said I had to give myself to you for one day. We're stuck here for three. The deal starts tomorrow. I'm tired."

Cowen was silent for a moment, then nodded. "Agreed, but I ask for a token of good faith."

"What kind of a token?" John's voice was laced with suspicion.

"I want a kiss."

John started to shake his head but stopped and asked, "What do I get out of it?"

Cowen looked pleased. "One kiss and you can have the bed to yourself. For now."

"Deal." John was tired and he knew he would be able to face what was to come with more clarity if he was well rested. And had he been forced to share the bed with Cowen now, he would not have been able to close his eyes.

"Deal," Cowen echoed, then he stepped into Sheppard's personal space.

John steeled himself as a strong hand cupped his cheek then warm lips were pressed were on his and he closed his eyes.

THE END...of part 2
Chapter 3: Part 3

...part 3

John allowed the kiss. He had closed his eyes to blank out the image of Cowen's face, but it was not enough to allow him to forget that he was being kissed by a man. There was the rasp of stubble against his skin and Cowen's lips were thin and dry, not soft and full like a woman's lips. The fact that he was being so clinical as to compare the difference, amused John. Or would have if he was not fighting the urge to shudder in reaction. But no way in hell was he going to give Cowen the satisfaction of knowing that this was creeping him out.

As if reading his mind, Cowen pulled back and John resisted the urge to heave a sigh of relief. Instead he drawled, "Was it good for you?"

Cowen locked eyes with Sheppard. "We're not finished."

"Oh yes we are!" John was not hearing this. "You said one kiss!"

"Not a child's kiss, major," Cowen countered. "I want you to open for me."

John knew what that meant and he shook his head. "No! No way...no tongue!" At the very thought of it he did shudder.

Cowen's thin lips curved into a smile. "Then I join you for your nap."

"Bastard!" John didn't shout the word, he hissed it out through clenched teeth. A part of him wanted to call the deal off and be done with it, but John suddenly realized that he was overreacting. It was just a kiss. It meant nothing. He needed to stay calm and cool, otherwise he was revealing too much of himself to Cowen, and John knew that the other man would use that to his own advantage. He was not going to let that happen.

"What's it going to be, major?" Cowen prompted.

John knew it was time to turn the tables, so to speak. To stop letting Cowen be the one surprising him. With that thought firmly planted in mind, John took action. He gripped Cowen's face in both hands then planted one on him. John didn't let himself think about what he was doing, he just did it, letting his tongue slide into Cowen's mouth. Giving the man what he had asked for. And he felt Cowen's body tense up in surprise and that pleased John to know end. He also felt the man recover quickly then strong fingers were curling in John's hair as Cowen tried to take over the kiss. John was not about to accept that so he made to break the kiss, only Cowen held him fast and John nearly gagged when the man's tongue plunged into his mouth. He reacted on instinct and bit him.

Cowen's howl of pain filled the room. He released John and turned away, one hand over his mouth.

Stepping back, John wiped his mouth with the back of one hand, wishing he had an giant-sized bottle of mouth wash handy.

"You will pay for that, major!" Cowen snarled. He spoke with a bit of a lisp and there was a slight streak of blood on one finger.

"Fair is fair, Cowen," John shot back. "I told you I wasn't going to make this easy on you." As he spoke, John shucked off his jacket, then he bent to unlace his boots. He hadn't been kidding about wanting to sleep. He was bone tired. From the moment Cowen had made the offer for John to meet with him, he hadn't slept much. John knew it was catching up to him and that he needed to rest. Sleeping would help pass some time
and he hoped he would wake up with some idea of what to do to get out of the deal he had made. John figured he should be able to trick Cowen into revealing the identity of the traitor on Atlantis. So with that thought in mind he stepped over to the bed and stretched out. To John's surprise, Cowen allowed it. In fact, he went into the room that passed for a bathroom. Sheppard felt relief wash over him and in the aftermath he realized he was shaking. "It was just a stupid kiss...get over it!" John chided himself. Then he closed his eyes and let his weariness pull him into darkness.

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John came awake with a start, jerking himself out of a bad dream. It was one that haunted him often. Steve the Wraith hadn't died on the Hoffan planet, instead he had escaped from his cell in Atlantis and had sucked the life out of everyone John cared about. And when John was the only one left, Steve simply laughed and walked away, leaving him alone with all the dead bodies. Alone and wracked with guilt. And it was guilt that had pushed him to come here in the first place. John had too much blood on his hands.

He rubbed his eyes then opened them and was a bit startled to see Cowen sitting in a chair next to the bed, watching him. It was unnerving but John didn't react to it. He simply stretched before sitting up then he smiled. "Take a picture, it lasts longer." John grinned at the confused look on Cowen's face, then he slid off the bed.

Cowen continued to watch him. "Are you hungry?"

"I could eat." John realized he was a bit hungry. Not surprising since he hadn't eaten anything since yesterday. Breakfast had not been appealing this morning. He looked at Cowen. "Can you cook?" John could use a microwave when necessary and he made a mean batch of brownies when bribed properly, but that was the extent of his culinary expertise.

"As a matter of fact, I can," Cowen replied.

John sniffed the air as he suddenly realized a wonderful aroma was wafting around him. "Smells pretty good," he allowed.

Cowen stood up and carried the chair back to the table. "It's ready when you are." There was a world of meaning behind his words.

It was not lost on John, but he chose to ignore it and moved to grab his backpack where he'd dumped it by the door. He had been allowed to bring toiletries and clothes. So John headed for the bathroom. "Be back in a few." With that he disappeared inside and decided to take a shower. He felt gritty and a bit lethargic from his nap. Not surprising, John realized, when he glanced at his watch. He had slept for over six hours. That surprised him a bit. But he shrugged it off as he stripped off his clothes and stepped into what passed for a shower. The water poured out of an overhead spout more than it sprayed out, but wet was wet and there was soap, so John washed up from head to toe, feeling clean and vitalized by the time he stepped out and dried off. He dressed quickly in jeans and a tee shirt, not bothering with socks. The floors were clean and he liked being barefoot. Although it made him long for sandy beaches and sweet breakers. When John returned to Atlantis he would have to head out to the mainland and check out the surf with Grodin. Who happened to be a fellow surfer and was working on making them a couple of boards.

"Need any help!" Cowen called through the door.

"Funny." John had jumped at the sound of Cowen's voice. He ran his fingers through his hair, since he didn't own a comb, then opened the door. He nearly ran into Cowen who was standing in front of it. John felt the other man's eyes roam over him and he wasn't thrilled with what he saw shimmering there. John recognized lust when he saw it.
Cowen pointed to Sheppard's leg. "What are these?"

John realized he meant his pants. "They're called jeans."

"I like them."

"I'm happy for you." John stepped past him and headed for the table. He saw that Cowen had already filled to bowls with what looked like some kind of stew.

Cowen followed him over. "Sit and eat, major."

John dropped into the chair and took a bite. It was surprisingly good. Not that he would ever admit that to Cowen. "Not bad." That was all the praise he was willing to give.

"We all have hidden talents, major," Cowen said as he dug into his own bowl.

"I suppose that's true enough." John took another bite. Maybe when this was all over he would break down and ask Cowen for the recipe. John was used to military food but the grub on Atlantis was pathetic for the most part.

Cowen chewed for a moment then asked, "So what are your hidden talents, Sheppard?"

John shrugged. "I'm pretty much a 'what you see is what you get' kinda guy."

"You are anything but that." Cowen was smiling when he spoke. "Come now. What do you do when you're not playing soldier?"

"Actually...I don't have a lot of down time." John let his tone deepen as he locked eyes with Cowen. "There are lots and lots of enemies lurking around every corner. I never know when a new one might pop up."

Cowen nodded. "Enemies come in all forms," he allowed. "But there must be something you like to do for enjoyment."

Not wanting to give away too much information about himself, John took another bite of food while he considered what to say. Eventually he shrugged. "I like to read. I used to draw." And just saying the last part made John a little sad. He really did miss drawing. He hadn't touched a sketch pad in years. It was a talent of his that very few knew about. Not even his father knew. Feeling the weight of his memories pressing down on him, John lost his appetite and pushed away his bowl.

"You need to eat, major," Cowen chided. "You're too thin."

"Guess that means I'm not really your type then," John shot back. He preferred to focus on the here and now. "Why don't we just call this deal off and talk about making peace?"

Cowen chuckled. "Nice try, major. But...no. The deal stands."

John had figured as much. He studied Cowen for a moment, wishing he could trade in having the Ancient gene for the ability to read minds. He wanted to know what made Cowen tick. John leaned his elbows on the table then cupped his chin in one hand. "So tell me something, Cowen. What is the point of this, really? I mean...what does fucking me prove?" John was proud of himself. He didn't wince or blush this time.

"We've already discussed this." Cowen dismissed John's query and concentrated on his food.
"Yeah...well...I'm still finding it hard to believe." John ran his fingers through his hair and tried not to let himself get frustrated. Somehow he would get through this. He would survive the three days then go home and hunt down the traitor.

Cowen pushed his bowl aside and stood up. "Perhaps we should begin now, major," he drawled as he moved to stand behind Sheppard's chair. "Why put off the inevitable?" As he spoke he laid his hands on Sheppard's shoulders and kneaded the muscles. "You might even discover you like it."

John made himself relax into Cowen's touch. The man gave a mean massage, but John still wanted to deck him. "Stranger things have happened," he allowed. "But..." As he continued, John rose from his chair, stepped around it and went toe to toe with Cowen. He smiled, knowing he could turn on the charm, and let himself lean in as if he would kiss Cowen. Instead John whispered, "Only in your dreams." John knew his insult hit the mark when Cowen stiffened. Still smiling John turned and walked away. He heard Cowen snarl then John felt something solid hit him and he went down hard. Instinctively he rolled over, only to find Cowen over him. Before John could react his arms were pinned by strong fingers wrapped around his wrists, and Cowen had insuatuited his solid bulk between John's legs, pressing down over him, which effectively pinned his hips.

"I don't like being teased, major," Cowen said softly.

"Sucks to be you," John shot back. He tried to buck up but Cowen was just let his heavier weight sink into him. "Get off me!"

Cowen shook his head then shifted a bit so that his groin was brushing over Sheppard's. "I'm not going to make this easy on you either, major."

John could feel Cowen's hardness and it shook him. But he kept his expression neutral as he drawled, "I'm so glad we understand each other. Now understand this. "Get. The. Fuck. Off!"

"No," Cowen whispered. Then he shifted down a bit, rubbed his face against Sheppard's chest, found what he was looking for, then bit him.

THE END...of part 3

Back to index
"Fucker!" John hissed the word as he tried to twist away from Cowen, but the man was heavy enough to keep John pinned. So he gritted his teeth and endured when Cowen found his other nipple and bit that one too.

"Let's do this now, major," Cowen breathed in Sheppard's ear. "Give yourself to me now then the deal will be done that much sooner."

John glared at Cowen and shook his head. He would keep his word to the man and do what he had promised, but he was not ready to deal with it right now. "We wait until tomorrow."

Cowen rubbed himself against John. "I don't want to wait."

"Too bad." John could feel Cowen's hardness and it was like a reality slap, what he had promised to do. Tomorrow night Cowen would shove his cock up John's ass. He wondered what Weir would say about his negotiating technique this time, and a giggle almost escaped John. Only he never giggled.

"Make you another deal," Cowen offered, before nipping Sheppard's ear lobe.

John doubted he would be interested but he figured it couldn't hurt to listen. And he was rather hoping that talking would distract Cowen from nuzzling him. "Okay...what's the deal?"

Cowen eased back a bit, but only so he could lock eyes with the major. "Let me pleasure you right now and I will give you anything you ask."

"Like the name of the traitor?" John shot back. He knew that wasn't what Cowen meant, but he figured it was worth a shot.

"Anything but that," Cowen ammended. "We stick to the original deal as far as that goes."

John considered what he Cowen had to offer him and it wasn't hard to think of something. Atlantis still needed food. Sgt. Bates had made a bargain with the Menarians, but after they had betrayed Atlantis to the Genii, that particular deal was off. John did not want Cowen to touch him, but if he could make a deal for an endless supply of crops for Atlantis, it would be worth it. At least he hoped it would. In theory he knew what Cowen wanted to do to him, and John figured he could get through it by closing his eyes and picturing Diane touching him. She was one of Beckett's nurses and had taken care of him after he'd been bitten by the Wraith bug. "There is something I want," John allowed, as he held Cowen's gaze.

Cowen looked pleased. "Name it, major."

"I want your people to supply my people with an continuous supply of Tava beans. And...anything else you have that's edible." John watched Cowen's face as he spoke and he could almost see the wheels turning. He rather hoped the man would refuse.

"You have a deal, major." Cowen smiled before easing back off of Sheppard and rising to his feet. He then held out one hand.

Which John ignored. He got up under his own power. "Good." A part of John was pleased because the food was important. But another part of him was filled with dread. But he told himself it was no big deal. He could handle it. He would handle it.
Cowen gestured to the bed. "Lie down, major."

"Now?"

"That was the deal, right?" Cowen looked impatient. "Do you want the crops or not?"

John shook off the dread and nodded. "I want them." That said he turned and moved to the bed. Then he just stood there, rooted to the spot.

Cowen moved up behind him, arms reaching around Sheppard's slender waist. "You won't need these," he drawled as he undid the fastenings on the jeans.

"Right." John twitched as felt Cowen ease the zipper down. He did more than twitch when fingers slid inside his boxers. His intent was to pull away but the arm around his waist held him fast and John reminded himself that he had agreed to this. So he focused on the bigger picture. His people would not starve.

"Easy, major," Cowen drawled as he pressed his lips to Sheppard's ear. "This is all about making you feel good."

John nodded then forced out a laugh. "Thing is...I don't think that's going to happen. This isn't really my cup of tea."

Cowen nipped Sheppard's earlobe even as he tugged down jeans and boxers so that he could curl his fingers around the major's cock. "It's not about gender, it's all about find pleasure. Feeling it." He began stroking Sheppard's cock.

"It's not working." John could hear the nervousness he was feeling bleeding out through his voice.

"It will." Cowen shifted the major, moving him towards the bed then easing him down onto his back. He released him but only to divest him of jeans and boxers. He tossed them aside before climbing onto the bed. "Close your eyes, major and let yourself feel."

John wanted to protest but he realized it wouldn't change anything. He was a man of his word and this wasn't a big deal. Letting another man touch him in exchange for an endless supply of food was a hell of a deal. At least that was what John kept telling himself, even as he let his eyes drift closed. But he couldn't stop his body from tensing up when fingers curled around him again. John let an image of Diane fill his head and, to his surprise his cock twitched and started to thicken. John indulged the fantasy and he continued to harden, but Cowen killed the moment by talking.

"Lift up," he ordered.

"What?" John's eyes flew open and he turned his head to see Cowen holding a pillow. "What are you doing?"

Cowen shook the pillow. "I need to slide this under the small of your back."

John glared at him. "Why?"

"Don't ruin the moment, major. Just do as your told."

"The moment is already ruined!" It hit John, like a slap in the face, that he was half naked with another man's hand on his cock. He felt his face flush and he had to fight the urge to pull the end of the blanket over
him.

Cowen released John but only to grip his hip. "Lift up!" he repeated, and it was an order not a request.

John found himself obeying. He wanted this over with. His face was still flushed and he closed his eyes when Cowen gripped his thighs and forced them open. He felt the man shift between them then thick fingers curled around his cock again. In desperation John dredged back the image of Diane. But the image shattered when warm wetness closed over the tip of his cock and John realized he was in Cowen's mouth. He had had his share of blow jobs in the past, but he was so not ready for this. It was on the tip of John's tongue to order Cowen to stop but he went mute when he felt a finger slip into the crack of his ass. Before John could find his voice again, the finger was pressing inside him. John hissed and his hips bucked up at the invasion. "No!" He opened his eyes and tried to pull back but his cock was still in Cowen's mouth and John froze when he felt the man's teeth bite into him. Not enough to really hurt him, but hard enough to give warning.

Another protest formed in his mouth though, but came out as a whimper when a sudden shockwave of pleasure went off inside him. Cowen's probing finger had found it's target and John had never understood what his gay friends had been talking about until this moment. But the pleasure wasn't good enough to erase the brutal reality of what Cowen was forcing him to do. John's body, however, turned traitor. It accepted the pleasure overload as it's due and released it's appreciation into Cowen's mouth. It wasn't until his body was trembling in the aftermath that John realized Cowen had shifted up over him. Before he could react, wet lips were pressed to his and a tongue slid into John's mouth. He could taste himself. He shuddered. It was one thing to taste himself after Lisa Grady had given him his first blow job as a birthday present at his sweet sixteen party. But this made him nauseus and John turned his head even as his hands lifted to push Cowen off him. "We're done!" John snarled. He was relieved when Cowen rolled off him, but it was hard to ignore the man's eyes on him as he slid off the bed and reached for his boxers. John pulled them on then grabbed his jeans before turning to glare at Cowen. "I expect the first delivery of Tava beens to be made the day after we leave here. Is that clear?"

"Clear as can be, major," Cowen allowed. He was rubbing his own lip with the tip of one finger as he watched Sheppard. "You don't have to be ashamed of what happened, major. Pleasure is pleasure. Your body understands that."

"Fuck...you." John almost whispered the words before making his escape into the bathroom. And after turning the water on as hot as it would go he stripped off his boxers and tee shirt, then stepped under the water and gave his body one hell of a lecture. But even as he scrubbed at his skin he couldn't wash away the feel of Cowen's touch or the memory of his own release. The residual tingle of pleasure remained, taunting John, and he felt himself begin to shake. "I can do this....." he whispered to himself. And it became his mantra until the water ran cold.

THE END...of part 4

Back to index
John dried off and got dressed in his jeans. But this time he pulled on a long-sleeved shirt and his socks. He left his boots off though. Then he left the bathroom and discovered Cowen sitting at the kitchen table, carving a piece of wood.

"Come join me, major," Cowen invited. "Or would you prefer John? Given the circumstances."

"Major works for me." John did sit down and he was surprised by what he found on the table top. What looked like a sketch pad and a lump of what looked like charcoal. He picked it up and it was a bit awkward because it was so thick and oddly shaped, but it fit his hand well enough. So John drew the pad to him and stroked a few lines. The paper was thicker than he was used too, and rougher, but doable. "Where did you get this?" John looked up at Cowen as he asked.

Cowen shrugged. In one of the cupboards. I figured we both needed something to bide the time."

John watched Cowen carve for a moment, then nodded. Then he turned his attention back to the pad and began sketching. It wasn't long before Rodney's face stared back at him. John chuckled to himself and resisted the urge to draw in a powerbar as he sketched Rodney's hands.

"Do we still have a deal, Major?" Cowen queried.

"You get what you want tonight." John's tone was sharp. He still felt sickened by what had happened. By the fact that his body had derived pleasure. He knew what would happen tonight and he wasn't ready for it, but he would see it through. If there really was a traitor on Atlantis, John needed to know. And he reminded himself that what happened tonight would also end up with the Genii becoming their allies instead of the enemy. As much as John hated this, he knew that Atlantis needed as many allies as it could get. So he would do what had to be done to get them.

Cowen stopped whittling to watch the major draw. "You're very good."

John shrugged. "It's just a hobby."

"Are you afraid, major?" Cowen blurted out the question.

"Of what?" John shot back. He knew exactly what Cowen meant but he wasn't in the mood to play whatever game the other man had in mind to play.

Cowen sighed. "I don't want to hurt you, John."

John gritted his teeth and glared at Cowen. "That's Major to you."

"Why be so formal? Do you think that acting that way will make you feel less pleasure when I fuck you?"

"Pleasure?" John was dumbstruck. "You bastard! I don't want to do this and you know it! I won't get any pleasure out of it!"

Cowen smiled and shook his head. "You are afraid."

John laughed and heard the cold bitterness in the sound. "I'm not afraid of you."
"No," Cowen agreed. "You're afraid of yourself. Afraid of what you might feel. You're afraid you're going to like it."

"Fuck you!" John was so angry his hand shook and he wrecked Ford's face. He threw down the lump of charcoal and shoved his chair back. He wanted to storm out the door and go for a run. He felt wound up from the intensity of his emotions and he needed some kind of release for them. Without thinking he stalked over to the wall and punched it. Pain radiated from his knuckles straight up his arm and into his shoulder, but John didn't make a sound. The pain brought focus. It gave him the outlet he needed so he channeled everything he was feeling into the pain and drew his arm back to throw another punch.

But Cowen gripped his forearm and hauled Sheppard away from the wall. "That won't help."

John tried to yank his arm back but Cowen's fingers dug into his flesh, clinging to him like a leech. The man was surprisingly strong. "Let the fuck go!" John realized he was swearing a lot and it was a red flag. When he was scared and felt like he had no control over a situation, he always seemed to revert to swearing a lot.

"Let me ask you a question," Cowen countered. "If I said you could leave right now...would you go?"

"Would you tell me who the traitor was first?" John tugged at his arm again but the fingers held fast.

Cowen shook his head. "No. But I will let you go, if that's what you want?"

John was surprised to hear that. "Why? What are you trying to pull?"

"I'm trying to be...fair." As he spoke, Cowen eased up on his grip, but only so that he could stroke his fingers along John's forearm, as if smoothing out the imprint of his touch.

"Fair?" John was more than a little confused. He pulled his arm away and took a few steps back. But he kept his eyes locked on Cowen's face. He saw something in the other man's eyes that disturbed him. Desire. "Let me ask you a question," John countered. "Why are you doing this really? Why me? Why this particular deal?"

Cowen cocked an eyebrow. "I thought we already had this conversation?"

John shrugged. "I guess it didn't sink in, because it doesn't make sense." And it didn't. But John needed it to make sense. He felt an almost desperate need to understand why this was happening. Maybe to justify why he was doing it.

"It's very simple, major." Cowen closed the distance between them. "I want to fuck you. I wanted that the first time I saw you. But we had other issues to deal with. And I knew then that I couldn't have you. You wouldn't have let me. But then I found a way and I lured you here."

"Are you playing games?" John demanded. "Is there really a traitor?"

Cowen nodded. "There is a traitor, major. I'm not so foolish as to think I could play you and get away with it. In the end we both get what we want. I get to fuck you. You get your traitor, and we both benefit from becoming allies against the Wraith. And as an added bonus you have an endless supply of food for Atlantis." As he spoke, Cowen took another step closer to Sheppard. They were face to face now and Cowen lifted his hands and slid his fingers into Sheppard's hair.

John surprised himself by allowing Cowen's touch. He knew the man was going to kiss him and he let him. He closed his eyes as the warm lips closed over his and he felt relief when he felt nothing. No reaction. No sense of attraction. John lifted his own hands but only to press them against Cowen's chest to push him away. When Cowen let go of him, John was surprised to see the man's face was pale and his eyes were bloodshot.
away. "It's not time yet." Strangely enough, John felt at peace with his decision now. He would let Cowen fuck him and it would be over and things would be settled between them. He could do this, it wouldn't change him. He wouldn't let it.

"You need to eat." Cowen turned and moved to the pot on the counter. He filled a bowl with stew and set it on the table. "Eat, Major. Then rest. It's going to be a long night."

"Whatever you say," John drawled. He smiled at Cowen before sitting down at the table and picking up the spoon. He felt back in control now. Soon he would be back on Atlantis and everything would be back to normal. So John ate, then he sketched for a bit, completing a picture with Weir, Ford, Teyla, Beckett and Mckay all grouped together. Then he realized he was tired so he stretched out on the bed and soon fell asleep.

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"NO!" Sheppard's throat felt raw as the scream erupted from him. He sat up, shaking, feeling the cold sheen of sweat on his skin. He had been dreaming about Sumner having the life sucked out of him by the Wraith bitch. A recurring nightmare for him since the day he had been forced to shoot and kill the Colonel. And in the nightmare the Colonel returned in the form of a Wraith to seek John out and suck the life out of him. He usually ended up shooting the Colonel again and the dream ended. But this time he had fired on the Colonel and he had gotten up, knocked the gun out of John's hand and sucked his soul out of him.

"Major." Cowen was suddenly there, one hand smoothing over Sheppard's forehead.

John batted his hand away. "What time is it?" He was still shaking and it hard to stop.

Cowen touched his face again. "It's time to seal the deal," he whispered.

"Whatever." John wanted to get this over with. And he was almost desperate enough to want this as a distraction from the lingering affects of the dream. He couldn't shake the images out of his head, or the emotions they evoked.

"Lie back," Cowen ordered, as he pressed a hand to Sheppard's chest.

John let himself be pushed down, but shifted uncomfortably as Cowen settled over him. Then fingers were curling in his hair and Cowen's lips were on his and John almost gagged as a tongue was stuffed in his mouth. He let the kiss happen. He would let Cowen use him for his own pleasure. A quick fuck and this would all be over.

Cowen continued kissing Sheppard, but his hands slid out of the dark hair to work on his shirt and pants. Eventually he broke the kiss so that he could strip the major. Then he stripped himself. "You really are beautiful," Cowen whispered.

"I can do without the commentary," John hissed. He could feel the cold chill evaporate from his skin as he flushed with embarrassment. John couldn't look at Cowen. He didn't want to face the other man's nudity. It felt surreal in this moment, to be naked and exposed with another man.

"As you wish," Cowen replied. He bent his head to bite one of Sheppard's nipples. John bit back a gasp, but a moan did escape as strong fingers suddenly closed over his cock. Skilled fingers and John felt himself twitching into hardness and suddenly he found it hard to breathe as panic hit him like a sledgehammer. It wasn't supposed to be like this. He wasn't supposed to feel anything. He grabbed Cowen by the wrist and tugged the hand off him. "No. The deal was you fuck me. That's it."
Cowen opened his mouth as if to argue, then snapped it closed and nodded. "True enough," he allowed. He leaned over Sheppard to snag a bottle of oil. He used it to slick his fingers then said, "Roll over."

"Why?" Suspicion was crystal clear in John's voice.

"Because I need to prepare you." Cowen pushed on his hip. "It will hurt less if I fuck you from behind."

John did not want to hear this. But he rolled over and closed his eyes. This made him feel more vulnerable than before. More exposed. He wrapped his arms around the pillow under his head and gripped it with his fingers. Then he bit his lip as he felt a slick finger press inside him. He wasn't backing away from pain. Rather he was swallowing down the protest that wanted to come out. But he couldn't stop this. He had given his word. Another finger joined the first and it burned, making John shift his hips. But then a fingertip brushed over his prostate and the shock of pleasure made John whimper. He flushed with shame as his hips twitched of their own accord.

Cowen eased his fingers out then positioned himself so that the tip of his cock was pressed against Sheppard's opening. He thrust his hips forward, one hand gripping the Major's hip.

"Fuck!" John hissed the word as he was breeched. It hurt. The burn and stretch of it shook John to his core. He hadn't expected this. How invasive it felt. Cowen was too thick and too hard and John couldn't help but try and twist away. But strong fingers dug into his hips, holding him pressed down. There was no escape. He muffled a moan into the pillow as Cowen's hardness pressed in deeper. The burn was intense and John had never felt more violated in his life. And it was an emotion he wasn't used too. It scared him. This scared him.

"Almost there," Cowen whispered, hitching his hips in short thrusts. Then he sank all the way in and went still. He bent his head to nuzzle the nape of Sheppard's neck. "You're so tight, major. So perfect."

John didn't respond. He couldn't. If he opened his mouth he would scream.

THE END...of part 5
Chapter 6: Part 6

Part 6

Warm lips nuzzled the nape of John's neck. He shivered and shifted and the movement shifted the cock inside him as well and John bit his lip as a shock of pleasure hit every nerve ending. It wasn't supposed to be like this. He went still then gritted out, "Move!" Cowen's cock felt too thick and too hard. Too invasive. John felt too vulnerable and he hated that feeling. Vulnerability equalled weakness and he could not afford to be weak.

Cowen bit Sheppard in the shoulder then eased back so that he could begin thrusting into him. "So tight, major. So...perfect." He grunted between each thrust.

John said nothing. There was nothing to say. He felt his body rock with each thrust. Felt his cock sliding across the sheet. He was still soft and he was grateful for that tiny victory. He clung to it like a drowning victim to a lifeline. The burn was fading but the hardness inside him still stretched him uncomfortably and John focused on that too. Then Cowen's thrusts were coming harder and faster and he was panting and grunting and John could feel the other man's sweat slicking his own skin. Then Cowen cried out and it should have been a warning to John, along with the pulse of the cock inside him. But still he was unprepared for the warm wetness that filled him and he a shudder ran through him and John buried his face in the pillow as Cowen emptied his release into him.

Cowen's weight slumped over Sheppard and his thin lips pressed to the major's ear. "That...that was incredible."

John did not want to hear that. He tried to shift Cowen off him but the other man was too heavy. "Are we done?" John could hear the cold stiffness of his tone.

"The deal was that you spend one full night in my bed, major," Cowen replied. "Or is the deal off?"

"No." John hissed the word then closed his eyes. He remembered Cowen saying that and his own agreement. But for some reason the meaning of it had not registered with him. Until now. John had prepared himself for one fuck. For it to be over now and he could move on. But it wasn't over and he wasn't sure he could do this again. But he heard himself reply, "The deal is on."

Cowen chuckled softly then nuzzled Sheppard's hair. "Go to sleep, major. You'll need your rest for the next round."

John stiffened. "Get off me."

"No. I like it here."

"Please." It wasn't really begging, John told himself. It was a simple request. He was just being polite.

Cowen eased back but he slid an arm around Sheppard's waist, drawing him with him so that they were still connected.

John started to squirm, wanting the softened flesh of Cowen's cock out of him. But warning fingers curled around John's own cock and he went still. "This wasn't part of the deal."

"The deal was that you spend the night in my bed. That means you do what I want, major. Or we can end the deal right now and you leave without the name of the traitor. Your choice." Cowen's hand stroked the major's cock as he spoke.
"You're a bastard!" John hissed, as he gripped Cowen's wrist. But the man tightened his hold and John winced. He let go. "Fine." He knew he had no choice. "Whatever you want," he whispered.

Cowen bit Sheppard's earlobe, all the while still stroking him. Then he pressed in closer, grinding his hips.

John gasped then bit his lip as the cock inside him brushed over his prostate. Cowen was still soft but the pressure was enough to set off little shock waves of pleasure and John almost whimpered as he felt his cock twitch into hardness. His mind screamed silently at his body's betrayal. A whimper did escape John as he pulsed his release over Cowen's hand. He was relieved when Cowen released him, but it was only to wrap his arm around John's waist to snug him in against him.

"Go to sleep," Cowen ordered.

"Fuck you!" John snapped, but he closed his eyes. His body was exhausted and he felt mentally drained and emotionally brittle. So when the dark fog of sleep crept over him, John welcomed it's warm comfort as he was shrouded in darkness.

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He woke up screaming. But the sound never left his throat, it just echoed in his head. John opened his eyes and jerked in surprise to find Cowen looming over him. Then the thin lips were pressed to his and John realized he was shaking. That what had wakened him was another dream. The same as the one before only this time it wasn't Sumner sucking the life out of him in the form of the Wraith. It was Cowen.

"Shhhh..." Cowen whispered against Sheppard's mouth. Then he pulled back and smiled.

"How...how long was I asleep?" John had to clear his throat to ask the question.

Cowen shrugged. "A couple of hours." He slid off the bed and held out one hand. "Come."

John glared at him. He was not going to obey like a puppy dog. "Where?" he shot back, with as much defiance as he could muster. Although it felt depleted. John knew he was running on empty.

"Time for a shower, major," Cowen drawled. His hand was still outstretched.

"Right...shower." John kept his tone sarcastic but slid off the bed, resisting the urge to bring the sheet with him. What was the point? Cowen had already seen him naked. But John made an attempt to gather his dignity around him like a cloak and he brushed past Cowen, ignoring his hand. Shoulders stiff, John headed for the bathroom. By the time Cowen joined him, he was already under the stream of water. And it felt soothing, like a balm to his aching body as it washed away the stench of sex that clung to John's skin and permeated his nostrils.

Cowen stepped in behind Sheppard, reaching for the soap. He lathered the major's back. John tried not to react as Cowen's hands slid down his body. He was proud of himself for not flinching when strong fingers gripped his ass, kneading it. But he couldn't stop himself from twitching when a soapy finger slid inside him. John fell forward, pressing his palms against the slick wall to support himself as his knees buckled. Then the finger slid out and a wave of relief washed over John. But it was shortlived as he was forced to endure Cowen washing the rest of him. He wasn't even allowed to wash his own hair. But then the shower was over and John stepped out and reached for a towel. But Cowen denied him even that priveledge.
"You truly are a beautiful man, major," Cowen said softly, as he toweled Sheppard dry from head to toe.

"I think you need glasses!" John shot back, eyes blazing with defiance. He reminded himself that it was almost over. Then he could go back to Atlantis and take care of business. The end would justify the means, said a tiny voice in John's head. And he wanted to believe it. He had to believe it. Because of this Atlantis would have an endless food supply and an traitor would be revealed. John would deal with them and Atlantis would be safe again. The people he cared about would be safe.

Cowen chuckled as he used the towel on himself now. "Why deny the truth? There is no shame in being beautiful, major. You should let yourself enjoy it."

John did not want to heard this. "Can we finish this up, please?" If he treated it like a business transaction, then that was all it would be. That's all he would let it be.

"Indeed. Let's finish this," Cowen replied. He led the way back into the other room then stood by the bed. "Lie down on your stomach," he ordered.

"Whatever floats your boat." John winced at the ragged edge to his voice. It was a strain to keep up the pretense he wasn't affected by this. But he would not let Cowen see anything else. So John stretched out on his stomach, biting his lip as he felt Cowen straddle his hips. Then he stiffened as he felt something cool poured over his back.

Cowen laughed then rubbed his hands over Sheppard's back. "Relax, it's just oil."

John had to force his muscles to unknot. "What are you going to do now? Marinate me?"

"Something much more pleasurable," Cowen drawled softly as he kneaded the muscles in Sheppard's back. He worked his way down to the taut ass and massaged that as well.

It took all of John's will power not to pull away. He gripped the pillow again and tried not to let a feeling of lethargy wash over him. As much as he hated what was happening, Cowan had talented fingers and his body enjoyed the attention. John silently cursed his body. He felt Cowen shift back and he could guess what was coming next. But he was wrong. Instead of a finger pressing inside him, John felt warm wetness. "What the fuck!" He tried to shift up but Cowen pressed him down. "What are you doing?"

Cowen's answer was to press his tongue deeper inside Sheppard, simulating fucking him with tiny thrusts and flicks.

"Stop!" John knew it was more of a plea than a command. But he had to make it stop. What Cowen was doing was too intimate and it would shatter him.

"Easy, major," Cowen purred.

John was happy to hear Cowen speak. To feel him shifting back, allowing John to roll over. But the look in Cowen's eyes unsettled him. "Just do what you have to do!" John hissed at him. And he could almost handle this. Cowen spreading his thighs open then pressing them back. But John had to close his eyes as he felt his legs draped over Cowen's shoulders. He bit his lip as the head of Cowen's cock pressed against him and the burn of entry made him hiss. But that was the only sound he made as Cowen fucked him. When he felt Cowen's release inside him, John opened his eyes. Then Cowen was pulling out and John shuddered, and was convinced his insides were going to follow. But before he had adjusted to the sudden emptiness inside him, he was biting back a moan as Cowen's mouth engulfed him and it shook John to realize he was hardening again. God he was so fucked up. When he came he swallowed a hysterical giggle, because he never giggled and this wasn't the least bit funny and he knew it. But John figured, why not laugh? It was
better than crying. And he wanted to cry. His eyes burned with the need to release his tears, but he held them back.

Cowen moved over him, fingers sliding into Sheppard's dark hair, holding him as he claimed his lips.

It was surreal to taste himself in the kiss and John felt strangely detached from it. He simply let Cowen kiss him. Let the probing tongue plunder his mouth. Then Cowen was pulling back and John forced his lips to twist into a smirk. "We done now?" he asked calmly. Too calmly, and he knew it was nothing but a fragile illusion.

"Yes, major. We're done now." Cowen rolled onto his side and scrached his soft belly as he watched Sheppard.

"What's the name?" John needed to know now. He needed to focus on this. To immerse himself in anger and let it consume him. It would burn away the shame. He knew it would.

But Cowen would deny him that. "You get the name tomorrow. When your ship comes to pick you up." That said, Cowen shifted onto his back and closed his eyes.

John didn't argue with him. He knew he couldn't force the issue. So he slid off the bed and headed into the bathroom. He turned the water on as hot as he could bear it then stood beneath it, letting it wash away the slick reminder of what he had done. But John found he could not wash away the feel of Cowen. The imprint of him was burned into John's skin. Still he grabbed a rag and scrubbed until his skin was raw and the water ran cold. But John was too numb to feel it.

THE END...of part 6
Chapter 7: Part 7

After his shower, John dressed in a long-sleeved black shirt, his uniform pants, socks, boots and finally his jacket. He felt cold from the inside out. But being fully dressed right now was more about feeling less vulnerable than anything else. When he returned to the other room he found Cowen asleep on the bed. A shudder ran through John to see the tangled sheets and the damp stains. He turned away and went to the table. The sketch pad and lump of charcoal-like substance were still there. So John sat down and began to draw.

He didn't know how much time had passed but suddenly Cowen was standing next to him and John felt a flare of panic. His fingers fumbled the charcoal and made blot on the paper. John cursed himself then forced his body to obey him for once. He stopped himself from shaking and lifted his eyes to Cowen's. There was a neutral expression on John's face as he asked, "What do you want?"

"We can go outside now, major," Cowen replied. "The door is unlocked so you can wait for your ship. If you like."

"I like." John grabbed the sketch pad and rose from the table with it tucked under his arm. He was taking it with him. He then scooped up his bag of gear then headed for the door. He didn't say a word to Cowen or even look at the man as he stepped outside. The air was warm the sun was bright and John realized he was still cold.

Cowen moved to stand beside him. He held out a radio device. "You can contact your people with this. I'm sure they're at the drop off location. You may tell them they can pick you up here."

John nodded as he accepted the device and it didn't slip by him how Cowen made it a point to brush his fingers with his own. He glared at the other man. "This will never happen again. You know that."

"I know." Cowen smiled as he let his eyes rove over Sheppard's body. "I am satisfied with our negotiations, major."

"I expect the first shipment of food to be delivered to Atlantis tomorrow!" John could hear the tenseness in his own voice. It took a great effort for him not to scream at Cowen. Not to raise on fist and slam it into the other man's nose so that the smug look on his face would be shattered.

Cowen nodded. "You shall have it, major. I am a man of my word. From this moment on the Genii and the people of Atlantis are allies in the war against the Wraith."

John believed him. After everything that had happened, he had to believe him. He clicked the radio and brought it to his lips. "Lt.Ford, can you read me?"

"Yes, sir. Waiting on your orders, major."

"I have coordinates for you to pick me up." John looked at Cowen who gave them to him and he repeated them.

"On our way, sir," Ford stated. "Out."

John handed the radio back then he simply stood there, eyes to the skyline. He didn't have long to wait before the Jumper appeared. John didn't look back at Cowen. Once the Jumper had landed he made for the door. A moment later he was nudging Stackhouse out of the Pilot seat. "I'm driving, soldier," he stated, and
he didn't have to force the smile that curved his lips. From this moment on John could forget what had happened with Cowen. He wasn't a man who allowed himself to live with regret. There was no point in it. No point in obsessing over the past. What he couldn't change he made himself forget about. Made himself look to the present and the future. Right now he was looking to go home.

Ford slid into the co-pilot seat. "You okay, sir?" he asked.

"I'm fine." A tiny voice in John's head called him a liar, but he ignored it.

"How did the negotiations go?" Ford persisted.

John didn't look at him. "I got everything we need." He spoke softly and couldn't quite stop the tremor that shook him. John lifted the Jumper into the air and they were off. He grabbed his ear piece and tucked it into place then contacted Weir. It felt good to hear her voice. It was proof that the negotiations were over and everything could go back to normal. Or for whatever passed for normal on Atlantis.

"What's your ETA, major?" Weir queried.

"About one hour," John replied. "I have something important we need to discuss, doctor."

"See you soon then," she replied.

John nodded to himself as he signed off. Then he shut out everything and let the feeling of flying again ease away the chaos of his body, mind and soul.

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John asked that the briefing be kept small. Just himself, Weir and Rodney. He felt happy to be back on home base. To see familiar faces. Weir and Rodney had both been waiting to greet him when he disembarked. The moment had felt normal to John and he let the familiarity wash over him. Let it chase away the uncertainty that had been twisting inside of him since he had given himself to Cowen. But that was in the past and John refused to think about it anymore. Instead he focused on what good had come out of it.

Slipping into a chair at the conference table, John smiled at his companions. "First things first," he stated. "The Genii have agreed to become our allies against the Wraith."

"That's great news," Elizabeth replied, a smile lighting up her face. "You did good, John."

"There's more." John didn't want her praise. She didn't understand what it meant. So he plunged ahead. "I got food. An unending supply of it. The first shipment will be delivered tomorrow."

Rodney looked surprised. "You did?"

John looked at him and nodded. "I did. So we'll finally get to find out if Tava beans are as good as Teyla said they were."

"How did you manage that?" Elizabeth countered. But she looked pleased.

"Maybe you're rubbing off on me," John teased. And it felt good to do so.

Elizabeth smiled and nodded. "Okay. Anything else?"

The smile faded and John leaned forward. "Cowen told me that we have a traitor in Atlantis."
"And you believe him?" This from Rodney.

"I do." John let them hear his conviction.

Elizabeth looked troubled but determined. "Who is it?"

John locked eyes with her and he could feel himself growing angry. He had sold himself for this information and he wanted to make the person suffer because of it. Projection, John knew. But he didn't care. He wanted to pound them into the ground. He unclenched his fingers, realizing they had formed into fists, and said softly, "Dr. Kavanaugh."

"What?" Elizabeth and Rodney chorused together.

"I don't believe it." Elizabeth shook her head.

Rodney was quiet a moment then said, "I do."

John looked at him and realized Rodney looked guilty. "Why do you say that?"

"Just...little things that have been happening." Rodney rubbed his hands together nervously. "I thought it was just me projecting my dislike of him into things. But I guess not."

"I'll take care of it." John was already rising from his chair.

Elizabeth waved him to sit. "I want Bates to handle it."

John glared at her. "I got the information and I'm the ranking military officer. This is my job!"

"This is internal, John," Elizabeth stated. "I want Sgt. Bates to handle this. You did your part by finding out about him."

"Which earns me the right to see it through to the end!" John felt himself flush red with anger. He realized he was shouting and that it was a loss of control and he hated himself for it. He also realized he was shaking.

Rodney was watching him. "Let Bates handle it, major," he interjected. "Why get your hands dirty?"

John almost laughed. He knew Rodney hated Bates almost as much as he hated Kavanaugh. He also understood what he was trying to do. Play peace keeper. And another thing hit John. He was betraying too much by his anger. It was over the top for this scenario and he knew it. So he let himself sink back down into the chair and looked at Elizabeth. "I'm sorry. You're right. Bates can handle it." John would go to see the scientist later. They would talk privately. No one would care. No one liked the guy anyway.

"Are we done?" Rodney asked, looking at Weir.

"I think so." She smiled at him then looked at Sheppard. "I'd like you to stay though."

John nodded.

Rodney headed for the door but paused to look back at Sheppard. "Glad you're back," he mumbled, then he headed out.

"It's good to be back," John said, more to himself.
"What really happened, John?" Weir had moved and was sitting on the edge of the table next to him.

He looked up at her, startled by her nearness. He hadn't heard her move. John hated that he was losing his focus. He was always aware of his surroundings, but he was losing that edge. Cowen's fault. And the images of the other man over him danced in John's head, taunting him. He closed his eyes but they wouldn't fade. He shook his head and forced a smile, knowing that Weir was waiting for his answer. "I told you. We..talked."

Elizabeth narrowed her gaze on him. "I guess your diplomatic and negotiating skills have improved."

"Yeah...practice makes perfect." John rubbed a hand over his face. He was tired.

"Go see Beckett," Elizabeth ordered. "He's waiting to do a physical."

John stiffened. "Why? I'm fine."

Elizabeth patted his shoulder. "Standard procedure anytime you go offworld, major. You know that."

"Yeah." He did know that. John rose to his feet. "Let me know what happens with Kavanaugh." He was curious about what Weir intended to do. Maybe ship the guy off to mother ship. John knew that was wishful thinking. He wished he could ship Cowen there though. But that thought just dredged up more images of the intimacy between them and John nearly bolted for the door.

He didn't head for the infirmary. He went back to his room and took another shower. It didn't help. It didn't wash away the smell of sex or the feel of Cowen's touch or the hardness that had thrust inside him. Nor did it wash away the memory of how John's body had betrayed him. That was what haunted him most. Cursing he dressed in layers again then headed for the door, only to freeze to find McKay standing there. "Rodney? What are you doing here?"

Rodney stared back at him. "Aren't you supposed to be with Beckett?"

"Don't tell, okay? I'm fine." John hoped that Rodney would go along with him here.

"You hungry?"

John shrugged. He wasn't but he knew he needed to eat. "Not really, but I'll keep you company."

Rodney nodded. "How about we make a stop at my lab. I found something I can't get to work. I thought maybe you could touch it."

"Sure." John was more than happy to comply. Touching things for Rodney was normal. But even as John made to step out the door, he felt his knees buckle and a wave of dizziness washed over him. His stomach churned and John swallowed down bile. Dark spots danced in front of his eyes and the next thing he knew he was lying on his bed. John blinked to make his eyes swim into focus. Rodney's concerned face peered down at him. "Sorry." John wasn't sure why he felt the need to apologize.

"Beckett is on his way with a gurney." Rodney's tone was blunt. "You need to eat more."

John was confused. Rodney was making less sense than usual. He wasn't sure how the two comments were connected.

Rodney seemed to read his mind. "I carried you to the bed, pretty much. You're too light for you height."
"You need to eat more."

"Oh." John sat up. "Call Beckett back. I don't need him. I'm fine." No way in hell was he going to the infirmary. But Rodney didn't budge and when he tried to shift off the bed, strong hands pushed him back down. One planted itself on his chest.

"Stay put!" Rodney sounded annoyed.

Oddly enough, that made John happy. This felt normal. But he still had no intention of going to the infirmary. However, his door whooshed open and Beckett was suddenly there, fingers on his pulse point. John batted his hand away. "I'm fine."

Beckett looked him over. "Rodney said you passed out."

"What...not fainted?" John grinned at Mckay but the other man was not smiling.

"On the gurney, lad." Beckett was slipping an arm around Sheppard to help him stand.

John pushed him away. "I can walk." He realized he wasn't getting out of this so he would go under his own power. Beckett would do a quick once over then he could come back to his room. Or maybe hang out with Ford. Maybe get something to eat with Rodney or touch things in his lab. Anything that would distract him.


So John walked out, resisting the urge to check whether or not Rodney was still glaring at him. They made their way to the infirmary and John sat on the exam table. He let Beckett take his pulse and blood pressure and listen to his heart. But when a hand slid under his shirt and started feeling around, John stiffened. He pushed Beckett away and jumped off the table, and had to lock his knees when he swayed.

"Easy, major." Beckett grabbed his arm.

"Let go!" John shook him off. He knew it wasn't Cowen. He knew it was just a simple exam being administered by a doctor whom he trusted. But his body and mind were reacting otherwise. "I'm fine, Carson. Okay?"

Beckett shook his head. "You're not fine, major. You're exhausted and you're dehydrated and you need to eat."

John nodded. "I know. So I'll go grab a bite then go to bed. Good enough?"

"No. It's not." Beckett blocked Sheppard when he tried to step around him. "What happened to you?"

"Nothing." John couldn't meet the man's gaze. He realized that Beckett knew, and that shook him.

Beckett sighed. "Major...I have to examine you and you know it. I don't want to make this hard on you."

John lifted his eyes to glare at him. He saw concern in Carson's gaze along with sympathy. John did not want to see that. He crossed his arms over his chest and let his patented, cocky, smile curve his lips. "What you're thinking is wrong. Okay?"

"Really? So Cowen didn't sexually abuse you?" Beckett's blue eyes were blazing.
"We had sex.” John stumbled over the word a bit. "It was...consensual. Which means I'm fine and this discussion is over."

Beckett shook his head. "I don't believe you."

John felt his control crumbling but he could not show weakness. He had to keep this as much a businesslike transaction as letting Cowen fuck him had been. "Believe what you want. I had sex with Cowen. End of story."

"I'll tell Dr. Weir."

"What?” John stiffened and stared at Beckett in shock. "You can't tell her. It's no one's business but mine!"

Beckett shook his head at Sheppard. "You're a mess, major. I don't have to know the details to know that you've never been with another man before Cowen. Have you?"

John opened his mouth to lie but closed it and said nothing.

"You did not meet with Cowen with the intention of having sex with him,” Beckett continued. "Which means he forced you. That's the bottom line. And you know that I need to check you out."

"Fine.” John had wanted nothing more than to stick his fingers in his ears to turn Beckett out. But he knew the doctor was right. So he could do this. It was no big deal. John locked eyes with Beckett. "Do what you have to do."

Beckett looked relieved. "Get undressed while I get what I need. You can leave your shirt and socks on and cover up with the sheet." That said he bustled out.

John did as he was told. He shrugged off his jacket then bent to unlace his boots. He kicked them off then slid out of his pants and briefs. Then he sat on the table and draped the sheet over his lap. He could do this. It was just an exam. No big deal. But he realized he was shaking.

"Ready?” Beckett asked as he entered the room.

"Sure.” John wasn't ready but he would see this through.

Beckett had stirrups with him and he attached them to the end of the bed. He then looked at Sheppard. "I know this won't be easy for you and I'll be as quick and as careful as I can be."

John nodded. He stretched out on the table when Beckett told him too, then he scooched down so his legs could be placed in the stirrups. He felt a chill settle into him and he stared shivering. He couldn't stop it. He was still shaking when Beckett draped a blanket over his chest. John forced a smile and nodded his thanks. He closed his eyes as the sheet was draped over his legs and he heard the scrape of the stool and knew that Beckett was between his legs. It felt surreal to John. But Beckett's gloved hands on his penis jolted John back into reality. He started to sit up.

"Easy...it's okay. I'm sorry, major,” Beckett apologized. "I'll tell you what I'm doing before I do it."

"No...just do it!” John didn't want to hear it spelled out. He knew what was coming. He forced himself to lay back down but his fingers were clenched in the blanket as Beckett's hands continued poking and prodding him. When one pressed inside him he flinched. The memory of Cowen doing the same thing taunted John. He opened his eyes the image still danced in his head. It wrapped around John, laughing at him. Reminding him of his body's betrayal. Nausea twisted in John's stomach and he swallowed down bile. He felt himself
shaking and then a hand was touching his shoulder and John realized it was Beckett. He blinked and saw that his legs were back down and knew it had to be over. "You done?" John croaked out.

Beckett nodded. "There is some bruising and a bit of tearing. I cleaned you up and I think you'll be fine. Just sore. I need you to tell me otherwise, okay?"

John nodded. He watched Beckett step back and he sat up. Bad idea. His stomach lurched and bile burned in his throat. He knew he was going puke and it must have shown on his face. Beckett thrust a basin at him and John emptied his stomach. When he was done he felt worn out and a cold sweat sheened his skin. "Sorry." His voice sounded raw.

"It's okay. Not surprising." Beckett handed him a glass of water. "You're suffering from shock, major."

"I'm just tired." John rinsed his mouth then handed the glass back. "Can I go now?"

Beckett shook his head. "I'm keeping you over night and hooking you up to an IV. You need to be monitored for a while. I'll give you something to make you sleep and we'll see how you're doing tomorrow. Then maybe you can rest in your room after that."

John stared at him in disbelief. "You're grounding me?"

"Aye, that I am." Beckett patted his shoulder. "I'll get your bed ready. Get dressed. I brought some scrubs." With that he left.

John watched him leave then he got up and got dressed and headed for the door. He wasn't staying here. He felt trapped again. He had to find a way to be free.

TBC
John headed for the balcony that was farthest away from both the infirmary and his quarters. He didn't want anyone to find him. It was cold outside and John had forgotten his jacket, but he didn't care. He felt like he could breathe out here. But eventually the wind sent him huddling into the corner, crouched down and shivering. But still he would not leave. John wasn't ready to face anyone. To be forced to wear his usual mask. The cocky-pilot-who-didn't-have-a-care-in-the-world mask. So he stayed where he was and let the cold air seep into him. It was a distraction from the other coldness. The one that made him feel numb inside. But as hard as John tried he could not rid himself of the memory of Cowen's touch. Of the way his body had betrayed him. All of it replayed in his head and John wished he could freeze it out of him.

"Major!"

The sound of Rodney's voice calling him made John jump. All the more so when he realized McKay was kneeling in front of him. Another reminder of how he was losing focus. John plastered a smile on his face. "Hey, Rodney. How did you find me?"


"I like the cold." And he did. Usually. He had really liked Antarctica and John wished he was back there right now. Wished he had never come to Atlantis. He had fucked everything up.

"I'll carry you inside if I have to," Rodney stated. And as he spoke he reached out for Sheppard.

John jerked back. "No..I can walk." He knew Rodney was just trying to help but he didn't want to be touched right now. John just wanted to be alone. So he made himself stand up but his knees buckled and strong hands caught him.

Rodney guided him towards the door. "You're freezing." It was said in an annoyed tone.

"I guess it's a little cold," John allowed and it was then that he realized he was shaking so hard his teeth were clattering.

"I'm taking you back to the infirmary." Rodney was shrugging off his jacket as he spoke and he made to drape it over the major's shoulders.

John pulled away. He didn't want to be warm. Cold was better. Cold was detachment and icy anger. All the things he needed to cling too. "You keep it," he hissed through his chattering teeth.

Rodney glared at him. "Put this on, major. I have to get you warmed up."

"What are you, my mother?" John realized that this was fun. Verbal sparring with Rodney. He had missed it.

"I'm the guy who is taking you back to the infirmary," Rodney said firmly. "Now we can walk there or I can call for a med team and a gurney."

John knew Rodney would do it too and he shook his head. "No. I'll walk."

Rodney nodded then made another attempt to drape the jacket around Sheppard. "Good."
"Thanks." John let the Jacket fold over him but he didn't feel any warmer. But strangely enough he felt comforted in a way he couldn't explain.

"Whatever." Rodney blew off the thanks then guided Sheppard in the right direction. "I have a feeling Carson is going to be pissed at you," he warned.

John laughed. He knew Beckett would be furious and he didn't care. That was normal for them. John ended up in the infirmary. Carson tried to keep him there. John slipped out. A familiar pattern that was just part of the norm. And that was what John wanted right now. For everything to be back to normal. "He'll understand," John whispered.

Rodney shrugged. "If you say so."

They walked the rest of the way in silence. They didn't even make it all the way to the infirmary when Carson came stalking towards them. He shooed Rodney back as he fussed over the major.

"What the bloody hell do you think you were doing taking off like that?" Beckett groused.

"I don't like it here." John locked eyes with Beckett, pleading with him.

But Carson shook his head. "You need to stay for a bit, laddie. Now come on and put your scrubs on and get into bed. I'll get you hooked up and you can get some sleep."

John found himself nodding. He was very tired. But he pulled away from Beckett for a moment, so he could turn and look for Rodney. He was still there, kind of hovering in the background. "Thanks," John said softly.

"Sure, major. I've got nothing better to do than play rescue Sheppard all day." The words were spoken with the usual Mckay sharpness, but there was an underlying softness to them that Rodney didn't try to hide.

"Somebody's got to do it," John teased back. And this felt right. This was how things were supposed to be. He felt Carson tugging on his arm and let himself be led off. All too soon he was lying in one of the beds, hooked up to an IV, with three blankets and some kind of heating pad wrapped around him. But John found he was still shivering.

Carson checked his vitals. "You'll warm up soon and you'll be allright, major," he said softly.

John nodded. He would be all right. He had to be. "Thanks."

"I'm going to give you something to help you sleep. No dreams, laddie." As he spoke, Carson injected something into Sheppard's IV.

"Thanks." John let his eyes close and kept them closed even when the image of Cowen danced in his head. But the image faded, washed away by warm darkness. And John let himself drift into it. He didn't want to dream anymore. He didn't want to remember. And his last conscious awareness was the sound of Rodney's voice. And it made John smile as he slipped into slumber.

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Rodney glared at Beckett. "Is he going to be okay?" He was stabbing a finger in Sheppard's direction.

Carson sighed. "I hope so."
"What happened to him?"

"He's just...worn out." Beckett couldn't say a word, and he wouldn't.

Rodney kept glaring but then he turned away to look at the major. He looked so slim and pale and almost fragile. It scared Rodney a bit. Sheppard was the strongest man Rodney knew so this set off warning bells. Something was wrong. "Can I stay with him?" he asked.

Carson looked surprised but nodded. "Sure. If he gets restless or anything, let me know."

"Right." Rodney stomped over to a nearby chair and dropped into it. He rested his elbow on the arm, leaned his cheek on his hand, and settled his gaze on the major. And for the next three hours, he didn't move.

TBC
Chapter 9: Part 9

Part 9

John knew he was dreaming. He was reliving every moment with Cowen. His body remembered the pleasure and the pain. And with it the guilt and the shame and he wanted to wake up and make it all go away. But he knew it wouldn't fade away in the light of day. Cowen's touch was imprinted on his skin, and John could feel the man's hardness throbbing inside him as if it were happening all over again. "No...no.....NO!"

"Major!"

"NO!" John came awake with a start, pushing at the hands that gripped his shoulders until the face that loomed over him came into focus. "Rodney," he whispered, letting himself slump back against the pillows. Rodney nodded. "That's right..it's me. You were dreaming."

John nodded and forced a smile. "Yeah...I guess I was." He closed his eyes again and was relieved to see only darkness. But he started when something soft brushed his face. John opened his eyes in surprise. Rodney was wiping his face with a soft towel and John realized he was sheened in a cold sweat. He grabbed the towel and managed a shaky nod. Rodney's touch was gentle but John wasn't ready to be touched. "Thanks...I'm good."

"Maybe I should call Beckett." Rodney fidgeted a bit, scuffling his feet as he stared at Sheppard.

"No...I'm okay." John toyed with the towel, twisting it between his fingers. "Uh..how long was I out?"

Rodney glanced at his watch. "About three hours. How do you feel?"

John shrugged. He felt worn out and shaky but no way in hell was he going to admit it. "Better." He winced at the lie because he could see that Rodney didn't believe him. But, blessedly, he let it slide. John was tempted to thank him but knew better. It would reveal too much of the truth. "Um...you don't have to check up on me. I'm okay...really."

"I wasn't checking up on you." Rodney started pacing. "I never left."

"You didn't?" John was more than a little surprised by that. "Why?"

Rodney froze and wouldn't look at Sheppard. "I just...I wanted to make sure you were all right...all right?" He made a face. "I don't like the thought of going out on missions with Ford. Or Bates. They get on my nerves more than you do. So....I just wanted to make sure you're okay so we can get back out there. You know?"

John listened to Rodney ramble and he smiled. This was normal and he wanted normal back. "I know," he said softly. "I'm sure Beckett will clear me soon."

"Did I hear my name mentioned?" Carson interjected, as he entered the room. He looked at Sheppard, taking in his appearance, then he frowned and turned to Rodney. "I need to check on the major so you have to go. You can visit again later."

"Sure..whatever." Rodney turned to head out but he paused to look over his shoulder at Sheppard. "I'll sneak you some real food later," he promised.
John snorted. "There's real food on Atlantis? You've been holding out, Rodney." Teasing the other man felt good and John felt himself relaxing for the first time since he'd come back.

Rodney rolled his eyes. "You have no clue, major," he stated, then he waved one hand and stalked off.

"How do you feel, major?" Carson asked his patient.

"Fine." John almost believed his own lie. He even managed not to flinch when Beckett snagged his wrist to take his pulse.

Carson said nothing for a moment. He continued his exam then asked, "Are you hungry?"

John shook his head. "No." He wasn't going to lie about it. Food was the last thing on his mind, in spite of Rodney's promise.

"You have to eat, major. You know that." Carson folded his arms over his chest as he spoke.

"I will. Later. Can I go now?" John wanted out of this place.

Carson sighed. "I'm willing to let you go back to your room, but you're bed rest for a few days."

John shook his head. He didn't want to lie around. He wanted to get back out through the gate. He needed to keep busy, to distract himself from the memories that lingered on the edge of his consciousness. "I'm fine, Beckett. I've rested enough."

"You're far from fine, major." Beckett moved closer and leaned in. "Look...there's no easy way around this. But I have to do another internal exam."

"No!" John snarled the word and was surprised by his own vehemence.

Carson held firm. "There was tearing, I have to make sure you're healing okay. You know I wouldn't put you through this if I didn't have to."

John opened his mouth to make another protest but he knew it would fall on deaf ears. And he realized that the more he argued the point the more likely Beckett was to keep him grounded. He was revealing too much again. So John took a deep breath and made himself relax. He forced a smile and managed to hold Beckett's worried gaze as he replied, "I know you're doing what you have to do. It's fine. Sorry I yelled."

"I know this is hard on you, major." Carson made his own apologies. "I'll be as quick as I can."

"Okay." John knew he couldn't get out of it so he would endure. He had made it through a night of sex with Cowen. He could do this. It meant nothing.

Carson looked relieved. "Get undressed and I'll be back with what I need," he ordered.

John did as he was bid, pushing the covers back and sliding out of bed so he could remove the scrub pants. He then sat back on the bed with the blankets draped over him. When Beckett returned, John averted his gaze as stirrups were locked into place. He slid down as instructed and fought back a hysterical bubble of laughter as his legs were positioned. Then the sheet was shifted and John closed his eyes, knowing what would come next. No surprises this time. He didn't move a muscle when a gloved finger slid inside him. But the memory of Cowen's thick fingers stretching him open, flashed in John's head. He felt a shudder run through him and bit his lip to hold back a whimper of protest.
"It's all over," Carson stated, as he stood up and released Sheppard from the stirrups. "You seem to be healing well enough. But I need you to tell me if you feel any unusual soreness or if you start bleeding again. Do you understand, major?"

"I understand," John echoed, as he sat up and swung his legs over the side of the table, dragging the sheet over his lap as he did so. He looked at Beckett and was proud of himself for not flinching at the sympathy in the other man's gaze. "Can I go now?"

Carson sighed as he pulled off his glove. "I'd prefer it if you stayed at least for another day. I'd like to keep an eye on you."


"Major--"

"I promise to rest in my room." John would beg if he had too. But he didn't. Beckett nodded at him. "Thanks." He slid off the table, hoping the other man would get the hint and leave.

Carson caught on quick. "Once you're dressed stop to see me before you go. I'll give you some pain killers and something to help you sleep. Just a mild sedative in pill form."

John nodded. "Sure." He doubted he would take either pill but he would accept them to appease Beckett. He watched the doctor walk out then reached for the scrub pants. John pulled them on then tossed the sheet aside. He looked for his clothes and found them on a shelf. Scooping them up he headed out of the infirmary. He wanted to take a hot shower, then he had someone to see.

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Mckay felt guilty, but only a little. He had left the infirmary and had started back to his lab but had done an about face and wound up in Sheppard's quarters. He had the gene so he could let himself in and he didn't even hesitate. Rodney knew something was wrong with Sheppard and he wanted to find out what it was. What he thought he would find in the major's room he didn't know. Until he found it.

Rodney went through the pictures in the sketch pad several times. They were beautiful. Simple charcoal drawings that were vividly alive with emotion. And to his surprise, the majority of the drawings were of himself. Rodney was stunned. He hadn't thought about Sheppard being artistic but the man was truly gifted. But what stunned Rodney most was seeing his own face. Sheppard had drawn moments they had shared. Like when the major had pitched him over the balcony. And when they had discovered the transporters. Watching the major's football tape. And the picture that made Rodney giggle was the one where he was eating a power bar. Good moments, Rodney thought, and it made him happy that Sheppard apparently thought so too. But he couldn't help but wonder if there was some deeper meaning as to why the major had drawn him. Rodney wanted to believe that there was.

He studied the drawings again then realized that time was ticking by and he risked getting caught. So he returned the sketchbook to it's hiding place and slipped out of the major's room. And just in time. Rodney had just slipped around the corner when he heard footsteps approaching. He peeked around and saw the major. It bothered him that Sheppard still looked ghostly pale. Something was terribly wrong and Rodney was determined to find out what it was. Silently he slipped away.

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John entered his room with one thought in mind. Hitting the shower. He pulled off the scrubs and stepped under the hot spray. He tried to scrub away the memory of Cowen's touch as well Beckett's examination, but
both lingered. But John was determined to get past this. He knew what he needed to do to achieve that goal. So he got out, dried off and got dressed. Then he headed down below to the holding cells. It was time to confront the traitor.

But when John reached the cells they were empty. No sign of any guards and no Kavanaugh. Anger burned through him as he stepped into a transport then made his way to Weir's office. John barely knocked before he entered. "Where the hell is Kavanaugh?"

Elizabeth had been typing on her lap top but she looked up and appeared startled at Sheppard's anger. "He's gone," she stated.

"Gone where?" John's hands were clenched into fists as his side and he realized his body was vibrating with anger.

"Off world." Elizabeth stood up slowly and moved to face him. "I told you that Sgt. Bates was going to handle Kavanaugh."

John nodded. "I get that. But why did you move him off of Atlantis?"

Elizabeth frowned. "We felt it was best. It's going to come out, John and people are going to be angry. Hell..I'm angry. I feel betrayed."

"Yeah...I know the feeling." John made himself speak softly. "Where is he? I want to see him." He needed to see him. Needed to confront Kavanaugh. Needed to deck him.

"I think it's best if you don't know that." Elizabeth's tone was gentle but firm. "Only three people know and I want to keep it that way. You did your part, John, now let it go."

John was stunned. "Let it go?" he echoed. "Are you kidding me? Do you have any idea what I had to do to get that bastard's name? Do you?" As he spoke he stalked over to Weir and practically screamed in her face.

She didn't flinch away but she looked worried. "No, John...I don't have any idea of what you had to do. Why don't you tell me?"

"Forget it." John realized he had just given too much away. He hadn't meant to say that and it shook him that he had lost control. He stepped away from Weir and forced a shaky smile. "I'm sorry. I'm just...I'm angry. Kavanaugh could have caused alot of damage."

"I know." Elizabeth's eyes narrowed as she studied Sheppard. "Did Beckett release you? You look awfully pale."

John didn't like the way she was looking at him so he decided to distract her. "I got a clean bill of health. I'm just a little tired. As a matter of fact I think I'll go take a nap. If you don't mind?"

Elizabeth smiled and nodded. "I think that's a good idea. I'll stop in later. I'd like to hear more details about what you and Cowen talked about." She didn't seem to notice when John flinched. "Oh...I thought you'd like to know. The first shipment of food arrived. Cowen kept his promise."

"Great." John had to swallow down bile before he could speak. Weir's words were a reminder of what he had done to get the food. John felt his knees buckle and he caught himself on the corner of her desk. "I'll see you later then," he whispered, then he headed out the door. But he didn't go to his room. Instead he made a beeline for Rodney's lab. Weir had said that only three people knew where Kavanaugh was. John could guess that Weir and Bates would be two of those people. And his money was on Rodney as the third.
Reaching the lab, John willed the doors open with a thought. He strode into the room and spied Mckay at a side table. John walked over to him, tapping him on the shoulder to get his attention. When Rodney turned to face him, John got straight to the point. "I need your help," he blurted out.

Rodney looked surprised but then he nodded. "Sure, major. What can I do for you?"

"You can tell me where Kavanaugh is!" John locked eyes with Rodney as he spoke. Then time seemed to stand still as he waited for McKay to reply.

THE END...of part 9
John watched as Rodney shifted from one foot to the other, obviously debating on whether or not to tell him what he wanted to know. What he needed to know.

Rodney stared at Sheppard for a moment then he dropped his eyes to the floor. He opened his mouth then snapped it closed. "Major -- " he began, only to break off and shake his head.

"I know you can help me, Rodney," John countered, his own voice sounding hoarse to his ears. "Please. I need to know where Kavanaugh is."

"Why?" Rodney looked up as he asked, his eyes locking on Sheppard's face.

John wondered how much of the truth to tell McKay. Then he decided to keep it simple. "I need to talk to him."

Rodney nodded then asked again, "Why?"

"I just do," John believed he could trust Rodney with the truth. "I...I'm the one who got his name from Cowen."

John heard his voice crack on the Genii's name and he shook himself. He could not...would not...fall apart over this. But he felt as if he were teetering on the edge of some precipice. One step in the wrong direction and he would hit the ground and shatter. John hated feeling this way. Hated how chaotic both his thoughts and emotions were. So he made himself focus on the one thing he could have control over. John locked eyes with Rodney and said calmly, "I've earned the right to confront the bastard."

"Yeah...you have." Rodney sighed and ran a hand over his face and his hand was shaking. "I'd like to talk to him too. He's part of my team. I should have guessed -- " he broke off again, shaking his head.

John could see that Rodney was upset and that surprised him. Enough so that he started to reach out to him but drew his hand back and stuffed it in his pants pocket. "Where is he?" John could tell that Rodney wanted to tell him and he was willing to beg if he had too. But he had a feeling that asking would be enough.

Rodney seemed to gather himself and determination glittered in his eyes. "He's on the mainland. We'll need a jumper. I can open the bay doors from inside with my laptop. I'll get it."

"I don't want you to get in trouble with Weir," John countered, following McKay around the lab. "Just tell me where to find Kavanaugh."

"I'm going with you and that's final, major," Rodney shot back. He had his laptop in hand and now he headed for the door. "You coming?"

John felt a smile curve his lips. "I'm coming," he said softly, as he followed Rodney out.

*************

"Dr. Weir?"

Elizabeth looked up from the file she was reading. "Yes?"

Grodin looked uncomfortable. "Uh...it looks as if one of the Jumpers is missing."
"What? What are you talking about?" Elizabeth was on her feet and around her desk. "What do you mean..missing?"

"Just that. It's missing."

Elizabeth glared at him. "How can a Puddle Jumper go missing?"

Grodin shrugged. "I can't answer that. We didn't know it was gone until Zalenka called it in. He went to the Bay to do some repairs on Jumper one."


"Right away." Grodin almost ran out the door.

Fifteen minutes later Grodin gave Weir his report. Both Major Sheppard and Dr. McKay were missing."

Elizabeth was furious. She paged Sgt. Bates and ordered him and a team of four to the mainland. Elizabeth knew exactly where to find Sheppard and McKay.

************

John had landed the Jumper and he and Rodney made their way to the location by foot. As they walked they maintained a comfortable silence, until John broke it. "Did I remember to thank you?" he asked, and he saw McKay's surprise.

Rodney shrugged. "You didn't but that's okay. I want to do this. Kavanaugh deserves to have the crap beaten out of him."

"Yeah." John couldn't have agreed more but he was surprised by Rodney's anger. He was even more surprised by his own lack of rage. At the moment he felt nothing at all.

"This is it." Rodney had stopped walking and was pointing to one of the hut-like houses that the Athosians had built since moving to the mainland.

John recognized the two marines who were guarding the entrance. He looked at Rodney and nodded, then he moved to the soldiers. He greeted them with a neutral expression. He was their commanding officer and John was ready to pull rank on them if necessary. But he found no opposition to his request to see the prisoner. In fact, the marines looked more than happy to let him inside. They even smiled as they stepped aside so he could enter the hut.

Rodney stepped up to Sheppard, blocking him from going in. "I can come with you," he offered.

"I need to go in alone," John replied. The feeling of numbness had faded and he felt himself starting to shake. So John forced a smile then turned to go inside. He paused to let his eyes adjust to the semi-darkness, then he headed towards the back of the hut where another marine stood. "Take a break, private," John ordered. And received a salute and a *Yes sir!* before the young man departed. Once he was alone, John turned and took the remaining steps to the cage where Kavanaugh was being held. He was shaking so hard at this point that his teeth about chattered. He stuffed his hands in his pockets as he stared at the scientist. Kavanaugh was sitting a wooden bench, but he was watching him. John had a million things he wanted to say to him, but all that came out was, "Why?"
There was a long moment of silence then Kavanaugh muttered, "You wouldn't understand."

John didn't buy that. "Try me." It was an order, not a request. He needed Kavanaugh to explain it to him. John needed to understand why the man would betray everyone on the expedition. Why he would put them all at risk. It was bad enough, John thought, that he had awakened the Wraith and put his people in danger. But that had been an accident. What Kavanaugh did was on purpose. "Why dammit?" John shook with anger now.

"What difference does it make?" Kavanaugh rose to his feet and approached Sheppard. "You can't understand, major. Everyone likes you. Respects you." Kavanaugh droned on in the same vein.

But John tuned him out. The words were just a buzzing in his ears as memories replayed themselves in his head. But they were more than images. They were a sensory replay that John could not fade out. He could feel everything Cowen had done to him. His body even reacted to it now. To the touch that had made him shiver. The hardness that had stretched and burned inside him. John bit his lip to hold back a whimper as he relived every moment, every touch, every sensation. His body was as much of a traitor as Kavanaugh and John felt himself grow pale and his body shuddered in reaction so that his knees buckled. But John would not give in to this. He sought out a distraction and he shattered the memories with pain. Only he didn't realize that the pain came from repeatedly punching the wall with his fist.

It was Rodney who made him stop. When calling Sheppard by name didn't work, he gripped his arm and hauled him away from wall. Holding on to him even when the major nearly slugged him. "You have to stop now, major. Please."

It was the plea that made John react. He went still and was able to bring Rodney into focus. "I'm fine," he hissed, shaking off McKay's grip. John stared down at his hand and saw the blood on his knuckles but he didn't feel the pain.

"Major Sheppard."


Bates nodded. "I'm here to take you back to Atlantis, sir."

"Of course." John turned to Rodney. "Sorry about this. I'll let her know it's my fault."

"Like hell you will," Rodney shot back. He was practically vibrating with anger. But he turned it on Kavanaugh who was watching the scene before him with grim amusement. "I hope you rot in hell you bastard!" Rodney snarled at him. "You're a piece of shit, Kavanaugh. You know that?"

Bates moved to intervene when McKay pressed in against the bars. "Time to go, doctor," he said firmly, taking McKay by the arm and dragging him back.

Rodney made to protest but when silent when he caught Sheppard's eye.

"It's okay," John told him softly. But he appreciated Rodney's anger and his sentiment. Turning to Bates, John stated, "We're ready." And he led the way out of the hut and back to the Jumper. Jumper three was parked next to Jumper one and John didn't protest Stackhouse flying them back. He said nothing to anyone on the ride home and ignored Rodney's attempt to look at his hand. John sat in the back, his hands between his legs, letting the blood from his knuckles drip onto the floor. And he did nothing but watch it form puddles.
The ride back was short and John was still silent as he was escorted to Weir's office. Beckett was there and tried to fuss over him but John held him back with a cold glare. Then he focused on Weir. He could see she was angry but her eyes held understanding as well.

Elizabeth moved to confront the major. "What were you thinking?" she prompted.

"I told you I wanted to talk to him." John refused to explain himself further. She would never understand and he could never explain it to her.

"I see," Elizabeth replied.

A cold smile curved John's lips and he shook his head. "No...you don't." He left it at that.

Rodney interjected. "It's my fault. I took him there."

"McKay was just along for the ride," John shot back. He didn't want Rodney getting into trouble. He had done nothing wrong.

"I think it's best to hold off on who's at fault for whatever," Carson interjected, and he gave Weir a look that brooked no argument. "I really need to get the major to the infirmary to have a look at his hand. Could be broken."

John shook his head at Beckett. "It's not." John had broken his hand once and he remembered, all too well, what it had felt like. Although he had to admit to himself that it was starting to sting. More than a bit. And since he didn't want to deal with all the questions he could see lurking in Elizabeth's eyes, John was more than ready to let Beckett drag him away. He could make his escape from the infirmary.

Elizabeth sighed then nodded. "Go ahead," she told Beckett. "Rodney...you stay put." This when McKay started edging towards the door. "We need to talk."

"Don't blame him," John stated emphatically. He would protect Rodney at all costs. Rodney had tried to help him.

"I don't," Weir said firmly. "I just want to talk to him. Go with Beckett, Major. You and I will talk later."

John was about to argue the point but Rodney was smiling at him and making shooing motions with his hand. So John smiled back and let Beckett guide him out the door. He said nothing as they made their way to the infirmary. He didn't even flinch as Beckett examined his hand, poking at the torn flesh and pouring antiseptic over it before bandaging it from fingertips to wrist.

Beckett studied his handiwork then nodded. "No showers until I check it again tomorrow. It needs to stay dry, major."

"Fine." John made to slide off the table but a hand on his chest stopped him. He jerked back from the contact.

"Sorry." Carson made a face. "I want to take your temperature. All things considered, major, it wouldn't surprise me if you developed an infection. So I'm going to keep a close watch."

John said nothing but allowed Beckett to stick a thermometer in his ear. He listened to the doctor cluck over the reading and didn't move a muscle when Beckett gave him a shot.

Carson studied John a moment then said, "I'm going to give you a sedative."
"Fine." John wasn't about to argue. He was tired and he wanted nothing more than to sink into sweet oblivion.

"Let's get you back to your room first." Carson waved the major off the exam table. "You'll be more comfortable there."

John wasn't about to argue. They walked to his room in silence and he *thought* open the door. Once inside he slipped off his jacket, unlaced his boots then stretched out on the bed. He watched Beckett administer the shot then let his eyes drift closed. The image of Cowen danced in John's head for a moment. But it faded to gray as the sedative took effect. Then it morphed into the image of Rodney facing off with Kavanaugh, before warm darkness claimed him.

THE END...of part 10
Chapter 11: Part 11

PAIRING: Sheppard and Cowen with McKay added later
Sheppard makes a deal with Cowen. Rodney helps him Deal with it later.

part 11

After leaving Weir's office, Rodney slipped off to the infirmary. He was tired and a bit hungry, so he wolfed down a power bar along the way and smiled to himself to remember the major's drawings. But the smile faded as he entered the infirmary and all the beds were empty. Rodney back-pedalled out and went in search of Beckett. He found the doctor doing inventory in the back. "Where is Sheppard?" Rodney demanded.


"Is the major okay?" Rodney countered.

Carson sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. "He will be." That was all he really could say.

Rodney shook his head. He knew there was more to it. "Something happened with Cowen...didn't it?"

"You'll have to ask Sheppard about it." Carson was firm. "Go get some sleep, Rodney."

"Whatever." Rodney tossed over his shoulder. He was already halfway out the door. He didn't slow down until he reached the major's quarters. One hand lifted to knock but Rodney drew back. If Sheppard was sleeping he did not want to wake him. So Rodney risked getting yelled at by using his gene to make the door open. He couldn't do it as smoothly as the major could, but Rodney was proud of himself none the less. He slipped inside, wincing as the doors whooshed shut, loudly, behind him. Then he moved over to the figure on the bed.

Rodney studied the major. He was still pale and he didn't look the least bit relaxed in slumber. Rather he looked tense and disturbed and Rodney wished he could do something to chase away whatever demons were haunting Sheppard. And Rodney knew all about demons. He had enough of his own. Still, despite everything, Sheppard was still beautiful and Rodney allowed himself a moment to simply look at him. Imprinting the major's image into his brain. Sometimes Rodney would look at Sheppard and be amazed by how beautiful the man was. Amazed as well by the fact that the major wasn't vain about his looks. Sometimes Rodney wondered what it would be like to be so beautiful, only to tell himself it was probably more of a curse than anything else. Telling himself that made him feel better.

Heaving a sigh at his own thoughts, Rodney moved to the chair in the corner of the room and sat down. He was tired. Enough so that he didn't even mind how uncomfortable the chair was. He simply shifted around a bit then closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

John was dreaming and he knew it, but it was more like reliving a past moment in his life. It felt so real. He remembered, clearly, how he had felt all those years ago. He had been sixteen and his friend, Mike, had invited him over. Mike's parents were away for the weekend and Mike's older sister, Tracy, was home from college and in charge. But she was a bit of a wild thing and she and her boyfriend and decided to throw a party. Mostly college kids. But Mike and John had been allowed to mingle and John had been enjoying himself, and the beer, until Tracy had pulled John into her bedroom, after he had exited the upstairs bathroom. After three beers he had to go.

Tracy hadn't been alone. Her boyfriend, Dave, had been with her. Dave was big and older. Old enough to buy the beer and booze legally. John had tried to leave but Dave had blocked the door. Then Tracy had
pulled him over to the bed and John had stumbled and fallen on it and before he had been able to orient
himself, Tracy had his cock out and in her mouth and all thought and logic and reason had flown out the
window. It had been John's first blow job and it had been a good thing, until the bed had shifted and John
opened his eyes to see Dave looming over him. He had tried to pull away from Tracy but Dave had pinned
him and kissed him and even as John had struggled against them he felt something push inside him and even
as he realized it was Dave's finger he had come hard and long, the pleasure sweeping over his body and
making him feel weak.

John had been shaken by his body's betrayal, but he had pretended everything was cool. He had kissed
Tracy back when she made him taste himself on her lips. Then he had let her tuck him back in his pants, all
the while pretending that Dave wasn't in the room. Then John had left the room and the house and he hadn't
gone back. Not ever. He had gotten past it. But even as the memory faded and Dave's face morphed into
Cowen's, John felt the pain of the betrayal of his own body and it shook him. He could feel Tracy's lips on
his cock, but the face staring back at him in the dream was Cowen's. And he could feel Dave's finger inside
him, only it was Cowen's cock that filled him. John felt shudder wrack him and he cried out, wanting to
destroy the memory, wanting to wake up. But the memories were imprinted on his skin and in his soul and
John felt cold and sick and he came awake with a cry, feeling himself shaking.

"Shhh...it's okay. It's okay, John." Rodney was on the bed and pulling Sheppard into his arms.

It should have freaked John out to have Rodney wrapped around him. But it felt good to let himself relax
against the broad chest. He felt safe in Rodney's strong embrace. Rodney would never hurt him. It was the
mantra that echoed in John's head. He knew he could trust Rodney and it was almost a relief to let himself
be held. And the warmth of Rodney's body seeped into John, warming him from the inside out. But he
realized he was still shaking and that Rodney was still trying to soothe him. "I'm...I'm sorry," John
whispered, and he wasn't at all sure what he was apologizing about.

Rodney shushed him again, but he was worried. The major was warm, too warm. Rodney knew he had a
fever. He knew he should call Beckett, but he hated to let Sheppard go. He was clinging to him and Rodney
knew that he needed the contact. And it felt good to hold him. He was slim and shaking and yet Rodney
knew that Sheppard would never break. He was too strong and too pliant, but it shook Rodney to realize
that something had happened to the major. Something that was breaking him down. "You have a fever...I
need to call Beckett," Rodney said at last, when good sense ruled out over his own desires.

"Don't call him. I'm okay." John eased back from Rodney, realizing that he had been clinging like a leech.
He was relieved when Rodney just let him go without saying a word. And nothing in Rodney's _expression
revealed what he was thinking. John scooted back to lean against his pillows and rubbed his fingers over his
eyes. They felt gritty. Then it hit him. Rodney was in his room. "Why are you here?" John asked.

"Um...I...uh...I just wanted to check on you." Rodney went with the truth.

John nodded and almost smiled. "Thanks. I'm okay, Rodney."

Rodney glared at him. "Like hell you are! What's wrong, major? What's going on? What did Cowen do to
you?"

"Nothing!" John felt a flare of anger and he latched on to it. "I'm tired, you should go." But even as he said
the words he wanted to take them back. He wanted Rodney to stay.

"I'm not leaving." Rodney folded his arms over his chest and glared back. He could out stubborn a mule any
day, so Sheppard wasn't even a challenge.

John felt a bubble of laughter slip out. This felt normal and he embraced it. Another chuckle emerged, and
another and John realized it was tinged with a bit of hysteria, but it felt good. Until it turned into a cough which choked him and then he was scrabbling off the bed, one hand pressed against his mouth, fighting a wave of nausea as he stumbled for the bathroom. But John's legs gave out and he waited to hit the floor. But strong hands caught him and practically carried him into the bathroom. Just in time. John emptied his belly and then some. He felt his vision greying out and he must have passed out for a moment because he came back to awareness and a cool cloth smoothing over his face. John realized he was stretched out on his bed again. He blinked and Rodney's worried face came into focus. "Sorry about that," John mumbled, his throat feeling raw.

Rodney made a face. "You should be. It was gross." He shuddered a bit.

"Yeah." John felt tired and worn out yet, infinitesimally better. He shifted up against the pillows then thought to ask, "How is your back?"

"What?" Rodney looked confused.

John cocked an eyebrow at him then explained. "You have a bad back, right? You're always complaining about it?"

Rodney cocked his own eyebrow then shook his head. "So? What if I do have a bad back? And thank you for actually listening to me on occasion. Still...what does that have to do with anything?"

"You must have dragged me back to the bed," John pointed out. "Ergo I figure you might have hurt your back in doing so."

"I carried you back to bed," Rodney countered. "Carried...not dragged. And my back is fine. You're too skinny, major. I've told you that before."

John opened his mouth to argue the point but his doors whooshed open and he watched Beckett enter with a bag in hand. John made a face then glared at Rodney. "I told you not to call him!"

Rodney looked indignant. "Hey...you have a fever, you puked and you passed out. Of course I called him." He turned to Carson. "He's all yours, doc. Do what you can."

"Aye...that I will," Carson replied, as he moved to the bed and stared down at Sheppard. He then pulled a thermometer out of his bag and stuck it in the major's ear.

"I'm fine!" John hissed, yanking his head back.

Carson smirked as he checked the reading. "One hundred and one, major. I'm not happy about that. I think it's time to move you back into the infirmary. I'll hook you up to an IV and pumped some antibiotics and some fluids into ya."

John shook his head at him. "No infirmary. Please. Can't you give me the IV here?"

"Not without someone to watch over you." Carson sighed and scratched his head. "I suppose I can ask Emily to watch you. She's got a crush on you, major."

"I'll stay with him," Rodney interjected.

Carson frowned at him. "When did you get your medical degree?"

Rodney rolled his eyes. "How hard is it to stick a thermometer in someone's ear. Besides which you know
I'm a hypochondriac. I can take a pulse with the best of them. BP too, if you like."

"I want Rodney to stay." John was a bit surprised at himself for speaking up, but he meant what he said. If he had to have someone with him, he wanted it to be Mckay."

"Fine..whatever." Carson threw up his hands. "First things first. I want you to get into a set of scrubs. I want you to eat something, and then I want you to get some sleep. Meanwhile I'll have and IV brought in and we'll get you set up and some aspirin in you to fight the fever and what not."

John nodded then closed his eyes. He didn't care about the details. He just wanted to be alone. But not completely alone. Not alone with his thoughts anymore. Nor did he want to sleep and dream.

Carson studied Sheppard for a moment, not liking what he saw. But then he got down to business. "I'll help you out of your clothes, major."

"No!" John batted away the hand that had been tugging at the zipper on his shirt. "I'll do it." He locked eyes with Carson, his own begging.

"Okay then." Carson knew when to back off. "I'll go get some scrubs for you and the other things I'll need."

John nodded, letting his relief show. "I have a set of scrubs though," he stated.

Carson looked surprised. "You do?"

"You gave them to me the last time I was laid up. Remember?" John wished he didn't. He had spent way too much time in the infirmary since coming to Atlantis.

"Aye...now I do," Carson allowed. "Okay...get changed and I'll be back soon." He headed for the door but looked over at Rodney. "You coming? I'm sure the major would like his privacy."

Rodney nodded. "Yeah..I'm coming." But he moved to the bed first. "I'll be back soon and I'll bring chocolate."

John managed a shaky smile. "Thanks...for doing this. You don't have to, you know."

"I know. And you know me, major. I don't do anything I don't want to do." With that Rodney turned on his heel and barrelled out the door.

"Yeah...I know," John whispered to himself. And it made him wonder why Rodney was willing to stay with him. But he realized he didn't care. All that mattered was that he would not be alone. And with that thought John struggled off the bed and got undressed.

end part 11
Chapter 12: Part 12

Part 12

By the time John had gotten dressed in the scrubs, he was more than ready to crawl into bed. He dragged the covers over himself and must have dozed off a minute because he was suddenly aware of voices. He opened bleary eyes to see Rodney and Beckett standing near the door. "Hey guys," John called out to them. His voice sounded thick and hoarse and he cleared his throat as he pushed himself up against the pillows.

Rodney was first to reach him. "I brought you some soup," he said, holding out a dark green mug. "Broth really."

"Maybe later." John smiled and waved the mug away. He really wasn't hungry.

"You can sip on it while we chat," Rodney countered, setting the mug down on the bedside table.

Carson shouldered him out of the way. "Let me get the major set up then you can talk his ear off," he said firmly.

John watched as Beckett laid out his supplies. He had an IV hooked up to a stand already. "Can't you just give me a shot or something?" John asked. He hated IV's. He'd had too many of them in his travels.

"No...there's no magic shot for what ails ya, laddie." Beckett spoke softly as he went to work. He swabbed the back of Sheppard's hand with an alcohol wipe then lifted the needle. "Just a pinch and we're in. You've got good veins."

"Yea for me." John tried to be lighthearted but the effort drained him.

Beckett taped the IV to the back of Sheppard's hand then checked his pulse. He took his temperature again, handed over some aspirin, then made to leave. "Get some rest, I'll be back to check on you in a couple of hours."

John nodded. "Fine." But he hoped Beckett would get caught up with some other project or patient and leave him alone for a while.

"And you." Beckett turned to Rodney. "Call me if anything happens. And make yourself useful. Check his temp every hour."

"Yeah yeah..got it." Rodney shooed Carson out the door. Once the doctor was gone and the doors had closed behind him, Rodney moved back to the bed. He picked up the mug of broth and held it out. "Drink up, major."

John grimaced. "I'm really not hungry."

Rodney shrugged. "It's really not food. It's broth..liquid. You're dehydrated so you need to drink. So drink." He practically pushed the mug into Sheppard's hand.

"You're a pest," John stated, but he was smiling as he curled his fingers around the mug. He would humor Rodney. The guy was willing to sit with him to get Beckett off his back.

"I'm your pest for the next couple of days." As he spoke, Rodney pulled the corner chair over to the side of the bed. "So...shall I tell you all about myself?" he asked as he settled himself comfortably. "I'm quite fascinating, you know."
John snorted and it felt good to want to laugh. "I'm sure you are. You're an endless source of fascination for me, Rodney. I'm pretty much always stunned by the things you say and do." And John meant that as a compliment. Without Rodney and his genius, Atlantis would have been lost long ago. And John knew the guy had saved his team more than once.

Rodney understood what John meant and flushed a bit. He shifted in the chair and shuffled his feet. Then he cleared his throat. "So let's talk about you, then. The enigma. Hot shot pilot and closet math genius. Interesting combination."

"What you see is what you get, Rodney," John said softly. And to distract himself he took a sip of the broth. It was surprisingly good.

"I doubt that," Rodney shot back. "I've got you...sort of...figured out. I mean...that fact that you're like a chameleon. You change who you are to fit your surroundings, but you also present an image to people of who you want them to see. Not necessarily who you really are."

John cocked an eyebrow at Rodney. Truthfully, the scientist was uncomfortably close to the truth. "When did you get your psychology degree?" he teased.

Rodney shrugged. "You're looking at someone who does the same thing. Only with much less finesse."

"I'm not sure if I should take that as a compliment...or slug you." John smiled as he spoke and this felt good. This banter between them. Rodney was always honest about things. About what he thought and felt. There were no games, no deceit. John needed this. It made him feel grounded and secure in a way he couldn't quite explain. But understanding why didn't seem to matter in this moment. John was just content to let it be.

"Don't slug me." Rodney pouted. "I hate pain and, besides, I doubt you're strong enough right now to squash a fly."

John winced. He wished he had a snappy comeback, but the truth was Rodney was probably right. So John took another sip of the broth then said, "I want to thank you, Rodney."

Rodney looked surprised. "For what?"

"For taking time out of your very busy day to sit with me." John offered a smile and noticed that Rodney looked a bit uncomfortable. He wondered about that but didn't ask about it. He was too grateful to make waves right now. "I really appreciate it. I'm rather tired of hanging out in the infirmary."

"Yeah...I bet." Rodney shifted in the chair again, but was smiling. "You do know that Beckett is considering giving you your own bed, right?"

John could believe that. "Yeah...well...I'm going to make it my New Year's resolution to stay out of the infirmary."

Rodney snorted. "Just don't go making any bets on it. You'll lose."

"Gee...thanks." John took a few more sips of broth and realized the mug was almost empty. He reached out to set it on the bedside table, wincing a bit as every muscle in his body protested the movement. Even his hair felt sore at the moment.

"You okay?" Rodney was on his feet and hovering over Sheppard.
John realized he had groaned out loud. "I'm fine. Just sore. I'm good." He waved a hand at Rodney. "Sit."

Rodney plopped back into the chair. "So..what were we talking about? Oh yeah...you being a math genius."

"Quit saying that." John rolled his eyes.

"Okay...math geek?"

Pinning Rodney with a glare, John countered. "I wasn't a geek. I was a jock."

It was Rodney's turn to roll his eyes. "Well..duh. Like I couldn't figure that out. I imagine you make more friends and get more girls being a jock, right? Hell...I know that from experience. Geeks are not popular."

"It wasn't about popularity," John protested, and he realized he wasn't really offended. He also realized that he wanted Rodney to understand the difference. It mattered that he understood. "It was just easier to fit in as a jock. We moved around a lot. Military brat and all."

"The brat part suits you," Rodney shot back, but he was smirking as he said it.

John chuckled and it came from a good place. "Yeah...my mom wouldn't argue that point. I was a brat. But, for the record, I was still the closet geek. Every school I went to I got put into the accelerated math program. Everyone knew about it but pretty much let it slide." John didn't bring up the few occasions where he had bloodied someone's nose or sported a black eye of his own. And most of the time it wasn't because he was defending himself, it was while defending one of the kids from his math class. One of the so called *Real geeks*.

Rodney nodded. "Of course they let it slide. You were one of the chosen ones."

"What does that mean?" John wasn't sure what Rodney meant.

"You were popular, right? That made you one of the cool kids. One of the *Chosen* ones." Rodney looked sad as he spoke.

John shook his head at him. "That doesn't mean anything, Rodney. At least not for me. It was a front." More so than anyone ever knew, John realized. Rodney was right about him. Much of the time he gave the illusion of being the person people wanted him to be. A sharp pain throbbed in his temple and John rubbed at it absently. He was so damn tired.

Rodney noticed. "You need to sleep."

"No!" Sleep was the last thing John wanted. If he slept he would dream. "I'm not tired."

"Liar." Rodney's voice was soft but laced with conviction. "What did you dream about?"

John was surprised. Or maybe not. Rodney might come across as self-absorbed most of the time, but John knew that he was always attuned to his surroundings and to the people around him. Rodney was a good judge of character for the most part. He just was a bit awkward and insecure socially. He didn't know how to apply what he knew to people. John avoided Rodney's gaze but surprised himself by replying, "I dreamed about my first blow job."

Rodney looked startled for a moment, but recovered quickly and shot back, "What...when you were twelve?"
"Heh..." John chuckled. "I was precocious but you give me way too much credit, Rodney." But his smile soon faded and the pain in his temples increased. John pressed his fingertips against them and rubbed hard.

"Tell me about it," Rodney prompted. He was leaning back in the chair, looking relaxed and unconcerned, but his hands were clenched into fists and there was a tightness in his tone.

John opened his mouth to protest, but found himself doing as Rodney asked. He had never told anyone about that night, but John knew he could tell Rodney. He knew he could trust the other man to understand. So he explained about the party and Tracy and Dave and he stumbled over what Dave had done to him, and John heard the bitterness in his own voice as he spoke about his body's betrayal.

Rodney was leaning forward in his chair now. He hadn't said a word as Sheppard told his story, but now he locked eyes with the major as he asked, "You feel guilty because you orgasmed?"

"I felt ashamed." John gritted out the admission then rubbed at his eyes. They felt gritty and achy and he wished he hadn't said anything. It reminded him to much of recent events. Of everything he was trying so damn hard to forget. "It was stupid," John whispered. "I was stupid. I have gay friends...it's no big deal." He had told himself that time and again, until he had managed to wipe the memory out of existence. Until now.

"I'm gay," Rodney said softly.

John felt like Rodney had just whacked him with a two by four. "Oh..." That was all he could think of to say.

Rodney got up from the chair and paced around to the other side of the bed. "Have you ever been hit on by another guy?" he asked, suddenly.

"I guess...a few times." John wasn't sure why he answered. He had no clue why Rodney was asking.

"Ever wonder why?" Rodney paced back over to the chair and sat down again, locking his eyes on the major's face.

John shrugged. "I guess I didn't want to know." And that was the truth. He hadn't wanted to think about it. Hadn't wanted to know what he had done to garner such attention.

Rodney nodded. He let a heavy silence fall between them for a moment, then he asked, "Did Cowen fuck you?"

"No!" John felt anger wash over him in waves. He stared at Rodney in stunned disbelief, then he cloaked himself in defiance. "We made a deal. I let him do what he wanted." The memory of Cowen's body thrusting into his own hit John without warning and he closed his eyes to shut it out, but his body couldn't forget. His stomach twisted into knots.

"Did you ask him why he wanted you?" Rodney persisted. He was shaking a bit but he was determined to see this through.

John didn't open his eyes as he whispered, "Yes."

Rodney leaned forward, resisting the urge to touch Sheppard. "What did he tell you?"

"Nothing!" John gritted the word out between clenched teeth as he squeezed his eyes shut tighter. Right this moment, he wanted Rodney to go away.
"Let me guess." Rodney's voice was quiet but forceful. "He told you you're beautiful."

John felt himself begin to shake. "Shut up!" he hissed. He didn't want to remember this. It meant remembering his body's betrayal. It meant confusion and pain and anger all tangled up inside him.

Rodney slid onto the side of the bed and reached out to cup Sheppard's face in both hands. He held on until the major opened his eyes and looked at him. "It's okay to be beautiful, John," Rodney whispered. "And you are beautiful."

"No!" John was still shaking but he realized something. Rodney was touching him and he didn't feel scared or upset. Rodney's touch was warm and soothing and John wanted to melt into it. And that confused him all the more. "I'm so fucked up," John whispered. Then he reacted on instinct. He locked eyes with Rodney and breathed, "Kiss me."

THE END...of part 12

Back to index
Chapter 13: Part 13

John stared at Rodney, holding his breath as he waited for the other man to respond. For a moment he thought Rodney was going to turn away, but then strong hands cupped his face and John closed his eyes, waiting for the feel of Rodney's mouth on his.

"Look at me," Rodney demanded.

After a moment, John obeyed. He opened his eyes and saw Rodney gazing at him with warm intensity. "I'm sorry," John whispered, and he wasn't at all sure what he was apologizing for or why.

Rodney brushed his thumbs over John's cheekbones. "No apologies. I want to kiss you. I've wanted that for a long time."

"Why?" The question was out before John could stop it. But he needed to know. He needed to understand why this was happening. Why he had made the deal with Cowen. Why his body had betrayed him. John's thoughts and emotions were pure chaos and he wanted everything to make sense.

"I can give you a million reasons," Rodney replied. "You might not like some of them."

John held Rodney's gaze. "Try me."

Rodney leaned in to press a kiss to John's cheek. "I'm going to be very honest and say that the first thing that attracted me to you was your looks. You are, without a doubt, the most beautiful man I have ever seen. Movie stars have got nothing on you, major."

"Bullshit!" The word was softly spoken but laced with steel conviction. John tried to pull away from Rodney, but the hands cupping his face held firm. He thought it should bother him to feel trapped, but he wasn't scared. This was Rodney and Rodney would never hurt him.

"People tend to be shallow, major. Everyone admires a pretty face and form. It's human nature." Rodney let his lips brush over John's other cheek. "What Cowen did...what he wanted from you, that was based on lust. He wanted you because you're beautiful. I believe it was the same for Tracy and her boyfriend. Because we're attracted to beauty, we want to possess it, as if it might make us more beautiful."

John closed his eyes again. "That's insane."

Rodney laughed softly. "Beautiful people don't get it. You can't understand it, John. But answer me seriously...the women you've slept with....were they all beautiful?"

"I thought so." John hadn't ever really developed a *type* so to speak. It wasn't being blond or tall or busty that grabbed his attention. It was a woman's confidence in herself that drew him in. But looking back he realized that they had all been very attractive.

"Sometimes that's all we want. Just to possess that beauty for a night or whatever. But that's okay." Rodney pressed a kiss to each of John's closed eyelids, then watched them flutter open. "But when we want a deeper connection that beauty doesn't matter. It's nice but beauty without substance fades away fast. But you have substance, major. You're smart and witty and charming and you care about people. That makes you all the more irresistible. To me. To the others....maybe all they wanted was to possess you. Like Cowen."

John didn't want to think about Cowen. He didn't want to remember his body's betrayal. He didn't want to feel dirty anymore. "Please...Rodney," he begged, and he didn't have to spell it out. Warm lips were pressed to his and John stiffened. But the kiss was gentle and soft and John felt himself relax. He felt fingers sliding
into his hair as the tip of Rodney's tongue traced his lips and John opened for him. And it was nothing like what Cowen had done. This was tasting and teasing and something else that John could not define. But even as he felt warmed by it, he felt shaken as well. He had never been with a man before Kolya. Had never been attracted to another man, and yet here he was - kissing Rodney. And he liked it. And John thought that his body was betraying him once more.

Rodney broke the kiss. "Don't, major. Don't analyze it. Don't regret it. I know this is confusing for you."

"I've never been attracted to a man before," John whispered, as he pulled away and tried to curl up into himself. He was shaking.

"Are you attracted to me?"

John looked at him. "I don't know. I feel safe with you, Rodney. I can't explain it...even to myself." John felt pain throbbing in his temples again and he closed his eyes and rubbed them.

Rodney shifted onto the bed so his back was against the headboard. He grabbed the extra pillow and put it in his lap. "Put your head here," he ordered, tapping the pillow.

"Rodney..." John thought about protesting but he realized he wanted to be connected to the other man. It was soothing to him to be with Rodney. So he shifted down the bed and put his head on the pillow.

"Close your eyes." Rodney drifted one hand over John's face.

John obeyed and felt a hand smoothing his hair back and it was soothing. Then fingers brushed over his forehead in a light touch that eased the ache in his head. He knew it wouldn't be long before he drifted off to sleep. "Guys aren't beautiful," he mumbled.

Rodney chuckled softly. "You are. I guess you haven't heard all the whispers about you. The general consensus is that you're the hottest person on the base."

"You're full of it," John shot back and he was pretty sure Rodney was just messing with him. He wanted to continue with this banter but his brain was shutting down. But he had one more thing to say. "I liked it."

"Liked what?" Rodney leaned in to hear him better.

John managed a sleepy smile then he whispered, "The kiss." He didn't see the happy look on Rodney's face as darkness wrapped him in its warm embrace.

THE END..of part 13

Back to index
Chapter 14: Part 14

Rodney fought dozing off but lost the battle, and was snoring away until a rough hand shook him awake. He blinked his eyes open to see Carson's worried face. And even as that registered, Rodney realized why. He could feel the heat of John's skin burning through his clothes. "Oh god!" Rodney touched John's forehead and it scorched him.

Carson was already removing the IV from the back of Sheppard's hand. "We have to get him in the shower, now!"

"How high is it?" Rodney asked even as he shifted off the bed. Then he was helping Carson get John to his feet and the major whimpered in protest and mumbled something Rodney could not understand.

"Too high." Carson wasted no time. They got Sheppard into the bathroom and he handed him off to Rodney. "Strip him down to his boxers," he ordered as he moved to turn the water on.

Rodney did as he was told, but it wasn't easy, John fought him a bit. "A little help here!" Rodney cried out as he almost lost his hold on the major and the slim body nearly hit the floor.

Carson cursed then grabbed hold of Sheppard. "Hurry!" The urgency in his tone could not be ignored.

"I'm sorry...this is my fault. I should have been checking his temp." Rodney realized he was babbling a bit and he was shaking and it made it hard to get John's shirt off him. But finally it was off and Rodney went to work on John's pants. That they were loose scrubs made them easier to remove. "Now what?"

"You want to go in with him?" Carson locked eyes with Rodney.

Rodney nodded. He wanted to help. "Yes...I'll go in with him." And he knew it would be best, that John would trust him.

Carson nodded. "Strip down as well." He held the major while Rodney obeyed. Once the scientist was down to his boxers, Carson eased the major into his arms. "Get in. It's gonna be cold."

"Fuck!" Rodney cursed as the cold spray hit him. But he knew it had to be worse for John. At first the major didn't respond to the cold spray on his skin, but then he began to squirm and to whimper and Rodney knew it had to hurt. And then the shaking started. John was shaking so hard that Rodney was sure his bones were going to start rattling. "Easy...it's okay, John. We have to cool you down." This when Sheppard tried to pull away from him.

John was cold. It was a bone deep kind of cold that made his body ache and his skin feel like it was burning. He realized he had to be on base and outside. Wet snow felt like acid as it hit his skin and he bit his lip to hold back a whimper. One of the scientists hadn't come back and John was head of the search team in the west sector. It was fifty below with the wind chill factor. Only it hit him that they had found the guy. He remembered finding him. He remembered how cold he had felt for days afterwards. The doctors had made him take a hot shower then they had made him dress in layers and curl up in bed with an electric blanket. But still John hadn't felt warm, not for a long time. And it hadn't burned then like it did now.

"No...no..stop.." he begged.

Rodney tried to soothe him. "Just a minute longer, John. It's okay." He rubbed one hand over John's chest, meaning to comfort him.

"Stop!" John felt panic surge through him. He remembered a rough hand moving over his slick skin. Remembered the solid body pressed against his back. He couldn't remember the man's name, but he could
smell him. The scent was different this time, but John didn't want this. Didn't want to be touched. "No...no...please," he begged, but the words didn't make it out of his throat which felt swollen.

"That's enough. Get him out," Carson ordered. And he had a towel ready. He dried the major off, stripping off his boxers and tossing them aside. Moving swiftly and almost roughly before wrapping him in another towel.

Rodney was holding John one minute and the next minute he watched as Carson lifted the major into his arms. A surprising feat and yet not so much. John was taller than both of them but weight quite a bit less. And Rodney knew that Carson had once been a wrestler. He was very strong. He shook away such idle thoughts as he continued drying himself off. He shucked his boxers and wrapped the towel around his waist. He wondered if he could find something of John's to wear, but realized everything would be too small. Then it occurred to Rodney to wonder why he was thinking such trivial things. He hurried into the bedroom and watched as Carson put in another IV line. Then he watched the doctor take John's temperature. "Is it better?"

Carson frowned at the reading then nodded. "A bit. Keep an eye on him. I'm going to go get you something to wear and some ice packs. Keep him calm."

"I will." Rodney watched John shift restlessly on the bed. He moved to sit on the edge and smoothed the dark hair back. John's skin was still burning. "Sorry I fucked up, John. I should have been paying attention. I fuck everything up eventually. The things that matter, anyway."

From a distance John heard a familiar voice. He couldn't place it but it was a soothing voice and he drifted towards it. It made him feel cooler. But then he heard the other voice, the one that made his skin crawl. The one that made him feel like his flesh was searing, not from heat but from an icy coldness that welled up from deep inside him.

Rodney frowned as he watched John shift away from his touch. But he didn't have time to dwell on it for suddenly John's body started to shake and then he was convulsing and Rodney pressed into him to hold him still. He didn't think, he just started shouting for Beckett and the man appeared, as if by magic. He had a nurse with him and they shoved Rodney back while they worked over John. Rodney found the clothes Beckett had brought him and he put them on. Then he paced as he watched and relief flooded him when Carson turned to him and nodded. "He's okay?"

"I think he will be. But Emily is going to stay to keep watch on his temp. You can help her cool him down."

"Sure. I can do that." Rodney would do whatever he had too. And for the next twenty-four hours he didn't leave John's side. He was there to soothe every whimper. He talked over John's mutterings of Cowen's name, so Emily wouldn't hear him. He held him down when John tried to shift away from the ice packs. And when his fever broke he wiped away the sheen of sweat from his skin, then lifted John and held him, wrapped in a sheet, while Emily changed the bedding. Carson returned, one of many times, to check on the major and he was smiling this time as he took his temp.

Rodney was smiling too, when John's eyes fluttered open.

John heard voices and he recognized Rodney's. He blinked hard and opened his eyes and Mckay's face came into focus. Carson was there too. "Hey," John croaked, and his voice felt raw. And he felt weak as a kitten and that bothered him. He also saw concern in Rodney's eyes and the guy looked exhausted.

"Take a sip of water," Carson said, holding a cup with a straw to Sheppard's lips.

John took a small sip and felt better. "Who died?" he asked, because he got that vibe from Rodney.
Rodney looked horrified. "No one! Jesus, major!"

"You took a turn for the worse, lad," Carson interjected, patting Sheppard on the shoulder. "Don't mind Rodney, he's tired. He kept watch over you."

"Yeah...right." Rodney snapped, as he paced in the corner.

John frowned and lifted one hand to run it through damp hair. And that little motion drained him. His hand felt as if it weighed a ton. "What happened?"

Carson sat on the side of the bed. "You ran a high temp and you had us worried for the past thirty hours. But you're fine now. You're just going to have to be patient. You'll be slow getting your strength back."

"Oh." John didn't know what else to say. He looked at Rodney and he wanted to say something, but he was so damn tired. His eyelids refused to stay open and John felt darkness swirl over him and drag him into it's warm embrace.

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"What time is it?" John had to clear his throat twice before the question came out loud enough to get Rodney's attention.

Rodney jumped and lifted his eyes from the laptop he had been working on. He got up from the chair and moved to the bed. "It's..uh..ten am."

John nodded and realized he felt better. More or less. Still achy, still weak, but better. Other than the fact he felt gritty and dirty. "How long was I out?"

"About sixteen hours."

"Gotta pee." John laughed at the look on Rodney's face. He started to sit up and the room spun around him.

Rodney cursed and caught John by the shoulders. "I'll find a....you know...thingy."

John shook his head. "Nope. I'll crawl to the bathroom if I have too. The room stilled and he shifted his legs off the bed, batting away Rodney's staying hand. But even as he tried to stand, John's knees gave out. He felt and arm shift around his waist. A warm arm, and he knew that because John realized all he was wearing was a pair of boxers. Last he remembered he had been wearing scrubs. But that didn't seem to matter. His bladder was screaming at him. "Help," John requested, and he was relieved when Rodney practically carried him into the bathroom. He smiled when the other man hovered. "I can handle it from here, thanks."

"Oh...right." Rodney flushed red and backed out of the room, closing the door behind him. "Call me when you're done."

"Okay." John took care of business then made his way over to the shower. He had to get clean. He slid his boxers down, stepped out of them, then turned on the water. A minute later he was under the warm spray, but he was shaking as he fought to keep upright and he was losing the battle when a solid mass was suddenly behind him, supporting his weight. For a moment John's mind flashed the the image of Cowen, but the touch was different and John knew it was Rodney. Rodney was safe.

Rodney was pissed. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" He demanded.

John winced. "I feel sticky and dirty. Okay with you?"
"You should have asked me to help you." Rodney was still pissed. But he was stroking John's stomach with his thumb, unaware of the fact.

"You're helping me now," John replied. Then he caught his breath as Rodney's thumb dropped lower. He waited for the feeling of revulsion that Cowen's touch had evoked, but John felt himself relaxing at the soothing touch. He let himself relax back into Rodney's solid form until he felt a hardness pressing against his ass. John went rigid and pulled away, knees buckling again.

Rodney held him. "I'm sorry. It's okay, John. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm sorry...I can't help it...my body...I...I want you..I'm sorry." He was babbling and didn't care.

John found himself wanting to laugh and he wasn't sure why, but he turned around and did laugh when he realized Rodney was wearing boxers. Soggy boxers. But it wasn't really funny because John could see Rodney's erection. He reached out and stroked the tip. "I do that to you?" he asked, in wonderment.

"All the time. Not your fault." Rodney risked a smile. "You're beautiful and sexy and hot, even when you're sick. And I should be shot for doing this." Rodney's smile faded. "I'm an ass. A jerk. I'm sorry." He started to leave.

"No." John spoke softly, gripping Rodney by the arm and pulling him back. "Don't go."

Rodney shook his head. "You're not ready for this, John."

John was thinking the same thing, but his body didn't always listen to his head. So he cupped Rodney's face in both hands and kissed him. When Rodney kissed him back and took control of the kiss, John let him. And there was no disgust or fear. To John's surprised, he liked the kiss. Just like the last time. And when fingers curled around his cock, John tensed for a moment, but then he made himself relax as Rodney continued to kiss him and to his surprise, or maybe not...John felt himself harden.

THE END...of part 14

Back to index
Chapter 15: Part 15

Part 15

John moaned as he felt himself harden in Rodney's grasp. It felt good and scary and confusing all at the same time. John's body wanted Rodney to continue. To touch him and kiss him and taste him the way he was, but a little voice in John's head was screaming at him to make this stop. That this was wrong. That just like with Cowen, he wasn't supposed to enjoy it.

"Let yourself feel, John," Rodney whispered against his mouth. "It's okay to feel good. I won't do anything you don't want me to do. I won't hurt you."

"Rodney..." John knew that he could trust the other man but this scared him. He was losing control again. But Rodney was looking at him with desire in his eyes. Desire, not lust, and John realized he wanted to give something to Rodney. To give him this and at the same time prove something to himself. So he leaned in and kissed Rodney, softly, and it was nice. It felt good. But he wanted to be honest with Rodney. "I'm scared."

Rodney nodded. "Yeah...me too. Cause I've dreamed about this for a long time." As Rodney lifted a shaky hand and smoothed his fingertips over Sheppard's face.

John shuddered but not from revulsion. Rodney was still stroking his cock, and that along with the butterfly touch against his cheek was sending vibrations of pleasure throughout his body. "I don't want to disappoint you, Rodney," John whispered. And he meant it. Rodney had done so much for him. He wanted to do something for him in return.

"You can't disappoint me," Rodney replied. He kissed John again then sank to his knees. He let the tip of his tongue touch the tiny slit at the head of John's cock then licked it.

"Fuck!" John felt his knees buckle, and not because of the fever this time. He closed his eyes then felt Rodney shift him around until his back was against the warm tile.

Rodney kissed John's inner thigh then breathed, "Hang on."

John could do nothing but give himself up to the pleasure Rodney evoked. He gasped as his cock was enveloped in Rodney's warm, wet, mouth. He bit his lip to hold back a moan as strong fingers kneaded his balls. And when a finger stroked between his cheeks, John expected his body to tense up but instead he exploding, pulsing his seed into Rodney's waiting mouth. John's knees did buckle now but a strong arm wrapped around his waist and John let Rodney hold him up for the moment. He realized he was panting, trying to catch his breath as he floated down from the orgasmic high. And there was no sense of shame or disgust this time. Just a warm haze of pleasure. A soft gray haze that suddenly shaded to black and John realized he was falling.

"John?"

"Wha...?" John blinked open his eyes to find a fuzzy Rodney looming over him. "What?" He was more than a little bit confused. He had been in the shower and now he was lying on his back and he felt dry and...

"What happened?"

Rodney looked worried but relieved at the same time. "You kinda passed out. Guess it was a pleasure overload." At that he looked a bit smug.

John remembered everything now. He tried to sit up but he felt shaky and he let Rodney help him shift up
against the pillows. "Thank you," John said softly.

"For making you pass out?"

"Yeah. That was incredible, Rodney." John wanted him to know that. But at the same time he realized he was feeling confused again. He loved women and his body had never reacted to another man before. Until Cowen. Now John felt all fucked up about everything. About who he was and what he was supposed to feel. Because what Rodney had done to him had felt good and right in so many ways."

Rodney touched a hand to John's face. "Don't over analyze it. You can love women and still enjoy being with men. Pleasure is pleasure, John. That's how I see it."

John nodded but he wasn't convinced. And now he was feeling a bit guilty. Rodney was sitting on the bed, wrapped in a towel and John could see the bulge of his hardness. It still stunned him and confused him that he could do that to another man. That Cowen had wanted him. And Rodney. He had explained to John why he wanted him, but it still didn't make sense. John bit his lip and ran his fingers through his damp hair. "Please don't take this the wrong way...but I'd like to be alone for a while."

"Okay. Sure." Rodney studied John for a moment then got off the bed. "I'll get dressed and head out. Okay if I check on you later?"

"Sure." John knew he didn't sound convincing but he was glad when Rodney took him at his word. He closed his eyes and listened as Rodney got dressed, then jumped as a hand settled on his face.

Rodney made a face. "Sorry...didn't mean to startle you. You feel a little warm. I'm gonna send Carson in to see you."

John shook his head. "Don't. I'm fine."

"Better safe than sorry, John." Rodney smiled softly. "I'll see you later." That said, Rodney slipped out the door.

"Shit." John wasn't angry at Rodney, he was mad at himself. And he felt guilty and confused and he felt a headache coming on. He threw back the covers and realized he was naked. And it hit him anew that Rodney had seen him naked and had touched him. That he had made John come and it had felt amazing. "Fuck!"
Shifting off the bed, John rummaged in his dresser and pulled out a pair of sweats. He slipped them on along with a tee shirt and some socks, then he headed out the door. He needed some time alone.

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John wandered the lower sections of Atlantis. He had no destination in mind, he just didn't want to go anywhere he might risk being caught by Beckett. Eventually he found himself standing in a section they had yet to explore. In front of John was a closed door. He brushed his hand over the panel and it whooshed open. As he stepped inside, John was surprised to see that it was lavishly decorated with wall hangings and tapestries. The lights came up softly as he moved further in and at the far end he discovered a huge bed.

John almost smiled to realized that the room conjured up the image of where a Sultan might house his harem.

Moving to the bed, John sat down on the edge. He was tired and realized he was shaking. He shouldn't have left his room. No doubt Rodney would panic and everyone would start looking for him, but he didn't care. Heaving a sigh, John rubbed his face then crawled up onto the bed. He stretched out and let his eyelids drift shut. He didn't even notice when he slid into sleep.
"Found him!" Rodney couldn't hide the note of relief in his voice.

"Where?" Elizabeth was by his side in an instant, staring at the video screen.

Rodney pointed. "There. It has to be John. It's a section of Atlantis we haven't searched yet and he's the only infrared form."

Elizabeth nodded. "Check it out and take Carson with you. Let me know."

"Will do." Rodney was smiling as he headed off but it soon faded. He wondered why John had felt the need to run away.

John felt a hand on his face, then something cold on his chest. His eyes flew open and his body tensed, ready to lash out, but strong hands gripped his wrists, holding him back, and John realized it was Rodney. He felt himself relax, but then he frowned in confusion. "What...how...how did you find me?" John remembered where he was.

Rodney grinned. "Wasn't easy but I am a genius, remember? You had me worried though."

"Aye..me too," Carson interjected. "Now hold still." He pressed his stethoscope to John's chest.

"That's cold!" John realized that was the coldness he had felt.

Carson made a face at him. "Shh!" He listened a moment then nodded. "Bit of a temp, nothing to worry about. You do need to get back to your room and back to bed. I'll send for a stretcher. It's too long a walk for you to make again."

John shifted up and shook his head. "No...I'll stay here. I can sleep here for a bit till I'm ready to walk back."

"I'll stay with him and help him back," Rodney piped up.

"How did I know you would say that?" Carson replied, rolling his eyes. "Okay. Well then, I'm going to leave a thermometer and I'll send some food and water and stuff for you both."

John felt himself relaxing again, a smile curving his lips. "Thanks."

Carson nodded. "Sure thing." He left the thermometer but packed up his other things into his bag and made to leave.

"I'll see you out," Rodney offered.

John watched them and saw Rodney lean in to whisper something to Beckett. He wasn't sure he wanted to know what it was. He was content just to lie here. He was still confused about his feelings for Rodney, but he found himself glad the man was with him. John felt the bed dip and realized his eyes had drifted closed. He opened them to see Rodney's worried face. "I'm good," John assured him.

Rodney nodded. "Yeah. You were running away though...weren't you? From what you feel for me."

"Maybe." John wasn't sure if that was what he had been doing or not. "I just needed to be alone. Maybe to
stop thinking for a while."

"I can relate to that." Rodney slid closer and reached out to touch John's face in a soft caress. "You know how I feel about you physically...but I want you to understand something. I want to tell you something and then I want you to sleep on it. Literally."

John was mesmerized by the look in Rodney's eyes. Blue eyes that held a myriad of emotions at this moment. There was tenderness and warmth and a touch of uncertainty shimmering back at him. "What do you want to tell me?" John invited. Although he wasn't sure he was ready to hear what Rodney had to say.

Rodney took a deep breath, released it slowly, then blurted it out. "I love you. Now don't say anything...just...just know. Okay? I just feel like you should know that. And I want you to understand that it's okay that you don't feel the same way. This is all new to you, John. I know you're confused enough about what Cowen did and everything that happened...and I'm not trying to mess you up more. I'm telling you this because I want you to know that no matter what happens, I'll always care about you. We can just be friends and I'm okay with that. I'm not expecting anything of you. I'm telling you this so that you can trust me."

"I do trust you, Rodney," John whispered. He felt overwhelmed by what Rodney was telling him and by what it meant, but he also understood what it meant. He just wasn't sure how he felt about it.

John rubbed his face with one hand and realized he was shaking. "I'm tired." He knew Rodney would understand.

"Go to sleep." Rodney found a blanket and was about to cover him.

John grabbed it. "Come lay with me?" He didn't want to be alone. He wanted Rodney with him. He wanted to feel him.

Rodney hesitated. "You sure?"

"I'm sure." John waited and was relieved when Rodney climbed onto the bed, dragging the blanket with him.

"Lay on your side," Rodney ordered.

John grinned. "You're bossy."

Rodney snorted. "Well duh. Roll over." He pushed John onto his side then snuggled up behind him, curving and arm over his waist before drawing the blanket over them both.

"Thanks, Rodney," John said softly.

"You might regret this." Rodney pressed his lips to John's ear. "I snore." He said that and snuggled in close.

John caught his breath as he felt Rodney's crotch snug into his ass. He could feel that Rodney was hard. It was a reminder of how Rodney felt about him and John was almost relieved. Only he didn't understand why. He found himself shifting back, wriggling to fit in closer to the solid warmth of Rodney's body.

Rodney moaned. "You're killing me, you know that...right?"

"Sorry." John wasn't. This felt surreal and he felt suddenly powerful and in control. But he also felt exhausted and couldn't hide a yawn.

"Go to sleep," Rodney whispered in his ear.
John closed his eyes and drifted off. Soothed into warm darkness by the sound of Rodney's breathing in his ear and the soothing hand that stroked his chest. John slept knowing he was loved.

THE END...of part 15
John came awake to the feel of a warm mouth on his and a tongue tickling his lips apart. He opened his mouth to make a protest only to find the tongue silencing him. John stiffened, but even before his eyes flew open he knew that this wasn't Cowen. He knew it was Rodney and that he was safe and his body reacted to the kiss. Not with shame and guilt, but with desire. And the low moan that filled the air came from John.

Rodney broke the kiss. "You okay with this?" he asked bluntly.

"I think so." John felt a little shaky but he was able to hold Rodney's blue gaze. He saw warm desire glowing there. Desire and love and other things. A bit of uncertainty that John wanted to banish. "I don't know what this will mean down the road, Rodney...I don't know how I'll feel about you or us or any of this. But right now I want to be with you. And if that's enough for you...then I want to make love with you."

"It's enough for me." Rodney kissed him again. "Just so long as we can be friends no matter what happens."

John nodded. "This won't change our friendship. I promise." And he meant it. He valued Rodney's friendship far too much to let anything change it. Especially given the past few weeks when Rodney had been there for him. Without him, John knew he wouldn't have dealt well with everything that had happened. Not that he was doing all that great a job of it anyway, but he knew that he needed Rodney in his life. And where it would lead them, John didn't know. He would simply go with the flow.

Rodney shifted back, his eyes locked on John's face, then he pulled off his shirt. He looked a little uncomfortable.

"What's wrong?" John asked. He could see that Rodney was a bit uncertain.

"I'm fat." Rodney pinched the flesh around his middle.

John frowned at him. "You're not fat, Rodney. You're just solid."

Rodney sighed and shook his head. "I am fat...especially compared to you. Even when you weren't so skinny."

"Hey..I'm not skinny!" John shot back, and it was an instinctive protest. He'd been called skinny his entire life.

"You are..but that's okay...it looks good on you." As he spoke, Rodney was pulling John up to ease his shirt off. Then he bent his head and bit a flat nipple.

John yelped then let himself fall back with Rodney over him. They kissed some more and it felt good to John. He liked the taste of Rodney. He let his own tongue slip into the other man's mouth and they duelled for control and there was no pressure. They kissed until they needed to breath then Rodney slipped off the bed. John was going to protest but he realized Rodney was stripping off the rest of his clothes. John watched, feeling a bit nervous, but this was Rodney...not Cowen...and he wanted to see him.

Rodney stripped quickly and a bit awkwardly, but he was finally naked and he stood there, letting John look at him. Knowing this was an important moment for them both. "You okay?" He had to ask.

"Yeah." That was all John said as he moved off the bed and went to Rodney. He reached out to touch the solid chest and realized his hand was shaking. But he wasn't scared, he was nervous. He wasn't sure about
what he was feeling, but he was intrigued and curious and he let his hand brush over Rodney's chest, down the soft belly and lower into the crinkly hairs before wrapping around the warm hardness of Rodney's cock. Warm as in hot and sleek and throbbing and John bit his lip as he stroked him. He had never touched another man's cock before. "This okay?"

"God...yes!" Rodney moaned his reply. "John...you need to stop." He gripped Sheppard's wrist.

John felt guilty. "Sorry." He made to pull back.

Rodney held on. "No...it's okay. It's just...if you don't stop I'm going to come now. You have that affect on me. And I want to be inside you when I come. If you still want to do this. You don't have to, John. It's okay if you don't."

"I want to." John didn't hesitate. He dropped his eyes from Rodney's. He felt so gauche in this moment. Like a teenager about to have sex for the first time and he hated feeling so uncertain.

"It's okay." Rodney knew what John was feeling. "We'll take it slow. How about we get you undressed. Sex works better that way."

John nodded and reached for his pants but Rodney batted his hand away. So he let Rodney undress him, closing his eyes until he felt fingers curl around him. He felt himself begin to harden and a whimper escaped him.

Rodney gave a happy sigh. "You are so fucking beautiful, John."

"No --" That was all John got to say because Rodney was kissing him again. John felt Rodney moving them back towards the bed and then John was stretched out on his back with Rodney over him, and he could feel the other man touching him everywhere and it felt amazing. It was as if Rodney had developed a dozen pairs of hands. And there were warm lips that touched him everywhere almost reverently and all the things Rodney was whispering about him and John didn't believe him but he didn't protest because it was Rodney and if it made him happy John would let it go. And then Rodney's mouth was sucking on the tip of John's cock and he couldn't swallow down the whimpers and moans. Cowen had made John's body react to the pleasure, but this was different. This was Rodney and it was as if every part of John was on fire. His skin, his cock, everything. "God.." he choked out and it was all he could say. Then his body exploded into pure pleasure and John felt hazy darkness creeping over him, but he didn't fall into it, he just let himself float on it for a while and came back to full awareness when Rodney kissed him. And John realized he could taste himself on Rodney's lips.

"You're even more beautiful in the aftermath," Rodney whispered against John's lips.

John felt himself blush but made himself lock eyes with Rodney. "You really think I'm beautiful...don't you?"

Rodney nodded. "Because you are and you know I'm not the only one who thinks that. Everyone does. And there's nothing wrong with it, John. Although I imagine it's made things difficult for you at times. Like a beautiful, blond bombshell of a woman with a genius IQ trying to be taking seriously by her male colleagues. Only for you, I bet you had to be better at everything than everyone else."

"Not really...it just kind of became an issue at times once I joined the Air Force. Stupid, petty, shit." John shifted under Rodney, feeling the other man's hardness against his thigh. This was what he wanted to focus on now. "I want to make you feel good, ROdney," John said softly, as he reached between them.

"Wait." Rodney pulled back, seeing the hurt look in John's eyes. "I want you to make me feel good, John.
But I don't think you're ready for that yet. One step at a time. Besides..you know I want to be inside you. Can I?"

John smiled and nodded. He wanted this very much. He wanted to prove to himself that being with Rodney was different than what Cowen had done. "I want that," he whispered, then he felt himself blush again. He felt so uncertain and that bothered him. It was strange to not be in control and yet, with Rodney, John knew it would be okay. He knew he could let Rodney be in control and that it didn't change the dynamic between them. It didn't change who John was.

Rodney smiled then shifted off of John for a moment. He reached for something then held it up. "Beckett's version of lube," he explained at John's stunned _expression_. I asked him to bring it with the other supplies. He watched John blush again and kissed him. But then it was his turn to blush. "I've wanted to be with you like this for a long time. So I was...hoping."

"We you ever a boy scout, Rodney?" John teased, and it felt good to be able to do so. To ease the anxiety he was feeling. He did want this but he was still scared of what he might feel. Scared of what it would mean when it was over.

"Me..a boy scout?" Rodney snorted. "If you weren't so irreverant of rules I'd have pegged you for one."

John laughed because Rodney had him dead to rights on that one. "But you're the one who's always prepared."

Rodney nodded and locked eyes with John. "It's good to be prepared." His tone softened and he stroked one of John's thighs with his fingertips. "You ready?"

"Yeah...ready." John's voice was barely a whisper. But he held Rodney's gaze. He was scared and he knew he could let Rodney see that, but to know that he wasn't scared of him. And he could see that Rodney understood. "Um...what do you want me to do?"

"Just feel." Rodney coated his fingers with the gel then moved his hand between John's long legs. He found his opening and pressed a finger in.

John bit his lip as Rodney's finger pushed inside him. He let his eyes close and made himself relax when he felt his muscles tensing up. He could handle this. Then the finger was moving deeper and suddenly John gasped as pleasure shockwaves went off throughout his body. "You're...you...you're good at this," John gasped.

Rodney chuckled softly. "Practice. Relax, I'm going to add another finger." He did that even as he leaned in to kiss John.

John let himself melt into the kisses. Let his fingers curl in Rodney's hair to hold him as they tangled tongues. But then Rodney was moving away and John felt breathless, and a bit bereft, but then he realized Rodney was ready to move to the next level and John looked at him and nodded. He watched Rodney shift between his legs then lift them over his shoulders. John caught his breath as he felt Rodney's hardness press against him.

"Any time you want to stop..I'll stop," Rodney stated. "Just tell me."

"I will." John said nothing more. He clenched his fingers in the sheets and waited. Then he felt it, Rodney pressing in and it hurt but it was Rodney so John could deal with this.

Rodney hitched forward slowly, pressing in past John's resistance. "Breathe in then exhale slowly," he told
him.

John obeyed and suddenly Rodney was slipping all the way inside. The burn shook him but then Rodney was kissing him and John focused on that but his body never lost awareness of the cock inside him. And he waited for the shame to follow the burn but it didn't come. No shame at all and when Rodney shifted and started thrusting into him, John matched the rhythm, moving with Rodney. And then Rodney changed the angle of his thrusts and John felt himself harden again as pleasure washed over him.

"John..fuck!" Rodney ground out as he held himself back.

"It's okay, Rodney." John touched his face with a shaky hand. "You can't hurt me. Go for it." And John wanted this. He wanted to feel Rodney deep inside him. He wanted to be the one to make Rodney cry out with pleasure. So he clenched his inner muscles and the groan that erupted from Rodney made John smile. And when Rodney's hands dug into his hips John felt grounded. He closed his eyes and went along for the ride and then he felt it, warm wetness filling him even as Rodney screamed his name. And that amazed John. Rodney was a screamer and he screamed his name. And then Rodney was slumping over him and John realized something. He had come again without being touched. And it should have been gross but it felt right that they were connected on every level and he lowered his legs so he could wrap his arms around Rodney and hold him tight. He kissed Rodney's temple and held him through the aftershocks.

After a long moment, Rodney lifted his head and smiled at John. "That was amazing...thank you. Thank you so much for trusting me, John."

John shook his head. "I'm the one who should thank you, Rodney. For not betraying that trust."

"You make it easy." Rodney kissed John then bit his lip. "Um...I know this is asking a lot but can I stay inside you for a bit? It feels good. If it hurts --"

"It doesn't hurt...I like it." It was strange to John to realize it, but this felt right. It was confusing as hell and he felt another headache coming on. But he could sort things out later. With Rodney. John didn't feel pressured now. He knew that whatever happened between them in the future, Rodney would be his friend. If they could be more it would be wonderful. But for right now, John was content to just be in the moment. To just be with Rodney.

Rodney kissed him again. "I love you, John. Even if you can never say it back...I will always love you and this will always be special to me."

John blinked back tears. He knew he was tired but he also knew that this was a turning point for him. He could leave behind what Cowen had done. It no longer mattered. And maybe it had been fate in some ways. Maybe this was where John was supposed to be. With Rodney. And John was okay with that. But he was also very tired. "Thank you, Rodney," he whispered, sleepily.

"You're welcome, John." Rodney kissed his temple then shifted them a bit so they were still connected but more tangled together on their sides. "Go to sleep."

"Okay." John let his eyes drift closed. He knew he had more healing to do, just as he knew there was still a war to be fought with various enemies. But right now, for this moment in time. He was at peace.

THE END