Like Clockwork
by pikasafire [archived by mtac_archivist]

Summary

Like Clockwork. The same routine. The same emptiness at the close of every case. There was no closure.

Notes

Note from Jessi, the archivist: this story was originally archived at MTAC, an archive of NCIS fanfiction which closed in 2017. To preserve the archive, I began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project after August 2017. I tried to reach out to all creators about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator (and this work is still attached to the archivist account), please contact me using the e-mail address on the MTAC collection profile

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The same routine. The same emptiness at the close of every case. There was no closure. No relief.
He stumbles into his apartment, not bothering to turn the light on, shedding his clothes where he stands, toeing his shoes off and leaving them in a haphazard pile, to be dealt with much later.

He hates the reek of death that sticks to his clothes; permeates his skin. Some of the clothes he’ll soak. Some he’ll burn, as though he could cremate the memories with the fabric, others he’ll toss away like rags.

Sometimes after a particularly hard case, he’ll keep something; A scrap of material to put in his box of memories- Another square of cloth to add to his personal patchwork of life’s horrors.

He walks naked to his kitchen, going immediately to the cupboard he knows hides his solace. He pulls down the first bottle he sees, not bothering with a glass- he knows he’s going to finish it.

A grimace as he takes a healthy swig- the liquor burning down his throat, warming his skin. Some people like to pretend that the bottle makes them forget. Tony tells himself no such lies- it makes him remember. The smell of blood, the victims clouded, unseeing eyes- face contorted into an eternal grimace- capturing the fear and terror of encountering life’s last moments.

He soaks himself in the pain, sprawled naked on his couch, alcohol clutched precariously in one hand. His eyes stare into the darkness. The unfathomable ceiling becomes his beloved silver screen, enrapturing him in memories designed to make him that little more bitter, that little more jaded.

He’ll wallow in guilt, drink himself into a stupor, and if the tears fall, or his stomach recoils- it’s just another slice of pain.

He’ll pass out on that couch, knowing that tomorrow’s another day. He knows he’ll put on that smile; catch another bad guy- another piece of his soul gone; because at the end of every case- someone is dead. Someone is missing their lover, son, husband or daughter. The perpetrator may be caught, but there’s always more out there- sicker people, more gruesome murders. It’s a war they can never win, a futile battle against humanity.

Yet in the morning, he knows he’ll wake up to the sound of footsteps. Hear the coffee machine bubbling happily in the kitchen as sunlight assaults his eyelids. He knows that when he tries to stand, Gibbs will be there to catch his as he stumbles, heedless of his nakedness, of the dried tears on his cheeks, or the smell of stale alcohol on his skin.

He knows he’ll help him to the bathroom, pretending he doesn’t see the evidence of self destruction.
littering the apartment as he pushes him gently under the warm spray, washing him with the care and concern of a lover.

Tony knows this. A dance. A ritual they’re both familiar with. Tony knows that should he break, Gibbs will be there to clutch him close as sobs wreak his body with tremors. He knows that if he should push Gibbs under the spray, plunder his mouth with his own in a desperate act of turmoil, nothing will be said.

It’s a strange comfort. Skin slick and wet, sliding together like silk. Heated mouths on hotter muscle, panted moans and wordless pleading for a release they both need to put their lives back in order.

Gibbs will leave him there, sated and exhausted under the cooling water. Tony knows he’ll be back, already changed, with a towel and his omnipresent coffee, watching as he pulls on his sweats- a metaphysical way of pulling himself back together under the constraint of clothing.

It’s like clockwork, he knows the ritual. Knows that Gibbs won’t leave until he’s sleeping a healing sleep. His missing slice of soul replaced with another sliver of blue and silver- preventing him from shattering, and keeping him whole.

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