



# Tree of Life by lamardeuse

written for Aerly and the Sweet Charity auction



Most days, Evan Lorne liked his job, as much as you *could* like a job involving the constant threat of death. Still, if he didn't like it, or at least think it was important, he wouldn't still be with the SGC after five years, and he sure as hell wouldn't be living in another galaxy where freaky alien space vampires were always looking to get you on their lunch menu.

Some days were better than others, though, and every once in a long while, a trip through the gate was more like a vacation than work. He'd been lucky enough to score one of those three days ago, when the Colonel had assigned his team to safeguard a botanical expedition to M4X-887. "You're due for a break," Sheppard had said, smiling at him. "Bring your sketchbook; from the way it's described in the Ancient database, it sounds like an artist's paradise."

There were still times when Evan had no idea how to take Sheppard; his style of command was as close to no style of command as he'd ever seen, but crazily enough, it seemed to work. It helped that Sheppard commanded probably the most dedicated, highly-trained fighting force in the modern-day military, but Evan knew men and women like that were less inclined to blindly follow orders, especially from a CO who didn't live up to their own high standards. He also knew he'd follow Sheppard to hell and back, and he was pretty sure every other man and woman serving on Atlantis would sign up for the same march. In the end, that was all that mattered.

He walked through the gate with his team, his sketchbook, his P90, and five botanists, all practically vibrating with excitement. It didn't take long to figure out why they were so hyped. The Cereans lived in a garden that made Eden look like a garbage dump. They'd been practicing planned cultivation for over ten thousand years, and they were damned good at it, but for them, it was more than planting crops in a field and hoping they'd grow. Evan and the rest of the Lanteans soon discovered the Cereans' relationships to the soil and the plants they grew in it were almost symbiotic, a sacred trust they took very seriously.

Their dedication was reflected in the unparalleled splendor of their gardens; the groundskeepers at Versailles would weep and fling themselves at the feet of the Cereans if they could've seen their work. Evan wasn't an expert at landscaping, but he did like to think he knew beauty when he saw it, and the carefully planned arrangement of the dozens of species into a harmonious whole was beautiful. It was also everywhere you looked, because the Cereans didn't believe in separating plants – or land – according to function. Their houses, shops, town squares and bridges were surrounded (and often covered) by painstakingly maintained greenery, and their food crops were intermingled with their flowers and ornamental shrubs. It should have ended up looking like a mess, but instead it was breathtaking and strangely humbling.

Of course, the discovery of a society that revolved completely around the reverent care of plant life was every botanist's wet dream, and it was kind of fun to watch the science team stumbling around with big, stupid grins plastered to their faces. The only one Evan had had any kind of prior contact with was the science team leader, Doc Parrish, a tall, gangly Canadian who came across like the stereotype of the absent-minded professor. If Sheppard was sometimes a mystery to Evan, Parrish was a total cipher, but then a lot of the scientists were.

Sure, Evan knew the Atlantis expedition had started out as a mission of exploration, and when you were out wandering around in a new galaxy, you needed everything from anthropologists to zoologists. But once the Wraith woke up and things started getting nasty quick, Evan had been surprised that what he thought of as the more esoteric disciplines had continued on with their work. What's more, when contact with Earth had been reestablished, he would have thought a lot more of those non-essential people would have bugged out back to safer territory. Some had left, but an equal number had come to take their place, with the blessing of the SGC.

That last part was the hardest of all to fathom. When the shit hit the fan, you needed a McKay or a Zelenka to build you a better bomb, but when the hell would you ever need an ornithologist to save



uncoordinated dancing, a little singing (Evan winced at Dr. Brown's attempt to belt out Aretha Franklin songs; some things just shouldn't be allowed) and an attempt on the part of one of the botanists to teach juggling to several amused Cereans. Nobody made an asshole of themselves, though Evan still breathed a sigh of relief when the party broke up a couple of hours before dawn.

"Oh, God, I'm drunk," Parrish said, as Evan walked with him back to the quarters they'd been assigned.

*You got a real talent for stating the obvious, Doc,* Evan thought about saying, but didn't. Parrish wove a little to the right, and Evan grabbed his elbow to set him back on his previous course.

"I haven't been drunk since..." Parrish thought about it for a while. "Two Christmases ago. No, three."

"Then I guess you were about due," Evan observed.

Parrish came to a complete stop, though he wobbled a bit before he went completely still, and faced Evan. "I only drink for very special occasions," Parrish informed him solemnly.

Evan's mouth twitched. "I believe you."

"I came out to my father two Christmases ago." Parrish blinked. "Three." He waved a hand. "Whatever."

Evan's mouth slammed shut. Okay, he hadn't been expecting that one.

"He didn't take it very well." Parrish licked his lips and looked away. "He was a car salesman. Not that I think that necessarily had anything to do with it."

"I'm sorry," Evan said. Since he was stone cold sober, he didn't say he'd never gotten around to telling his own dad.

"Well. He's dead, so –" Parrish scrubbed a hand over his face. "Hm. I should probably stop talking now."

"It's kinda late," Evan said, as kindly as he could. "You must be tired."

"Yes, I suppose so," Parrish said, though the weariness in his tone was more than exhaustion. He resumed walking again with only a slight stagger, and this time Evan kept his hands to himself.

Evan didn't exactly avoid Parrish the next day, but he figured he'd give him some room, so he went off into the hills for the afternoon with Dr. Torrington and helped him schlep sensor equipment all over the place. By the time they were ready to call it a day, Evan had worked off a lot of the – whatever the hell Parrish's unexpected confession had stirred up in him.

The thing was, he'd never really thought of his sexual preferences all that much. He supposed he was bi, but he'd always hated labels like that; the politics had never interested him, being career military, and he didn't like dealing with the personal fallout, either. You told people you were bi



“No!” Parrish's shout drew the gazes of the nearby Cereans, whose eyes widened as they saw what Evan was holding. *Oh shit*, Evan thought, *I've touched the sacred tree and now they're going to chop us all up for fertilizer.*

The Cereans began running toward them, and Evan braced, cursing himself for leaving his P90 in the hut; it was a hell of a lot more intimidating-looking than the .45, and he didn't want to have to actually open fire on these people. He shot a look at Parrish, who he belatedly realized had reached out and closed his hand over Evan's. His touch was warm and solid, reassuring in a way Evan didn't have the time to think about right now.

“I didn't know it wasn't allowed – ” Evan began.

Parrish shook his head. “It's not that. You haven't offended any custom; they're only concerned because the fruit is poisonous.”

Evan frowned. “Poisonous?”

Martilla, one of the Cereans, nodded as she stepped up to them. “Yes, to offworlders. It is not fatal, but it causes great distress.”

Evan looked down and saw that Parrish was still holding onto his hand. When he looked up, Parrish started guiltily and let go of him, and Evan ignored the way his fingers tingled. “It seems to be a food only the Cereans can digest; some feature of their physiology that's evolved unique to this world.”

“Oh.” With his hand finally free, Evan handed the fruit to Martilla. “Sorry.”

“Not at all,” Martilla said easily. “If you are hungry, the evening meal is being prepared in the dining hall.”

“Thanks,” Evan said, feeling sheepish, like a little boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“Mind if I join you? I – I was hoping we could talk,” Parrish murmured, expression hesitant and shuttered.

Evan suppressed a sigh. “Sure, Doc. Actually, let me clean up first and then I'll meet you there, huh?”

Parrish looked him up and down, taking in his grimy state, and nodded. “Fine. See you in a bit, Major.” Evan nodded back and watched him go, wishing fervently that he hadn't walked Parrish home last night.

Luckily, the rest of his team and the other botanists were already digging into supper by the time Evan reached the hall, and so there wasn't any opportunity for Parrish to corner him. Whenever he happened to look up, though, he caught Parrish eyeing him from across the table like a chicken hawk watching the coop. No chance of escape, Evan thought grimly.



“It does seem strange,” Parrish said, rubbing the back of his neck. “It’s occurred to me that the Cereans do have a remarkably – relaxed – society.”

“And they don’t seem to have developed any defensive measures against the wraith,” Shapiro added. “Not the way we’ve seen on practically every other world.”

“But the bottom line is, none of us are experts on this stuff,” Evan said. “We should get a couple of dedicated historians in here to go through those archives with a fine tooth comb. No offense, Doc.”

Brown shook her head. “None taken.”

“And maybe a sociologist or two,” Evan added. Wow, had he just said that?

“Why don’t we just come out and ask them what their secret is?” Parrish asked.

“Because maybe it *is* a secret,” Evan answered. “There could be all kinds of reasons they’re not culled, right down to them being wraith worshippers. And we don’t even know at this point if we’re right about this.” He paused to survey the room, then nodded. “Okay, folks, get some shut-eye, and we’ll continue on as before until we get confirmation of Doc Brown’s hypothesis.”

The Cereans had no problem with having a few more Lanteans over to visit, and so three new members were added to the expedition. Evan had gated back to Atlantis the next morning with Doc Brown to explain the situation, and she’d approved the work, reluctantly.

“I don’t like going behind their backs on this, but I agree it’s the best course of action for the moment,” Weir had said. “Teyla says the Cereans are known for keeping to themselves. Although they are friendly to any visitors, they don’t seek out trading partners, and don’t leave their world. While that in itself isn’t suspicious, it does suggest we should tread carefully. And all the members of the expedition understand the need to remain discreet?”

Evan recalled the array of stony faces from the night before. “Yeah, I think they know how important this is,” he said.

“Fine,” Weir had said. “You’ll have the additional personnel by tomorrow morning.”

Three days later, the historians were still hip-deep in the archives, and Evan was starting to get restless. Parrish hadn’t asked him again for a private conversation, and Evan had done his best to forget about it, though he hadn’t had any luck forgetting the feel of Parrish’s hand covering his own. Evan didn’t have small hands, but Parrish’s were huge, the fingers long and strong and surprisingly calloused, and no, Evan had not been looking at them this morning at breakfast.

He’d been worrying about the ability of the botanists to keep their cool around the Cereans, but in truth he was the one who was getting antsy, and it annoyed him that he might end up being the one to start their hosts asking questions. The hell of it was, it wasn’t their hush-hush research that was making him twitchy, but his own personal – and increasingly X-rated – thoughts about Parrish. Christ, he didn’t even know the guy’s first name, and he was lying awake at night wondering what he looked like naked. Big, loose-limbed guys with farmers’ tans and open, guileless features had never appealed to him before, but Parrish was getting under his skin in a way that made absolutely



Parrish's face fell. "I – I didn't mean to imply that you were..."

"Hey, whoa, it's okay," Evan soothed, and man, his hand had wound up on Parrish's arm again. He pulled back, trying not to make it look like he was eager to get away.

"I keep saying the wrong things," Parrish muttered, shaking his head. "I'm sorry." He looked up and caught Evan's gaze, and Evan was suddenly pinned, helpless. "That's what I meant to say the other night, when I asked to speak with you. That's *all* I meant to say. Just that I was – sorry. For unloading that on you."

Somehow, Evan found his voice. "S'okay, doc. You weren't really yourself."

Parrish barked a short laugh. "Or too much myself."

"What do you mean?"

Parrish's eyes widened. "I – nothing."

Evan took a step closer. He was getting sick of wandering around in the dark, and now was as good a time as any to get educated. "Don't tell me it's nothing. What did you mean?"

Parrish shut his eyes. "I, um. I suppose the truth is – I wanted you to know. About me."

Evan's heart started to pound. "Why?" he asked, softly.

"Because I –" Parrish's eyes opened again, though his gaze didn't seek out Evan's this time. "I might have formed an inappropriate – attachment to you."

Evan blinked at him. "You –"

"Oh, God," Parrish breathed, clapping a hand over his mouth. "I can't believe I said that. I'm not even drunk."

"It's okay," Evan said, still stunned.

"No, it's not. You're in the American Air Force, for God's sake. I can't just –"

"The rules don't apply to you. Don't worry about it." Evan waved a hand. "Just out of, uh, curiosity, when did you –?"

Parrish looked at him then, and his cheeks flushed. "Well, to be truthful, right from the first time we worked together – in the, um, the forest. You probably don't remember."

Shit, yeah, he remembered. Barely; it had been seven or eight months ago. "That was your first offworld mission, right?"

"Yes, I –"

Evan shook his head. "I don't – look. I'm not trying to tell you how you feel, but sometimes stressful situations like that can – magnify things." Parrish stared at him. "Feelings."

"Are you saying I find you attractive because I confused you with a knight in shining armor?"



“Not unless you want to find a convenient bush,” Evan murmured. “In fact, we shouldn't even be doing this here.”

“Right, yes, sorry,” David said, releasing Evan with what seemed like reluctance.

“I'm the one who's sorry. Look, you – this isn't actually a good idea. If we try to do this, it's not gonna be easy.”

“You mean we'd have to lie. Sneak around.”

“Yeah,” Evan breathed. “You sure you're up for that?”

“I don't know,” David said honestly. “To be honest, I had no idea this would ever be more than a fantasy. I'm having a little bit of trouble adjusting.”

Evan chuckled. “Okay. Why don't you think about it and let me know, huh? There's nothing we can do about this now anyway.”

“All right,” David said. “May I kiss you one more time?”

Evan closed his eyes briefly against the sudden wave of lust. Man, who knew he had a politeness kink? “In the interest of getting you used to the idea, sure,” he murmured, leaning in again. David pulled him against him, reeling him in slowly until they were pressed together from shoulder to hip, and Evan made a low noise in his throat as he realized that there was muscle and heat under that egghead exterior. David was full of surprises, not the least of which was that he was a really dirty kisser. By the time they pulled apart, Evan's hands had made a mess of David's hair, and Evan's ass had been thoroughly groped.

“Okay, so,” Evan rasped, touching his fingers to his no doubt swollen lips, “think that'll do you?”

“I – ah – yes, thanks,” David answered, just as scratchily.

“Don't mention it,” Evan said.

Two days later, one of the historians radioed him and quietly requested a meeting as soon as possible. He arranged a conference with her, Shapiro, Brown and Parrish in their quarters in an hour.

Dr. Lall came straight to the point. “We used the last known break in the cultivation record – two thousand, eight hundred and fifty-seven years – and concentrated on texts from that period, hoping it would yield a culling reference. This morning, I found it; an eyewitness account, no less. Well, it wasn't actually much of a culling; the witness talks about how she was captured by a wraith and attacked.”

“And she survived?” Evan asked.

Lall nodded. “The wraith couldn't feed off her, even though it tried multiple times. She was shaken,



Martilla looked stricken. “We wish we could tell you how it is possible,” she said, “but the focus of our science has always been the earth and its bounty, and our best minds have been unable to discover the secret.”

Weir hesitated a moment, then said, “With your permission, our historians have been studying your archives; they have found a reference to a wraith attack nearly three thousand of your years ago.” Martilla looked genuinely surprised as Weir continued. “Apparently the wraith tried to feed on several of your people at that time, but they were unable to take any of their life essence. Can you think of any reason why this might have happened?”

Martilla shook her head. “This is the first I have heard of such an incident.” She turned to her colleagues, who stayed silent. “Are you saying they did not return because they were unable to feed upon us?”

“That seems the most likely assumption,” Weir answered. Leaning forward, she said earnestly, “Martilla, I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that we would give just about anything to find a truly effective defense against the wraith. If your people have an immunity to them, and we can discover this secret and find a way to share it with the rest of the galaxy – ”

“You could do this?”

“We could try. But we would need your help and cooperation.” She held up a hand as Martilla opened her mouth. “Please understand, we're not just talking about imposing upon your hospitality or gaining access to your records. We're talking about taking medical samples – blood, tissue – from willing volunteers. This is probably the only way we'll be able to understand what makes the Cereans special.”

Martilla held Weir's gaze for a long moment, while Evan could practically feel the assembled Lanteans holding their breaths.

“When you are ready, Doctor Weir, I will be your first volunteer,” she said, voice low and determined.

After that, things moved swiftly. Weir approved the bringing of Martilla and several other volunteers to Atlantis, where Beckett poked them with needles and sewed them up and probably gave them a lollipop. Weir did a little better, treating them to a lavish feast featuring stasis-packed vegetables from the Milky Way galaxy. Evan couldn't even imagine the cost to the SGC of having fresh Brussels sprouts trucked from Earth on the *Daedalus*, but it was a huge hit with the Cereans, who gobbled it all up and immediately asked to trade for the seeds.

A couple of days after the Cereans returned to their home world, Evan gated back with Parrish to attend a meeting called by the medical department. Beckett said that the initial tests had proved that the Cerean blood chemistry was markedly different from that of other Pegasus galaxy humans, as well as the Lanteans.

“Could that account for the reason the Wraith are unable to feed?” Weir asked.



pushy?

Evan gave back as good as he got, but it was a struggle, because God, he'd been trying not to want this for weeks, and he'd been failing miserably, and now to suddenly have it was overwhelming. Pretty soon, he ended up flat on his back on the bed, David's long, lean body completely covering his. Evan didn't doubt he'd win in a fight, but there was something strangely hot about being surrounded by someone who was kissing you. He arched up against David, experimentally, and was met with resistance, David's body grinding down into his as he pinned him to the mattress.

“Is this okay?” David panted, pulling back suddenly.

Evan couldn't help it; he laughed. “Only if we start getting naked real soon.”

David grinned down at him, then sat up, straddling his thighs, and began undoing Evan's pants. Wanting to be helpful, Evan shucked out of his t-shirt, then helped David out of his jacket. When the last sock was gone, David stared down at him, a weird look on his face that Evan couldn't read. Before he could open his mouth to ask what was wrong, David lay down beside him and placed his open hand over Evan's heart. After a couple of seconds, the hand glided up to his shoulder, then slid sideways, fingertips caressing his collarbone. Evan closed his eyes and suppressed a shiver.

“Is this okay?” David asked again, voice almost a whisper this time.

Evan forced his eyes to open and focus on David's face. “Yeah,” he said, hoarsely. “Yeah, 'sgood.”

“I just – I've thought about this for so long. Thought about touching you.” David's hand was on Evan's arm now, skimming the sensitive skin of his inner elbow. “I still can't believe I'm actually doing it. That I'm – allowed.”

Christ. If this had been like all of Evan's other experiences with guys, both of them would have already gotten off. He thought about speeding things up, about just grabbing David's hand and putting it on his cock, but he knew that wasn't what he really wanted; that was just the embarrassment talking. Truth was, he'd never had this, never had somebody treat his body like it was some kind of – of shrine or something, and he was afraid of liking it too much.

David kissed him then, but it was slower, more tender than his earlier kisses, and after a second Evan realized David was doing the same thing with his mouth that he was doing with his hand – learning Evan's body, touching it in every way he could. With a noise that was frighteningly like a whimper, Evan buried a hand in David's hair and pulled him closer, opening under him. David groaned and took him up on the invitation, diving into Evan's mouth like there wasn't anywhere he'd rather be.

David's fingers brushed Evan's belly then, and that was it, that was all he could take. “C'mon, God, *please*,” Evan begged, and David plunged his tongue into Evan's mouth and wrapped his hand around his cock at the same time, and that was it, three swift, hard strokes and Evan was gone, orgasm slamming into him like the blast from a wraith stunner.

He wasn't sure how long he lay there gasping, but when he was sufficiently conscious again, he looked up to see David grinning down at him fondly. He tried to smile back, but he couldn't make his face work right.

“This is the best night of my life,” David said heartily, and Evan chuckled.

“Saving the galaxy, great sex – you're batting a thousand.” Reaching down and finding David still hard, he smiled and said, “Well, maybe you're only five hundred so far, huh?”



around the waist. Evan sucked in a startled breath, tensing as David pressed his face to Evan's belly.

“Hey,” Evan murmured, stroking David's hair, his ear. “What's goin' on?”

David shook his head. “I – nothing. Nothing I can talk about yet.” He looked up at Evan. “Okay?”

Evan frowned, but nodded. “Okay,” he said, knowing he was lying. With a final caress to Evan's jaw, he asked, “You gonna be able to sleep?”

“Yes. I'm pretty exhausted.”

“Okay. G'night.” Evan turned to go, but before he reached the door, he heard David say his name softly.

“Yeah?” he asked, turning back.

David opened his mouth, shut it again. “Good night,” he murmured. Evan pasted on a smile and left, wishing like hell he'd gotten an A in chemistry all those years ago.

The next day's mission to M3R-777 was boring, boring, *boring*. You would've thought he'd be grateful for an easy mission again, but it only pissed Evan off, made his bones grate and his skin itch. He didn't need to be here; there had to be a dozen other worlds where he could make himself useful running from *something*.

His team returned without so much as a hangnail just after noon, and right away he knew something was wrong, because everything was as quiet as a tomb. As soon as he could, he snagged Campbell. “Something happen with one of the other teams?”

Campbell shook his head. “No, sir. Doctor Parrish was taken to the infirmary shortly before you returned. He's – I haven't heard how he's doing, just that it looked pretty serious when they brought him in.”

Evan didn't know what look was on his face, but he knew it had to be pretty bad, because Campbell was looking at him sympathetically, like he was the grieving widow, for Christ's sake. “Okay, uh, thanks, Sergeant.”

Campbell nodded, then returned to his station. Yeah, maybe if he were Canadian military like Campbell, he could break down in the middle of the fucking gate room and run straight to the infirmary, but that wasn't gonna happen. So he descended the stairs to the locker room, and he took a fast shower, trying to make it look like he wasn't hurrying, and then he put on a fresh uniform and headed for the infirmary, trying to remember how to put one foot in front of the other.

When he reached the corridor outside the emergency room, he could hear coughing, then a gut-clenching retching noise, and his heart stopped. Jesus, that was David.

“Now, that's enough of that, lad.” Beckett's voice, firm and sure, and Evan immediately felt a little better, because Beckett was usually pretty together, but he sounded like he was totally in charge of the situation. “Rita, let's start him on a saline drip, please; he's lost a lot of fluid, and I'll be giving



will kick your ass so far past the South Pier you'll need water wings, a snorkel and a friendly dolphin named Flipper to get back home.”

David closed his eyes. “Please let me...”

“I was *worried* about you, you asshole,” Evan choked out. “Do you know what it was like, listening while you – standing there and wondering if you were gonna –” Evan stepped back abruptly, passed a shaking hand over his face. “Christ.”

“I’m sorry,” David whispered. “I shouldn’t have – only I was – we’re not finding a solution. The medical biochemists are telling us it can’t be done, only – dammit, if they’d just start *helping* us instead of hindering us – ”

“And you think this was a good way to prove your side’s smarter?” Evan said, swallowing a bitter laugh. “Jesus, even my six-year-old nephew knows not to swallow poison.”

“I was desperate!” David yelled, rounding on him. “I thought if the effects weren’t as bad as the Cereans claimed they were, we could make a case for continuing the research.”

Evan blinked. “Wait a minute. They’re pulling the plug?”

David shook his head. “Not entirely. But they want to scale back the work. I’ve got my entire team working on it, and they say there’s no justification for devoting those kinds of resources to it. And now that I’ve proven to them just how toxic it is, I’ve hammered the final nail in the coffin myself.” He staggered over to the bed and sat on it heavily. “The hell of it is, they’re right. The Cerean biochemistry – it’s developed over thousands of years of interaction with their environment, and especially with this particular fruit. We can’t just change the chemical makeup of an individual or a population overnight; that’s how you kill people. Even if we find a way to dilute the toxicity – and we can’t remove it, because the toxin is the key contributor to Cerean immunity – the change will take generations. It’s not going to be the quick fix I hoped it would be.”

Evan sat down beside him. “I don’t get it. Doc Beckett has that gene therapy; one injection and boom – instant new you.”

David smiled sadly. “It’s not as simple, believe it or not, as genetic manipulation. And if you did manage to figure out a way to change blood chemistry through gene therapy, you’re faced with the same problem: instantaneous change can be fatal.” He shook his head. “The Cereans are like the monarch butterfly.”

Evan frowned. He’d been doing okay right up until that point. “Come again?”

“The monarch caterpillars eat the leaves of the milkweed plant, which contain a toxin. However, the caterpillar experiences no ill effects, and when it becomes a butterfly, the toxin makes it unpalatable to birds and other predators.”

“And none of the other butterflies have this trick figured out, huh?” Evan asked. David shook his head. “Well, that’s only because they don’t have you.”

“Evan...”

“Look, not to use a cliché, but Rome wasn’t built in a day. You’ll figure out a way to make this work, and maybe it’ll take fifty years, a hundred, but it’ll happen.”

“And maybe you’ll have the wraith beat in a year,” David countered.



Despite his CO's tacit blessing, it was close to oh dark thirty when Evan let himself into David's quarters. David was dead to the world as Evan gingerly lifted the covers and slid in behind him, but he shifted and sighed softly when Evan pressed close.

“Shh,” Evan whispered. “It's okay. Go back to sleep.”

“Mmmph,” David said, and did just that. Evan burrowed closer to his warmth and followed him, lulled by the reassurance of David's sure, steady breaths.

He awoke with a start, heart pounding from the momentary panic brought on by unfamiliar surroundings. It was just after dawn, but David's quarters, unlike Evan's, looked out on the setting sun, so it was still fairly dark. But Evan didn't need a lot of light to know he was alone in the bed.

He tensed, listening, and heard the muffled but unmistakable sound of somebody brushing their teeth. The tension didn't leave him as he waited for David to emerge from the bathroom. Was he just freshening up, or was he going to sneak off and head back to the lab against orders?

When the door to the bathroom finally hissed open, Evan closed his eyes and feigned sleep. He heard soft footsteps coming closer, then stopping right beside the bed. There was a long pause after that; Evan tried to keep his breathing shallow and even, but it wasn't easy.

Finally, the footsteps moved to the other side of the bed, and the mattress dipped. Evan swallowed his heart again when he felt cool air at his back, and then the unmistakable feel of David's long, lean body against him.

“Evan?” A hand slid over his side and across his chest, settling on his right pec. “You're awake, aren't you?”

Evan took David's hand in his and squeezed it. “Yeah,” he admitted, a little sheepishly.

“When do you have to go to work?”

“I don't. The Colonel – uh. Gave me the day off.”

“Oh,” David said, then: “*Oh.*”

Evan had to chuckle at that. “Yeah, 'oh' pretty much covers it.”

“Do you think –”

“Yeah. I guess. Who the hell knows? This is Sheppard we're talking about. Man's a mystery.”

David tightened his hold on him, and Evan couldn't pretend he didn't enjoy it. “I – ” Evan heard David take a deep breath, let it out, start again. “I need to say something.”

Evan frowned at the tremble in David's voice. “Yeah?”

Another stretch of deep breathing exercises. Just at the point where Evan was starting to get good and worried, David blurted, “I don't know why you're here. With me. I mean in the general sense, rather than right here at this moment. I mean – why you're with me.”



"I'm in bed," David said primly, planting a sucking kiss on Evan's neck.

Evan arched under the attention, dick hardening. "Yeah, but you should be the one flat on your back, not me." Shoving, he flipped David over (thank God for his bigger bed) and sat up, straddling him.

David stared up at him, gasping. "Oh, my God, that was – so incredibly hot." He reached up to drag Evan down again, but Evan batted his hands away.

"Forget it, Doc," he growled. "You're takin' it easy."

"You've got to be kidding me," David whined. "I want –"

"I know what you want," Evan said, leaning down and biting at his chin, "but you're gonna let me give it to you."

"And what am I supposed to do?"

Evan licked his Adam's apple. "You're just gonna lie back and take it."

David stared up at him, eyes glazing over with lust as Evan watched the realization hit him like a two-by-four. "O-okay," he stammered finally.

Evan smiled. Silently, he started stripping David, pushing up his t-shirt and pulling it over his head, then sliding his boxers down his legs. He took care of his own underwear quickly, then straddled David again, surveying the territory. David stood it for about a minute, then begged, "For the love of God, please do something."

Evan's smile turned to a grin. "Don't get your blood pressure up," he murmured, stroking a hand over David's shoulder, then down over his left pec. "You'll get what you need."

David shifted his hips at that, and Evan felt the press of a hard cock against his inner thigh. In retaliation, he rolled David's nipple between thumb and forefinger, eliciting a groan and a soft curse.

"Yeah," Evan breathed, leaning down, "that's it. Let me hear you." He kissed his way down David's body, making him shiver and moan, resisting all attempts on David's part to participate in the proceedings. When he reached David's groin, David was trembling all over, his muscles bunched tight and his fists clenched, a tautly drawn wire of lust.

Evan closed his mouth over the tip of David's cock and sucked a little, but he could tell David was close, and he didn't want him to come that way. After a minute, he pulled back, earning a frustrated, broken sound from David, and sat up, leaning over to open David's bedside drawer.

"Evan –" It was a plea, and it went right to Evan's cock, lighting him up like a Christmas tree. He worked quickly, coating his fingers, then reaching back and pushing in, hastily preparing himself. The burn was worse than he'd been expecting – it'd been a long time since he'd done this, and so far he'd only topped with David – but he rode it out until the pain was almost gone.

David brushed his fingers over Evan's knee, making him jerk in surprise. "I thought you –" David began.

Evan grunted softly as he pulled his fingers free. "Easier for you this way," he said. David kept

