

Alternate Version of Scene from *Wander Home*

(Jack and Sarah)

[This is a longer version of a scene from Chapter Three of *Wander Home*. I ended up going for a more wistful, less bitter tone.]

Jack felt something pulling him out of the memory. He and Sarah now stood at a distance from their earlier selves and their playful daughter. Sarah was sobbing, with the hard jerky movements of someone who hated to cry. Jack drew her close to his chest. She pulled back enough to speak, fighting to speak clearly.

"I remember. I remember how I felt. She seemed so happy. And all the while, I was waiting. Waiting for it to change."

Jack kissed her forehead and stroked her hair. "I know. I felt it too."

Shuddering, deep breaths. "We could make her happy -- sometimes. But we -- I couldn't *keep* her happy. I never knew how long it would last . . ." He could feel the tightness in her arms as she clenched her fists. "And I *hated* that! I *hated* it!"

"Sweetheart -- you didn't hate *her*. You know that."

More deep breaths, growing more even. It broke Jack's heart to see her try to smile. "No, I didn't hate her. But I did resent how it made me feel -- like an inadequate mother. Like a failure. I'd never felt like that before."

Jack hugged her tighter, kissed her neck. "You did everything anyone could. We both did. We gave her as much happiness as any parents could. Look at her."

They turned back toward the remembered Eleanor, lumbering around swinging one arm like an elephant's trunk, her laughter pealing across the African plain. Watching, he felt a summons. "It's my mother. She wants us. Are you ready?"

Sarah gazed for a long moment at her child. "Let's go."