

Title: Serenity

Author: Biblio

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Season/Spoilers: Season 4. Missing scenes for "Chain Reaction."

Synopsis: General Hammond's shock resignation leads Jack to join forces with Maybourne to protect Daniel, SG-1 and Hammond's family.

Warnings: Violence.



Serenity

Starting Points Part Three

A slash story by Biblio

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JACK

"So, what do we know about this new guy?" Carter asks.

He's late?

I lean forward and peer past her. The Air Force has filled our unwanted vacancy for a C.O. faster than they've ever managed to fill a toilet paper requisition. I'm amazed the general didn't get a memo from the Joint Chiefs ordering him not to let the door hit him in the ass on his way out. I haven't had a chance to wring word one from the grapevine. I think we can conclude from the breathtaking turnaround just how much thought, care and effort hasn't gone into the selection process. I sigh and say sourly, "Not much."

Daniel is plucking restlessly at his sleeve. I wish he'd leave his arm alone. I don't care what he says, I did *not* leave teeth marks. I refuse to be made to feel guilty. He says now, still plucking, "Let's hope he's not some sorta spit and polish, brass tacks -"

This has hit Daniel just as hard as the rest of us, but it's hit him differently. He has no less commitment to the SGC than Carter or I just because we're career military and he isn't.

We've *all* gotten to know and trust the general as a friend as well as our commanding officer, but Daniel's journey kinda started at the friend and worked up to the C.O. part.

He's completely at a loss to know how to deal with it at the moment. He's used to me telling him what to do, although his version of obedience is significantly at variance with the Air Force definition, or even my own definition, and he's used to telling the general what we should do and usually getting his own way over it. He's deeply concerned that this new guy might come in and – er – give him *orders* or something. He's accepted he works for the government but we're still slowly closing the gap on the military thing.

"Hardass?" I finish dryly. I stretch and find myself shifting my feet awkwardly. This is not good. Our glorious leader hasn't even reported for duty and already he's starting with the power games.

Daniel peers round Carter to me. "I was building up to that."

He's still pulling at his sleeve. Nope. *Still* not feeling guilty, here, Daniel. Movement in the doorway catches my eye. I snap to attention, "*Ten* hut!" The squadron moves as one man. Or should I say, *except* one man, the man with the sleeve fixation. Leave it alone, Daniel! Jesus. No more ice cream in bed, I swear.

"My name is Major General Bauer." I watch him out the corner of my eye as he looks coolly around the gateroom. Classic poker where his backbone should be paper pusher. "I'll be your new commanding officer. I'd just like to say I look forward to working with all of you. Thank you."

Asshole almost leaves a slipstream he's outta here so fast. I can't help myself. I actually turn my head and watch him striding out of the gateroom. Strictly a no no, but I'm doing better than Daniel, who has his hands in his pockets and is blatantly peering round behind me 'cause I'm blocking his view. Gotta talk to him about this protocol stuff. Again. Why is military the *ONLY* language he doesn't speak?

I face front again. "Squadron at ease." I never yell at 'em. They can hear me just fine. I'm more than a little thrown by how fast Bauer cut us dead. He's no frigging respect at all. I glance across at my team. "Always leave 'em wantin' more. I guess."

Carter turns to Daniel. Like me, she's disconcerted. That whole display was *WAY* off base. I stare out the door after Bauer and his acolytes. Out with the old – in with the new, putting us well and truly in our place.

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"Jack!" Daniel erupts into my office, slamming the door behind him. "I'm off the team!"

"I know," I come out from behind my desk, take him by the shoulders and sit him down, unresisting.

"Sam, too! Why didn't *you* tell us? I can't believe we had to hear it from HIM."

I can't believe I got it in a memo. I'm the team leader, for Chrissake. I'm supposed to know *before* they do. How dare this bastard circumvent the chain of command this way? I keep my hands on Daniel's shoulders and hold on, trying to hide the cold anger starting to coil in my gut.

Daniel spits at me, "I quote, 'An archaeologist has NO place on a front line unit.' From now on I'll be working as a *consultant*, only allowed off-word as *required*. Nice to know I'm so expendable!"

Huge, bewildered eyes stare up into mine. Already melting from anger to hurt. Daniel finds it hard to *get* mad with people, let alone stay mad with them. Me most of all. My thumb gently traces his cheekbone.

"Valuable." I correct. "He's trying to protect an irreplaceable asset, a civilian possessing unique skills and knowledge." At least, that's what it said in my memo, re the disposition of Dr Daniel Jackson. The emotional barometer plunges well below freezing. "That's HIS motivation, Daniel. I don't agree with his decision, I don't support it - and I'll be fighting it." I can see his mind race, connecting the dots. Yeah. It's news to me too, kid.

A moment later he's on his feet hugging me. He's an absolute menace to good order and military discipline. Carter's never been known to beat him off with a stick either. Even Teal'c was gushy enough to firmly clasp Daniel's shoulders at a very emotive time. I don't allow myself to kiss Daniel, much as I'd like to. I've reluctantly given ground on that one. He's right. We have a long history of hugging, but ecstatic lip lock *is* a little harder to explain away.

"I'm *sorry*." Daniel says regretfully.

"For being upset? Don't be stupid, Daniel." You'll be making it up to me later in ways you've never imagined.

He gives me that tiny wincing smile but it only lasts for a second. "There's worse to come, Jack. I'm quoting General Pain in the Ass: 'The Pentagon feels that the Stargate project, while exposing the Earth to considerable danger, is yet to produce any practical returns'."

"What kind of practical returns?" I know how bad this is going to be; Daniel's normally gentle face is forbidding and there is no longer a Goa'uld anywhere on the planet.

"The Pentagon wants to experiment with the explosive power of naquadah, allied to *nuclear* ordnance. Sam has to design a weapon of mass destruction. Bauer is breathing down her neck, she couldn't even snatch two minutes to come and talk to you herself. She's got a huge report to digest and a team to brief."

“Fuck’s sake.” I say quietly, disbelieving. “She’s building a *bomb*? What the *hell* is he thinking?” My informative memo said scientific projects more suited to *her* skills and knowledge.

Daniel sidles a little closer and gives me a melting look. And the pout that begs ‘kiss me better’. He stops just a breath away from my lips. I could so easily –

“Promise me –” He’s blowing on my lips. It’s incredibly erotic. I know we agreed the base was off-limits but – whoa.

“Promise what?” I demand, ignoring the tempting little snuffs of air playing over my mouth.

“Promise you won’t go in there with all guns blazing and – “

“Go where?” He and I both know where.

“He’s not the general, Jack. He’s rigid and closed-minded. He doesn’t listen. He *won’t* listen. I think he’s governed by ruthless self-interest. He’s a political animal, not a soldier. Take care. Take *great* care.”

I don’t even pretend I’m *not* headed straight over to Bauer’s office. Bad enough to lose the general, but to lose my team? My kids? Taking away Daniel and Carter? It’s the wrong decision on so many levels it’s scary. They’ve pulled our nuts from the fire so many damn times – Teal’c and I think one way, Daniel thinks another and Carter works the common ground between us all. We flow together. There *is* no SG-1 without them. Heart, soul and – to be brutally honest – the brains of the team. How the hell can they be replaced?

“Promise, Jack.” Daniel insists.

“I’ll try.” I can’t promise any more and I see he didn’t really expect me too. He gives a tiny, resigned nod and steps away from me. Daniel doesn’t do anger well. I do.

I hate that Bauer showed so little respect for SG-1 and what we’ve accomplished he dismantles the team the minute he gets here. I hate that Bauer went over my head and talked to my team *before* he talked to me. A fucking memo, for Chrissake. He’s upset my kids and undermined my ability to do my job effectively. He’s also put me in an intolerable position, completely undermined my authority. Maybe Daniel doesn’t think in those terms, but Carter and Teal’c do. The rest of the SGC does. Bauer’s cut ground out from under me I didn’t even know was shaky until the memo and Daniel let me in on it.

I have to wonder – why?

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I turn the corner to General Hammond's office, a place I've always been welcomed. Not tolerated. Welcomed. Respected. Trusted. As little as I understand Bauer's actions in his new command do I understand Hammond blowing off the SGC like this in the first place. I stand in front of Bauer's door and hesitate. I hate to go into combat blind. I don't know Bauer, nor have any clue to his motivations for treating me and SG-1 this way. I haven't been given enough time to find out. Things have gone to shit too quickly for me to do anything but react to the cues I've been fed. I can't fight what I can't see.

I take a deep breath and rap my knuckles right on Bauer's name plate. Just once. Can a knock sound contemptuous? I sure hope so.

"Come."

I won't give the bastard the satisfaction of seeing me rattled. I open the door and stroll in. Bauer is with his admin officer. I don't know her, either. He's in the midst of unpacking. Don't get too cosy, asshole. Won't be here long, you keep making decisions like this one.

"Colonel O'Neill."

I keep my hand on the door knob, just in case he has any dumb ideas about me jumping to attention. "General."

"Thank you, Captain." Bauer dismisses his admin officer. I don't want to fight in front of subordinates. The chain of command is supposed to protect us all. Supposed to be something you can trust with your life.

Bauer walks over to Hammond's desk. "I've just been going through your mission reports." Then he sits in Hammond's chair.

It's pissing me off royally. I close the door and slouch over to the centre of the office. Give him attitude, though my voice is still polite. "Yes, sir."

"They're satisfactory, although in future you might want to include bullet point summaries with each section. Makes for an easier read."

Is he fucking *kidding* me? He *destroys* my team and *this* is keeping him awake nights? My face is losing respect as fast as the rest of me. Including my voice. I walk right up to Hammond's desk, biting off the words. "Bullet - point - summaries."

"Is there a problem with that?"

I clasp my hands behind my back in a recognisable parody of the 'at ease' stance I haven't been given permission to assume. My tone is withering. "General, I realise the format of my reports is of *vital* importance, and if you'd like, we can get together some day and talk about fonts and margins, - " I see Bauer shifting irritably, " - but right now I'd like to discuss the fact you're *dismantling* my team without discussion."

“General Hammond may have allowed you a certain latitude in his presence, colonel, but you do *well* to watch your tone with me.” Bauer tells me with unmistakable menace.

I’m hanging onto my fraying temper by a thread, still trying to get him to address the only issue of importance. I know this could be a step too far but I have to take it. He isn’t leaving me any room for manoeuvre. “You know, General Hammond kept us together for a REASON.”

The sonovabitch pulls a face and just turns away, utterly contemptuous of me, my team, the general. Too frigging much for me. Just where does this Pentagon Pussy get off, copping this attitude? “If it wasn’t for SG-1, right now you’d be sitting there with a snake in your head instead of your head up your ass!” Aw. Crap. Crap. Way to go, O’Neill.

“Colonel!”

He’s furious. First honest reaction he’s shown since I walked in here, but even this he controls, with the rush to his feet that segues into a slow, menacing loom. Politician. Daniel was right, oh boy, was he right. Handed Bauer a loaded gun and -

“No one around here is above reproach. If it continues, your *long* - history - of insubordination will come to a swift and completely unspectacular end under my command. That I can assure you.”

He uses it.

“Now I suggest you take some time. Think things over. Decide if you want still want to be a part of this operation. Dismissed, colonel.”

If I push it any further – all my alarm bells are ringing. I just shake my head wearily, turn and walk away. There’s nothing whatsoever I can do or say. I’ve just been played for a fool. I played along like a fool. I realise I’ve given him exactly what he wanted from the moment I walked through the door.

Correction.

From the moment *he* walked through *our* door. Hammond’s out. SG-1 is dismantled. I’m – borderline. One foot over the threshold of the door I’m being *pushed* out.

What the *hell* is going on?

I need Daniel. I always need Daniel, but right now I need him because he’s the smartest person any of us know.

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DANIEL

One glance at Jack's stony face has me out from behind my desk in a second as we reverse the scene we played out in his office such a short time ago.

"I take it things didn't go well?" I hope he doesn't hear any blame in my voice. He's kicking himself enough for both of us. His eyes warm suddenly, ruefully twinkling at me.

"You want it blow by blow or just the bullet point summary?" Jack says dryly. "Makes for an easier read."

I lead him over to the couch George felt I required for my office, for reasons I've never been able to fathom. Nobody else has a couch on the whole base. I don't think my friends gather in my office for the pleasure of my company. The couch is sinfully comfortable, even when you've woken up on it. Jack has designs on it. Or at least designs on having *me* on it. I let him fantasise. It's completely harmless, given I won't even let him kiss me while we're here on base. Sex with Jack is adventurous enough. I don't need the additional thrill of doing it where he can get actual jail time if we get caught.

Most conversations we have, Jack simply sets himself down in the most inconvenient spot. At my desk or workbench, among my books, on artefacts that never did him any harm when they were in one piece, on the delete key on my computer, pretty much as the mood to annoy me takes him. All part and parcel of who Jack O'Neill is.

Some conversations require the couch. He's obviously just done all the things I specifically asked him not to do, and if me snuggling up reasonably adjacent to him on the couch will help him own up with the minimum fuss, then so be it. You have to be kind to be cruel.

Military personnel are trained to knock and await permission before entering. Despite Jack's persuasive claims to the contrary, they won't wait until he's come before they do. There is, however, sufficient warning to allow you to, for example, curl up next to your colonel of choice and slip your fingers into his hair in a comforting and sustaining manner. This particular colonel thinks it also allows him sufficient warning to turn to me and put his hand on my thigh, but I don't make an issue of it. His eyes wander down but I don't think he's *that* traumatised. I'm keeping my boots on.

I ask as kindly as possible, "What happened?"

"I played right into his hands," Jack says flatly, "Gave him exactly what he wanted. He wouldn't let me discuss the disposition of the team, gave me some song and dance about bullet point summaries on my mission reports. I let my temper ride me. He knew exactly what brought me to his door and he compounded the offence by refusing to address it. I've never been treated so contemptuously in my career. It simply isn't done. Superior officers - "

I snort, "Superior? I *don't* think so. Let's say higher ranking." Jack's gratitude manifests itself in the hand on my thigh abandoning the general vicinity of my knee, and generally insisting it would be much more comfortable higher up. I quell these inappropriate advances and my treacherous hormones, wishing he wasn't so good at multi-tasking. He can feel me up and talk at the same time. I need to concentrate.

"Higher ranking officers feel the most strongly about their personnel doing what they're told simply because it's usually them doing the telling. They don't fuck with the system that protects them. Bauer's done exactly that. I don't know if you realise how untenable my position is, Daniel. Cutting me out of the loop, letting my team know before he had the courtesy to even let me know his decision, let alone discuss it. I got a memo. A *memo*."

"Are you saying this was deliberate provocation, Jack?" I think it's exactly that.

"And I fell for it hook, line and sinker." Jack says bitterly. "You and Carter aren't just off the team. I'm on vacation, effective immediately, to consider if I want to go on being part of this command."

"WHAT? Are you serious? That's - that's really very clever. Or it would have been if you were as dense as you like to make out. What did Bauer think you'd do? Resign on the spot in high dudgeon?"

Jack looks self-conscious. "I wouldn't give the bastard the satisfaction. Just walked away."

"I don't think we can escape the conclusion he's trying to get rid of you. Permanently." Jack's voluble conscience can be very inconvenient when building a bomb is your top priority. His disapproval has a way of filling every available space and stifling opposition. He's also relentless in pursuit of what he feels to be right. I can quite see why Bauer wouldn't want him hanging around like a psychotic Jiminy Cricket.

Which leads me to another inescapable conclusion. If Bauer were to discover the truth about Jack and I being lovers, I don't think it would be a question of quiet retirement for Jack and a fresh start in Chicago for both of us. I don't doubt Bauer would court martial Jack and attempt to ensure he got the maximum jail time possible for his 'crime'. He'd have to deal with the most hostile witness on the face of this or any other planet in me, but Jack's reputation and career would be ruined whether he was found guilty or not.

Unacceptable.

"Daniel, I think I should go talk to General Hammond. See if I can't get him to change his mind. I can't see any way to get Bauer to reinstate you and Carter as it stands. SG-1 is finished as is for the duration. My position here is shaky, and I'd hate to think what could happen to Teal'c if the NID took another run at him."

I say warmly, "I think that's an excellent plan."

"I'll have to book pretty soon or I think Bauer will have me escorted off the base. I'll go over there now, try to talk some sense into the general." He smiles at me. "I'll see *you* at home."

I hate to do this, when he looks so tired and stressed already. "I don't think that's such a good idea, Jack." I think it's a terrible idea.

"You've got to be kidding! What the hell?" Jack is stunned. His eyes say, what did I do?

I say steadily, "You're already on what amounts to a suspension. If Bauer is determined to get rid of you, I can't think of a better way than him finding out about us, can you? We've been cosily relying on General Hammond giving us a graceful out if the worst came to the worst, simply because he cares about us. Bauer would have you in a cell so fast your head would spin. What's the penalty for - "

"Making love?" Jack snaps.

He'll happily call it 'doing the nasty' to tease me, but he won't use any term he considers disrespectful OR the noun you'll find in the dictionary. Not unless we're playing Dirty Scrabble, when anything goes. It's much more fun than strip poker and what Jack can do with a Triple Word Score isn't anybody's business but mine.

He takes me by both shoulders, insisting stormily, "Who the hell cares! I want you home. With me."

"I won't be used in evidence against you."

"You're overreacting," he says firmly.

"Jack, if he really wants to be rid of you, how long do you think it'll be before he tackles the issue proactively? Goes looking for stuff to use against you? How long will it be before he hears about your little Space Monkey?"

Jack says indignantly, "That was completely - " he catches my eye and sulkily amends, " - almost completely innocent."

I sigh. "Jack, we might be hiding in plain sight, but the truth remains. We *are* hiding. I'm only talking about a few days - "

"Days?"

I sternly override him, " - only until you've had a chance to sound out General Hammond and find out more about Bauer."

"Days?"

Two seconds later I'm flat on my back, pinned under a desperate man. I'm quite annoyed. I never realised how trying it could be to have a lover with Special Forces training. He gets me every damn time. I'll just bet he never did this to Sara. Then his lips close voraciously over mine, which part automatically to let him in. I'm a little dazed by the force of his passion but I'm vaguely aware this wasn't quite what I had in mind. Banning sex at home shouldn't have suggested I'd lifted the ban on sex at work. My hormones decide if he's going to be cut off, he might as well have something decent to tide him over and kiss him back enthusiastically. My higher brain functions are still arguing the point but lack conviction. The blood is drumming in my ears when he finally lifts his head.

After a few gasps, I manage to get out, "I'm scared for you."

Jack rocks his hips suggestively against mine and says lasciviously, "Scared *stiff*."

"Jack." I warn.

He knows that tone and reluctantly backs off, growling his displeasure. Jack is much easier to handle as a lover than he is as a friend or team leader. He's got very strong feelings about boundaries, trust and respect. He doesn't look anything but sullen but he does sit up and pull me after him. We both look extremely rumped. Before I can stop them, my fingers are smoothing down his hair.

"I'll do it for you, but I want to make it absolutely clear I am *not* happy about this." Jack tells me pugnaciously. "Like it wasn't bad enough already. The general AWOL, Carter building bombs, Teal'c shipping out with SG-3, and you not only being tied to a desk but having the humiliation of a lover who's on the verge of drawing a pension. Can it get any worse?"

I hate to be the bearer of more bad news. "SG-11 have been recalled from their off-world exercise. I'm not the only archaeologist who's been grounded. They return tomorrow." Jack was thwarted in his efforts to have that heart to heart with Alex. SG-11 shipped out while we were on medical leave, for team building.

Jack groans. "Perfect, Daniel, just perfect. I'm banned from the base, Teal'c will be tied up with the marines and Carter's got her hands full with nuclear ordnance. Keep far, *far* away from Devoe. I clearly no longer have the clout to get him quietly transferred and I wouldn't trust Bauer to do his duty as far as I could throw him. He's likely to get rid of *you*, not Devoe. If Devoe gives you a problem, *call* me. I'll - er - speak to him off base. Okay? *Okay?*"

I don't know what Jack thinks could happen to me on a military base with dozens of people in earshot wherever you are, but I agree equably. No point upsetting him any further. I nod and say simply, "I love you."

He cups my jaw. "I love you too. Let Carter and Teal'c know I'm on this and take care. Call me."

"I will. Just a few days, until we get this sorted. I'm sure General Hammond will listen to reason. He'll come back, once he knows we can't do without him."

"God, I hope so. Our options are severely limited if he doesn't. I've never seen myself as the barefoot and pregnant stay at home type."

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JACK

I let the girls down gently from the exuberant full body hug they've just swamped me with. Even Danny could learn a thing or two here. They scoot off to play and I turn to see the general at his kitchen table. Keeping a watchful eye.

I crouch and spread myself extravagantly against the glass, planting a smacker on one of the panes. The only kissing I'm likely to get for some time if Danny has his way. I hate when he does this. He has this infuriating habit of being right and making me swallow unpalatable facts I could well have lived without. He also has a long history of making me do things I would swear six ways from Sunday I wouldn't do at gunpoint right up to the point I actually do them. Just because *he* says so.

I have to convince the general to return. The alternative is unthinkable. Bauer has made it crystal clear he can't and won't work with me. Carter is safe, even if she isn't happy. She'll follow orders and she still has enough friends at the Pentagon to get reassigned if she can't stick it. Teal'c? More problematic. If he wants to go to the Land of the Light, I may just get a spectacular end under Bauer's command after all. Teal'c will make up his own mind. Always does.

If I go, Daniel goes. That's a given. He's already made his decision. I'm not such a selfish bastard I can't see what a disaster that would be for the SGC. I'm also not so dense I don't know even the most wildly exciting dig in Egypt won't do it for him. Not now he's had so much more. It would never be any more than the palest imitation compared to the single most important human endeavour for the future of mankind, to the meaning of life stuff.

I have no desire whatsoever to supervise Daniel supervising a dig in any part of Egypt. Especially as I have no doubt he has four years worth of chain of command scores to settle. On a purely practical note, sex and sand do not mix.

The general already has the door open for me. Looks - okay.

"Hello, Jack. Come on in."

I smile and walk in. "General." I see some kind of craft kit on the table, pick it up curiously. He traded the SGC for this? I say dryly, "Good to see you're - er - keeping busy."

"Have a seat."

No arguments here. Harder to evict me if I'm sitting down.

"What are you doing here?" The general reaches for the lemonade.

What's a nice euphemism for being publicly humiliated and shown the door on a possibly permanent basis? "Ah - a little vacation."

"Didn't you just take some time off?"

"Ye-ah. This one wasn't by choice." I spread my hands eloquently. Made it out the door under my own steam at least. No armed escort. A shake of my head to him. Don't ask, sir. Just don't ask.

"Not everyone is going to be as patient with you as I was."

Cut to the chase, huh? Me too. "That's why I'm here, sir."

"Bit of a rough adjustment?"

That has to be the understatement of the galaxy. This has to work. He won't leave us in the lurch for - lemonade. I keep it light, casual. Shrugging it off. "Oh, no! Everything's fine." I pause and then hammer home the bad news in the most casual tone I can manage given the way I actually *feel* about this shit. "SG-1's been dismantled. Daniel's got a desk job, Teal'c's with SG-3 and Carter's working on some kind of doomsday machine. You know - same old same old." I stare down at the table. Can't quite meet his eyes. All we've worked for - all it's meant. Undone in a day. Not your fault, sir. Just haul your ass back to the SGC pronto and *fix* it.

"Are you serious?"

As serious as you, sir. "For once, yes."

"It's just going to take some time to get used to the man. I'm sure he's very competent."

What? What is this crap coming out his mouth? Did he *hear* me? Get used to Bauer? Better get used to lemonade and hobbies, 'cause that's what I see in my future. I lean forward earnestly, try to speak as emphatically as possible, help him *get* this. We need him. He needs us. "Oh, come on, general. I've never met anyone who loved what they were doing more than you. And you were good at it. *Great*. You'll never convince me you got fed up. I'll never buy that."

"I'm sorry. It's out of my hands, Jack," he says gravely.

I stiffen, lifting my head to stare at him intently. Trying to read this. Read him. "What does that mean?" I'm getting that same feeling I got from Bauer. That supposedly safe ground being cut out from under me feeling. Not a feeling I *ever* expected from Hammond.

"I can't discuss it."

We have too long a history for him to blow me off like this. "General?" My tone is quiet, compelling.

The general sighs and sits back in his seat. "You don't understand."

My alarm bells are ringing all over again. I thought this was about Bauer. Now I'm beginning to see it's about Hammond, too. And my kids are caught in the cross-fire. It's a small opening, but I use it. This is deadly serious. As am I.

"And I won't, unless you explain it to me."

The general turns from me and stares out the window into the garden. Watching his girls. I wait as patiently as possible while he thinks it through. Decides to trust me. Or not. "Two weeks ago I was contacted by a representative in the NID. He suggested I should become more aggressive in my policies."

"They have no jurisdiction over you." I say quietly.

"They wanted me to help them gain access to off-world technology, which they're unable to do since we shut down their little side operation."

"You told them to go to hell." No question of *that*.

"Of course. Then he told me if I didn't co-operate, there would be consequences. The next day, two men in plain clothes, driving a black, unmarked car picked up my granddaughters at school."

I freeze in my seat. I'm not naïve but this is so far outside even the special ops playbook – it's inconceivable. "I don't believe it." 'Say it isn't so, George'. That what I'm after? Don't *want* to believe it. I used to *be* these people.

"They took them for a little ride, then brought them home. The girls were fine, but I got the message."

So do I. He says it so quietly, so insistently. I shake my head, like that would clear it. I'm utterly at a loss.

"We're talking about an organisation as powerful as the CIA. These people are above the law. I *can't* protect my family twenty four hours a day. I had no choice."

"Of course not," I bite off the words. Not mad at you, sir. *Hate* this. I turn to look at the girls, face as flinty as my heart right now. This changes *everything*. No way, no fucking way I'll sit idly by and see harm come to those children. This doesn't change the situation. Bauer's got to go. He's in this up to his neck, no question. I - my kids - need Hammond back, and I have to bring his family off safe as well. That's my primary objective.

"Don't get yourself into trouble over this, Jack."

"You know me, sir."

Oh yes. I'll be bringing a lot of trouble to other people's doors. I have to fix this, ASAP, and I have to make sure it never happens again. Ever. Nobody's family will be safe if those NID bastards get away with this. The general is right. I can't take on the NID and win. Unfortunately, I know a man who can. If anybody can.

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DANIEL

He's between me and the door. Why do I keep thinking that? He hasn't said or done a single thing - Just, act like he's stalking me. Without trying to make it *look* like he's stalking me. Alex is a little too close for comfort. When I move, he does. Always between me and the door. And the phone. A subtle hunter-prey dance. I'm trying not to feel - cornered.

"Daniel, you're not giving me a chance. I'm in love with you, don't you get that? I think about you all the time. Can't you even do me the courtesy of hearing me out?"

"I respect your feelings, Alex, but I didn't invite them and I *don't* return them," I say quietly.

Alex eyes me bitterly. "How do you know you don't return them? You haven't given me a chance. You won't have dinner with me, won't even talk to me. You don't *know* me."

"I'm not interested in pursuing a relationship with you. I'm not..." I trail off. I'm having sex with a man but I'm not - I mean, it's *ONLY* with Jack. I *love* him, so we -

"Not? Not gay?" Alex says softly.

He takes a deliberate step into my personal space and I - I step back. Find myself pinned up against my workbench. He stretches his arms either side of me, not touching me, fingertips lightly resting on the bench. Don't escalate this, Jackson. Don't move. I don't

want him to *stop* me. Jack has told me often enough not to start a fight I can't win. I stand still and refuse to show fear, meeting his fervid eyes calmly. As calmly as I can.

"So why are you letting O'Neill screw you every chance he gets, Daniel? Pity?"

An emphatic rap on the door and Sam's angry voice calling my name makes me jump. Alex simply steps smoothly away, a final look promising me this is far from over. I manage to find my voice and ask her to come in. Alex goes to the other side of my desk as if he's been there the whole time, just as Sam barrels in.

She pulls up short at the sight of him, freezing to absolute correctness. "Colonel Devoe. I'm sorry, sir. Am I interrupting? I could come back later..."

Alex smiles and tells her casually, "Just a question I had. Didn't want to get my facts wrong before I made them public knowledge. Dr Jackson was very helpful in that regard. Confirmed my theory. I won't be afraid to speak out."

Sam says sweetly, eyes twinkling at me, "Archaeologists, sir? Get *one* word wrong and they'll happily put you straight for *hours*, in *many* languages. Getting that from a whole team?" Her body language cheerfully says she can't imagine a worse fate, no way, no how, loud and clear.

I return her smile dutifully. It's the first real smile I've seen from her since Bauer cast a pall over the whole SGC. I haven't the heart not to respond.

Alex strolls over to the door. "Major." He smiles at me, pleasantly. "Dr Jackson. We'll talk again. Soon." He gives Sam a nod and closes the door behind him.

As soon as he's out of earshot, Sam says stormily, "Want to hear the latest? The test site supports plant *and* animal life. He won't listen to a damned word I say."

I'm glad she has her dander up. She's too mad to see how sickened I am. That was an unmistakable threat. What does he expect to accomplish? He can't blackmail me into returning his feelings, which I won't dignify by naming as love. Not after this. Is he thinking he can blackmail me into having sex with him by threatening Jack this way? He'd better think again. I won't do it. I'll resign first and warn Jack to do the same. Jack wouldn't thank me for prostituting myself to save his career. In fact, he'd - Doesn't do any good to think of him. Any good at all.

"So what's new there, Sam? Bauer hasn't listened to a word anybody has said to him since he got here."

She walks over to me and surprises me with a hug. I lean into her, trying to offer her as much comfort as she's offering me. When she steps away I ask shakily, "What was that for?"

"You looked as if you needed it." Sam says simply.

"You too."

She bites her lip. "I've skimmed through the report on the test site. I'm not happy about any of this. We're taking so many shortcuts and I just don't – Daniel, I have no real idea what will happen when that bomb detonates. There are so many variables I haven't the data to calculate. It could be a disaster. Could you take a look at this for me?"

She hands me a tube and I open it, spread out an aerial survey.

"Bauer told me there are no signs of human habitation within fifty miles of the test site. Check it for me, please? I want to be sure. I – I need to be sure. Too many shortcuts already, and we're moving into the test phase too rapidly."

"Of course, Sam. I'll do it now, if it will set your mind at ease." I offer warmly.

She sighs. "I'd love to stay, but he's on my back the whole time. Get back to me if you find anything, okay?"

"I will."

Sam hesitates with her hand on the door. "I miss the colonel."

"Me too." You have no idea how much.

After Sam goes I stand staring blindly at nothing. We're not doing well, any of us. Not just Sam and Bauer; Teal'c needs someone to cover his back, and as for me – I think Alex won't be satisfied until he has me on mine.

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I'm poring over the aerial survey when my phone rings. I reach out a casual hand. "Daniel Jackson."

"Like I didn't know that already? You're a mine of redundant information."

I love you too, Jack.

"Can you talk, Danny?"

"Can you?"

A slight pause. "Yeah, Maybourne is in sight but out of earshot. Miss me?" He asks, smugly certain of an affirmative answer.

“Like a blow to the head.” I say sweetly. “Miss me?”

“Nah. Harry looks pretty good in civvies. I’m seeing him in a whole new light, now we’re in bed together and all –” Jack tells me insouciantly.

“Jack! That’s – God – That’ll keep me awake tonight.” I stutter, appalled, hearing his rich chuckle. “How’s it going? Maybourne giving you hell?” I know how much Jack hates this, but with everything at stake his choices were slim to none. Nothing is more important than protecting George’s family. Not Jack’s peace of mind.

“He’s being surprisingly helpful. I trust him less in this mood than – you know.” His tone is unwontedly serious.

“I love you.” I tell him softly.

“Ditto, kid. Can’t talk for long. Can’t turn my back to this goomba for a *second* or he’ll stab me in it. How are things at your end?”

“NOT good. General Bauer is testing his naquadah bomb. He’s taking shortcuts which Sam thinks could be *disastrous*.”

“Well, Maybourne claims he doesn’t know whether Bauer is in with the NID or just a gung ho patsy.”

I can hear his frustration. We can’t *prove* a single thing and it doesn’t change the case regardless. “Yeah, well, either way he’s dangerous.”

Jack says, “Well, hang in there and do what you can. I’ll check back.”

I hang onto the phone for a few moments after he hangs up. It wouldn’t do him any good whatsoever to know the rest. He needs every scrap of focused attention to keep Maybourne in line. I’m not going to have him labouring under any additional pressure.

I turn my attention back to the aerial survey. Sam said she was told there were no signs of habitation within fifty miles of the test site. I concur, but I see unmistakable formations and discolorations in the topography. The signs remain to be read after hundreds, even thousands of years. A large site – synchronic, no question – so a definite time period of development and abandonment. Maybe Teal’c can help shed some light.

~~~~~

JACK

“And you trust this man?” Kinsey says, disbelieving.

I glance at Maybourne, cocking my head a little. “No.” I shrug. No offence. Maybourne shrugs back. None taken I guess.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, but this conversation has lost all amusement for me. I have a party to get back to." Kinsey's voice is light, confident.

I cut the bullshit. "We're not going anywhere."

Wipes the smile right off Kinsey's face. "Excuse me?"

"I'm not leaving 'til I get what I came for." He's bristling. Good. He's slicker than a snake in baby oil. I want him *rattled*. Making mistakes. Giving me an in.

"Oh? And what are you going to do?"

What am I going to do? Good question. I want my *life* back. I want those girls safe, I want my kids back together, I want my C.O., I want my Daniel. What am I prepared to do to get all that good stuff? What have I been prepared to do, so often, in the past, just because I was told to do it? Damned good question.

"Well, I was thinking about shootin' ya." I speak as confidently as I reach my hand into my jacket, draw my pistol and cock it.

"Ja-ack? What are you doing?"

Whaddya know? I've finally piqued Maybourne's interest. He's trying to work this unexpected angle, work me, like he has from the moment I walked into his cell. Does me no harm to keep *both* of them rattled.

"Getting a little dirty for you, Maybourne?" Kinsey's face freezes. Guess he doesn't watch a lot of Showtime. Doesn't even know he's getting the 'bad colonel worse colonel' routine. I'm aware of Maybourne on my periphery, heading purposefully over to the PC.

"Colonel, have you completely taken leave of your senses?" Kinsey snaps.

Anger? That'll play. "I'm hanging around Maybourne, what does that say?"

"How *dare* you come into my home waving a gun?"

What am I? An amateur? "Not waving! *Pointing*." I demonstrate perfectly controlled pointing with the gun. "Siddown."

I glance behind me, check on Maybourne. He's already on the Internet. He's efficient, I'll give him that.

Kinsey stalks over to the chair, absolutely friggin' furious. "I hope you realise, Colonel, you're making the biggest mistake of your life? When this is over, I promise you'll regret the day we ever met."

"Oh, that day has come and gone, senator." I say coolly.

"If you don't care about your own career, maybe you should think about your friends?"

I stiffen. Way to get on my good side, Kinsey. Threaten my team. "What does that mean?"

"You mess with me, Dr Jackson will be out of the SGC – permanently. And Major Carter will be scrubbing toilets in some Air Force weather station in Alaska."

Venomous sonovabitch. A true politician. Negotiating from what he thinks is a position of strength. Hostages, Kinsey? Well, I don't negotiate. I eliminate. Kinsey is smirking, confidence oozing back. You think you've got the stuff? Bring it on.

"And as for the alien, Teal'c? Well, let's just say I know some bioengineers in the Department of Defence who'd just *love* to get their hands on his symbiote."

Of course, I'm shocked to my cotton socks. Never saw *that* one coming, naïve, trusting little soul that I am.

"Okay, I'm in."

I turn at Maybourne's voice, still covering Kinsey with the gun.

"I need the password."

My pleasure! I turn slowly back to Kinsey and say icily, "I'll give you a choice." I point my gun at his chest. "White meat – " Then I point my gun at the place where his balls should be. " – or dark meat."

"You wouldn't dare!"

I wouldn't? Really? You're alone in that opinion.

"It's usually something familiar, like wife's maiden name."

I look from Maybourne to Kinsey, give him my best 'talk or I'll work up the energy and shoot ya' shrug. Emphasising the point. With my gun.

"I have a wife, three children, seven grandchildren and various nieces and nephews. Good luck." He spreads his hands and settles back in his seat.

Shit. We do not have the time for guessing games and I really don't want to have to shoot this asshole. I don't have a silencer. I look back at Maybourne. He sits by the computer

looking blandly back at me. I sigh. Maybe I should work Kinsey over. Satisfying - but not practical.

Think logically, O'Neill.

The good lady is dumb as my behind. Decorative, but not particularly functional. My eye falls on a photo of the little woman. Here? In his office? He doesn't come over as the tender type, quite the opposite - could hardly contain his disdain. Why a photo of - the dog. He's fondling man's best friend. His *only* friend, most like. The mutt is totally uncritical or he'd bite Kinsey on the ass and make a break for it.

"Try Oscar." Gotcha. Kinsey's face twists and he looks away from me.

"That's it. I'm downloading now. Kinsey's online activities connect him to NID actions over the last year and a half - "

I hope I'm showing every morsel of the contempt and rage I feel as I stare down on our squirming elected official. Even Maybourne sounds faintly disgusted, which should tell Kinsey all he needs to know.

" - including the secret operation I ran out of Area 51, the involvement with the Russians - and the threats to Hammond."

Self-righteous self-serving self-important *contemptible* bastard. "You're a piece of work, Kinsey. You try to shut down the SGC and you make this big speech about how much you hate secret organisations, then you jump in bed with the NID? What is that?"

"Oh, I still think the gate's a Pandora's box and I still think it should be buried forever, but as long as it's open and as long as it's a threat to this planet, then I am damned well gonna make sure it's used the way it *should* be used - to defend God's creation."

"Aw - blow the rhetoric up someone else's nose." I snarl. Self-deluding bastard - who the *fuck* is he trying to kid here? "You're nothing but a power hungry hypocrite." I can't find the *words* to express my loathing.

"The only currency in this town *is* power. So if I have to shake hands with the devil in order to do the Lord's work, then *so* be it."

I can hardly believe the nauseating crap he's spouting so forcefully. He *cannot* believe that! "You self-righteous sonovabitch! Where do you get off - "

"Judge *not*, lest *ye* be judged. I read the mission reports that come out of that mountain. You play with the fate of the planet on a *daily* basis."

Oh, bless. He's *angry*. World of difference between you and me, asshole. *World* of difference. "I'm doing the job I was *asked* to do. I doubt very much your constituents could say the same about you."

"Oh, *please*. Given the chance half of all Americans wouldn't vote and the half that do vote are too stupid to know what they're doing."

From sea to shining sea, huh? "Which explains how *you* got elected."

"In order to expose me, you're going to have to compromise the secrecy of the SGC. Are you really willing to do that?"

I don't have a ready answer so I say nothing. He's upping the ante with a vengeance. Double dealing scum might not have the stomach for a straight fight but he plays the game well enough it may not matter.

"I'm done."

Keeping Kinsey covered I ease over to Maybourne and hold out an impatient hand for the disk. Cough it up! "Uh - come on." Don't make me shoot *you*.

"What're you gonna do? Take down the whole NID?" Kinsey's confidence is spurring me on. Does he think I'm dense? Maybourne already painted this word picture. Graphically. "No. Here's the deal. Get them to reinstate Hammond or this disk goes to the press."

"It'll never see the light of day."

Like I haven't thought this through? I'm not going down on my own here. Taking Kinsey *with* me if it comes to that. Plus - I kinda like the idea of him sweating it out over my continuing health and welfare. "Well, I really don't think *you'll* see the light of day if your secret friends find out you're the weak link."

Kinsey tries to shrug it off, but I don't miss that betraying moment of stillness.

"You learned to play hardball pretty fast, didn't you, Colonel?" Kinsey checks out his manicure to avoid looking me in the eye.

I glance to Maybourne. Slightly embarrassed here. Not often I meet anyone makes me feel like a Daniel Jackson. "I had a good teacher." I say wryly.

"Trouble, Jack."

I turn at Maybourne's warning tone and head over to the window, tilt the blind. Trouble with a capital 'T'. Two black, unmarked cars. I can't help but remember two little girls being driven off in a car just like this. All the motivation I need to see this through.

"Who made the call?" Maybourne speculates.

Well, given the alternative, my money's on Oscar.

"Give me the disk. And you might just get out of here alive."

Senator Super Confident Snake in the Ass has a private army to do his fighting for him. The way he's shootin' his cuffs guess I'm supposed to be shaking in my shoes here. Might help if people *occasionally* remembered you don't get to *be* a special ops colonel if you're a Mrs Kinsey. You don't live long enough. I glance at Maybourne, assure him, "They won't come in here with the group he's got downstairs."

"But we still gotta get out."

I look from Maybourne, to the window, from the desk to Kinsey. How the hell do I get us outta here? What will make these guys back off? They won't risk exposing their operation in full public view of the high profile crowd downstairs so they won't come in. They'll wait patiently for *us* to come out. We need a distraction. A *big* distraction. Exposure. That's what they fear. Publicity. Publicity?

I - Shit. No. But, it has a certain logic. I'm a big believer in the freedom of the press. The cut and thrust of onscreen debate. Kinsey's views on Joe Public and democracy deserve a wider audience. Much wider. I can't think of a more fitting - and spectacularly abrupt - end to his career than the full *public* glare of a ruinously expensive presidential campaign. And I guess there's no time like the present to make a start with the three ring on-camera circus.

It's perfect. I reach into my pocket. Can I kill three birds with one phone?

~~~~~  
DANIEL

"Now, where were we?"

"I believe you were making offensive insinuations about my friend." I say coolly.

"Your *lover*," Alex corrects, pleasantly.

My plan to work at home for the day and avoid Alex has just backfired spectacularly. My own stupid fault. I needed some reference books from my office and called Sam. She said she'd get an airman to drop them off for me. She would hardly think to refuse if a colonel offered to drop them in on his way home. He didn't give a name to the doorman, Mike. The main reason Jack okayed this apartment, I think. I'm perfectly safe here. Ha ha. Mike is totally reliable, he wasn't to know. Delivery for Dr Jackson. Air Force. I just merrily opened the door so the airman wouldn't have to juggle the books and got right to back to work.

Imagine my surprise.

“Thanks to me, huh? Knocked him right off the fence. Got him to stop drooling over you and start screwing you.” Alex strolls over and closes my laptop with a snap. Guess I won’t be emailing an SOS, then. He leans in close and a hand on the back of my neck stops me leaning away. “I can’t tell you how happy that makes me, Daniel,” he says slowly, emphatically biting off each word. “Knowing I brought you together.”

“I love Jack,” I say with a much dignity as I can muster.

Wrong thing to say apparently. He reaches down and plucks the glasses from my face. “No. You may *not* kiss me. No.” I say immediately, clearly, firmly.

Not firmly enough I guess. His lips mould themselves to mine with a relentless pressure I rigidly resist. The disgust I feel is probably showing and doing me no favours, but I’m past caring. This man wears the same uniform and took the same oath of service Jack did, and he’s mauling me because I’m no longer the sweet innocent virgin he was expecting.

I silently endure until he abruptly pulls away, flushed and breathing hard. As he steps away from me, I slowly, deliberately wipe the taste of his lips from mine.

I’m not flushed. I’m icy cold, heart beating so fast I feel nauseated. I’m afraid and determined not to show it. If he - I’ll fight, knowing I’ll lose. I couldn’t take on Jack on his worst day and Alex has exactly the same training and maybe even greater physical strength. What’s more, he’s - motivated.

I say calmly, “You do *not* have my permission to touch me. I want you to leave, now. I don’t return your feelings. I love Jack and that won’t change. There is nothing more to discuss.”

He flings away from me, prowling restlessly. He’s making no move to leave and he’s between me and the door, me and the phone. If this escalates, I wonder if smacking him in the head with my laptop will buy me enough time to get away.

I’m trying not to make obvious eye contact, in case it brings him back to me, but I - I think he looks almost shocked. Maybe he didn’t mean - he’s angry and lashing out. Trying to dominate me, regain some of the pride I’ve apparently hurt. Playing power games.

I rise cautiously to my feet and turn towards him, saying again, just as clearly as before, “I want you to leave, now.”

I’m not going to give him a single word that can be misinterpreted or used as justification for - not a word. No and go. That’s all he’ll get from me.

“Daniel, I’m sorry. Truly sorry.” Alex is quiet, regretful even.

I feel a sick rush relief and say steadily, "I want you to leave, now."

He nods wearily and turns away. I take a few steps towards the phone, just in case, and then – God – he's *fast* – he spins me around and crowds me back against the table. My wrist has been twisted back in his grip and he uses the agonising pressure to force me slowly face down over the table. I'm lying spread-eagled, facing my window. It's still daylight. I don't know why that bothers me so much. A heavy hand at the nape of my neck prevents movement. I'm only able to lie here, look at my window and listen.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Daniel. I just want you to hear me out."

I go back through my litany of refusal, for what good it will do. If he cared at all, he wouldn't have touched me in the first place. I guess in Al – Devoe's vocabulary no means yes please. "I don't want you to touch me and I want you to leave now. I don't want you to touch me and I want - "

"I'd never hurt you. Never."

"That's good to know." Jack's voice is very calm.

"O'Neill." Devoe says, almost purring with satisfaction.

I've never been in a more degrading position in my life and I've never been more glad to hear Jack's voice. I can't help the gasp of relief that goes through me but it causes Devoe to increase the pressure at my wrist, so it segues into a gasp of pain.

"You should step away from Daniel, Colonel. It's what he's asked you to do."

Jack voice is light and pleasant, and getting closer to me with every step. I hear a click. "And now I'm *telling* you to do it."

"What are you going to do, O'Neill? Shoot me?"

"Jack, please - "

"Be right there, Danny, don't fret it."

That's not what I meant.

"Devoe. Trust me on this, I *will* come through you."

I don't want Jack shooting Devoe. Meanwhile Devoe isn't saying anything at all, nor is he easing the relentless pressure on me. I wish I could *see* what the hell was going on, not just hear it.

"I could shoot you dead and all I have to do is tell Hammond I walked in here and found you attempting to rape Daniel. Being dead would be the easy option compared to what he'd do to ya. Don't make me - help - you out. *Step* away." Jack's voice is silky.

Hammond? Jack did it? He did it. Thank *God*.

"Rape? What the - ? Daniel? I would *never* - " Devoe is letting go, stepping back. He sounds genuinely shocked. "I was *angry*. He wouldn't listen - I was holding him, not hitting - "

"Danny?"

I pull myself together and stand up, turn shakily to face them both. Jack is as pale as I've ever seen him, scrutinising my face while he snaps the safety on. Then Jack gives me a lesson in motivation, closing in on Devoe so fast he can't block the forearm that slams viciously into his face, knocking him flat.

While Devoe is safely down, Jack slips an arm around my shoulders and hugs me to him, a world of anger and self-recrimination in his eyes. It pains me to see it. This is *not* his fault. He's had more important things to do and he shouldn't have to feel he needs to watch over me every second of every day. I shouldn't need a keeper.

Jack's voice is cutting, "I think if I canvassed Daniel's opinion he'd be with *me* on what you were trying to do. What the fuck do you *think* he meant when he asked you not to touch him? Over and over again."

Devoe regains his feet, keeping a careful distance from Jack, whom he otherwise ignores completely, staring only at me. "Daniel, I may have kissed you but - "

Jack's eyes ice over as I flush, beyond humiliation now, reaction setting in with a vengeance. I read his intent and step forward, a calming arm slipping across his chest before he can get away from me and the situation escalates beyond our ability to fix it.

"No." I say firmly. "Jack - " He's rigid, straining against a light, shaking grip he won't use force to break. A silent lesson in respect I can see Devoe isn't too far gone to miss. His face is stricken. "Jack." Look at me. At me. Not at him. Me. See *me*. It takes a while, but he does turn to me, a rough hand reaching then cupping my jaw with infinite tenderness. Making sure. Without taking his softening eyes from my face, Jack orders Devoe to sit.

"What do you want to do, Daniel? I can't ignore this. I'm all the witness you need."

"What if he tells the general about us? I won't take that risk. Not after you've worked so hard to put things straight."

Jack goes still, saying softly, "You're a contemptible bastard, Devoe. Is that what you threatened him with? Blackmail. Jesus. Have you no respect at all for the uniform?"

Jack leads me over to the other sofa, and we sit, together, facing Devoe. I'm shaking a little, so Jack keeps a comforting arm around my shoulders. I lean into him, grateful for the solid unquestioning support and warmth of him.

"You can tell the general anything you like about us, but it won't stop him doing the right thing. The worst that will happen is that Hammond will issue an Article 15 on me and I'll elect to take his award. I doubt it will involve any jail time. Daniel can go to the general in the morning and report sexual harassment. If he chooses, he can also report sexual assault for the kiss alone. He has a witness now, one who doesn't believe a *word* of that bullshit you were spouting about just 'holding him'. What the hell would you have done if I hadn't gotten home when I did?" Jack's voice is flinty.

I guess Jack's question was rhetorical, given how surprised he is when Devoe answers him, snapping tautly, "I don't know. I *don't* know. I never meant to kiss him, either, but I did. He said no. It should have been enough. More than enough. It wasn't. I crossed the line, crossed it that much further every time I laid eyes on him. Wanted him more every time I - "

I glance at Jack and am surprised by - pity? Pity in his eyes. He's going to have to explain that to me.

Devoe sees it too. He flushes and we both see what he feels for Jack. Not so much envy - closer to hate. "I realised what had happened between you. In the infirmary. I underestimated you. I didn't think you had the balls to do anything about what you were feeling," he says almost conversationally.

Jack shakes his head. "Well, I misjudged *you* completely in the infirmary. I thought it was about sex, then I thought it was about love."

"I do love him," Devoe snarls.

"If you think *this* is love, you need help. Professional help. You don't force people you *love* to submit to you by using violence. It's contemptible and cowardly. It's not supposed to be about power and control, dominance and submission." Jack says wearily.

I feel the need to say something to these two men who are discussing me so freely. "Do you want to know why I love Jack and I would never love you? Never. No matter how I'd met you?"

I see Devoe flinch at every word but he's forfeited his right to my compassion.

Jack grins suddenly. "Might as well stop the tide as shut you up when you've got something to say, Dannyboy, so lay it on me."

“Very well. When Jack looks at me, he sees *me*. He knows *me*. When you look at me, I realise now you see yourself. Life is a mirror to you. You don’t see the impact you have on other people’s lives, just the impact they have on yours. I didn’t submit to your expectations, your demands of me. You could accept that when you thought I would refuse ANY man, but when you realised I was with Jack, you correlated that with my refusing *you*. Then you tried to force me to submit myself to you. You don’t love *me*. You love what you think I mean to *you*.”

He’s being flayed by my words.

“Jack is right. You do need help, and that is what I want you to do. Get help. I – “ I find myself faltering, and try to steady the tremor in my voice, “ – I did think you were going to rape me. I don’t think you would have stopped if Jack hadn’t come. I don’t think I could have stopped you, though I would have tried. I don’t want it on my conscience, you doing this to somebody else.”

“Daniel, I swear - I - “

“You can’t swear. Your word means nothing.” Jack interrupts savagely. “It’s an *insult*. You’ve no honour at all.”

I want to have my say. “If going to the general will get you the help you need, I will do it. You’ve humiliated me enough I shouldn’t worry about making it public.”

“Or you can resign from active service and submit to treatment. Doc Fraiser can set you up. I’ll go with you to see her. The deal is only good for five minutes,” Jack smoothly intervenes.

“Resign?”

“A senior officer who abuses his position to sexually harass a civilian employee and then commits a sexual assault? You’re not *fit* to wear the uniform. No question you resign. It’s that or jail time. You choose. The clock is ticking.”

Devoe sits in deathly silence for the longest time, finally saying slowly, “I won’t put Daniel through - “

“Don’t you dare hide behind Daniel, you sonovabitch. Therapy scares you *less* than jail, that’s all. Tell the truth for once.” Jack’s tone is glacial.

He has no real choice. “I’ll resign.” Devoe climbs to his feet, Jack gliding up to meet him, stepping smoothly between us, blocking his view.

“You’ve seen Daniel for the *last* time, Devoe. You *don’t* get to have him. Get over it. And, Devoe? Don’t make me look for you tomorrow. There will be consequences.”

I sink down onto the sofa while Jack escorts Devoe to the door, hugging a cushion to me. I hear Jack lock and bolt the door. Then his footsteps rapidly closing the gap, not quite a dead run, but close. He looms over me and pulls me to my feet. I can't disguise the tremors shooting through me, nor can I entirely meet his eyes. I feel so guilty. He looks so weary, he didn't need to cope with me bringing fresh trouble to his door.

"I'm sorry." I say helplessly. I've said it and meant it so many times. I don't need to make the same mistake twice, I find fresh ones almost every day.

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JACK

I can't believe how close he came – how close I let him come.

"For what? It's me who should be sorry." I say quietly. "I didn't see this coming. I didn't read him. Not this."

"I should have - " Daniel insists. "After what happened in my office, I should have - " He falters to a stop, eyes flying to mine, stricken.

"I should have just put one behind his ear." I say venomously.

Daniel is shivering convulsively. Abruptly I realise my reluctance to hug him when I'm pissed off at myself, life, the universe and the friggin cosmic injustice of everything just might be coming off as reluctance to touch what another man has just had his hands all over.

His eyes pierce through me as I yank him into my arms and hug him desperately, trying to quell the godawful shivers going through him. "Bed." I'm firm with him. He needs the kind of quality reassurance only being horizontal can bring.

I keep a comforting arm around him as I steer him into the bedroom. Guys don't spend a lot of time in other guys bedrooms, not unless they're sleeping together. I've been to Danny's apartment, sure, often and often, but his bedroom is new territory.

"You have a very big bed for a guy who sleeps alone."

"I like a lot of space. Don't like to feel crowded." Daniel says innocently.

He hasn't woken up one morning in my bed without me sprawled on top of him, pinning him beneath my weight. I feel obscurely guilty.

Something he picks up on immediately.

"You don't crowd me, Jack."

I lighten up a little and then he sneaks right under my radar.

“You’re just insanely possessive.”

He has a little sparkle in his eyes, thank God. I can almost see his mind ticking over as he undresses. Nothing really bad happened. A guy who should have known better kissed him and then twisted his wrist and held him down. That’s *all*.

I realise I made a mistake admitting I felt guilty. This has stopped being about Daniel and started being about Jack. I don’t think so. I’m naked and he’s still struggling with his shirt so I lend a hand. He’s perfectly competent, just *slow*.

“Jammies?” I ask lightly, heading over to the chest of drawers.

“Top.”

I open a treasure trove. I guess when you’ve had nothing else to cuddle up to – I take my time, gloating over the warm fuzzies. I finally narrow my choice to two pairs, one a soft blue green colour, the other as blue as Danny’s eyes. His wide eyes.

“What?”

“Nothing, Jack, nothing at all.”

Is he laughing at me?

“Er – I can’t wear *both* pairs.”

“These are for me.” I say, handing him the eyes colour bottoms. I don’t think me climbing all over him, naked and amorous, is a particularly good idea, not directly after he’s had a loveless bastard climbing all over him. I also think I might get away with not saying that if he’s suitably distracted by the inconceivable sight of Jack O’Neill in fuzzie jammies. Yep. Contact. Definite chuckle as I haul them on and then leap into bed with a flourish, folding down a tempting corner of the quilt, and patting the mattress invitingly.

Daniel sidles almost apologetically into his own bed and lays down beside me. I don’t know what’s going on in that mind of his, but I’m having none of it. I give him a long steady look then pull him ruthlessly into my clutches. He chokes out a little protest, which I ignore in favour of getting us comfortable and hugging him to the point his ribs are in serious danger. I’ve had a shitty few days too.

“You handled that well,” I tell him casually, while my hands stroke every available inch of skin. “Gave him nothing to feed off and use against you.”

Daniel nuzzles into my neck and kisses it, saying shyly, “I remembered what you said about escalation. Trying to maintain some control over what was happening.”

"You *listened* to that?" I'm kinda surprised.

Daniel is surprised too. He makes a move to sit up, which I ruthlessly suppress. I like having him sprawled where he is just fine. I get another chuckle. "I always listen to what you tell me, Jack."

Jacques Cousteau couldn't plumb the depths of my scepticism.

"I didn't say I did it, just that I listen," a quelling voice informs me.

I'm suitably chastened.

"You okay?"

Daniel holds out his wrist thoughtfully. "I think this will bruise."

I'm not going through this again. He's been giving me attitude about that wrist all week. Come on! Chocolate ice cream filled with little marshmallow Phish? What does he think I'm going to do with it? Eat it? "No more Phishing in bed for you, Dannyboy, not if you're going to give me grief every time I get a nibble."

Daniel loftily ignores this and promptly changes the subject. "General Hammond has been reinstated? How did you - you're not in any trouble, are you?"

"No." I say firmly. "Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"Jack!"

I've done everything I can to neutralise both Kinsey and the NID. I'm safe enough. For the moment.

"It's over, Danny. The girls are safe, the general will be back tomorrow and I get my team back. The one and only Senator Kinsey was in it up to his neck. What a piece of work that lowlife is. I got him *but* good, Danny. Strolled out of there with all the hold over him I needed and gilded the lily just a little." I gloat, "Senator Kinsey has all but announced his candidacy for the presidency. His view of the democratic process and the modern American electorate will NOT give the voters a cosy glow. He is going down. At vast expense and in the full glare of national television."

Daniel's jaw drops as he tries and fails to imagine 'President Kinsey' complete with holier than thou pontifications. Then he starts to chuckle. When I'm good, I'm *very* good.

After sputtering helplessly over Kinsey's all too probable fate for a while, Daniel asks me out of the blue why I felt sorry for Devoe.

My personal Psych 101 of sexual politics. In every couple, there is a kisser and a kissed. The kissed is the one with all the power. Between Sara and me, I was the kissed. With Daniel, I'm the kisser. Sha'uri, – not to say Hathor, Shyla, Linea and Devoe – they were all kissers too, each in their way. I don't think Danny even sees the power he wields over others, though he's suffered the consequences often enough.

He attracts. To know Daniel is to love him and want part of him for yourself. With the best of us – Carter, Teal'c, and Hammond included – that means giving back in equal measure. With the worst, it's a sickness of need and desire that means taking what he won't give freely.

I've skirted around the issue of how much and how long I've loved him, stuck with teasing the shit out of him for being clueless. It would only hurt him to know –

"Jack." I hear the warning note. He wants it straight.

I sigh, and try to feel my way through it. "I understand, a little, what he felt – I don't condone how he acted on it, don't think that for a second. I just have an inkling of why. Al'ishk. You know?"

He nods, cautiously. He knows the word, of course, but not what I mean by it. Simply doesn't equate that intensity of feeling with Daniel Jackson.

"The more I had of you, the more I wanted. Every day - more. If you didn't give as good as you get – " I shrug, not knowing how to express myself.

Danny is way ahead of me anyway. "But I don't, do I? I threw myself at you – "

I feel kinda smug. "And now we're here, we've got a virgin table to play with and no plans for breakfast."

"We do now." Daniel says with flattering promptness. He proves the point he was trying to make by squirming on top of me and cupping my jaw in earnest hands. Then he lowers his head and kisses me, tongue gently nudging my lips apart and sliding sweetly home. I automatically wrap every limb around him and hold on as long as possible. I embarrass myself sometimes. I've got no shame at all.

There's nothing tentative about the way Danny is stroking his tongue slowly over mine, delicately tasting every part of me. I reign back my instincts and let him have his way; he has his way and me for a very long time.

When we pause to draw breath, Daniel says ruefully, "I'm a little slow on the uptake, sometimes. It's finally occurred to me that I don't have to wait for you to come to me. I'm sorry."

Daniel is as sensual, passionate and responsive a lover as anyone could want. Anyone. He's also had a hell of a lot less time than me to think about this stuff, as well as my rampaging hormones to deal with. Despite teasing me mercilessly, he's never refused me, not once, and he's given back in full measure the pleasure he's taken. Confidence comes with time and practice. Lots of practice. Last thing I ever intended was for Daniel to start fretting about who does what and how often.

I say cautiously – this is *Danny* we're talking about – “Share and share alike. Starting to worry there you were thinking I – you're not very experienced at this, I guess I've been sticking with tried and tested. It's not about me having my way all the time.”

Danny blushes. “I love you having your way. Just took me a while to figure out I could have *my* way too.”

My sudden conviction I'm doing everything short of pissing on him to stake my claim recedes before it's even fully formed. If Daniel feels ready to discover it's just as much fun to 'give' as to 'receive', I'll be more than happy to accommodate him. I think I'm blushing a little myself as I say gruffly, “Think I was about eighteen the last time I tried that.” I see his eyes light up and say hurriedly, “Don't ask. Too long a story. *Way* too long.”

“Would you? I mean - ”

He's gone all shy. I think he's having difficulty imagining me opening up to him the way he opens up to me.

I decide to go for shy as I can manage, which, being me, isn't saying much, “You'll have to - ”

“Yes?” Daniel is all tender concern for Jack's sensitive feelings.

“You know - ”

He makes supportive, anxious little noises.

“Woo me.” I order complacently.

“What?” Shading neatly from aquiver with concern to wanting to smack me one. Just how I like my Danny to be.

I shrug. “Kate O'Neill didn't raise no fool. No dinner no nookie no way.” I think for a minute. “And just to be clear, I'm holding out for somewhere you get *cutlery* with your food.” I mull it over. “You get paid more than I do, so I also want a menu with no prices on 'cause if you have to ask you can't afford to eat there. A wine list with wines I can't pronounce. And music.” Then I smile at him sweetly.

For a minute I think I'm going to get the cute little bouncy indignation dance, then Danny pulls himself together, scoots down and extracts me from my jammies faster than he's ever managed to get out of his.

We both silently regard Mr Happy, who is letting me down badly, not so much happy as bordering on ecstatic.

Daniel does complacent very well too. "Fortunately, you're not the one actively making these decisions. This - " a gentle hand reaches down and curls around Mr Happy, who - er - weeps with all the excitement, " - would trade up for three day old pizza and warm beer."

"That's *harsh*. Way harsh." I'm wounded by his assessment of my character and moral fibre. "What do you think I am?"

"Easy," he says meanly.

Daniel then gives me an evil smile so of course I sit up and assist him rapidly out of his jammies, then pull him down on top of me. I smack his rump, making him yelp. Then I wrap myself around him again. What can I say? I'm a slut.

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I'm strolling around to welcome the general home. All is right with my world. The general is back where he belongs, my kids are back together and happy as clams, and Devoe has gone for good. Devoe wouldn't go into details as agreed but he said enough to ensure the Doc couldn't get him off the base quick enough. Daniel's name never came up. I won't be passing on *any* of the penitent sentiments Devoe wanted me to share with Daniel. I refuse to undo all the good work I accomplished last night.

Daniel expanded his repertoire significantly. I traded up the nookie for take out Chinese. The first time anyway. I have a few almost pleasant and very unaccustomed muscle aches to remind me of just how talented Daniel can be, and have to suppress a reminiscent smile as I turn the corner and tap lightly at the general's door.

Hammond turns at once. "Jack! Come on in."

"General, it's good to have you back." That has to be the understatement of the millennium. Few more days of Bauer and I would have been asking the general to scoot over and pass me the glue. I've been spared - hobbies.

"Thank you. I hear I missed quite a lot of excitement while I was gone," the general says warmly.

Most of which you would be thankful to your dying day not to hear about. Danny is just dandy this fine morn'. I'm - getting there. Having six feet of physical therapy

enthusiastically loving me most of the night helped a *lot*. “You’ll have to ask Carter about that, sir.”

“I’m looking forward to the debriefing.”

“As am I.” All the proof I need you’re back and this was all worth it. I smile and turn away but his voice holds me.

“Jack? What do I owe you for this?”

Too easy. Bauer was as warm as a slap to the face. “Continued latitude, patience and understanding.”

The general smiles at that. Okay, I’m understating it a *little*. “Just be yourself, sir.”

The Batphone rings and the general answers. “Hammond.” He glances up at me. “It’s for you.”

I can hear tinny Jamaican drums, so something tells me this isn’t the President. I shrug and take the handset. “Hello?”

“Hello, Jack.”

“Maybourne.” I turn to the general. “Where are you?”

“Well, I’m not in jail, if that’s what you think. I emailed myself a copy of the incriminating evidence when I saved it to disk for you.”

“I know.” Kept telling myself it was a calculated risk. Hoped I’d contained him – a faint hope at best. I knew what I was letting myself in for.

“Kinsey felt obligated to get me transferred to a nicer facility while I await my execution. Made things simple after that.” Good to know how tight my grip at Kinsey’s throat is, even if I *hate* what Maybourne did with it.

I’m also genuinely curious. “Why didn’t you try to escape when you were with me?” He didn’t make a fuss when I stopped him getting his hands on a weapon. Never gave me a moment’s concern after that. I can’t fathom his motivation.

“Aw, come on Ja-ack! Aw. You trusted me. I didn’t want you to look bad for the President. Besides, you’re too good to have let it happen.”

He – he actually did his very efficient best for me. We made an effective team. I still don’t know what to make of that. If we could turn his powers to good...

“So, what’re you gonna do now?” I don’t think I will hear the phrase ‘turn myself in’ pass his lips.

“Uh, short term, I think I’ll have a few margaritas. After that, who knows?”

“Yeah. Right.” I say wryly. It’s all I *can* say. He’s gloating from a frigging beach somewhere in the Caribbean from the sounds of it. ‘Burn in paradise, asshole’ just doesn’t do it for me.

“Thanks for all your help.”

Can’t squirm off a hook of my own making. Hammond owes his command in large part to a man who was more than due the death penalty for treason, who foreswore himself and disgraced the uniform he wore. It cuts, but I knew what I was doing. I got Maybourne out, knowing exactly what he was, none better. *Fought* to get him out. I gave him the rope. I can only be grateful he didn’t hang *me* with it as well as Kinsey. I hang up wearily, stare at my commanding officer and tell myself I made a good trade. Myself for Maybourne. I’ll keep telling myself that when I have to take full responsibility for every single bit of future damage, pain and mayhem Maybourne will cause.

“General, about what you owe me?”

Hammond says gravely, “Anything I can do.”

“Well, nothing right now, but one day I may ask you to – buy – back my soul.”

He nods, seriously. Taking me at my word.

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DANIEL

“V-E-N-E-R-Y. Venery.” I say smugly.

“That’s a word?” Jack is sulking because I got to use my ‘V’ after all. “What’s it mean?” he demands suspiciously, while he calls a time out to check the dictionary. His face falls and he says grudgingly, “Sex.”

What does he want? Blood? I’ve already taken pity on him and agreed at the appropriate time *both* my socks come off, but he’s still not happy. It might have something do with me beating the pants off him, literally, and my choice of bedtime activity. I’ve decided I want HIM in jammies for once. They yielded *excellent* results at my apartment. Jack’s trying to work out how we can do the nasty if he has to *stay* in those jammies.

The jammies in question were carefully selected by me for maximum impact. They’re draped temptingly over the arm of the sofa where he can’t miss them. His reaction was all I could have desired. A veritable howl of outrage echoed right around Chez O’Neill.

They're a lovely rich cream, which sets off the accent colour, air force blue, wonderfully well. Considering the motif, the accent colour is very appropriate. They've got little airplanes all over them. Jack thinks only the sickest of sick puppies could design, manufacture and inflict such degrading nightwear on an unsuspecting adult male populace. Well, he expressed himself more – colourfully – than that, but those were his exact sentiments.

I'm determined to win no matter what, given the alternative. His reaction was as nothing compared to mine when he unveiled what he wants *me* to wear while we do the nasty. He's wearing it right now. Apart from his sunglasses, shorts and one sock, it's all he's wearing and it's all the motivation I need.

My inflicting airplane jammies on Jack to annoy the shit out of him is perfectly acceptable within the established parameters of our relationship. Jack inflicting the hat that goes with his dress uniform on *me* because he thinks I'll look *cute* in it while we make love is *not*.

It takes a game of cutthroat Dirty Scrabble to sort the men from the colonels.

My next selection of letters yields, amongst others, 'Q' but no 'U', along with both 'X' and 'Z'. I swear, I was only gone long enough to heat up my coffee. Jack's reflexes will be the death of me. Bet he's got all the vowels over by him now. After carefully checking over the board, I have to surrender my turn. Being able to use only smutty words and smuttier euphemisms stifles a linguist's creativity.

Gloating, Jack peruses his letters for a long time. Then he makes a careful selection and slots the tiles neatly around my 'N'.

"C-A-R-N - thanks, Danny, the only letter I had missing -A-L, carnal," he finishes with a flourish. "And that net's me a Triple Word Score. Pay up. I choose to give, if that's okay with you?"

Snarling, I remove my pants. I'm also going to have to remove my shorts to pay my Triple Word Score penalty, but that's only temporary. "Only on the understanding you take off the hat *first*."

"Cap," Jack corrects absently. "I don't know, this cap rarely gets the chance to see action."

"It won't get to see any now, either, trust me on that." After a short, dignified pause, I say casually, "I've no objection to the sunglasses, if that softens the blow."

"I do my best."

He uncurls and closes in on me, hands on my shoulders urging me back and down onto the couch. The hat might not have seen much action but this couch certainly has.

“Hat.”

Jack settles me comfortably back and smirks as he kneels before me, nudging my thighs apart.

“*Hat.*” He’s not going to give in so I snatch it off his head and hurl it out of reach just as he engages his objective. A hot tongue laps gently up and down the length of my embarrassingly eager erection. I really *like* those sunglasses. Really.

He’s learning to know my body so well, tongue describing tiny circles all along the underside, pleasure boiling up through me. “Oh. O-oh.” Oh God. “*Oh!*” As his tongue, lips, teeth fit snugly over me and slide down the length of me to the root. “Oh God. Oh.” He’s killing me. Dying here – withdrawing inch by inch, sucking gently all the way. I moan his name, try to control my ragged breathing. He loves to do this, feel the warmth, the closeness. Feel me writhing helplessly, as I am now. The slow, tight glide of his mouth back down the length of me and the deliberate suckling all the way back. Hear me moaning his name over and over as I lose the ability to give any other coherent utterance. My heart pounding as the pleasure coils and spreads through my veins, he’s teasing, teasing me now, almost there, so close, he stops. Don’t. Please. Close my eyes, blissfully giddy now, he’s sucking hard and I fall for him, arching up, pouring into his throat. Collapse boneless beneath the weight that bears me down and soothes away the tremors.

I lie quiet, enjoying his satisfaction maybe more than my own. Lift my head to steal a kiss

“Triple Word Score gets better every time.”

He’s a smug bastard. Right as usual.

“Danny?”

I know what he wants. “Mmm.”

I curl up and drowse until he comes back to me, spoons up behind me and begins the now-familiar ritual, the dance we go through every time we want to make love. Then he sits, lifting me with him. I kneel confidently astride him, moving down to meet him as he thrusts up into me. Oh God, I love this feeling. Can’t be closer to him than this, lips clamped to his while I’m taking him all the way into me, eyes closing to allow me to fully absorb the sensations piercing my body.

“Ready, kid?” he whispers against my lips, eyes filled with a tenderness only I see. I smile, pull him to me and kiss him fiercely as he moves inside me, push down to meet him eagerly. Loving this way gives me the most shattering pleasure I’ve ever known. I want this every bit as much as he does. He doesn’t have his way, whatever he thinks. Truth be told, I have mine. His hands glide from my hips in a slow steady arc up my spine, massaging the nape of my neck before slipping into my hair, mirroring the movements of

mine. I rain kisses on his face as the tension builds, ecstasy spiking through me. I lean in for another deep, searing kiss, his tongue pulsing deep in my throat, eyes devouring me.

"I love you." I gasp.

His eyes go puppy on me, peering over the top of the sunglasses sliding down his nose. "I love you too, Danny. You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," he whispers sincerely.

His hands slip to his side and he smiles sweetly up at me, "Especially - "

"Mmm." There, oh, God, just there, Jack, just there.

His hands cup my head and a soft weight settles against my hair.

"Especially in my cap." He's laughing up at me, the cocksure shit. "I can stop *any* time, Dannyboy, you want to take it off."

I move more urgently, snarling, "SonovaRichardGerewannabe! You are *so* going to pay for this, I *swear* to God."

Jack smirks as he lifts my weight and rolls me carefully beneath him, my legs hooking high around his back as he thrusts deeply, urgently into me. I cling to him, helplessly moaning as he strokes against my prostate every thrust, the tension intensifying to the point I cannot bear it any longer and I convulse soundlessly, tightening around him, dragging him howling over the edge of climax with me.

We lie clasped together, breathing harsh and ragged as lungs burn, sweat stinging our eyes, hearts hammering. He carefully withdraws and cuddles up next to me, a wall to wall satiated smirk which has nothing to do with the fabulous sex he's just enjoyed to the full. I know and he knows I know it's because I'm still wearing his goddamn hat. He plants tiny kisses all over my stony face, then slips a persuasive tongue deep into my mouth. I kiss him back, thoughtfully, eyeing the jammies still draped over the arm of the couch.

I have not yet begun to fight.

FINIS