Stepping Out of the Shadows II: Out In The Open

by ellenscult

Summary

Tony and Gibbs deal with the immediate consequences of becoming dom and sub.

Notes


Based on the heartbreaking Look But Don't Touch, by Luna Altyerre and set in a Xanthesque BDSM-verse. Series title dreamed up by Ferneberga.

'Come on, let's get you cleaned up.'

Gibbs leads me from the bed to the bathroom, where he undresses me and washes me, reclothes me in fresh shorts and sweats, a t-shirt free from sweat and snot and drying tears. He tugs a sweater over my head and I let him, too wrung out to protest his taking charge of me. I let him take me into the kitchen, where I sit at the wooden table as he makes me oatmeal, boiled eggs and toast. Comfort food from his childhood, I guess: it wasn't ever a part of mine.

He sets food and coffee in front of me. 'Eat.' His hand is a warm weight on my head, stroking down my neck to rest briefly on my shoulder. 'I've wanted to bring you home and feed you for a long time,' Gibbs says, his voice a little rough as he sits down opposite me. 'I just couldn't work out why. It
wasn't my place to. I didn't think you'd let me.'

I shrug. 'I don't know if I would have. Couldn't afford you getting too close.' I pour maple syrup on my oatmeal and eat it. Breakfast passes in silence, but it's not oppressive. I don't feel my usual urge to fill it with chatter about anything and everything. Somewhere between leaving Israel and accepting Gibbs as my dom, something deep within me has shifted. My heart, my soul, my mental landscape: whatever. Something has fallen into place in a way that makes sense, in a way that it has never done before.

So this is what it's like to be a sub, I think, finishing off the last of my toast. It's okay. Maybe I can do this.

Gibbs washes up, dries, puts the dishes away. He makes me sit at the table. 'You can help some other time,' he says. 'For now, I want you to rest up.'

He takes me into the living room, sits me on the couch, flicks on the TV and pulls me back to his chest. There's a MacGyver marathon on; Gibbs lets it play while I lie between his legs, my body cushioned by his. He strokes me, pets my cheek, runs a hand over my shoulder and down my side. I haven't been touched this much in years and I find I am starving for it. Time passes in a blur of improbable escapes and advert breaks until eventually nature takes its course and I have to hit the head.

The weird thing is Gibbs comes with me. The even weirder thing is that I let him.

He watches while I piss, then takes a leak himself while I'm washing my hands. Together we go back into the bedroom and it isn't exactly a surprise when he sits me down on the bed and undresses me.

I haven't been this passive in, well, ever, and it's starting to freak me out a little. Somehow Gibbs senses it and distracts me with soft kisses that make my head swim, until by the time he's mapping the contours of my body with hands and tongue, a drugged lassitude holds me still, my arms at my side and my legs spread as Gibbs licks around my nipples, my ribs, suckles at my hipbone and measures the crease of my thigh with the span of his hand.

It's about sex, of course it is, but somehow sex is just the cover for what's really going on. I'm not entirely sure what that is and I'm too busy trying not to come as Gibbs takes me in his mouth and attempts to suck what's left of my brains out through my dick. I can only lie back and pant, too out of it to be embarrassed by the whimpering noises that slip past my teeth to hang in the musk-laden air of the bedroom.

I can't even grab at the sheets as one slick finger pushes inside me, rapidly joined by a second and then a third. All I know is that I want, I need - and then that need is fulfilled by the press and burn of Gibbs as he pushes slowly inside me. I'm aching with the desire to come, but at the same time, it wouldn't matter to me if I never got to come again, just as long as Gibbs does, as long as he can take his pleasure in me. That's somehow more satisfying than the last hundred times I've jerked off, put together.

Gibbs is solid muscle, heavy, surrounding me, filling me with his cock and with his tongue as he thrusts into me, grounding me. All I can do is lie there and take everything he gives me. If he'd let me, I'd stay right here and take him forever. But he speeds up, grunting hot breaths through a loose, openmouthed kiss. He pulls away just long enough to snap, 'Now! Tony, come!' then he's shuddering into me, his hips pressing hard against me. I have a moment to wonder what he means, but my body takes over, knowing exactly what to do and orgasm slams through me, rendering me blind and deaf to everything except my dom.
We lie together, one being, one heartbeat, one breath that passes from his lungs to mine and back again, until at last he softens enough to slip from me and I shiver with the loss. Gibbs rolls us so that I'm on my side, tucked under his arm, my head pillowed in the hollow of his shoulder which was surely made for me. We fit together like two halves of a puzzle and it is an impossibility that I lived a life without him.

Eventually, Gibbs sighs. 'You're going to have to come up a bit, Tony.'

I blink, unsure of how to speak.

'That's it, come up for me. I need to know how you're doing.'

'Um...' My stomach is rumbling, my ass is sore and I need to piss. 'I'm fine.'

Gibbs looks down at me and chuckles. 'I just bet you are. Come on, let's get cleaned up and then we can grab some lunch.'

He doesn't help me this time, just tosses me a washcloth then proceeds to sluice himself off under the shower. It isn't until I'm dressed once more and we're downstairs at the kitchen table with soup and grilled cheese sandwiches that I blink and the world comes back into focus.

'What happened there?' I ask, putting down my spoon. 'I mean, don't get me wrong, that was...' I suck in a breath, 'my god, that was incredible, but I don't get it. I don't.... I'm not normally like that. Well, when I say normally, I mean ever, so...'

Gibbs takes pity on me. 'You found your subspace, Tony.' He sits across from me, calmly spooning up soup as I gape foolishly at him.

'Subspace?' I ask eventually.

'Yeah, you know, the place you should have been finding ever since you were old enough to experiment. Eat up, or it'll be cold.'

Automatically, I finish up my soup and sandwich, then take my place at Gibbs' side, drying while he washes the pots.

'That was subspace? God, no wonder subs go crazy for it. But how-'

'How did you get there?' Gibbs dries his hands and pours us both coffee. 'Come on, we'll be comfier on the couch.'

We settle at opposite ends of the couch. Gibbs turns towards me, then pulls my legs up so that my feet rest in his lap. 'You've been running on empty for a while now,' Gibbs says, wrapping a warm hand around one sock-clad foot and rubbing absent circles on the instep with his thumb. 'And when you got on that plane, I could see you'd hit rock bottom. You really thought I'd leave you behind, didn't you?'

I drop my eyes to the carpet as a flush stains my cheekbones. 'I, uh... I couldn't see why you wouldn't choose her.'

Gibbs sighs. 'I will always pick you, Tony. Always. And if she'd been thinking straight, she'd have known that. When the plane took off, you looked so lost and I knew I'd seen it before, but I couldn't place it. You tripped my alpha nature so hard I was working on instinct when I sat down beside you. I couldn't leave you like that again. And when you let me hold you, that was pure sub. You started dropping then and I took advantage of you being too exhausted to fight it.'
'Why?' I ask, confused. 

Gibbs lifts his hand from my foot just long enough to tap me under the chin. I meet his eyes and relax when I see he's smiling. 

'Because I couldn't stand seeing you hurting so badly and not be allowed to take care of you. Not any more.' 

'What would you have done if I'd fought you on it?' 

'I'd have still brought you home with me and tried to take care of you,' Gibbs says. 'Without the sex.' 

'Yeah, about that... How did you know it'd be okay?' 

Gibbs squeezes my foot again. 'I didn't. I hoped, though.' 

I stare at him for a long moment. 'You hoped? You risked your career, our friendship, on hope?' 

Gibbs grins. 'Well, yeah, Tony. I knew you needed something you weren't getting elsewhere and you trusted me enough to let me put you into my bed and hold you all night. You trusted me enough to let me pin you down and wake you up the way you deserve to be woken up every morning.' 

'But-' 

'I've known you for long enough to know you'd wake up swinging if you felt threatened. And I know that if you were truly a beta, you'd never have let me sleep with you, let alone bring you off. And then I remembered where I'd seen that look in your eyes.' 

I close mine, remembering all over again the pain of knowing Gibbs was leaving, the sheer incredulity that he could simply walk away. 'Mexico,' I whisper. 

'Yeah.' Gibbs sighs. 'How the hell did you manage to fool everyone this long, Tony? How could you go this long without even trying to find what you need?' 

I shake my head, open my eyes. 'My father wasn't about to have a sub for a son. He'd have preferred it if I'd been an alpha, but even he couldn't pass me off as that and have it stick. And I couldn't have gone into law enforcement. Even when they changed the regs, I saw what the other cops did to subs who joined the force.' 

'I'm sorry, Tony,' Gibbs says. My jaw drops. 'I should have known. I should have taken you as my sub when I met you back in Baltimore. Maybe I could have kept you safe.' 

I shut my mouth with a snap and I scowl at him. 'I've never needed to be kept safe. I've never wanted it. I'm damn good at what I do, Gibbs! I don't need your protection.' 

'I didn't mean it like that,' Gibbs winces. 'I just meant... If I could have brought you home at night, made sure you ate something, got some sleep, been here for you, maybe life wouldn't have hurt you so much.' 

'Oh.' I sit and stare stupidly at him. 

'I sure as hell wouldn't have let you take that strapping from Vance,' Gibbs adds quietly. 'I promise you'll never have to take another again.' 

I open my mouth to tell him the strapping hadn't hurt nearly as much as knowing Jenny was dead and it was at least partly my fault, that it hadn't hurt as much as going home to my empty apartment.
where no one was waiting to help me out of my clothes and into the shower, to apply lotion to my back and thighs, to help me put on soft clothes and hold me while I slept. Then I realise that Gibbs knows and that's exactly what he means.

'You can't promise that,' is what I actually say. 'Only a collared sub can't be strapped without their dom's permission.'

'Then we'd better see about getting you a collar, hadn't we?' Gibbs grins. He takes advantage of my speechlessness to hustle me into shoes and a jacket and get me into his car.

'You really want to collar me? No, don't answer that, it's a stupid question. You never do things you don't want to. How will this work, Gibbs? I'm not- I'm a beta, at work anyway.' The questions keep me from focusing on Gibbs' driving, but from what I can tell out of the corner of my eye, we're actually traveling at something close to the speed limit for once.

'You wouldn't be the first person to find out they're a switch late in life,' Gibbs says.

'An omega? You really think people will believe I had an epiphany in Israel?' I ask scornfully.

'I hear that's the country to do it in, if you're going to,' Gibbs smiles. 'I think you can get people to believe whatever the hell you want them to, Tony. Anyway, it's nobody's business but ours.'

I try to relax, but I can't help the nervous flutter in the pit of my stomach. 'Fine. But I'm not wearing anything from Sears. Or Wal Mart.'

Gibbs laughs and after a second I join in.

We park at the mall and go in a side entrance. Gibbs keeps me close, a hand on my arm or my shoulder or at the small of my back as he maneuvers us through the Saturday afternoon crowds. On the upper level, half way down there's a shop with a gray and black frontage and discreet lettering on the sign: Perfect Submission. Gibbs steers me through the door. The interior is cool, elegant. I'm amazed Gibbs knows a place as classy as this.

He glances sideways at me, amused. 'What's up, Tony? It isn't Sears.'

'No, I can see that,' I grin.

A sales assistant comes to the counter. Her slim, black-clad figure and upswept auburn hair serve to highlight the gold and rubies that encircle her pale neck. The tag says R.M., but a pin on her blouse reads Naomi.

'Welcome to Perfect Submission. How may I serve you?'

Gibbs keeps a proprietary hand on my shoulder. 'We're looking for a collar,' he says. 'We're federal agents, so it needs to be something suitable for fieldwork.'

She nods. 'I see. Have you any thoughts on what styles or designs you like?'

Gibbs looks at me and smiles. 'Something that suits his eyes.'

Naomi smiles too. 'Of course. Do you have a budget?'

'Nothing over five figures,' Gibbs says. 'I don't want to have to mortgage the house.'

My eyebrows shoot up as the assistant leads us to the back of the store. 'Five figures? I hope that's including the cents! Are you nuts?'
Gibbs stops and turns to face me. 'You don't think you're worth more to me than my house? Tony, you are irreplaceable and I want everyone who sees you to know it.'

I can feel myself flushing. 'But-

His hand grips the back of my neck and he shakes me gently. 'I can afford it. And you're forgetting the most important thing.'

'What's that?'

'You don't get to decide,' Gibbs says quietly. 'You agreed I could keep you, so I am.' He waits until I relax under his hand before he turns back to face Naomi, who has a selection of black velvet trays laid out on the counter for inspection.

'These all have break-links,' she explains. 'For people in law enforcement, the forces, anywhere there's a danger someone might try to use a collar to choke a sub. The link won't break under normal use, but if you plan to use a collar for restraint play, we suggest you use something like a heavy-duty padded leather collar instead. If you ever need the link replaced, bring it back here or to any upmarket store. These have a lifetime guarantee in recognition of the good work people in those professions do.'

Gibbs nods, then dismisses half of the collars immediately. 'Too flashy.' The others he looks over one by one. 'How about this?' It's a chain, about as wide as my little finger. The links are flattened; they'll hide nicely under a shirt if necessary. There are two clasps, tiny golden padlocks that lock to either side of a blank nameplate shaped almost like a dogtag. Inset around the edge of the tag are emerald chips, forming a sparkling green border.

'That's perfect,' Gibbs says, but as he speaks, he's looking at me. I don't recognize the emotion that sweeps over me, but before I can analyze it, Gibbs tugs me in for a long, sweet kiss that makes me want to drop to my knees in front of him. I blink, clear my throat, take a shaky breath and let Gibbs pull my head down to rest in the crook of his neck. He sweeps a hand comfortingly up and down my back as Naomi puts all the other collars away, leaving only mine out on the counter.

After a minute, I compose myself and step back.

'Okay?' Gibbs asks softly. I nod. My voice seems to have disappeared, like last night, like this morning. Gibbs makes sure his hip is pressed against mine as he pays for the collar and arranges for the nametag to be engraved.

'Let's go grab a coffee,' he says. 'We can come back and pick it up in half an hour.'

There's a place eight doors down that does coffee and sandwiches. He gets me a pastry, doesn't say a word about the hazlenut creamer and sugar that goes into my drink. In silence, we take a seat at the back and watch people walking past outside through the store's plate glass window. Gibbs lets his leg rest against mine. When I've finished my danish, he puts his hand over mine.

'Is this what you want, Tony? Last chance.' His face is solemn. I can't tell what he's hoping I'll say. But his hand is still covering my own and Gibbs doesn't say or do things he doesn't mean. And he asked if he could keep me.

Briefly, the thought crosses my mind of leaving here and catching a cab back to my place. I could hide out until Monday. Gibbs wouldn't come after me. I could pretend this turn into the Twilight Zone never happened, go on with my life, business as usual.

I turn my hand under Gibbs' and squeeze gently. 'Yes,' I say softly and it's the truth.
We finish up, hit the head, go back to the store.

'We have a room in back, if you'd like,' Naomi offers as she hands over the black velvet box to Gibbs. He looks at me, quirks an eyebrow in silent question. I try not to look desperate, but the eyebrow drops and he snorts, amused again.

'Thanks,' he says and we go back behind the counter to a small private room, just large enough for a full-length mirror and a black wooden chair. Gibbs sits and I drop to my knees in front of him, bend my neck in the traditional gesture. He runs his hand lightly over my bared skin, raising goosebumps, then I hear him open the box and a moment later, the chain settles around my neck.

Gibbs closes the padlock, puts the tiny gold and emerald keys into his pocket, then drops the box on the floor to wrap his arms around me as I shake in reaction. I cling to him as tightly as he holds me and I feel the warmth of his breath as he presses kisses to my temples.

'You're mine now,' he murmurs, his voice rough with emotion. 'Never letting you go, Tony. Never letting you go.'

We both pretend his shirt front isn't damp when my shakes subside and I ease back. Gibbs spends a long moment staring at me with an expression of wonder, cupping my face in his hands, then he leans forward and kisses my forehead, then my mouth. I open to him like a flower to the sun, drinking in his kisses until he pulls back with a groan.

'Let's go home.' He stands and tugs me up off my knees, then turns me to face the mirror. For the first time, I see my collar on me and now I understand Gibbs' expression. My face is flushed, my lips just a little swollen and my eyes are shining as brightly as the jewels on the tag.

I trace the engraving with a fingertip: L.J. Gibbs.

Back out in the store, Naomi's face lights up when she sees us. 'That's beautiful. Congratulations! Here, this is the leash that goes with the collar and I thought you might want a plain leash for general use.'

Gibbs opens the long, thin box she hands him and looks inside. The leash is a gilt chain made of the same flattened links as my collar and the handle is a beautiful tan suede. The clip looks deceptively delicate; I have no doubt it's strong enough. The other leash sitting out on the counter is black leather with a dull gray clip. It's serviceable but nothing special: perfect for everyday use.

'Good choice,' Gibbs says and Naomi blushes.

'Would you like a chain for the key?' she asks. 'We have some that are similar to the ball chains used by the military for dog tags.'

'Been a while since I wore dog tags,' Gibbs says. 'Sure.' He takes the length of chain that Naomi offers and fishes the keys out of the box, quickly separating them. He threads the chain through the loop of one key, then fastens the chain and drops it over his head, tucking it under the collar of his shirt.

I swallow past the lump in my throat. Gibbs has a reminder of me with him and I know him well enough to know that key won't come off except in the most dire of circumstances.

'Can I bag these for you?' Naomi asks brightly.

'Thanks. How much is the leash?'
'It's on the house,' she says, popping it and the two velvet boxes into a tastefully discreet black bag.

'You sure?' Gibbs asks. 'I wouldn't want you to get into any trouble.'

Naomi hands over the bag. 'We understand the needs of our law enforcement clients,' she says. 'If you were buying a forty dollar collar, maybe it would be different.'

'If I were buying a forty dollar collar, I wouldn't have come here,' Gibbs says, amused. 'I doubt you do anything that's under a couple of hundred.'

'You'd be right,' Naomi smiles. 'It's a tough field for anyone to be in, not just a sub, so this is our way of saying thank you.'

Gibbs nods. 'Okay.'

We leave the store and for the first time in my life I am out in public as a sub. Not only a sub, but a sub with a dom. A collared sub. It feels as though people should point and stare, as obvious as though I've painted my body purple and dyed my hair bright blue. In some indefinable way, I feel naked.

Then Gibbs puts a hand on my arm and I stop worrying so much.

'You were right,' I say as we cross the parking lot.

'How's that?' Gibbs asks.

'It's perfect.'

He waits until we're in the car before he turns to me with a smile and says, 'You are.'

'If I'd known being your sub was going to be this good, I'd have told you what I was when you hired me,' I say, unable to stop my smile at his words.

'Nah, you wouldn't,' Gibbs says confidently, putting the car in drive and heading out of the lot. 'Never could do things the easy way.'

'I guess not,' I say. 'Wouldn't be worth as much if I did.'

Gibbs puts a hand on my knee and squeezes. 'I know. That's what makes your submission such a gift.'

'You aren't getting soppy on me, are you?' I ask with mock-suspicion around the lump in my throat.

'Just making sure you know how much you mean to me,' Gibbs says quietly. 'I want you certain of it before we have to go back to work on Monday.'

'Before you have to live up to that second 'b', huh?' I cover his hand with my own. 'Don't worry, Gibbs. I won't take it personally.'

'It's going to take some working out,' Gibbs warns.

'That's one thing we've always done,' I say. 'Worked it out.'

'Yeah,' The corners of Gibbs' mouth turn up in a little smile. 'You've always known how to handle me.'
I let my own smile turn lascivious. 'I could do some handling if you liked.'

Gibbs laughs and shakes his head, but he speeds up and when we get home, he wastes no time in getting me in the house and into the bedroom. He strips me until I am naked, kneeling at his feet, my head bowed, awaiting his pleasure.

He strokes my hair, runs fingers feather-light over my collar, then tips my chin up with a nudge. 'We need to get a few things clear first.'

'What, like house rules?' I ask flippantly.

'Like kinks and boundaries.' Gibbs says. After a moment, I nod and he sits down on the side of the bed. 'I need to know what it is you need from me so that I can give it to you. Most of the time, I'm going to be running on instinct and sometimes I'm going to push you places you don't want to go. I'm not into pain. I'm not saying I won't punish you if you need it, if you deserve it, because I will. But I don't think you need pain in bed and I'm not happy inflicting it. I like being in control, though, and I think you like it too. I think you need me to be in charge, at least for now. Am I right?'

I kneel there and think it through. Pain? I've never been into anything more than a little light spanking, though I've only given, never received. As for everything else... What do I really need from sex? I love burying myself in the hot, wet velvet sheath of a woman, but over the years, something's been missing from every encounter. I already know it's because I've been trying to top when I'm not cut out for it. Then I think of what it means to be Gibbs' sub and I surprise myself by laughing.

'Gibbs, you've had control over me since I started working for you. You've had control of everything, even my private life.'

'That's only because you didn't have time for one,' Gibbs smiles, understanding me perfectly. 'So you're okay with all of this? You aren't going to want to take charge in the bedroom?'

I shake my head. 'Gibbs, my ass has always been yours. The only thing that's changed is that you're making good use of it.'

'Is there anything specific you need from me before we get started? Because once I take you down, you're staying there until Monday morning.'

'Gibbs, I've never- I don't know the first thing about what kind of sub I am. But I trust you to be the top I need. Like you said, we'll work it out.' I take a deep breath. 'Go for it.'

Gibbs nods. 'Go use the bathroom, then come back here.'

I do as he says, taking a moment to admire my collar in the mirror. It's odd seeing it around my neck, but at the same time, it already feels as though I've worn it for years. The weight of the body-warmed metal, which should be unaccustomed, strange, is instead a soul-deep familiarity, a comfort I hadn't known I'd lacked.

When I come back out into the bedroom, Gibbs is naked too. The comforter is stripped off the bed, leaving the bottom sheet exposed.

'Sit down.' Gibbs pats the edge of the mattress beside him.

I do and he lifts a hand to stroke the back of my neck. The feel of that warm, strong palm on my nape quiets the butterflies I hadn't noticed in the pit of my stomach. We sit and breathe together and the urge to question, to chat, to comment, to fill the silence is overwhelming. It rises from my
diaphragm to my throat and crests upon my tongue, breaking against the backs of my teeth and leaving only a faint hiss to escape into the bedroom. As if that's the signal he's been expecting, as if he's been waiting for me to empty myself of words the way I emptied my bladder a few minutes ago, Gibbs leans in and kisses me.

It isn't hesitant in the slightest, nor is it a dialogue: Gibbs takes my mouth, my kisses, with the utter certainty of a man to whom they belong. He takes and I give all that I can, all that I am. He keeps on taking as he moves me into the middle of the bed, as he lays me flat and explores every inch of me with his hands and his lips and his tongue, those sharp eyes missing none of the scars I've gained since we started working together, finding all the ones gifted me by previous employment, by surgery and drunken escapades, by childhood misadventures.

At some point, he turns me over and pays the same attention to my back as to my front. As with earlier, this isn't really about sex, except for all the ways that it is. It's about me finding my subspace, Gibbs finding his topspace, about him claiming every inch of me. I enjoy the buzz, the floating sensation as my dom maps the contours of my body. Time is meaningless: it passes not in minutes and seconds, but in heartbeats and kisses, in the different sensations Gibbs wraps me in.

The scrape of teeth over my ankle bone... The flick of blunt nails across the arch of a rib... The moist, warm whisper of breath against my ear...

Gibbs is careful with my arm, with the bruises that are still coming into full bloom after my fight with Rivkin, after the not-so-careful handling by the Davids, both junior and senior. In the tension across his shoulders, in the set of his neck I can feel the slow burn of anger he keeps under firm control. Now isn't the time, nor is it the place for that anger to be unleashed. Our bed is no place to invite ghosts.

I relax into his possession as though it is my birthright. I suppose it is: Esau sold his for a mess of pottage, condemned himself to a lifetime of enforced submission, but Gibbs is my Jacob and to him I willingly render all the lands of my self and all the game therein. As Gibbs eases into me, inch by perfect engorged inch, this isn't a religious experience for me and I haven't been a good churchgoer since before my mother died. But phrases from the Song of Solomon pass through my head, even though I'm pretty sure my memory is paraphrasing.

*Behold, you are fair, my love, you are fair...*
*His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me...*
*Set me as a seal upon your heart, your arm: for love is strong as death...*

Gibbs lies on top of me, his cheek pressed against the back of my neck. He surrounds me with his body, he fills me with his strength. With every breath, I draw the wash of his breath into my lungs, and I can feel the pulse of his heart through my back and in the muscles that stretch around his cock. His arms bracket me and his muscled thighs push my legs apart.

I am hard and aching and the tiny corner of my mind that is still capable of thought can't believe I'm not humping the mattress, begging for relief. But my eyes are half-closed, my body as relaxed as it can be, under the circumstances. It feels as though we lie there, on the cusp of movement, for an eternity. As that last corner of my mind falls away into perfect no-thought, perfect sensation, I know I could lie here forever.

Then Gibbs pulls back and thrusts; long, powerful strokes, rolling his hips more and more strongly until he's snapping into me as hard as he can. He catches my prostate and I see stars. With each thrust, my dick rubs against the cotton sheet. A low whine rises in my throat and the fingers of my good hand flex and catch at the pillow under my head.
'Hold it,' Gibbs warns, slamming into me hard enough to make me shout. 'Hold it!' He noses aside my collar and sinks his teeth into the mark he made earlier. One last, brutal thrust and he freezes. I can feel him coming, cock pulsing into me. A sound of desperation rips its way out of me and I clench around him, fighting not to come, until seconds later he manages to let go, to breathe and he rasps out, 'Come!' and I do.

It's a while before I come up enough to notice that Gibbs is cleaning me off with a washcloth, that he's turned me over and wiped up the mess on the sheet, on my abdomen. My mind is hazy; it's too much effort to move my limbs, to start thinking, to take offense that he's laughing at the goofy expression on my face. If I tried, I couldn't object to the way he covers me with the comforter, slides into bed beside me and tugs me into his arms, so I don't. I just snuggle into his embrace and lift my face to receive the sweetest kisses I've ever been given. Gibbs drops kisses onto my upturned mouth until my eyes slide shut, then he drops kisses onto my eyelids, my nose, my cheeks.

It is the kiss to my forehead which chases me down into sleep.

When I wake, evening light is sliding into the room. Gibbs kisses me for an eternity, as though the sleep that interrupted us was only a moment's lapse in concentration. He kisses me until he stops, and his stopping is only to lead me back into the bathroom to use the toilet and wash up so that he can feed me dinner.

It's pizza, which he feeds to me bite by bite, sitting with me on the couch. He gets my favorite: pepperoni with sausage and extra cheese. Not the most romantic finger food in the world, but after tonight, I'm pretty sure it'll be my all-time favorite meal until the day I die.

There's no beer; Gibbs tops up his coffee level and the glass he gives me contains honest-to-goodness milk. Fresh, at that. I'd ask when he found time to shop for groceries, but somehow I'm not surprised. I note in passing the urge to chatter, but it never comes close to driving words to my lips. Gibbs is here with me. He's here touching me, his knee against mine, his thumb wiping sauce from the corner of my mouth.

I'm so caught up in simply being here with Gibbs that I don't even realize I'm still naked until we've finished eating and I'm brushing my teeth. It's only the gleam of the gold against my skin that draws my attention to the fact that I can see skin, that I'm not wearing a t-shirt. When I look down, I note I'm not wearing sweats or shorts or socks or shoes. It should bother me, but when I look up again, I see my collar and understand that I'm wearing all I need to.

It's early to be going to bed, but I'm worn out. I can't stop the yawn that threatens from becoming an actuality. Gibbs laughs and pulls me to him with a hand at the nape of my neck - the hand that magically makes the rest of the world fade out, that makes Gibbs the center of my universe - and kisses me again. He settles me in his bed, which, equally magically, has sprouted clean sheets and wraps me around him so that I can sleep.

I love subspace.

Instead of spending Sunday kicking myself over splitting up the team, in wondering if maybe Gibbs shouldn't have chosen to bring Ziva back instead, in struggling to wash and dress myself with a broken arm and drinking too much beer and eating takeout in front of the tv, I spend it eating and sleeping and catching up on a lifetime of touch deprivation, in skin contact and in constant, casual affection. Gibbs washes me and bathes me and feeds me, makes me nap, wakes me up, kisses me, handles me, fucks me, until by the time Sunday night rolls around, I feel more rested than if I'd taken a week off.

He brings me up a little, makes sure I don't need to take anything for my arm. He sets out a suit for
me to wear in the morning, checks my backpack has everything I need in it. Gibbs doesn't bring me far enough up that I can't sleep, though, so Monday morning, despite coming far too early, at least sees me having slept well and deeply, something I'll be grateful for later, I'm sure.

Gibbs wakes me up with a morning-breath kiss and a hand on my dick. When I'm hard and moaning, he pulls back with a wicked grin.

'Gotta earn it, Tony.'

With a whine and a pout, I flutter my eyelashes at him, then when he laughs I shimmy my way down the bed until I can take him in my mouth. I'd make more of a performance of it, but I only have one arm in full working order, I'm not sure how much time we have before we have to leave the house, and somewhere past my hard-on, I have to take a leak. Fortunately, it's not long before Gibbs grunts and comes in my mouth. He pulls out in time for the last couple of spurts to hit my chin, my neck. It's gross, but it's insanely hot at the same time and I'm desperate to come.

Gibbs earns that second 'b' all over again: he flips back the covers and heads straight into the bathroom. I trail after him, my dick bobbing stupidly with every step. He holds out until we're in the shower, then he shakes his head, pins me to the wall, kisses me hard and twists one soapy hand up and down my wet dick. It doesn't take any more than that: I come with a shout of surprise, which makes Gibbs laugh all over again.

We're still clean and dressed and out the door before seven.

The drive in to the Yard doesn't take too long. We stop off on the way for coffee and pastries and we're arguing good-naturedly about some trivial item on the radio news when we clear security and step onto the elevator. Like the pro he is, Gibbs has me distracted right up until we hit the bullpen. We ditch guns and badges and turn on our PCs. I avoid looking at Ziva's desk; McGee isn't in yet. Gibbs places a quick call, then jerks his head at the stairs.

'Come on, Tony. With me.'

'On your six, boss,' falls automatically from my lips as I stand and grab my coffee. Together we head up to the mezzanine level where MTAC and the director's office are located. I really hope we're going to MTAC, but I'm out of luck. We're not.

'What can I do for you, Jethro?' Vance asks. 'I haven't finished going through your reports yet.'

Gibbs shakes his head. 'It isn't that, Leon. It's personal.'

'So what's DiNozzo doing here?' Vance frowns, confused.

I step around Gibbs and loosen my tie, flick open the top button of my shirt and the overhead fluorescent light catches the metal. Vance's eyebrows shoot up and his mouth forms a perfect Oh! of surprise. It's funny, but it's also my career on the line.

It takes him a second, but Vance recovers admirably fast. 'What exactly are you trying to tell me, gentlemen?'

Gibbs places a proprietary hand on my shoulder. 'Tony's mine.'

Vance sighs. 'Nothing's ever easy with you two, is it? Okay, I'll have Cynthia sort out the proper forms for you later this morning. And I need a word with DiNozzo. In private.'

The hand on my shoulder tightens and for a moment I think Gibbs will refuse. Then he lets go and
steps back. 'I know you do, that's why we came straight up here. You know me better than that.'

Vance nods. 'Maybe so. I'll send him on down in a minute.' He waits until Gibbs has closed the door behind us before he gestures to my collar. 'Did Gibbs pressure you into that?'

I gape at him before my sense of outrage catches up. 'What? No!'

'You're a beta, Tony, not a sub. Gibbs is your boss and he's a pretty damn intimidating alpha at times. I need to know you weren't coerced.' His eyes narrow. 'Or is this an attempt to get out of a punishment you think is coming your way after the events of last week?'

I shake my head, anger chasing away the last of the weekend's subspace high. 'I have never hidden from a punishment, even when I shouldn't have been given one. I did my job last week and Rivkin tried to kill me for it. If self defense is enough to get me punished, maybe I'm in the wrong job. Or have the Israelis been pushing for it? Because I got the distinct impression they were dropping it after what Director David let slip.'

Vance sighs again. 'No, as far as I'm aware, you're in the clear. Which brings us right back to coercion.'

I put on my most convincing smile. 'Director, I'm hardly the first guy to find out they go both ways.'

'Uh huh.'

I can tell he isn't impressed. I drop the smile. 'What can I say that will let you believe I want this?'

'Tell me why now, why it's last weekend Gibbs collared you,' Vance says. 'You've worked together for years. What made last weekend so different?' He's watching me, assessing, seeing all the cracks in my façade.

I sit down, do up my button, fumble my tie back into place. 'I got tired of hiding who I really am,' I say quietly. The words displace the hundred others I have prepared to dance around the truth. 'I'm a sub. I'm his sub. I always was, in my heart.' I take a deep breath. 'He asked if he could keep me and I said yes.'

Vance looks at me and I can feel the weight of his judgment shifting all he knows of me into a new configuration. After a pause, he leans back in his chair and says, 'Okay. But I'm listing you as a switch, otherwise there'll be repercussions I can't control.'

'I understand.' And I do. I went into law enforcement before it was legal for subs to do so. Without my father's insistence on beta status, I'd never have had the chance to get this far, to work here. If I come out as a sub, it'll take people about five seconds flat to figure it out.

'If you need to talk about any of this...' Vance trails off. 'You're on desk duty til that arm heals,'

'Thanks.' I stand, but Vance puts out a hand.

'Last week... You did a good job, DiNozzo,' he says.

I'm back to staring at him. I doubt he'd have said anything like that before this morning's revelations. He's treating me like a sub. This is going to take some getting used to.

I nod and leave, take my cooling coffee back down to the bullpen, where Gibbs has left a raisin danish on my desk. I log on and the next half an hour is spent checking my email. When McGee arrives, hard on the heels of eight am, I'm moving on to paperwork. There's always more paperwork.
'Morning, McGee,' I say cheerfully. He doesn't look anywhere near as happy, or maybe it's the surprise at seeing Gibbs and me at our desks already, working away.

'Did we get a case?' McGee shrugs off his jacket and turns on his computer.

'Nope,' Gibbs says without looking up. 'Take twenty, then I want you both on cold cases unless something comes in.'

It occurs to me that we haven't talked about how we're going to handle this. Are we telling the team? Or are we going to try keeping this quiet? That might work; my collar is discreet and currently it's hidden underneath my shirt and tie. No, it'd only work until the first time we go down to the gym to spar, which, given my arm, will be a little longer than it usually would. Then there's Ducky; he's going to want to check on my arm, on my bruises. And how could I possibly keep something like this from Abby? I ignore the little voice at the back of my head that says I've been keeping something like this from her since I started working here.

A hand cuffs the back of my head lightly. It's enough to jerk me out of my worry. 'Thanks, boss,' I say gratefully, looking up.

A corner of Gibbs' mouth twitches. 'It's not yours to worry about, not any more,' he says softly. That would normally set me off worrying twice as hard, but instead I know he's right. Telling the team, keeping it quiet a little longer - it's his decision, not mine.

'Gotcha,' I grin. His hand brushes my hair and my stomach settles. He drops a couple of cold case files on my desk and I lose myself in crime scenes and witness statements, trace evidence and financial trails until I look up to see McGee standing in front of my desk. Gibbs isn't at his desk.

'Are you okay?' He's looking at me oddly.

I blink. 'Why wouldn't I be?'

'Because it's almost eleven and you've hardly said a word all morning,' McGee says.

'Really? Must be time for a break.' I stretch my good arm, roll my neck to get the kinks out of it. 'Be back in five,' I say, standing.

'Is that a hickey?'

'Don't sound so surprised, McVirgin. Not all of us spend our time off pretending to be elf lords.' I head off to the men's room with McGee trailing behind me.

'Yeah, well some of us don't see getting laid as the answer to everything.'

I move up to the row of urinals and unzip, hearing the door to the restroom swing shut.

'How can you do it?' McGee's voice is full of frustration.

'What, take a leak? It's easy. If you're having problems, try thinking of running water,' I advise, giving my dick a shake and tucking it away.

'Just go out and pick up some loose-necked sub for the weekend like nothing happened, like Ziva isn't gone. Like it isn't your fault.' McGee is standing by the door, fists clenched.

I wash my hands. 'It wasn't my fault, Probie. In case you forgot, Rivkin tried to kill me and Ziva chose to stay behind. And what I get up to in my own time is none of your business.' I stride past
him, slamming the door open with an outstretched hand. Unfortunately, it's the hand on the end of my broken arm and pain lances up my arm, whiting out my vision for a split second.

'Son of a bitch!' I snarl, cradling my arm to my chest. I change my mind about getting coffee from the breakroom, instead going back to the bullpen just long enough to grab my badge and gun. Scowling, I hit the button for the elevator. When the doors open, Gibbs is inside.

'Going somewhere, DiNozzo?' he asks calmly, but his eyes flick over me, missing nothing.

'Coffee run,' I say tersely.

Gibbs lifts the cardboard drinks carrier he's holding. Four coffees, one tea and one Caf-Pow! are fitted into the slots. 'Try again.' The doors start to close, but his other hand shoots out and stops them.

I step into the elevator and Gibbs lets the doors close behind me. He pushes the button for Abby's lab, then hits the emergency switch once we're between floors.

'I jolted my arm.'

'And that's what's got you so pissed?' Gibbs watches me steadily.

'It didn't help,' I mutter, looking down.

'That's what I thought.' He waits for me to speak and normally I'd spin him a line equal parts bullshit and distraction, but it doesn't feel right to that any more, so I keep quiet. 'Tony, look at me.'

Reluctantly, I raise my eyes to meet the clear blue of Gibbs'. 'McGee blames me for Ziva leaving. He's pissed and he thinks I'm a, a heartless manwhore.' I tug my shirt to one side and the top of the hickey shows.

'You complaining about my handiwork?' Gibbs growls. I sigh, but I can feel my bad mood lifting a little and when he says, 'Come here,' and hands me the drinks carrier, I take it and move into his space. He loosens my tie and unfastens the top couple of buttons on my shirt. Pushing it aside, he bends his head and kisses my neck. Then he licks me, bites down gently and starts to suck.

'Oh, shit!' My knees turn to jelly and I have to clench my hand around the carrier's handle so I don't drop it. It's as though there's a current flowing from Gibbs' teeth directly to my dick, which leaps to attention. My head buzzes and I barely notice when Gibbs lifts his head to admire his work.

'Leave McGee to me,' Gibbs says, stroking the back of my neck. He flips the emergency switch again and the elevator lurches into motion. 'Better?' He fishes in his pocket and reaches up to my neck. When he takes his hand away, the black leather leash is clipped to my collar and for a moment I forget to breathe.

The buzzing in my head subsides a little as the elevator stops. 'Am I going to turn into a zombie every time you do that?' I ask, wishing my hard-on would subside as quickly.

'It isn't brains I want you eating,' Gibbs says with a little grin. It doesn't help at all. He takes the drinks from me and leads the way into Abby's lab, slapping off her music in passing.

'Gibbs!' Abby whirls, beaming. She launches herself at him, arms outstretched, then her eyes widen and she backpedals, catching herself on the edge of her worktop. 'Oh my god!' One hand covers her mouth as she takes in my position at Gibbs' shoulder and the leash that loops from his hand to my throat.
'Tony?' Her voice is little more than a whisper, high and breathy.

'Hey, Abs,' I give her my most reassuring smile and wiggle my fingers at her. 'Guess what I did on my weekend off?'

Abby is the one person who's ever come close to pegging me as a sub. She's an omega, a switch, a wonderful, quirky, big-hearted, brilliant woman who refuses to fit into any roles other than her own. She's never come out and asked me, but she's so used to following the evidence, no matter how tenuous, that I know she's picked up on all the times my behavior's been more sub than beta.

'Would you get the others in here, Abby?' Gibbs asks softly. 'I don't want to have to go over this again.'

Abby nods, still wide-eyed and picks up the phone. 'McGee! Get your butt down here!' She redials. 'Jimmy? Gibbs needs you and Ducky in my lab, stat.' She puts the phone down and holds out her hand.

Gibbs sets the drinks carrier on her worktop, gives her the Caf-Pow!, then hands me a coffee before taking one for himself. I move a step closer to Gibbs, so that I'm half hidden behind him and the lead isn't quite so obvious. Less than a minute of uncomfortable, awkward silence later, McGee appeared in the doorway.

'So what's up?' McGee asked, but before anyone can say anything, Jimmy and Ducky walk in.

Gibbs nods towards the carrier and with more than a little surprise, the three take the remaining drinks.

'Will you tell us why we're here, or are we to guess, Jethro?' Ducky asks. He takes a sip of his Earl Grey tea. 'Thank you, although I fear tea never tastes quite as good from cardboard.'

I step out from behind Gibbs' shoulder. With my tie loose and the neck of my shirt wide open, my collar - and hickey - are plain to see. The nametag and the leash make my ownership plain.

There's a moment where everyone freezes, staring at my throat. Ducky is the first to recover. A gentleman to the last, he says, 'May I be the first to offer my most sincere congratulations.' He has a smile and a handshake for Gibbs, although the look in his eye promises a serious talk later, for both of us.

'This is some kind of a joke, right?' is what bursts from McGee.

'Tony's my sub,' Gibbs says firmly. 'If you have a problem with that, I suggest you speak up now.'

'But he's a beta!' Tim protests. 'He isn't a sub! I'm a sub, I should know.'

'Actually, I'm a switch,' I say. The lie doesn't come as easily as saying I'm a beta, but I know it'll get easier with practice.

'And you're only just figuring it out now?' It's Jimmy, the autopsy gremlin. He's been Ducky's sub for a while now, becoming a more confident member of the team under Ducky's experienced hand. With a little friendly hands-off help from yours truly, of course.

'I'm not the first guy to figure it out by meeting the right dom,' I say.

'So why not sooner?' Tim asks, bewildered. 'If all it takes is the right dom, why not years ago?'
Gibbs wraps the leash more tightly around his hand. 'When we first met, I was going through a nasty divorce. It's taken this long to see what's been right in front of me all this time.'

'Why didn't you tell us you were seeing each other?' Abby asks plaintively, upset at being excluded from such an important part of her family's lives.

'Because up until last weekend, we weren't,' Gibbs says with more patience than he'd show for anyone else.

'So, what, you kick Ziva off the team and just happen to hook up with Tony, who decides he's really a switch after all, then you decide to collar him, all in the space of one weekend?' Tim asks, incredulous. Anger makes his voice high and tight. 'One of the most closed-off alphas and an overgrown frat-boy, playboy jock of a beta? No, I don't buy it.'

I wince. Tim knows me better than that, I know he does, but in the face of his anger, everything else is irrelevant.

'Are you questioning Tony's submission to me?' Gibbs asks, his voice dangerously soft. 'I'm giving you a pass for now, Tim, but you might want to reconsider your attitude if you want to stay on this team. Now listen up, because I'm not saying this again. After everything Ziva and Mossad put Tony through last week, he needed me and I'm damn grateful he let me be there for him. He's mine and I don't plan on ever letting him go. If you can't handle that, if you can't treat Tony with the respect he's more than earned, then you need to take some time off and figure out where you want to be.'

Tim blanches and takes a step back. The whir of computers and machines is loud in the heavy silence, until Abby speaks up once more.

'Gibbs? What happened with Ziva? Is she coming back?'

Gibbs shrugs. 'I don't know, Abby. I'm putting her on indefinite leave until I hear otherwise. She's angry, confused. Grieving. She has a lot to work through.' Wisely, he avoids all mention of her ultimatum.

'The poor girl,' Ducky murmurs with the depth of compassion that sets him apart from the rest of us. 'She must be in such pain. I hope she can find what she needs to help her heal in Israel.'

I very much doubt it, given her father's confession. I don't see how she can find anything except more deception and lies, but like Ducky, I can hope.

'Is Tony all right?' Abby asks. 'And does this mean I don't get to hug him any more?'

'Tony's okay. On desk duty with his arm, but as long as you're careful with that, yes, you can still hug him. If he wants.'

'Cool!' Abby puts down her ridiculously large drink and comes over to me. As carefully as she knows how, she wraps her arms around me and enfolds me in one of her Ab-tastic specials. I hug her back and Gibbs kisses her temple. I'm in for a million and one questions later, but for now, Abby's on our side. I hadn't realized until she gave it just how much her approval means to me.

'This isn't another undercover op?' Tim's still desperately searching for some other explanation.

'McGee!' Gibbs says, exasperated.

'I don't get it. Tony's a beta, he's always been a beta. And you... And he's not even a redhead!'
It comes out in far more of a little brother whine than I'd imagine McGee's happy with, but it's the last of his resistance. He'll let Abby take him out for drinks and he'll stutter out the rest of his confusion and in the morning, Gibbs and me still might not make sense, but he'll have found a level of acceptance that lets him keep on working with us. I know it, Gibbs knows it and Abby knows it. She kisses my cheek, leaving a beautiful red cupid's bow, then she detaches herself from me and goes over to McGee.

'Anyone else? No? Then I suggest we all get back to work,' Gibbs says.

'I'd like to see Anthony down in Autopsy at some point today,' Ducky says. 'I want to check his arm, make sure it's healing properly.'

'He banged it earlier. You can look at him now if you've got ten minutes.'

I scowl at Gibbs, but my scowl fades when he kisses my other cheek and unclips the leash, letting me go with a pat on my ass. I ignore Abby's barely-suppressed squeak of delight and follow Ducky and Jimmy out of the lab, but I hear her asking McGee for help with something and I know she's going to start the process of getting his head screwed back on straight.

We make it down to autopsy without bumping into anyone else and Jimmy retrieves a clean sheet to cover one of the cold metal tables.

'Thanks, Jimmy.' I sit on the table and swing my legs, waiting for Ducky.

Jimmy hovers awkwardly in the doorway. 'Congratulations, Tony,' he says. 'I think you'll be good together.'

'Thanks,' I say again, this time with a lump in my throat.

'I'll, uh, just keep an eye on the door for you,' Jimmy says and escapes into the corridor. I know he won't let anyone in until Ducky's finished and I've got my shirt back on.

I take off my tie and unbutton my shirt, finishing just as Ducky comes out of his office carrying his medical bag. He shakes his head at the bruises that are colorful shades of black and purple across my front and back. The hickey he ignores. He checks my ribs, listens to my lungs, takes an x-ray of my arm to make sure I've done no damage since it was set.

When he's done, he steps back and looks at me. 'Anthony, as your physician, I need to ask you a few questions.'

'He didn't coerce me into this,' I say, unaccountably disappointed in the ME. 'He didn't pressure me in any way.'

'It hadn't crossed my mind that he had,' Ducky says. 'No, I'm afraid it's more... intimate than that. How accustomed are you to the pleasures of intercourse with another man?'

I shrug, pulling my shirt back on. 'I've tried it before, but only a couple of times. I prefer women.'

'To top, yes? So you've never bottomed before?'

I envy Ducky his ability to talk about such things without even a hint of embarrassment. 'No.'

'In that case, I need to examine you, just as a precaution. I don't imagine Jethro would do anything to hurt you, but I'd rather make sure. It's easy to get carried away in the heat of the moment.'
'I'm fine!' I protest, but Ducky is already stripping off his gloves and crossing to the phone on the wall.

'Jethro, I'd like your permission to give Anthony a little more thorough examination... Yes, I do trust you, but he's my patient and I would be remiss- ... Thank you.' The ME hangs up and turns back to me with a smile I've learned to distrust. 'You'll have to undress. Would you like a gown? I think I have a couple somewhere.'

'No, it's fine.' I shed my pants, my shorts and lie on my side with my legs pulled up into a curl, thankful for the sheet Jimmy spread over the cold metal table. 'It's hardly the first time you've seen my ass.'

'Yes, well, this is a little different.' Ducky pulls on another pair of gloves, squeezes a decent sized dollop of medical lube onto one finger and sticks it up my ass. I concentrate on breathing deeply and evenly until Ducky's finished feeling me up.

'Everything appears to be all right,' Ducky says, handing me a fistful of tissues so I can wipe myself off. 'Are you sore?'

'Nothing I can't handle.' I finish cleaning up and set about redressing myself.

'Here.' He hands me a tube of analgesic cream. 'If it gets too uncomfortable, use this. And if you notice blood, especially if it's more than a trace amount, call me.'

'Yeah, okay.' I'm looking down as I fasten the buttons on my shirt, but I can tell Ducky doesn't believe me. It's probably because I don't believe me either.

'Do I have to tell you what can happen if tears are left untreated? Must I explain sepsis? Anal fissures? Leakage?'

'No, no, I'll tell you, I promise!' I say hastily. 'You don't need to go into detail.'

'Good,' Ducky says, then with a warmer tone, he launches into the start of another tale. 'You know, this reminds me of someone I used to know. He was a beta, practically monosexual for women, like yourself. He was a cardiologist of some repute, at a teaching hospital in Pennsylvania. The hospital got its annual intake of interns and a couple ended up on his rotation. Within the week, he had allowed one of them to collar him. It was quite a scandal at the time; the intern was nearly ten years his junior and the cardiologist had shown no interest in men nor in submission prior to meeting this young dom.'

'What happened?' I ask, tying my shoelaces.

'As far as I'm aware, the intern had to finish out his cardiology rotation with another cardiologist, but was allowed to continue on at the teaching hospital. He's now a nephrologist at that same hospital, if memory serves.'

'What happened to the cardiologist?'

'He's still saving lives. They're very happy together, or at least they were last time I had occasion to speak with him.'

'Does he regret it?' I can't put my tie on by myself, so I roll it up and stuff it in my pocket.

'Not at all. In fact, he says he feels liberated, that finding his submission has given him a freedom he would never otherwise have found.' Ducky pats me on the shoulder. 'I'm very happy for you both. I
hope you find what you need in each other.'

'Thanks, Ducky. I'd better get up there before Gibbs comes looking for me,' I say and head out into the corridor, where Jimmy flashes me a smile and we bump fists. 'You'll have to come over one evening, see if you can beat me on the Xbox.'

'Sure, if it's okay with Gibbs,' Jimmy says. 'Are you moving in with him?'

'I-' There's a moment where my perspective shifts. Of course I'll have to clear things with Gibbs, even something as simple as having a beer and watching a movie. I gave myself to Gibbs: that means I'm his. It's up to him to decide where I live, what happens with my career, everything. Anything less, and my submission would be worthless.

I take a deep breath. 'It's up to Gibbs,' I say. 'Gotta go before he misses me.' Standing in the elevator, I concentrate on breathing rather than panicking. There's a lot we haven't talked about, but in a very real sense, it doesn't matter: it's too late to back out now.

By the time I reach the bullpen, I'm feeling well and truly off balance. It doesn't help that the minute I step off the elevator, it feels as though all eyes are on me. I know Tim and Abby won't have talked to anyone and Jimmy and Ducky haven't had time. Gibbs certainly won't have stood up on his desk and announced he's taken me as his sub. But it's as if the moment something hinky happens, it aerosolizes and gets distributed around the building by the central air, until everyone knows something's up.

With only the top button of my shirt undone, you can see a glimpse of my collar. I know; I checked my reflection in the back of the elevator doors. And the collar itself could be a necklace; a nice, masculine chain. I'm not one for wearing jewelry, not beyond my watch, but I could have had a change of heart. I could.

I hear conversations start up behind me on my short walk to my desk. Everyone knows. Everyone's talking about it. They're going to hate me for hiding who I am. They're-

'Ow!' I rub the back of my head. 'What was that for?'

'Focus, DiNozzo,' Gibbs growls.

I realize my whirling thoughts have settled themselves. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of me: Gibbs has the only opinion that counts.

'Yes, boss. Thank you, boss,' I say happily.

'Nice hickey,' Gibbs grins. He goes back to his desk, leaving me trying to see my reflection in the tiny screen of my mobile phone until Tim takes pity on me. He comes over to borrow my stapler and takes a surreptitious photo with his phone. A minute later, it pops up in an email.

I'm going to kill Gibbs. It looks as though someone's mauled my throat. I can see the top of the first lovebite peeking out from my shirt, but above that, there's a fresh purple mark the size and shape of Gibbs' mouth. There's no possible way of hiding it, short of putting on a turtleneck. No wonder people are staring at me. I look at the rest of the photo: my collar isn't obvious at all. I still look a little tired, but there's something different about my eyes...

I send a quick thanks to McGee, then an IRQ window pops up. It's Gibbs. Send me a copy. I reply On it! and forward the email. He can sense my untyped Why? because another message appears: Told you I like looking at my handiwork.

It's going to be a long day.
Gibbs takes me to lunch to get me out of the building and make sure I eat. There's a little place in walking distance of the Yard that does good sandwiches and coffee. It's popular, but the wait isn't usually more than five minutes. We sit at a corner table and place our order. The waitress is a sub I've been flirting with for the past couple of years.

'Hey, Andrea,' I smile. It's easy and familiar. 'What's good today? Besides yourself.'

She smiles back. 'The ham on rye's going down well. I haven't seen you in here for a while. Everything okay?'

'Just busy,' I say. 'Did the dom of your dreams sneak in here while I wasn't looking?'

'Only nightmares, hon. You set too high a standard; they know they can't live up to it. You want mustard with that?' She replies without missing a beat.

'Why not? Live dangerously, that's my motto,' I grin.

'Make that two,' Gibbs says curtly. 'And a large black coffee, as strong as you can make it.'

'Sure thing. Be right with you.' Andrea hurries away and I watch her hips sway as she slides between tables.

A hand grips my chin and turns my head to face a scowling Gibbs. 'What the hell was that?' He sounds about as happy as he looks.

'What, Andrea? I was just trying to brighten up her day, that's all. It gets pretty busy and some of the people who come in here can be rude,' I explain. 'We've never dated, if that's what you're asking. Could you let go now, please? I'd like to keep my bottom jaw, makes it easier to eat, you know?' I try to smile at him, but his fingers are digging in, which doesn't help with the whole talking thing either.

'Come here,' Gibbs says, sliding his hand down my throat.

I shiver. 'Where?' My voice comes out oddly husky.

Gibbs shifts sideways and I slide my chair round to his side of the table. He leashes me, pulls my head to his shoulder so that my forehead rests against the curve of his neck. The hand holding the leash rests on the table; the other cups the back of my neck, not stroking, just holding me gently, firmly in place. I inhale and all I can smell is Gibbs, coffee and sawdust and clean, warm skin. I breathe out, breathe in again and my eyes drift shut. That floating feeling starts up again and when Andrea comes back, her startled, 'Oh!' barely registers.

Gibbs sips his coffee; I can feel the muscles of his throat work every time he swallows. I float until his hand moves off my neck and he nudges my chin with a knuckle. 'Time to eat,' he says and I sigh.

Lifting my head is harder than it should be. It feels heavy, but at the same time it's so light it's in danger of floating away. Gibbs eyes me with amused affection. 'Eat,' he repeats and I look down to find a sandwich on the table in front of me. I blink stupidly at it and Gibbs lifts a half and holds it to my mouth. It sets the pattern for the rest of the meal. Every time he holds up my sandwich, I take a bite. Then he takes a bite and we chew and swallow and he holds the sandwich up again.

'How the hell did you never find your subspace?' Gibbs asks once he's brushed the crumbs away from the corners of my mouth with his thumb. 'You go down so fast.'

It's good that's a rhetorical question; I wouldn't know how to answer it even if I weren't pretty much
incapable of speech right now. It's Gibbs, that's the whole of it.

He pays and we leave. Gibbs keeps me close to him, keeps me leashed.

'It's a good job we don't have a case right now,' he says as we head back into the building. 'I'll have to bear that in mind.' He unclips me as we pass through security, ushers me into the elevator and kisses me until the doors open on the bullpen. Dazed, I follow him to our desks.

'You up enough to go back to work?' Gibbs asks. 'Or do you want me to keep you down for a while longer.'

I find my voice. 'I, uh...' I blink. 'I can work.'

'Okay. Get to it, then, Tony.' Gibbs waits until I'm seated behind my desk, until I've turned my attention, such as it is, to the cold case file in front of me, before he sits down at his own desk and gets back to work.

An hour later, I realize the bullpen's awfully busy for a Monday afternoon. From the corner of my eye, I monitor the people walking past. Yup, definitely busier than usual and everyone managing to walk as close to my desk as possible. I look up in time to see Gibbs deliver a glare to one of the other agents who looks as though they're about to say something to me.

'What's going on?' I ask, then like the proverbial light coming on, the answer pops into my mind. 'Security saw the leash.'

'You think?' Gibbs gives me a hard look for stating the obvious. 'You went down at the coffee shop.'

'So now the entire Navy Yard knows.' I bang my head off my keyboard, ignoring the beep from my PC.

'Got a problem with that?' Gibbs asks. He sounds genuinely curious about my answer.

'Nope, not at all. Why would I have a problem with everyone in the agency stopping by my desk to catch a glimpse of my collar?' I'm surprised to find I mean it. Well, the first part, at any rate. 'I have exactly no problems with being your collared sub, boss.'

Gibbs eyes me speculatively, then comes to a decision. 'You still got a change of clothes in the filing cabinet?'

'Yeah, unless someone took it while we were out.'

'T-shirt and sweats?'

'Pretty much. And shorts, socks, a sweater. I might have a clean shirt in there somewhere. Why?'

Gibbs smirks. 'Since they're all coming by here to stare anyway, you might as well give them something to stare at. Go change into the t-shirt and sweater.'

I laugh, then swing round to grab my clothes. I hurry to the men's room and strip off my shirt. While I'm carefully taking it off my bad arm, the door opens and McGee comes in.

'Shit, Tony!'

I glance round to see him looking away uncomfortably from the sight of my bruises. He takes up guard on the door so no one else can come in. 'Something you wanted?'
'Just... I didn't exactly react well earlier. I thought Gibbs might not want anyone else getting an
eyeful,' McGee says, manfully covering his embarrassment. 'I didn't realize...'

'What do you think tried to kill me meant?' I ask, my voice sharper than I mean it to be. 'How long
have we worked together, Probie?' I tug the t-shirt over my head, hiding my bruises, then pull on the
soft gray NCIS sweater over the top. My collar shows clearly, but I lift it so the nametag sits on top
of the sweater, so there can be no mistaking whose I am.

'Why didn't you say anything? I'd have come over and given you a hand,' McGee says.

'No, you'd have come round and been angry at me,' I reply. 'And I'd have pissed you off on purpose.'
I wait, because he's clearly steeling himself to ask me something. 'Just spit it out, whatever it is,
before Gibbs comes looking for us both.'

'What's it like being his sub?' Tim asks, the words tumbling over themselves. 'You, you don't have to
answer that.'

But I can tell he really wants to know and not in a prurient way. He genuinely wants to understand.
That's the only reason why I don't make some smartass comment and turn it into a joke.

'It's everything I ever needed and couldn't ask for.'

After a moment, Tim nods. 'I don't get it, I still don't see how you can be a beta last week and an
omega this week, but if you're both happy, I'm happy for you. I'm working on the rest.'

'Can't say fairer than that,' I say, clapping him on the shoulder. 'Come on, before the hordes are
forced to use the restroom downstairs.'

There's a couple of guys hanging around outside looking like they need to take a leak, but when they
catch sight of my collar, their glares vanish.

'Holy shit, Tony! I heard the rumor, but...' Charlie breaks off with a whistle.

'Nice collar, DiNozzo,' Graham adds. 'Should've known only Gibbs could take your crap twenty-
four seven.'

'I never knew you cared,' I say sweetly and breeze past them back into the bullpen.

As I sit down at my desk, Gibbs gives me a once-over and the faintest of nods which tells me he
approves. 'McGee, coffee,' is all he has to say on the matter, though I can tell from the tone of his
voice that he knows, or at least very strongly suspects, why Tim followed me and it's gone some way
towards redeeming the agent in his eyes.

The stream of people coming through the bullpen gets worse as word gets out. It doesn't go
unnoticed: Gibbs looks up to the staircase behind me and I know Vance is watching. Last year, he'd
probably have told everyone to get back to work, but now he's been here longer and he knows if he
lets them get it out of their systems, things should be pretty much back to normal by tomorrow. At
least, that's what I'm hoping. I'm not sure what it'd mean if the director thought this was some kind of
twisted payback for all the years I've clowned around, acted out to get attention.

Maybe it's a bit of both.

For all the foot traffic, no one actually comes up to my desk. No one calls me. No one so much as
emails me about my collar. Well, Cynthia drops papers on my desk and on Gibbs', but that's
expected. I'd be a little freaked out over it, only sitting across from Gibbs, I can see him glaring at
everyone. He's sending out seriously toppy 'hands off' vibes and everyone in the building knows not to cross him when he's in a mood like this.

It's distracting as hell: I'm hard and I've never really been into dominance and ownership power games before now, never had an exhibitionist streak, but if Gibbs wanted to bend me over my desk and take me right now, I'd be naked and begging in seconds. Bastard that he is, Gibbs knows it. There's that evil gleam in his eye that says he knows exactly how I'm reacting to his display and he's not going to do a damn thing to help me out.

I struggle through the paperwork my change of status has generated, pausing only at the change of address. 'Boss?'

'Yeah?'

'My apartment...?'

'Won't need it. We can make time this weekend to haul your stuff on over to mine.' Gibbs doesn't even bother looking up from his own pile of paperwork, which is about twice as thick as mine since he's not only my dom, he's my superior as well. IA and HR are going to love this. And that's it, that's all the discussion we have on the matter. Gibbs knows if I objected, I'd tell him, but I can't see this thing between us working if it's part-time. For this to be what we both need, I have to be Gibbs' all the time, twenty-four seven. I have to know I belong to him. I have to know he won't abandon me, he won't leave me behind again.

As if he hears my thoughts, Gibbs puts down his pen and comes over to stand beside me. Wordlessly, he skims his knuckles over my cheek and tips my head up for a gentle kiss that nonetheless leaves me breathless. Then he taps me lightly on the back of the head and says in a voice that's full of promise, 'Finish up so we can go home.'

'On it, boss,' I answer softly. I know, as I hurry through the last of these damn forms, that we still have a lot to sort out between us, but right now, with Gibbs impatient to take me home and fuck me stupid, I know we've got the important things right. Gibbs will always be my dom, my alpha, my top and I will always be his sub.

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