

8. Dulce Domum

Vlad flung himself down on the larger of the apartment's two couches, unfastened his jacket and sighed deeply. Niki grinned.

"Had a good time?" he asked. "Saved the universe or anything?" Vlad shook his head but smiled. It was always good to speak Russian again after a few days spent with the team. His English was improving but it was hard work to speak nothing else.

"But you had Adam," prompted Niki.

"No, I did not 'have' Adam," said Vlad, pulling a mock sad face.

"But I thought..."

"Well, yes, SGX had Adam, but unfortunately..."

"Any progress?"

"If you call dropping hints in Latin, I suppose so."

"In *Latin*?!"

"Yes, and I think he understood, but at any rate he is still speaking to me."

"In Latin?"

"No, in English, but I shall continue to dream."

"I wish you luck, though I must say I prefer the gorgeous Sharon."

"I'd wish *you* luck, but I get the feeling she prefers her men in uniform."

"I could invent a uniform - she'd never know - the order of Cossack knights or something..."

"You could model it on St. George..."

"Or the dragon!"

The conversation deteriorated into pure silliness, a sure sign that Vlad was winding down after the mission. He had jumped at the chance to come to America and was still excited by his role as a Stargate team member, but he still found it quite stressful at times, and welcomed Niki's uncomplicated friendship and his ability to defuse the tension with jokes. He also welcomed being able to talk about his fixation - the blond Englishman. He had admitted his feelings to Niki after a fair amount of vodka, not long after Adam's arrival, and to his everlasting relief, the other Russian had proved sympathetic and supportive. He leaned back, flicked his hair out of his eyes and indulged in a daydream until Niki brought vodka from the fridge and he heard the clink of ice in a glass.

"Dear Emma,
Another very ordinary week."

(Well, to some people, going through the stargate *had* become ordinary. Not to him. Not yet.)

"I have been working hard, and feel I am gaining the respect of my colleagues."

(Not quite the word in Vlad's case, perhaps...)

"Some of them have again visited a Roman re-enactment display with me, and found it very enjoyable."

(At least, Vlad found the dancing boys enjoyable, and possibly the sherry-style drink.)

"I have been exercising with a pole rather like a pilum, and am improving my skills against a weapons instructor."

(Mustn't mention the fact that he's an alien.)

"A Russian major has joined our sessions and is showing real aptitude."

(Not to mention fluid grace and a body to die for. Not even to mention that to myself.)

"The computers are keeping me busy and I haven't seen much of America yet."

(But I've seen more than I expected of another world.)

"You know, of course, that a lot of what I do is classified, so I can't tell you much about it, which makes my letters rather boring as I spend most of my time at work!"

(Not on computers, either!)

"Sorry, Emma. A boyfriend working abroad, who doesn't even send news, must be a trial. Hope the hospital is treating you well and you get some sleep from time to time. I may come home on leave at Christmas,"

(Why did I say that? Still, it's months away.)

" and we can have some good long walks, depending on the weather.

Love.

Adam"

Adam sat back and contemplated the email he'd just composed. It really was incredibly boring, but what could he do? He had absolutely nothing to write about that wasn't either covered by the official secrets act or, and here he swallowed, totally unsuitable for his girlfriend's eyes.

He looked across at the poster of St. George. What was he going to do about Vlad? He would have to stop pretending to himself that it was all just teasing. There would be no

purpose to it, after all. He hadn't provoked teasing and he didn't react outwardly. So that left Vlad seriously hitting on him. His mind whirled. Fragments of teenage angst and desire crept out of some vault where they'd been firmly locked away. He thought he'd thrown away the key to that particular closet. His courtship, if that was what it was, of Emma, had been designed to set him on a conventional path. They'd had sex, occasionally. (He hadn't been around that often). It had been good, but with something missing. He hadn't been prepared to ask himself what. Now Vlad was raising the question for him and he couldn't think of an answer.

He sent the email, but as he did, he pictured Vlad's brown hair and grey eyes rather than Emma's neat dark looks. Then he tuned his guitar and played Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now," singing the words softly and finishing with a few discordant notes.

Sharon found Teal'c in the commissary and joined him, a large cup of coffee in her hand. The big alien fascinated her. She was usually wary of men - in her home town most guys were only after one thing and in the airforce men were something to compete with, or impress with her skills, depending on whether they were her peers or her seniors in rank. Suddenly she was faced with some new men. The Russians were different, although Vlad was a senior officer, and the Englishman didn't fit into any of the normal categories, either. But Teal'c was a whole magnitude of difference even from these. Alien. Polite and charming. Non-threatening in any way that mattered. In fact, she thought he seemed protective rather than threatening, and treated herself to a slight daydream, then sat down and greeted him.

"So SG1 are back?"

"Yes, Sharon, SG1 are back. We have been visiting the Tok'ra and discussing further possibilities for defending their base against the Goa'uld. Samantha enjoyed some time with her father."

"That must have been good. You didn't save the planet or dig up any skeletons this time, then?"

"No, Sharon, we did not. What about you? I believe SGX have also been off-world this week."

"Yes." Sharon considered. The excitement of finding the ruins had faded a little, and she had not particularly enjoyed her stay in Castra Nova.

"No heroics, and no skeletons, but we *did* find some real live Romans, and Vlad and Adam have been brushing up their Latin."

"I heard about the ruins. What is Latin, and why does it need to be brushed?"

"A dead language. Only it seems it isn't quite as dead as we thought, and the boys already know a little so they've been practising. That's what brushing up means," she added. Nobody knew when idiom would defeat Teal'c.

"I thought your ruins were Roman."

"Yes, and the Romans spoke Latin."

Teal'c raised his eyebrows and started muttering through what he knew of language names. "The Spanish speak Spanish, the Italians speak Italian, the Russians speak Russian..." Sharon stopped him.

"The Americans speak English," she reminded him and was glad to see his face clear.

"So, how do you celebrate being back?" she asked.

"After I have practised Kelno' reem? I rest, and I exercise and I prepare for the next mission. Sometimes the other members of my team involve me in their social life."

"Do you ever, you know, have social life of your own?" She wasn't sure how she'd got that out. Or how it sounded.

"Not often. Are you suggesting something?" Teal'c looked interested.

"Maybe we could go out for a meal," she heard herself say.

"We could indeed. Do you have a particular preference in eating places?" Sharon forgot to breathe, then told herself it was only a meal. Only! She suggested an Italian restaurant she'd heard was good and Teal'c immediately agreed. Before she knew it, they'd arranged to meet at the restaurant that evening, and Sharon went home to change, a lilt in her step and stars in her eyes.

Bob Somerfield finished the official report and handed it personally to Hammond.

"Fenwick did well," he told the general. "He's an asset to the team. Any chance of a permanent assignment?"

"It's something to consider. We have a precedent for civilian members in Daniel Jackson, and in Jonas, I suppose. But I'm not sure we have a pressing reason for such an appointment, even if he were agreeable to it. Mind you, the Brits would probably jump at the chance. Leave it with me and I'll discuss it with all concerned."

"Well, if you get the go-ahead, I'd like him on SGX. So remember I asked for him first!"

"Of course, but are you looking at an addition or a replacement?"

Somerfield didn't reply for a moment, then he said hesitantly,

"Potts is a good lad but I don't think his heart's really in this. Though I wouldn't like to wreck his hopes, if he has any. If *you* leave that with *me* I'll get back to you with a firmer answer later. Is that all right?"

"Perfectly," replied Hammond, and settled to read the report, while Somerfield left for home.

Martha was baking when he arrived, and the house smelled of warm pastry and something savoury and good. Bob kissed her dutifully and turned on the television. He half heard his wife ask if he'd had a good week on his training course, and replied with some platitude that came easily to his lips. Not a lie exactly. Just an economical version of the truth. Martha had no need to know where he and his team had been. He turned his attention to the news and the baseball scores. Life was back to normal, till the next mission, of course.

