

these are the things i will save for you

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these are the things i will save for you

by [synecdochic](#)

Summary

Civilizations and eras end overnight, sometimes. Daniel's used to picking through their pieces.

Friday nights are soaked in tequila and bourbon and whiskey now, penetrated with the haze of fumes and reminiscence, and he'd known going in this particular weekend would be just as bad. If not worse. Jack's house is always where they have wakes.

Notes

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Post season 8, pre season 9. slashfic25 prompt #17: *map*.

(5.)

"Are you okay?" Sam asks, when Daniel stumbles back into the house, takes his seat in the chair and reaches for the bottle again. He'd expected to find them draped across each other, but a careful neutral zone has developed; Jack's half-leaning on the arm of the couch, and Sam's moved over to leave a gap between them. He wonders what made them move, wonders what impulse pried them apart.

"Yeah," Daniel says. He knows she can hear the lie.

(7.)

Civilizations die. Daniel's known that for as long as he can remember; he's sifted through the dust and bones of a thousand cultures who don't even survive in fragments and legends, had his hands dirtied with the tales and hints of lives lived so long ago the light from the star they walked under will not reach Earth until Daniel's long turned to dust himself. He's built empires and wars and lifetimes in his head, constructed them from nothing more than scraps and shards, let them bloom and live and die in the free spaces he has between all the pieces of his life.

Civilizations and eras end overnight, sometimes, disappearing without a trace and leaving tantalizing hints behind. Daniel knows that too -- the great mysteries, the questions that will never be answered. He's just never been part of one that did before.

They'd never found a good way of explaining temporal theory without giving everyone a headache. Sam had once threatened to pass out shots of Jack Daniels with the briefing materials whenever they had to discuss it. Daniel remembers turning the file folder marked with his name over in his hands and thinking: there is a small plot of earth, halfway across the world, where he's nothing but fragments of bone. Perhaps he had once walked over it, knelt with brush and notebook, sieved away the grains of history and tended a chip, a sliver. Perhaps his mother's fingers, long and slender and reverent, once lifted a tooth, a vertebra, and held it up to catch the light; perhaps his father once roped and cordoned off a grid, then tilted his head to the morning breeze, struck by a sudden sense of recognition, somehow, somewhere.

Somewhere in Egypt there is a handful of sand, fertilized five thousand years ago by his DNA, component molecules breaking down and being re-built and re-used in an endless cycle, its own little mystery: the lifetime of a man who once was and now is not and will never be again. Daniel wonders how many more of them there are, the ones he will never know.

He wakes in the middle of the night, overheated in a bed that's too small, and forgets why he's encased in skin and bone. Then he remembers: *not done yet*.

(3.)

They're drunk, but Daniel's not surprised. Friday nights are soaked in tequila and bourbon and whiskey now, penetrated with the haze of fumes and reminiscence, and he'd known going in this particular weekend would be just as bad. If not worse. Jack's house is always where they have wakes.

Sam's lips are glossed with alcohol and her eyes don't know where to settle. "I figured it out, once," she says. "Eight years. If you chart it out, we did something to save the world every fifty-five days. Point seven. Directly or indirectly."

"That can't be right," Jack says. He's got one arm stretched out behind Sam on the couch; she's tipping, slowly and involuntarily, closer and closer. His other ankle's twined around one of Daniel's. Daniel wonders if Jack even notices it, either one.

Whiskey, he thinks, makes him an observant drunk. And a maudlin one.

"I must confess, I also do not agree with your numbers," Teal'c says. He's the only sober one; Daniel's never seen him drunk, never seen him lose control. Doesn't really want to. "By my calculations, we have saved the world a number of times, but not anywhere approaching that frequency."

Sam leans forward, having to pinwheel her arms a bit to get loose of the couch's gravitational pull. Daniel wonders if there's a paper in there somewhere. Ratio of alcohol to local gravity. "No, I'm not just counting the big ones. I'm counting the ones nobody knows about. Maybe not even us. The ones that *could have* gone bad, but didn't. Because we were there. Because we did something."

They're quiet for a minute. "The Aschen," Jack finally says. They still don't know where that warning came from.

"The ZPM in Egypt." Daniel knows that Sam's fingers still itch when she thinks of that tape, wondering what happened, wondering who those alternate selves were, how they lived and how they died. "All the other tiny things. The things that didn't seem important at the time. The things that we stopped just by being there. By being us."

Daniel drops his head back against his chair, closes his eyes against the vertigo. "We can't ever know," he says. "Not until it's all over. Until we get some perspective. Not until we can look back." He's not sure what he really means; there's something in there about a feather balanced on a scale, something about the most fragile of shells wrapped in white linen, something about perching his consciousness on the edge of an atom and watching the dance of causality from outside the circle of time.

When he's drunk he almost thinks he can remember. It's worse tonight. Worse since he came back again. Tiny icebergs keep calving from the depths of his subconscious to present themselves, whole and complete and melting away the minute he turns the sunshine of his attention to them.

Another few minutes of silence. Daniel's used to quieting rooms with the things he says, but from them, like this, it always feels different. Contemplative.

"All this time saving the planet," Jack finally says, "and we went and made ourselves a world we just don't fit into anymore."

"You get used to it after a while," Daniel says. He strokes the side of his ankle over Jack's. It's there, and Jack doesn't seem to mind.

"I don't think it's that we don't fit into the world," Sam says. She sinks back against the couch, tilts a little closer to Jack. "I think it's that the world doesn't fit into us."

"It has never been comfortable," Teal'c says, "to be an exile."

(1.)

Daniel forgets his sunglasses on his desk, a few hundred feet beneath anywhere he'd need them. He has to squint against the light as he makes his way across the field to where the baseball game is in full swing. It hurts his eyes. He's been living under a mountain for far too long.

Jack is sitting in the bleachers, away from the proud parents, with a clipboard forgotten in his lap. "Don't swing at it," he's muttering when Daniel comes into range, "don't swing, it's going to be --"

Daniel sits down just as the umpire calls the strike. "I thought you'd be cheering them on from closer," he says.

"*Assistant* coach," Jack reminds him. "It's easier to see patterns from out here." His eyes are intent on the field, but as Daniel settles, Jack leans into him, so subtly that an observer might not even notice. "I thought you had that thing this weekend."

They're used to communicating around possible eavesdroppers, so Daniel knows Jack is asking why he's not on Dakara playing the diplomat with Teal'c and SG-11 right now. "We had to postpone because Sam found something interesting with the equipment," he says, with the special dip in inflection to turn 'equipment' into 'Stargate' in Jack's ears. "She called to leave you a message, but your phone must be dead, so I came out to let you know."

"Huh," Jack says, and fishes his cell phone out of his jacket pocket. "Guess it is dead, isn't it." He seems far less concerned than he should be, like he's not the commander of a vital military program. For the millionth time, Daniel wonders why General O'Neill seems so much more tired than Colonel O'Neill ever did, except it's probably a dumb question. "Have to get a new one from Stores."

Daniel reaches over and plucks the phone from Jack's hand. He lets it roll through his fingers as he turns it over, flicks the battery loose with a thumb, and bangs the power pack once against the bleachers. The sound of it is still echoing as he pops the battery back in and turns the phone on; it chimes once, a cheerful good-morning noise, and then begins vibrating over and over as the voice mail begins to arrive just as the low-battery warning sounds.

"Or you could just remember to charge it," Daniel says, mildly, and slips the phone back into Jack's pocket. He can feel Jack's ribs through the lining, rough and wiry even underneath the

soft grey t-shirt.

"Busted," Jack says, and stretches as his team takes the field. Watching Jack watching them, Daniel thinks Jack does this not because he wants to, but because he thinks it's the only thing he has left.

"They finally got back to me," Jack says after his pitcher gets the first out. "About DC. I could still turn them down, if I wanted."

"You don't want," Daniel says, immediately. He doesn't need to think about it; he's been thinking about it for days, weeks, ever since Jack first raised the possibility. Staying here is killing Jack slowly, piece by piece, Gate team by Gate team. Daniel can see it as clearly as he can read Tok'ra poetry. "It's okay. We're done. You can go."

He's expecting some kind of snide comment about how Jack answers to the Joint Chiefs, not one erstwhile archaeologist, but all Jack does is nod. "Yeah," he says, and Daniel can't read that tone in his voice. "I guess I can."

(4.)

Daniel has navigated Jack's house drunk, blind, injured, exhausted, and hundreds of other states in between; he shouldn't be having this much trouble. But there are boxes everywhere, stacked and waiting for the movers, and they interfere with Daniel's habitual trails.

He stubs his toe while weaving his way back from the bathroom. When he gets back, Sam has tilted closer to Jack again, her head canted to the side, her face set like she's listening to something very important on a distant, half-tuned radio station. It makes something small and ugly turn over in Daniel's chest, and he reaches for the bottle of whiskey on the coffeetable a little too fiercely as he falls back into his chair.

"I must go," Teal'c says. "I am due on Dakara in six hours, and there are arrangements I must finish making first."

His eyes are quiet on Daniel's face, though, and Daniel gets the impression Teal'c is trying to say something. Daniel stumbles to his feet as well, far less gracefully. "I, uh, probably should go too," he tries, and a muscle in Teal'c's jaw twitches and Daniel has no idea what it means.

"Stay," Jack says, his eyes still closed. "We said we were going to take the whole weekend."

Jack's fingers are a millimeter shy of stroking Sam's shoulder. Daniel wonders if Jack knows what he's asking, if Jack has ever known what he's asking, if Jack has ever understood the silent and mostly-unspoken struggle waged around him by two people who love each other as deeply, as strongly, as they love him. Daniel has always known Jack is smarter than he pretends to be, but he's stupider than Daniel sometimes wants to give him credit for and it's burned Daniel more times than he can count.

"All right," he says, because Jack might be the one who can't ever say no, but Daniel's the one who can't walk away. "I'll just go wait for the car on the porch with Teal'c. I could use some air."

"You'll be back, right, T?" Jack asks. They've said their goodbyes already, Daniel knows; he'd seen them in the kitchen earlier, grasping each other's forearms and sharing another of those looks that say everything they need to. Jack's asking now because he needs to be reassured. Daniel knows this.

Teal'c knows this too; he inclines his head. "I shall," he says. "I will be present for the ceremony, if nothing else." His lips quirk, in the smile it took them so long to be able to read. "Someone must be present to ensure you do not grow too large for your briefs."

Sam chokes on her laughter. "Britches, Teal'c," she says. "Britches."

Teal'c's eyes are laughing at them as well, but he gives them his best half-bow. "Indeed. I will leave you to your celebrations."

It's a pleasant late-spring night outside, and Daniel stumbles to sit on the steps before he falls over and embarrasses himself. He realizes he brought his whiskey with him when it clinks against the brick as he puts his hands down. Teal'c settles next to him, with much more dignity.

"You will be fine, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c says, after a moment. "We will all be fine."

Daniel has to laugh. He's always fine. It's cold out here -- well, no, it's not, but he's drunk and barefoot and his arms are covered in goosebumps. He rests his head against Teal'c's shoulder, warm and wide and solid, and breathes in and out. Teal'c doesn't even hesitate; he wraps his arm around Daniel, and together they wait in silence.

(2.)

A lecture Daniel had designed is part of every intake session at the SGC: two hours fitted in between Basic Wormhole Theory and Goa'uld For The Tau'ri Tourist and The History Of Every Time We've Nearly Gotten Our Asses Kicked. He stopped delivering it himself a while ago, but the gist of it is:

Culture shock doesn't just happen on other planets. Culture shock is what will happen to you when you spend five miserable stranded days foraging for food in the jungle, where you and your team are the only heartbeats for miles, and then come back and stop at the Safeway on your way back home. It's what will happen when you put the morning news on for background noise when getting dressed, and two hours later you're holding a conversation in a dialect that's been dead for centuries. It's what will happen when you are treated for the local equivalents of cholera and dysentery, and then sent home to watch PBS and browse the internet.

It's what will happen when you go to work every morning to fight for the safety and well-being of an entire world, and come home at night to have dinner and drinks with an old friend who's only concerned with what happened on *American Idol* the night before. It's the name for that gritty, twisting feeling in the pit of your stomach that makes you want to reach out at the mall and shake someone by the shoulders until they stop caring about whether or not the pants they're contemplating buying make their ass look fat.

Culture shock is what will happen when you're standing in line at the commissary picking up a lunch that happens to be your midnight snack, and there's a knot of new recruits with their heads together at a table, whispering. One of them will catch your eye, accidentally, and blush and duck. You'll hear your own name, and "--dead--", perhaps, or "--planet--" or "--under fire--", and you'll think they're implausibly young, no matter how old they appear to be, and you'll know the odds of all of them sitting there again in a year are so fractional that someone might need to invent new branches of math to describe them.

Daniel doesn't do the new recruit briefings anymore. He's been an expert on culture shock for a long time, but no one's ever comfortable hearing about how it's worst on the planet he happened to be born on.

(6.)

"This is stupid," Sam finally says, shattering the silence. "And I'm sick of it."

Jack's face closes over. Daniel watches Sam as she struggles out of the couch's embrace, swaying slightly against the invisible breeze. He knows what she means; he's not surprised Jack doesn't.

He wants to leave -- he doesn't belong here, doesn't belong between them, and he's known that for longer than he'd care to admit -- but Jack's eyes flick over to him, and he can read confusion in their depths.

She stands in front of Jack. "Let me show you," she says, her hands pausing at the button of her jeans. Jack frowns, because he thinks he already knows.

"I was there, Carter. I've got one too."

Daniel was there, too. He sits up, feeling the alcohol swimming through his veins, listening to the crashing, rocking pulse in his ears. "That's not what she means," he murmurs. He has always been their translator.

Sam tenses for a minute. She spares him a glance; he can read every thought written in hieroglyphs of line and shadow across her face. He wonders what she sees in return to make her relax and smile like dawn breaking over the Nile. He must be a better actor than he thinks.

Jack's eyes rest on Daniel's face, pensive, and then flick back to Sam. She breathes in and squares her shoulders. Her jeans slide to the floor like gravity's a lover. The dark lines of the symbol against her hip are thin, no larger than a thumbprint, and they would be insignificant save what they stand for.

"Let me show you," she says again, her voice catching -- nervous, terrified, shaking in her knees and elbows and all the way down her spine. Daniel's heart breaks for her, and he sets his glass aside and forgives them both in the space between one breath and the next.

Jack's still frowning, but his face clears as Daniel stands, brushes past Sam and holds down a hand. Sam turns her face into Daniel's shoulder, shivering; the courage that has gotten her this

far has failed her.

Daniel wraps the other arm around her waist as Jack puts his hand in Daniel's and struggles to his feet. "Shh," Daniel says against Sam's hair, and pulls Jack forward. Jack hesitates. Daniel drops Jack's hand and touches Jack's face -- cheekbone, nose, eyebrow, lips, reading him like Braille. It's starting to come into focus.

"It's all right," Daniel says, to Jack, to them both, and picks up Jack's hand to place it on Sam's hip. Sam's fingers pull at the small of Daniel's back.

"I won't *let* it," Sam says into Daniel's skin, with the clarity and petulance of the inebriated. Daniel doesn't know what she means, except he has his own ways of finishing that sentence. Won't let it break us now, after all we've been through. Won't let it take this away from us.

"This is crazy," Jack says with soft finality. His other hand slides along Daniel's hip; Daniel can feel his fingers brushing Sam's, and the only thing for him to do is to put his hand back on Jack's face, curl fingers along jaw and complete the circuit.

Crazy isn't no. Daniel's spent too long building a translating dictionary of Jack. He nudges Sam forward, with hip and hand, until she tilts up her face and meets Jack's eyes, then meets his lips. Jack's fingers are fumbling at Daniel's buttons, and then Sam's mouth tastes of tequila and Jack, and then Jack is kissing him and he can't tell anymore whose hands are stroking him, whose skin is beneath his fingertips, but it doesn't matter, because these people have always been his resting place.

(8.)

Jack had tossed ten hundred-dollar bills and his military ID on the counter, and suddenly the paperwork had disappeared and the looks stopped and they were all being led back into a bright and sterile room.

"No problem," the artist said when Daniel unfolded the paper and held it out. She was young, but her portfolio was beautiful. (Daniel had found her: MFA in painting and art history with a concentration in medieval Italian techniques, who'd ditched the academic world and never looked back. He liked her style.) "The same for all of you?"

Nobody on the outside had ever figured out how to tap into the grammar of eye-shift and mouth-quirk they'd spent so long refining. Jack's head-tilt said *how much of a security risk can it be when they've got you driving a desk* and Teal'c's eyebrow said *this rite shall be far more emotionally satisfying than the last* and Sam's half-smile said *when you're pushing forty, it can't be teenage rebellion*. Daniel remembered, or remembered having remembered, the days when all he would have seen would have been three other people not quite meeting anyone's gaze.

"Always," he had said, answering for them all.

And the thing is, Daniel understands ritual, understands it in a place inside his heart he never thinks to call upon until he needs to. Ceremony and connection and closure don't share a common linguistic root, but they start from the same place anyway. He's never felt the need

to mark his stories under his skin, but this isn't *a* story, it's *the* story, *in principio erat Verbum* and *en arch hn o logos* and this is the only thing they could have done.

Jack's peaceful when he's sleeping; the lines in his face smooth away, and he breathes softly and does not move. Daniel can feel Sam pressed up against his back, tight and compact and taking up far less space than she should. They're beautiful, and they're his and always will be, and he's theirs and two thousand miles or two thousand light-years can't ever take that away.

Jack's plane leaves on Monday, and Teal'c is already half gone, and Sam's building mental lists and getting ready to clean house, and Daniel's ordered boxes to pack up his office, and none of it matters. Atlantis will be beautiful. It will be half of everything he ever wanted, and it will let him do the work he was born to do, and there is a pinprick of light limned on his hip, part of them forever, their point of origin, whispering over and over again in every language he knows: *home*.

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