

Queen's Magic

by

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Queen Qanehwa of the Qiiwethu watched SG-1 load boxes onto their machine. They had the tiiwekhu they wanted. They'd be leaving soon. It wasn't fair.

Uncle Tiipeneh hovered around them, handing them more presents and smiling a lot. He always thought if he smiled, no one would know what he was thinking. He was so stupid. Qanehwa rolled her eyes and stood away from the window. She twisted the ring on her middle finger, thinking, then slipped out of the palace and into the hot midday sun. Two little girls bowed to her, but everyone else was facing SG-1, waving and saying goodbye. She wove through the crowd gathered until she was near enough to hear Uncle Tiipeneh say, "Please come back if you need more. You are always welcome here."

Daniel smiled. "Thank you. You're very generous." An elderly woman stepped up and pushed another joqou fruit into his hands. He was trying to hold four of them, as well as one of Aunt Piika's masks, but the slippery fruits kept sliding around. Qanehwa giggled, then ducked behind a fat man before Uncle Tiipeneh could spot her.

Jack -- she always thought of him as Jack even though Uncle Tiipeneh told her to call him Colonel O'Neill -- Jack touched the brim of his hat and gave it a little tug. "It's been swell, Tiipeneh," he said, smiling. Uncle Tiipeneh beamed and stood straight, showing off how proud he was. Jack glanced around the circle of people and touched his hat again. "Ready, kids?" he asked Sam.

Sam checked one of the straps on their machine and nodded. Teal'c was at the Gods' Circle. The frightening explosion of water burst forth then fell back, held by the magic of the circle. Qanehwa chewed on her lip and toyed with the ring on her middle finger. The water meant SG-1 were about to leave forever. They would leave her alone here, and never come back, she

could just tell. Uncle Tiipeneh had given them all the tiiwekhu they wanted. Why would they ever come back? It was so unfair.

The crowd parted and the machine moved toward the Gods' Circle. Sam followed it. Daniel managed to put some of the joqou fruit in his pockets and tucked the mask under his arm. He scanned the crowd, and Qanehwa's hope surged. He was looking for her, she knew it. Of course. He wouldn't leave her here. She shouldn't have doubted.

Then Daniel said to Uncle Tiipeneh, "Please tell Queen Qanehwa we're sorry about last night." Uncle Tiipeneh nodded gravely.

Qanehwa watched Daniel turn to follow Sam, and felt the blood drain from her face. Last night! They were leaving because of her. It wasn't the stupid tiiwekhu. They were leaving because she'd acted like a baby at the feast last night. She didn't know what had come over her. She'd been so mad at Uncle Tiipeneh and Aunt Piika, and she had tried so hard to impress Daniel, but she'd only made a fool of herself. It was all her fault, and now they were going and they would never understand.

Unless... Qanehwa bit her lip and touched her ring. She couldn't do it. Mama had said she must never do it. She watched Daniel following the machine. Teal'c and Sam had already waved one last time and stepped into the magic water. The crowd was starting to break up. Uncle Tiipeneh stood by the altar with the red jewel, looking proud and important. Jack was getting two hwaqapeh shoved into his hands by Niipukeh's father. Within moments, it would all be over. SG-1 would go, Daniel would go, and she would be all alone. And no one would ever understand.

Unless... Qanehwa silently prayed to her mother to forgive her, and ran up to Jack. He was holding one of the hwaqapeh up and sniffing it curiously. When he saw her, he lifted his eyebrows and smiled at her.

He bowed his head and said, "Your Majesty." He always made it sound like a joke, and Qanehwa had to giggle. She knew she was making the right decision. She turned the ring around her finger.

"I was afraid we wouldn't get to say good-bye," he said. "Tiipeneh said you were, uh, not feeling well this morning."

Qanehwa felt the color rise in her cheeks. She

was so ashamed about last night. But it would be all right now. They would understand.

"Jack," she said. "I don't want to say good-bye." She held out her hand.

Jack leaned over a little, stuffing the hwaqapeh into a pocket. He took her hand. "Hey, it's all right. If Carter's right about this tee-whatchamacallit stuff, we'll be back. And Carter's always right." He grinned.

Qanehwa squeezed his hand tightly. She expected to feel something. Maybe she wasn't squeezing hard enough. She moved her hand a little, and felt the ring rubbing against his fingers. Jack was still smiling, but he furrowed his brow and stared at her. Qanehwa squeezed again.

She wasn't strong enough. She'd felt nothing. It hadn't worked. Maybe that's why Mama had told her never to do it. Maybe Mama had known all along, it was a magic that Qanehwa couldn't do. She wasn't good enough to make it happen.

She dropped her hand and said, "I don't want you to go."

Jack wiggled his fingers and stood up straight. He clasped his hands over his weapon and cocked his head to one side. "I know. Hey, listen, you'll be all right?"

Qanehwa nodded. What else could she do? They were leaving and it was all over. They would never understand.

Jack patted her hair. "Hang in there."

Qanehwa wasn't sure what that meant, but she understood that he was leaving. He turned to go, and Qanehwa looked up and saw Uncle Tiipeneh standing by the altar, glaring at her. Qanehwa ran, shuffling in her long skirt, and caught up with Jack. She said, "Tell Daniel good-bye for me. Oh, and Sam and Teal'c, too," she added.

Jack glanced down at her, smiled and nodded. "Will do."

Then they were at the Gods' Circle. The strange machine had just disappeared into the magic water. Jack climbed up the steps and disappeared, too. The magic water drained away. Qanehwa stared at the empty circle for a while, before reluctantly facing Uncle Tiipeneh. It was so unfair.

Jack pulled on his robe and wandered out of the showers, flexing the fingers of his left hand. The hand Queen Qanehwa had tried to squeeze the hell out of. Weird kid. A bit like Cassie about a year or so ago.

He stood at his locker and looked at his hand. There was a reddish mark on one of his fingers. Must have been where Qanehwa's ring had rubbed against his skin. Maybe he should mention it to Fraiser. Except the skin wasn't broken and it didn't hurt or anything. It was nothing. He wiggled his fingers and decided to forget about it.

Daniel came out of the showers wearing a robe and towelling water from his hair. Jack realized his robe was unfastened and tied it up quickly. He sat down on the bench with his back to Daniel and reached for his clothes.

"Good news," Daniel said. "Doctor Fraiser said we could keep one of the joqou fruits and eat it. The rest are going for analysis. She thinks they could have similar medicinal properties to the tiiwekhu plants."

Jack slid on his socks and drummed his fingers on his knees, waiting for Daniel to finish. "Oh, good," he said distractedly.

"I told Sam and Teal'c," Daniel said. "We can meet in the mess and share it after the debriefing."

Jack glanced back over his shoulder. Daniel zipped up his pants and buckled his belt. "You're trusting the joqou to the mess?" Jack asked.

Daniel slid his glasses on and blinked at him. "No. I told Doctor Fraiser to lock it up for us." He grabbed his shirt and slipped it on over his t-shirt and left. Finally.

Jack grabbed his clothes and dressed hurriedly. When he was fully covered, he relaxed, stuffed his hands in his pockets and headed for the briefing room where Carter and Teal'c were already seated. The cigar-y things that old guy had given Jack at the last minute were on the table. Daniel came in as Jack sat down. He was carrying his notebook and some file folders. General Hammond joined them and started the meeting.

Debriefings like this were a breeze, Jack thought. Nice, friendly planet. Nice, friendly folk. Cool plants that could possibly cure all kinds of diseases, if Carter was right, and he was sure Carter was right. She always was.

He thought of Queen Qanehwa. He'd said much

the same to her just before he left. The teen queen, he thought of her. Take the flowers out of her hair and swap the long bark skirt and burlap-looking tunic for jeans and a t-shirt and she'd look right at home in any mall in America. Maybe he could send some clothes to her with the next SG team to go to P9A-296.

"Colonel?"

Jack glanced around the table. General Hammond frowned a little at him. "Yes, General?" Jack said.

"I was asking about these... things you brought back," the general said, nodding at the cigar-y things.

Jack picked one up and rolled it around in his fingers. "Well, they look like cigars, sir. The guy who gave them to me wasn't clear about what they were. He just said they were a gift."

"Can I see that?" Daniel asked. Jack handed him the cigar-y thing. Daniel turned it around in his fingers and sniffed it.

General Hammond clasped his hands over the table. "Given the situations that have developed in the past, I think the wisest course of action would be not to smoke them." He smiled a little. "Doctor Jackson, I'd like you to add them to the rest of the gifts from P9A-296."

Daniel nodded, sniffing the cigar-y thing again and putting it down. "Speaking of gifts, besides the tiiwekhu plants and the joqou fruit and these things, the queen's aunt gave me the most amazing mask made out of dried gourds. I'm sure it has religious significance, and I'd like to cross-reference the designs on it with some of our Earth cultures--"

"Yes, Doctor Jackson," General Hammond cut in, smiling politely. "Major Carter, I'd like you to work with Doctor Fraiser on the medicinal plants. I have clearance to assemble a special biomedical expert team."

"Yes, general," Carter said, smiling. Jack was sure she couldn't wait to get her hands on those plants and some microscopes and start curing diseases left and right. However it worked. Really important stuff, but it didn't sound like much fun.

They had six days before their next mission, so General Hammond gave them leave. Carter and Daniel would probably spend it working,

anyway, but Jack was grateful for the downtime. He went home, had leftovers for dinner, and crawled into bed.

Jack slept for almost eighteen hours. When he woke up, he couldn't believe the clock, and checked two different TV channels before it sunk in. The last time he'd slept that long, he'd been in a coma, or near enough. Maybe he was coming down with something. But he felt okay.

He took a long, hot shower, scrubbing hard at rough skin. Gate travel took its toll. They went to a lot of dry planets. Sucked the moisture right out of the skin. And out of the hair, too, he decided, working shampoo into a lather. He stood under the shower spray and read the shampoo bottle. Maybe he should buy the stuff with conditioner next time. He sniffed the open bottle. Something that smelled better, too. This smelled antiseptic. It'd be nicer to have something floral. Or fruity, even.

After the shower he shaved. He stared at himself in the mirror and ran his hand over his jaw. He could still feel a little stubble. Damn. He pulled out a fresh razor and touched up a few spots. As smooth as it was going to get, he supposed, frowning a little at himself.

What heavy brows he had. He'd never noticed before, but hell, looking at them now he wondered how anyone had ever known he'd gone Neanderthal a couple years back. How had they been able to spot the difference? He ran a finger over each eyebrow, smoothing it. And there was that damn scar. Ugh. So ugly.

Jack stood back and rested his fists on his hips. He turned his head from side to side. It was funny -- he'd lived with this face all his life, but he'd never taken a good hard look at it before. All those lines. All those imperfections. His nose was way too big, his eyes were way too deep-set, and his mouth... Yuck. He pursed his lips. Yeah, that was about the only way to pretend he *had* any lips. No wonder he couldn't get any dates.

He padded into his bedroom and opened the closet. Same old boring clothes. When was the last time he'd bought anything new? He couldn't even remember. He slid the hangers around and pulled out a couple of shirts. He held one up to his shoulders and looked down at it. What a horrible color. He tossed it aside and held up the other one.

Better color, but it made him look fat. He tossed that one aside, too.

He went through every shirt he owned before he settled on a black henley. It still made him look fat, but black was supposed to be slimming. Then he pawed through all his pants and wondered why he had so many pairs of chinos and baggy jeans. Fat clothes, all of it. He found one pair of jeans slightly less baggy and slid those on. They fit okay, but were worn at the knees. Might get holes any second. He looked around at the unholy mess on his bedroom floor and decided he *so* needed to go to the mall.

Jack had cereal for breakfast and read the comic and entertainment sections of the newspaper. He turned on the TV and jumped between MTV and the Discovery Channel for a couple of hours before he got bored. He picked up the phone and called Daniel. Not home. Jack tapped the phone against his palm and paced around. Where was Daniel? Oh yeah, of course. Jack called Daniel's office at the SGC.

"Hey."

"Hi, Jack. What's up?"

Jack wandered over to the window and looked at the yard outside. "Oh, nothing. Whatcha doing?"

"I'm working on some translations with Teal'c."

Jack stood very still. "With Teal'c? I thought you said you were going to work on that mask thing."

"Yes, I am," Daniel said, voice fading out and in as he moved around. "But I had a backlog of some Goa'uld inscriptions SG-11 brought back last month and I thought I'd use this time--"

"I see," Jack snapped, cutting him off.

There was a silent pause, then Daniel said, "Uh, what did you want, exactly?"

Jack relaxed and paced around the living room. "I don't know. I just called to see what you were doing."

Another pause. "I see. Well, um, I'm kind of busy right now."

Jack frowned and flopped onto the sofa. He stretched out and swung one leg onto the back of the sofa. "Well, if you're *busy*..." he said, scooting around until his head was hanging off the side.

He looked at his upside down living room furniture and got a head rush. "Hey, listen, wanna come to the mall with me later?"

"The mall? Why?"

"I gotta get some clothes."

A long pause this time. Jack moved his head from side to side, seeing if he could make himself dizzy.

"Well..." Daniel said. Jack winced and scooted around until he was sitting up straight again.

"Oh, just forget about it, then," Jack said. He gave the coffee table a desultory kick.

"Are you... Are you feeling all right?" Daniel asked.

Jack sat back and put his feet on the table and slid down low in the sofa. He held the phone close to his ear. Daniel wanted to know if he was all right. Daniel was concerned about him.

"I'm okay. I guess," he said. "You know, I just wanted to go out and do something and not sit around here all day. But if you're too busy, y'know, then I guess I'll just hang out here."

"Um... Okay. I'll tell you what," Daniel said. "Let me work on this for a few more hours, and I'll meet you over there, in the food court. Around 4."

"Okay," Jack said, scissoring his knees back and forth. "Cool." He waited for Daniel to hang up before he set the phone down, then went back to the bedroom to look for something to wear.

At 4 o'clock Jack circled the water fountain, chewing gum and slurping on a peach smoothie. Daniel had said the food court, but just being near all that greasy food had made Jack feel dirty, so he'd come here to watch the entrance. As he made another pass around the fountain, he checked out his reflection in the shiny glass of an eyeglasses store. After trying on almost everything he owned, he'd gone back to the henley and jeans, but now he was wishing he hadn't. Most of the guys walking around wore really baggy jeans that hung down low. Jeans that fit were so out of fashion. Everyone had to be staring at him.

Finally Daniel showed up, walking in through the glass doors, so tall and broad-shouldered and good-looking and... *That* was what he was wearing? Ohmygod. Chinos and a checked shirt. Tucked in. Dork central.

Hiding his mortification, Jack finished off his

smoothie, tossed it in the trash, and headed Daniel off from the food court. "Hey."

"Oh, hi." Daniel gave him a curious look. "Where to?"

Jack shrugged. "I dunno. The Gap?"

They walked slowly toward the other end of the mall, threading through the crowd. "So, Jack..." Daniel said.

Jack said, "Yeah?" automatically. He slowed down in front of The Limited, looking at a pretty purple sheer blouse over a blue tanktop. They had it displayed over a purple denim skirt, but it would look so much better over the black faux leather pants. Made for someone leggy.

"God, that would look so cute on Sam," he said.

"What?"

Jack nodded at the black pants. "Those. With this shirt."

Daniel folded his arms across his chest, glanced at the display, then looked at Jack. "On Sam. Um. Yeah, I guess so."

They walked on. "Sam's so lucky. She has, like, no fat. She can wear anything," Jack said, eyeing a Dress Barn display in passing. The next store sold jewelry, and Jack caught a glimpse of himself in the mirrored display case.

"Do you think I look good?" he asked, unhappy with how huge his nose looked in the mirror.

"What?"

"Look good." He glanced over at Daniel, who regarded him with an uncertain frown. "You know. Attractive."

Daniel lifted his eyebrows. "Jack, you're the most handsome man I know," he said.

"Oh." Jack looked at another reflection of himself in window glass, tilting his head from side to side. "Really?"

"Yes," Daniel said as they reached The Gap.

Inside The Gap, Jack was less than inspired. Everything was so boring. But he needed new jeans, so he tried on a bunch of pairs and got Daniel's opinion on each. Then went back and tried them on again and narrowed it down to two pair. When he came out of the dressing room, Daniel was standing in front of a sweater display with his hands in his pockets. God, he looked so

cute when he did that, even in those awful clothes. He had such a cute butt.

Jack scanned the displays. Daniel needed some jeans that fit really well. Black would look good on him, make him look really strong and dangerous. Black jeans with a belt. And maybe a blue shirt, or a blue sweater without a shirt. V-neck, to show off more skin. That would look nice, Jack decided.

While Jack was flipping through the shirt racks, some skinny guy breezed up to Daniel and started talking. Jack glared at the guy. No way. Daniel could not be interested. Could he? Jack chewed on the inside of his lip as he watched Daniel say something back. This was unbearable. Jack abandoned the wardrobe he'd been picking out for Daniel and marched over to them.

The skinny guy was talking about cotton blend and fingering one of the sweaters. Jack shouldered between Daniel and Skinny Guy and said, "I'm getting these. Can we go now?"

Daniel blinked and frowned at him. Behind Jack's shoulder, Skinny Guy said, "Can I help you?"

Jack shot him a look. "That's okay. I don't need any help."

Skinny Guy arched an eyebrow and moved on to a guy trying on jackets. Daniel was still frowning. "What was that all about?"

Figured. Daniel had no clue sometimes. "Never mind. Let's just get these and go."

While the cashier was running Jack's credit card through, Skinny Guy came to ring someone else up at the other register. Jack stared at him, made sure he wasn't going to start flirting with Daniel again. Cotton blend, yeah, right. Whatever.

The cashier shoved a receipt and pen at Jack, and Jack signed his name in swooping, sloping letters. He looked at the rounded J, then dotted the i with a little circle and slid the receipt back. As they left the store, Daniel said, "Ready to go?"

"I still need shirts," Jack said, staring at him in disbelief. Like, that was so obvious.

"Are you sure you're feeling all right?" Daniel said as they wandered through the mall and Jack scanned the different displays looking for shirts.

"I feel fine. What are you? My mother?"

"Um, no. But you have to admit, you're acting a little... strange."

Jack stopped in front of Waldenbooks and faced

him. "What do you mean, strange? You think I'm strange?"

Daniel folded his arms across his chest. God, he looked so great when he did that. Really strong, like a bodyguard or something. "I didn't say that, although... Look, all I mean is that you've been acting a little funny today."

Jack frowned. "How?" He made himself unfrown. Frowns were bad, caused wrinkles. And probably made his eyebrows look, like, ten times thicker.

Daniel glanced around and rocked on his feet before answering. "Uh, well, you've been acting a little... juvenile." He winced apologetically.

Jack stared at him, horrified. Juvenile. Damn. He was ruining everything. He thought they were having fun together. He thought Daniel liked him. And now everything was ruined because he was being stupid. He wanted to crawl into a hole.

"I'm sorry," Jack said quietly. He turned and walked away, quickly. He had to get away from here, before he made everything worse.

"Jack!" Daniel caught up with him. "Jack, I really think you should go see Doctor Fraiser."

Jack didn't say anything. He'd only say something stupid. Something juvenile. Make things worse. They reached the exit and stepped outside, and stood on the sidewalk. Jack spotted his truck in the parking lot, off to the left.

Daniel touched his arm. "Did you hear me? Go see Doctor Fraiser. I can drive you there if you don't feel up to it."

Jack looked over at him. "I'm okay to drive." He smiled a little. "Thanks."

Daniel gazed into his eyes worriedly. He patted Jack's arm and nodded a little. "Okay." He headed for his car.

Jack sat in his truck for a few minutes getting his breath. Ohmygod. Daniel had touched him. Had touched his arm and been all concerned and... Ohmygod. Maybe he hadn't ruined everything after all.

Jack didn't feel sick or anything, so he didn't see the point in going to the infirmary. He drove around and replayed those precious moments in his mind. Daniel's hand on his arm, Daniel's worried expression. To have those gorgeous sky blue eyes staring at him, full of concern...

Jack bit his lip. Daniel had really been worried about him. Maybe he was sick and just didn't know it. Maybe Daniel had seen something on him. Alarmed, Jack tried to check the rearview mirror to see if he had splotches on his face or if he'd gone all pale. He couldn't tell. Still, he'd promised Daniel he'd go see Doc Fraiser, and he didn't want to risk losing Daniel by breaking a promise.

On the way to Cheyenne Mountain, Jack switched on the radio and scanned until he found a decent station. He was thinking about Daniel calling him handsome and touching his arm like that when the song came on, and it was just perfect. It was like someone had witnessed his life today and written it into song. It was so beautiful: "Baby, I'll be there, telling you I care... This I swear... It's just the two of us... the two of us..." By the time he reached SGC, Jack had made up his mind to write everything down in a letter. While he changed in the locker room, he composed it in his mind.

Dear Daniel, it went, I don't know how to say this, but today I felt like you feel the same way and I have to know if it's true, because it will break my heart if it isn't and I don't know what I'll do.

He got stuck after that. The thought that Daniel didn't feel the same way haunted him. He didn't think he could go on if that were true. How could he live with a broken heart? The thought was too much. He could hardly breathe, imagining the pain. He went back to working on the letter, while Fraiser was twiddling around with blood samples and MRIs and needles and stuff. Jack lay back on the infirmary bed with his knees up and relaxed. No matter what happened, he had today, when Daniel had touched his arm and looked at him with those beautiful clear blue eyes. It would always be special. Jack hummed the song he'd heard on the radio until he dozed off.

They don't understand!

It was Qanehwa's voice in the darkness.

I'm so bored!

"Qanehwa?" Jack asked, searching the dark.

"Your Majesty?" he added belatedly, because it was still hard to think of her as a queen.

I don't want to be queen.

"Where are you?"

I'm here. I did a bad thing.

Jack stopped searching. The dark was completely black. He couldn't even follow the direction of her

voice. "Okay," he said levelly. "Why?"

Because they never listen to me. They never see me. They just stare at me and call me queen. But they only listen to Uncle Tiipeneh, and never to me.

"It's an awful lot of responsibility to be queen," Jack said. "Tiipeneh is just trying to help you, don't you think?"

I know. But I'm so bored because I can never do anything. Uncle Tiipeneh does it all. But I can't make friends and go outside and meet boys, either, because he won't let me because he says I'm a queen. Aunt Piika brings all the girls she likes to me and tells me to be friends with them but I should make my own friends. And when I met you, I wanted to make friends with you so much and I wanted you to like me. Then I went and did a bad thing.

"We do like you, Qanehwa."

Does Daniel like me?

Jack sighed a little over the sad, hopeful yearning in her voice. "Yes, Daniel likes you. We're your friends. Daniel's your friend."

Do you think... Do you think Daniel would marry me?

Jack frowned, searching for something to say. Parenting a son who died before adolescence hadn't prepared him for questions like this. "Qanehwa--"

"Colonel."

Gentle shaking of his arm and a cool hand on his forehead brought him out of the dream. Jack opened his eyes and squinted at the infirmary lights. Fraiser gave him a concerned look.

"How do you feel?"

Jack looked past her. General Hammond, Teal'c, Carter and Daniel stood around the bed, all staring at him in that way that told him he'd just gone through another weird alien close encounter.

"Confused," he replied.

Daniel, arms folded over his chest, glanced briefly at Carter and Fraiser and asked, "What's the last thing you remember?"

Jack thought back. "Qanehwa. I was talking to her." His mouth was very dry and he was getting a dull headache right behind his eyes. He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"On the planet?" General Hammond asked.

Jack thought about it. "I think so, sir." Bits of the conversation slipped into place. "Wait. No.

Not entirely. It was like..." He trailed off because this was going to sound crazy.

"Like what, Colonel?" Fraiser prompted.

"Like she was here. In my mind or something." He rubbed a hand over his forehead. "Am I going nuts? Again?"

Fraiser smiled a little. "No, Colonel. We think something from P9A-296 has affected you like a drug. I can't find any chemical traces, but your tests showed some hormonal anomalies, and your MRI was... abnormal."

Jack frowned at her. "Abnormal? What does that mean if it doesn't mean I'm going nuts?"

"Your brain pattern was like that of an adolescent girl, 13 or 14," Fraiser explained. "I gave you an injection to correct the hormonal imbalances, and it seems to have helped your brain scan return to normal, but I'm not sure why. There's no one-to-one correlation."

"Like a girl?" Jack repeated, staring at her.

Fraiser nodded. "I'm afraid so."

"I think it may be Qanehwa," Daniel said. Carter gave him a look that said she'd already heard this theory and couldn't believe it, and Teal'c raised one eyebrow.

Jack's head ached too much to find holes to pick in the theory just yet. He asked, "Why? And how could she do it?"

"I'm not sure," Daniel admitted. "It could be a chemical we're not able to detect yet. And as for why, we were hoping you might shed some light on that."

Jack thought back, fighting the headache. He remembered the redness on his finger and lifted up his hand, flexing. "She squeezed my hand. When I was leaving. She said she didn't want us to go."

Fraiser took his hand and examined it. She pulled on a latex glove and touched the red spot gently, then set up several tests and scans before admitting defeat. "I'm not sure I can completely reverse the effects without knowing exactly what's causing it."

"What about the hormone treatment?" Jack asked.

Fraiser shook her head. "I don't understand why it's working now, and if it stops working... The effects could become irreversible."

"General," Daniel said. "I think we should go back to the planet. Talk to Queen Qanehwa and find out what she did. Maybe she can reverse the

process."

General Hammond conferred with Fraiser, gave Jack a look of grim sympathy, and gave them a go.

Fraiser gave him another injection before they left. Jack had felt fine and hadn't seen the need for it, but Fraiser had become concerned when Jack had started humming. Looking back, Jack acknowledged that the humming wasn't a good sign. He felt okay now, just wished he could shake off this killer headache.

Tiipeneh was waiting for them by the DHD. A few of the Qiiwethu stood around, watching in awe. They were not used to seeing the gate active and receiving visitors. SG-1 strolled down the stone steps in front of the gate and greeted Tiipeneh.

"We did not expect you to return so soon," Tiipeneh said, twisting the hem of his bark shirt. "I am sorry. We do not have a supply of tiiwekhu ready for you."

"We're not here for the plants," Jack said. "We'd like to see Queen Qanehwa."

Tiipeneh's dark eyes widened. Alarm. "W-Why?"

Daniel stepped closer to him. "We just want to talk to her. We think she may have... given Jack something."

Jack winced. Daniel made it sound like he had the clap. He watched Tiipeneh, who took a step back from them, still fiddling with his shirt.

"I am sorry. You cannot see the queen." Tiipeneh's eyes showed fear. Something was up. Something bad.

"We really need to speak with her," Daniel insisted. "It's important."

Tiipeneh took another step back, shaking his head.

Jack said, "We're going to see her, whether you take us to her or not." He marched past Tiipeneh and through the people standing around gawking, heading for the big hut with the red cloth in the doorway. What the Qiiwethu considered a palace. Daniel, Carter, and Teal'c fell into place behind him.

Tiipeneh hurried after them, but caught up too late. Jack had already tossed back the red cloth

door and entered the hut, Daniel and Carter at his shoulder.

"Please," Tiipeneh's voice came from behind them, begging.

Queen Qanehwa was stretched out on a blanket on the floor, eyes closed, motionless. Piika knelt beside her, stirring a dark purple mash in a bowl. Mash from tiiwekhu plants, Jack realized. Piika looked up from her stirring. Her eyes were red and puffy from crying.

Daniel knelt beside her. Carter moved to the other side of Qanehwa and got out her first-aid kit. "What happened?" she asked.

Piika shook her head. "After you left, she collapsed. She will not wake up. The tiiwekhu is not working." She slowed her stirring, then stopped, slumping as she stared at Qanehwa's still form.

Jack stared, too. He had an idea, but it was crazy. He glanced at Daniel, who had lifted Qanehwa's right hand and was looking at a wide metal ring on her middle finger. Daniel exchanged a look with Jack. Okay, they were both having the same crazy thought. For some reason, that made it seem less crazy.

Jack caught Carter's attention and tilted his head at Piika. Carter nodded once and moved to Piika, talking to her quietly and gently moving her out of the way. In the doorway, Teal'c stood, not quite blocking Tiipeneh, but enough to keep Tiipeneh quiet and back. Jack sat down next to Qanehwa.

"Same hand?" he said to Daniel. He flexed his fingers.

Daniel gave a little shrug. "Best bet."

As Jack reached for her right hand with his left, he said, "It can't be this easy, can it?"

Then he fainted.

Who's there?

Qanehwa's voice, small and timid in the darkness.

"Qanehwa, it's Jack. I'm here."

You came back?

"We came back. Just to see you."

I did a bad thing. I didn't know it was bad. I didn't know it would work. Now I'm scared.

Jack spoke calmly and patiently. "It's okay. We want to help you undo the bad thing."

I don't know how!

Uh-oh. Jack bit the inside of his lip, thinking. "Is it the ring? Should I wear the ring?"

N-no. Qanehwa sounded uncertain. *Mama said the magic comes from inside me. The ring brings it out. She told me never to do it. I'm so sorry!*

"I know you are," Jack said, still thinking. Damn. He wished Daniel were here, wherever here was. He could probably figure out something. He was good at making crazy ideas work.

"Listen. If the magic comes from inside you, and you want to undo it, can't you just... will it back? Pull it back inside you?"

Qanehwa didn't answer for a moment. *How do I do that?*

"I don't know. How did you make it come out? Thinking about it?"

I will try. She sounded determined. Jack held his breath.

"Jack?"

Daniel patted his face. A little too close to Jack's eyes. Jack blinked and pushed his hand away and sat up. He looked down at Qanehwa. Damn. No change.

"How long was I out?" Jack looked around at the window openings, expecting to see night.

"About a minute," Daniel said. "Do you remember anything?"

Jack touched Qanehwa's hair and smoothed it gently. "I talked to her. She said she'd try. Poor kid. She's scared."

Daniel nodded and tilted his head to look at her. Her eyelids fluttered, opening briefly. Jack held her hand.

"You can do it," he said. "Come on."

She inhaled a deep breath and stirred and opened her eyes again, squinting and blinking. When she exhaled she coughed a little and looked around.

"Daniel," she said weakly, smiling. Daniel smiled back.

Jack patted her hand. "Hey, I'm here, too."

"Your Majesty!" Piika squealed and scrambled across the floor, pushing Jack and Daniel aside to hug Qanehwa, sobbing with relief. Qanehwa sat up and hugged her back.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Piika. Uncle Tiipeneh. I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

Tiipeneh stepped past Teal'c and knelt beside her. He bowed his head. "Your Majesty. We were

so worried." He looked up and smiled at SG-1. "It is a miracle, brought by our new friends. Magic from the Gods' Circle."

Jack shared a smile with Qanehwa. "Not from quite so far away."

Fraiser kept him in the infirmary overnight, just to make sure. No injections, several brain scans. Finally she gave his brain a clean bill of health, and Jack wandered down to Daniel's office before heading out for the rest of his leave. Daniel was measuring the mask Piika had given him and taking notes. Jack perched on a stool and watched him.

"Feeling better?" Daniel said, glancing up.

"Well, I no longer feel the urge to buy Backstreet Boys CDs, so, yeah."

Daniel turned the mask over and jotted down something else.

"Fraiser told me you called her and told her there was something wrong. She had Hammond send someone to my house, in case I didn't make it to the infirmary. Thanks." Jack picked up an unidentified animal skull and turned it around in his hands. "So, uh... What happened exactly? What tipped you off?"

Daniel looked up from the mask. "Other than you wanting to go to the mall and go clothes shopping? I don't know. It was just a vibe, I guess. You didn't seem completely you."

Jack opened and shut the animal's jaw bone. Daniel had a "completely Jack" to work from -- the thought had never occurred to Jack before.

He smiled a little. "I think Qanehwa had a crush on you."

Daniel gave him a steady, guarded look. Maybe he thought Jack was going to tease him about it. Jack said, "She'll grow out of it." He set the skull down and slid off the stool. "You know what crushes are like."

Daniel's gaze shifted down to the table and the mask. He rolled his pencil around in his fingers. Jack stuffed his hands in his pockets and was at the door before he heard Daniel say, "Yeah." When he glanced back, Daniel was measuring another part of the mask. Jack strolled into the corridor, heading for home.

(the end)

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