

September 21st – Morning
SGC
Earth

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It had been three days since Daniel fell out of Jack's life. Three days where the SGC employed teams to search the world; on foot, in the air by UAVs, and using ground rescue equipment used to locate bodies within the ground.

The UAV was sent out to where Carter told them a river ran through the otherwise barren world, but the distance was deemed too far for the man to have covered in the time he'd been lost.

Strange animals were seen, and located within hidden caves in the honeycomb-like crust of the world, but there was no sign of the human body of Doctor Daniel Jackson.

Hope was vanishing by the minute. Whenever Jack did fall asleep he was woken by dreams of Daniel disappearing under the surface, crying out for him to help him but Jack stood by, motionless, and let him disappear. So Jack spent most of his time up in the Control room, sitting beside the officer on duty, waiting for any word to come back from the rescue team.

SG-1 insisted on joining the search party but Jack had been refused permission because of his cracked rib. Sam and Teal'c went through for the first two days but on the third day, as they were about to go through, word came through that the ground had shaken again, causing the scanner to plummet through the surface, leaving it a crumpled heap yards below in a gaping hole and killing the Lieutenant that was working with it.

Jack now stood at the window, looking down at the gate and dreading the meeting he was about to have. Hammond entered the room, keeping his eyes diverted from the others in the room. The rest of SG-1 sat around the meeting table but the colonel remained standing. From his position Jack and Sam exchanged glances, both with tight faces - lack of sleep would do that to you, after all. Jack seemed to have consumed his and Daniel's quota of coffee over the past 72 hours, so he was quite jittery but with good reason.

"Sir," Carter had started the argument even before Hammond had drawn his first breath.

The general held up a hand to silence her. "I know what you're going to say, Major.."

"Sir, the planet is clearly like honeycomb. There are many places that Daniel could be lying, in need of help.."

Hammond nodded throughout her spiel. "I am aware of that Major, however we lost

a good man out there today and some pretty expensive machinery along the way.”

“So we just give up?” Jack grumbled from the window.

“Well, Colonel, unless you can assure me that men will be safe and machinery will not be lost..”

Jack growled as he lowered his face and rubbed a hand across his eyes. Hammond sighed heavily through his nose and returned his attention to the blonde officer on his left. “Major, I’m aware of your request to resend the UAV..”

“If I can just reconfigure the settings, Sir, I think I can make them powerful enough to see through at least the first few layers of that world.”

Hammond turned to the man by the window, who was standing with his hand buried deeply into his pockets and his eyes fixed firmly on the gate. “Forgive me if I’m wrong here colonel, but didn’t you say in your report that Daniel Jackson fell through several layers of this world?”

“Yep,” Jack said softly.

“And didn’t you report that his body was covered completely by sand?”

“He fell through once, sir, maybe he fell through again?” Sam offered hopefully.

Hammond played devil’s-advocate. “Or maybe he fell in and was buried by the sand as it filled the hole.”

Carter’s mouth turned down instantly. “Yes, sir,” she mumbled before straightening up.

“I’m sorry, really I am, I know how important Doctor Jackson was to your team.”

“He was more than that, Sir,” Sam said. “He was our friend.”

Hammond nodded solemnly. “I understand, Major.” Although the tone showed compassion, Hammond knew his orders and he knew he had to follow them through.

Carter forced a smile but her watery eyes belied the polite show.

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September 21st – Late Afternoon
Cave
Px3-908

Trepur watched as the stranger scratched at his crotch in his sleep, knowing that it was the sand in his strange coverings that was causing him the discomfort.

Although he had bathed the stranger he did not venture to areas other than beneath the top covering the unconscious man's chest. Obviously they were built alike, and Trepur felt that to intrude in certain areas would be taboo.

He gripped a cloth in his fist, squeezed it lightly so that it retained some of the liquid and then he placed the cloth to the split lips. The stranger began to suckle the moisture out of the cloth as he slept. The image brought a smile to the alien's lips.

He soothed back some of the hair that had fallen into the sleeping man's eyes. Hair fascinated Trepur. He had none. It wasn't something that his race had but he enjoyed touching the soft strands on the stranger's head, along his arms and over his fingers.

There was something that tingled through Trepur's body when he touched the hairs on the stranger's stomach as he washed him. He had to admit that over the past three days he'd ventured a little lower on the stranger than he knew he should have by shifting the fabric he wore down and angling his hand into the space to reach more of the flesh to clean. At least, he told himself, that he could excuse his behavior if the stranger should awaken by telling him he was just cleaning him. Trepur resisted looking inside the stranger's clothing though. He prided himself on that restraint.

As the eyes finally opened again – fully - for the second time since the stranger fell through his sky several moons ago Trepur noticed that some of the swelling and color had gone.

"You are safe," he called out as Daniel stirred in his sleep and suddenly sat up, slamming his head on a small outcrop of rock behind him. "Kustof!" He quickly moved to the stranger's side and touched a hand to his shoulder. Daniel flinched away. "I harm you not. I am Trepur.."

"Third in the House of Lords," Daniel murmured and Trepur smiled at being recalled.

In his darkness Daniel felt the warmth of a body near him and heard the crackle of a fire. He could smell something like cooking and his mouth began to water. "Where am I?" he asked the blackness.

"You are safe. Do you wish to tregal?"

"Tre-gal?" Daniel tried the strange word then felt something against his parched lips and accepted the warm liquid into his mouth. It wasn't unpleasant so he accepted more.

"You are hum-coffing well."

"Hum-coffing?"

Soft fingers touched around Daniel's swollen eyes delicately.

"I'm blind," he said.

"You are hum-coffing. Your miggs served you well."

"My miggs? My rest.." Daniel recalled faintly another conversation. "How long was I.. migging for."

"Migging?"

"At Miggs?" Daniel tried again.

"This is the third orb cycle."

"Third orb?"

"Do you require neykof?"

"Neykof?" In the darkness Daniel felt something brush his groin.

"You are like me. You require neykof?"

An ache in his bladder was causing Daniel more discomfort than he realized until it was brought to his attention. "Ah, yeah, I need to .. ah.. neykof."

"I will guide." Trepur got to his feet gently aiding the blind stranger to his own and then he slid an arm around the sturdy body and guided him from the cave they'd been in for three days.

As they stepped from the stuffy cave, Daniel felt the breeze and sun on his skin for the first time in days. He drew in a deep breath, coughed softly then tilted his face towards the sun.

"Orb," Trepur said.

"Orb?" Daniel repeated. "Sun." He recalled faintly as the heat penetrated his clothes and warmed his skin. It soothed his eyes too, though he could see nothing through the swelling.

"Sun?" Trepur tightened his hold as they continued over the rocky terrain. The stranger stumbled a few times but Trepur held him well.

"We call it sun."

"You know your House now?"

"My House? No," Daniel said, stumbling on a rock. Strong arms caught him again

before he could fall to the ground.

"We are here," Trepur said.

"Where?"

"Neykof," Trepur told him.

Without the ability to see where he was Daniel felt like he could have been anywhere. As wind whipped his hair a feeling of vulnerability seeped through him again. "Just.. here?"

Trepur touched a hand to the black cloth that covered the stranger's shoulder. "I will guide," he said, and started to unfasten the buttons on the green pants. Immediately the stranger's hands went to stop him.

"I can.." Daniel fumbled with the buttons. Then he waited. "Ah... anywhere?" His felt before him but there was nothing but open space.

Trepur placed a hand on Daniel's shoulder and turned him slightly. When the stranger still hesitated Trepur reached into his pants, extracted the shaft and said, "neykof." He guided Daniel's hands to the shaft now and stepped away.

Daniel, unsure why such behavior surprised him, needed more than a heartbeat to get his stream started, and then it was as if he would never finish. A strong, pungent odor wafted up to sting his nostrils and he felt his face burn, from embarrassment more than from the heat of the sun. When he was finally finished he shook the shaft then tucked himself away before turning to blindly reach out for his guide. When he felt no one, he called, "Trepur?"

"I am here," came the reply, from a short distance away. Trepur was breathing heavy when he reached Daniel's side indicating that he'd run to reach him. "You are ickschtog."

"Ickschtog? Ah.. finished? Yes, I am finished, thank you," Daniel stammered and felt the reassuring arm go around his waist again.

"I will be reggening when the orb goes out, will you reggen with me?"

"Reggen?"

"You are plektart. You must reggen."

"Whatever that is.." Daniel felt a hand clasp around his elbow.

"Perhaps we reggen next orb cycle. You may not wish to come once the orb is out. It grows dim now."

The blind man pondered that thought and wondered if it was worth pointing out to his kind stranger that he couldn't see anything now, let alone when the sun went down, or out, as Trepur had described it. But he decided not to. Next orb cycle sounded fine to him. His head hurt and he wanted to sit down again.

On their way back to the cave, Daniel asked his companion, "Ah, about this...not seeing...thing... Do you know if it's ... usual for me?"

"Use-ue-al?"

"Have I always been unable to see?" He pointed two fingers to his eyes.

"How would I know?" Trepur answered honestly. He stopped and Daniel felt a touch to the edge of his left eye. "You are hum-coffing well. Perhaps you may .. see.. again. There is much trenal in there."

"Trenal?"

Trepur scooped up a palm of sand and poured it into Daniel's hand. "Trenal."

"Ah... I have this in my eyes?"

"I am hum-coffing your orbs.."

"You're healing my... eyes?" Daniel asked.

"It will take more turns of the orb but you may.. see.. again."

Daniel smiled weakly. "I hope so." He reached for Trepur's arm. "Thank you. I don't think I would have survived if you hadn't found me."

Trepur patted Daniel's hand on his arm. "I have had no younker for many orbs."

"Younker? What does that mean?"

Trepur smiled. "I am unsure what it means to you, to me it means you. I have had no 'you' for many orbs.."

"You've had no.. company?"

"Kum-pany?"

"I.. I think so. Company... is having someone else to talk to." He paused and frowned. "I think."

"You are kumpany to me."

Daniel smiled now. "I hope so."

Trepur took his arm and continued to lead his blinded companion back to the cave.

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September 21st – Late Evening

SGC

Earth

Sam tugged on her leather jacket as she headed down the corridor. This was to be her first night out of the base since Daniel's disappearance three days ago. With Hammond declaring him lost that morning they had called off the rescue and life was expected to return pretty much back to normal as if Daniel never existed.

She hated that part of her line of work. The part that told them all that, despite tragedy, life had to go on. They were soldiers and losing people in the line of duty was meant to be an expected, if not acceptable, part of their jobs. She was grateful that General Hammond cared as much as he did, though, and had ordered them all a three-day leave, with counseling. Tonight she just wanted to get the hell out of there, get on her bike and ride with the wind in her short hair.

As she past the Colonel's office she wasn't surprised to see the light burning inside. She paused a moment at the door, raised her hand to knock but cocked her ear to listen instead. She heard nothing. Maybe he was asleep?

She hadn't seen him look so rough in ages and knew that he was taking Daniel's disappearance particularly badly. She knew, as the CO of the team, he was bearing the brunt of the responsibility despite his huge efforts to save the archaeologist.

She lowered her hand and straightened up with a heavy sigh. The colonel probably wanted to be alone and she couldn't blame him. She moved on from his door and continued along the corridor to the elevators.

End of part 3