Probie: An NCIS Tail
by wintermute

Summary

This is the story of a shaggy pup that wonders into NCIS, makes a mess, and in the process teaches a dysfunctional family about how to live a happy life.

Rating will change in later chapters.

Notes

This is written in response to rose_malmaison’s ‘If a dog was the teacher’ fic challenge :) Originally, I wanted to write a series of drabbles, but I forgot that you shouldn’t feed plot bunnies gremlins after midnight… *facepalm*

Spoilers/Warnings: Everything up to current season just to be safe. Oh, and there is a dog. Yes, a dog. Ratings will go up in later chapters.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

A dog follows Gibbs back to the Navy Yard. Madness ensues.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to silvertales for the speedy beta!

Chapter 1

*Thrive on attention and let people touch you.*

It was bright, sunny and warm; a beautiful spring day in DC. Leroy Jethro Gibbs was in a considerably good mood. It’s almost the weekend. They wrapped up their last case the day before and were in the process of getting caught up on the paperwork. The team hadn’t caught a case yet and they weren’t on call for the weekend. He’s got a truck load of new lumber that he could play with, so life was good – well, sort of, if he succeeded in ignoring that pang of longing whenever he looked across to the desk of one Very Special Agent Tony DiNozzo.

He snapped out of his little reverie when the barista placed the red eye he ordered in front of him. He grunted a muffled thank you and left the shop.

*Get a grip, Marine. Ain’t gonna happen, so stop moping about it.* He tried to tell himself as he strolled out of the patio area, passing by people who sat out just enjoying the nice weather.

It was when he was walking through the parking lot of the Yard that he sensed he was being followed; his Marine spidey-sense was on high alert. He stopped dead in his track, and turned around to scan the perimeter only to find nothing.

Gibbs frowned. He must’ve been more stressed out than he thought he was, because he’s obviously imagining things. Maybe it’d be a good idea to let everyone take an early day, he shrugged as he thought to himself, and resumed his track back to the office.
And then something at his feet nearly tripped him, and caused him to spill half his coffee down his shirt and onto the ground.

“What the…” Gibbs shook his hand to get rid of the wetness, and then looked all over his pockets for a handkerchief he knew he had to wipe himself off. That was when he noticed it.

Yes. It. The reason for him nearly having a close encounter with the asphalt.

At first he couldn’t quite tell what it was. And then it started moving. Underneath the mop of leaves, twigs and fur was a pair of big brown eyes and a big wet nose.

“How the hell did you get in here?” Gibbs frowned – dogs weren’t exactly allowed in the Yard. It looked like a stray, but it was too comfortable around humans to be a stray. The dog simply nuzzled his pant leg and looked at him with its big eyes.

Gibbs nudged the dog out of the way and continued on, but the dog got up and followed him. Gibbs stopped and turned around. “Shoo! Go.” Gibbs hissed and pointed, but the dog just sat down and refused to budge. He stared at the dog, and the dog stared back at him.

Gibbs liked dogs. He still remembered the stray that would always walk him home from school when he was a kid. Jack wouldn’t let him keep it, but he’d always save up scraps of food for the mutt anyway. This is clearly something for animal control to handle, but those eyes…

He ran a hand across his face. This is ridiculous. He’s having a staring contest with a dog.

“Fine,” if it wanted to follow him, then so be it. The dog would probably run off before long. He was sure that security would at least be able to keep it from entering the building.

He strolled into the NCIS building, cleared security and, after checking that the dog didn’t seem to have followed him in, breathed a sigh of relief. That was until he heard a squeal of delight from behind him.

“Gibbs!” it was Abby. “Where did he come from? He is so cute! He followed you back here?”
“Abs, what are you talking…” Gibbs turned around, only to find Abby hugging and playing with the walking bush of leaves and twigs. “Oh for Christ’s sake, who let the dog in!?”

“Uh, no one, Agent Gibbs,” the nervous security guy stuttered out.

“Then how the hell did it get in here?” Gibbs snapped. “Never mind, don’t answer that. Abs, take it back outside!”

“But Gibbs!”

“It’s filthy and it’s dirty, and who knows what kind of disease it’s got?” Gibbs growled. “Take it outside, and leave it there.”

“You mean if he gets cleaned up and checked out he can stay?” Abby completely and, in all likelihood, intentionally misunderstood Gibbs’ orders. “Come on boy, Abby will give you a bath, clean you up, and take you downstairs to get checked out by Jimmy. Then you get to meet my friends. They’ll love you!”

“Abby…”

“No, Gibbs! This poor pup is lost, if not abandoned, and we need to help him!” Abby pouted, and the dog just looked at everyone with those big brown puppy eyes, tail wagging like a metronome.

_Damn_! Gibbs cursed under his breath. He had a hard enough time saying no to Abby’s puppy eyes, let alone two sets of them.

“Fine! But keep it in your lab, don’t let the dog wonder around,” Gibbs finally said, exasperatedly.

“Awesome! Thanks Gibbs!” Abby gave Gibbs a big hug before she led the dog toward the garage.

Gibbs sighed and shook his head as he went for the elevator to head up to the bullpen. He’s going to have to call the shelters to see if they have room.
The rest of the day passed as normally as it could, by NCIS standards anyway. It was as if the bad guys had decided to take a break – no major case came in, so by 1600 everyone was goofing off, waiting to leave.

Gibbs knew something was off as soon as he left the Director’s office after wrapping up the week’s briefing. There was laughter coming from the bullpen. He looked down as he got to the stairs, and found the reason why.

“Hey, Tony, I think he likes you!” Ziva was desperately trying not to laugh, as she sat at the edge of her desk watching the madness in the middle of the bullpen.

“Maybe Tony can take him. I’ve got Jethro at home so another dog is out of the question,” McGee chimed in, his voice wavering with hints of a serious case of the giggles.

“Ooh! Good idea, Timmy!” Abby exclaimed while jumping up and down. “Now he just needs a name.”

“Before you guys get carried away, can you please get the dog off of me?” Tony was pinned solid by the dog, which was licking madly away at Tony’s face and hands.

Gibbs scowled at the presence of the dog, but at the same time he had to try very hard at hiding the smirk that was threatening to creep up his face when he saw Tony being ‘ravished’ by the large dog. He made a loud whistle, and the dog immediately backed off, trotting over to Gibbs and sat down obediently.

“Wow, Boss, that’s impressive. Gotta teach me how to do that one of these days!” Tony said as he got up from the floor, wiping his dribble-covered face at the same time with a tissue he stole from McGee’s desk. “Eww! That is just gross!”

“Aww, Tony, I think you need to take him home. He obviously likes you,” Abby grinned at Tony. “What are we going to name him?”

“No one’s naming anybody,” Gibbs said sternly. “I’m taking it to the pound.”
“You can’t do that! Gibbs! They’ll put him down!” Abby exclaimed, looking horrified.

“Maybe someone’s looking for him?” McGee offered. “Could just be a lost dog.”

“He’s got no collar, and I’ve already scanned him – no chip either,” Abby’s shoulder slumped as she replied.

“Well, I can’t take him. My apartment doesn’t allow pets, especially one this big,” Tony sighed as he said. He didn’t want the dog to end up at the pound either, but he couldn’t take the dog, no matter how bad he felt about it. “Probie, don’t you-”

“WOOF!” the dog made his presence known, and trotted over to Tony, sat down in front of him and looked up.

“Uh…” huh? Tony frowned. “Probie, you know anyone-”

“WOOF!”

“Probie?”

“WOOF! WOOF!” the dog barked happily, circling around Tony’s feet.

There was a very brief moment of silence before Abby, McGee and Ziva began to giggle uncontrollably. Even Gibbs couldn’t help but let out a few chuckles.

“Looks like you got another team member, Gibbs,” Ziva managed to squeal out between fits of laughter.

“Hey! Maybe Gibbs can take Probie!” Abby had a light-bulb moment. “He’s got a yard, and he’s great with dogs!”
“Abby!” Gibbs almost growled. “I don’t have time for a dog.”

“Come on, Gibbs. How can you say no to this face?” Abby hugged ‘Probie’ around his head, and tilted his head to look at Gibbs. “Plus you can always get Tony to help you, right? ‘Probie’ here loves Tony!”

“What!? Abby!” now it’s Tony’s turn to protest.

“Please? Tony? Gibbs? I don’t want to send him to the pound,” Abby almost begged.

“Oh all right, as long as it’s ok with Gibbs. I’ll help,” Tony sighed. He really couldn’t say no. He would’ve taken the dog if his living situation allowed for it.

“Gibbs?”

Gibbs sighed. “The pup can stay. But you’ll do the bulk of the work, DiNozzo.”

“Yay! Thank you guys!” Abby wrapped her arms around her two most favorite guys, and squeezed tight before kissing them both on the cheek.

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*Take naps, and stretch before rising.*

Gibbs ended up sending his agents home early, seeing as they weren’t getting any useful work done at all after he’d allowed the dog to stay. They deserved it after the hellish week they just had anyways. McGee and Ziva left just now, and Tony had volunteered to go give Abby a hand with something before he himself would leave.

The dog – he should really start getting used to calling him Probie now, since it was the only thing he would answer to – was lying on his side beside Tony’s desk, fast asleep.

Gibbs had to admit that Probie was a handsome dog, after the crusted layer of debris and mud was cleaned off his coat. He had a fluffy thick layer of white and grey fur that was just long enough to
cover his eyes most of the time – how he was able to see where he was going was a complete mystery to Gibbs. Abby had proudly proclaimed that, after much discussion and research with Palmer, Probie was a Bearded Collie. Basically the ‘Shaggy Dog’, as Tony put it.

Gibbs wondered what the dog was dreaming about, if dogs dreamt at all. What in the world did he get himself into? But then deep down he knew he didn’t want to say no either way. Probie wasn’t some walking piece of evidence, or an unusual suspect, like their previous encounters with dogs on the job, and, if he was honest with himself, the dog was a playful sweetheart. *Kind of like Tony.* He smiled to himself at that thought.

“Guess I’m stuck with ya buddy,” Gibbs muttered as he walked over to Tony’s desk and knelt down to pat the dog. It was kind of amusing how Probie had taken an instant liking to Tony – Tony didn’t normally fare well with most animals and small children. Probie’s bushy tail began to tap the floor with a steady rhythm like a drumbeat at Gibbs’ touch. He raised his big furry head and bent over to lick Gibbs’ hand before getting up and stretching his large frame on the floor.

“You two seem to be getting along.” Tony’s low tenor sounded behind the man and his dog. Gibbs could hear the smile in his voice. “You need a hand getting Probie here settled?”

‘Should be ok on my own’ was the response he should’ve gave, but his mouth had a mind of its own. So Gibbs replied with a small curl at his lips as he looked up behind him at Tony. “I wouldn’t mind a hand, if you’re offering.”

“All I ask is beer and pizza afterwards,” Tony returned with an easy grin as he moved over to pat the fuzzy head, kneeling down all too close to Gibbs.

“Deal.”

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TBC
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Probie settles into Casa Gibbs.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to silvertales for the speedy beta!

Chapter 2

Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride, and allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.

Gibbs drove back to his place with Probie in tow and Tony following behind. They agreed as they rode the elevator down to the garage that Gibbs should drop off his Challenger first. There wasn’t any point in driving two cars to go pick up the essentials for a dog.

The temperature had warmed up considerably from the morning, and it was now hanging at a balmy 80 degrees. With a case-free weekend ahead, both men were in good enough moods to simply sit back and enjoy the nice weather now that they were off the clock. Tony drove at a leisurely pace, and surprisingly, Gibbs didn’t complain even once about it being too leisure.

This is nice, Tony thought to himself as he stopped at a red, his fingers tapping the steering wheel unconsciously to the music from the stereo. He rolled down both of the front windows to let the fresh air in, and cracked the back just large enough for Probie to stick his head and tongue out.

Gibbs turned to look at Tony, who had started to hum to the music. Gibbs had always known that the younger man had a nice voice – it sounded like liquid silk – but he didn’t know how well Tony could sing. He wondered if Tony had ever taken classes and performed in public. Or in other, more private capacities, his wandering mind thought briefly but he quickly dismissed it.

A light breeze blew through the open window as Tony resumed their course, making him smile, and Gibbs’ breath hitched at the sight. The smile was a relaxed, happy one that he rarely saw at work and had always secretly treasured. He couldn’t help losing himself in the warm, open expression on Tony’s face.
“So, what do we need to get?” the question almost went unheard by Gibbs as he became entranced by Tony’s high spirit.

“What we need?” Gibbs absentmindedly parroted the question.

Tony let out a small chuckle and it was music to Gibbs’ ears. “You know, for the dog? Boss, I know we’ve had a rough week and we’re both tired, but you might want to wait ‘til we get back to your place before you pass out on me. There is no way I’d be able to lug you back into the house on my own.”

“Tony, we’re off the clock. Don’t call me Boss,” Gibbs answered with a smirk. “And no, I wasn’t tired. Just resting my eyes.”

“Hey! That’s my line!” Tony laughed. “Fine, Gibbs…”

“My friends call me Jethro,” Gibbs interrupted him, smirk widened into an easy smile.

Tony seemed to startle slightly at that. “Okay, Jethro, what’s Probie here gonna need? Haven’t exactly had a pet before, so any suggestion is welcome,” Tony took a right to get off the main street, pulling into a mall parking lot. There was a flash of something that looked like a mixture of longing, regret and sadness on his face that quickly disappeared before Gibbs could analyze it. “It’s funny how he took an instant liking to me. That’s never happened to me before.”

That’s because you’re likable. Gibbs had those words at the tip of his tongue, but decided not to risk making the moment awkward. He couldn’t help wondering why Tony would find it surprising that Probie would like him. It both irritated and saddened him.

“Well, I could probably build a kennel myself, but I don’t mind just letting him in the house. I’d say let’s start with the grooming supplies, some food, a collar and leash, and maybe a dog bed for him to sleep in when he’s indoors,” Gibbs replied after giving it a thought. “We’ll have to take him to a proper vet to get checked out. As much as I trust Palmer when it comes to dead bodies, he’s not a fully qualified vet.”

“Well, Abby gave me the number for a friend of hers whose practice is pretty close to your place. Same vet McGee’s got so I assume it’s okay,” Tony said as they walked into the PetSmart with Probie following briskly at their heel. “I called the vet’s office before we left work, and the
receptionist said that they had a cancellation so we can bring him by tomorrow.

“Sounds good,” Gibbs agreed. “Let’s go find a collar and a leash first. Probie might listen to me at the Yard, but you never know if he’s gonna go crazy when he sees another dog.”

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*Eat with gusto and enthusiasm. Stop when you have had enough.*

Neither man were big on shopping, so half an hour later found all three of them back in the car and ready to head home with all of the essentials a dog would need. Probie was sporting a new collar – black with little bats, Abby would be proud – adorned with his tags and registration. He was entirely too excited to be back in a moving vehicle, sticking his head out the window, his long tongue waving in the wind as they drove and his bushy tail wagging like it’s nobody’s business.

“I think I know why he likes you,” Gibbs was watching Probie’s puppy antics and he couldn’t resist teasing Tony. “He must’ve recognized his own kind.”

“You’re comparing me to him? Seriously?” Tony yelped indignantly at Gibbs’ teasing. “Plus, he liked you too! What do you say to that?”

“No, he listens to and obeys me, there’s a difference. Right, Probie?” Gibbs turned in his seat to pat Probie on the head, and the dog barked happily in reply.

“You little traitor! Hey stop that, you’re blocking my view,” Tony smacked Gibbs lightly on the arm before he sobered up and realized what he’d done. “Oh shit! I’m sorry, Boss! I didn’t mean to hit… I mean, I do that with my frat brothers all the time so it’s like a habit…”

“Hey! It’s okay!” Gibbs grabbed hold of Tony’s flailing right arm, calming him down. “What did I say about being off the clock?”

“Uh, don’t call you Boss?”

“And?” Gibbs quirked an eyebrow.

“Good. Now that that’s out of the way, what do you say we go grab that pizza and head back to my place? I’m sure there is a movie or something on that we could watch while we eat,” Gibbs pulled out his cell phone when they stopped at a set of lights. “Pepperoni, sausage and extra cheese?”

“Hey, you remembered,” Tony beamed, batting his eyes like he was Betty Boop. The subsequent head slap was really not unexpected.

Probie perked up at the mention of food, and let out a loud bark as if he wanted in on the whole pizza thing.

“Sorry bud, you can’t have that,” Tony looked at the dog through the rear-view mirror. “Kibbles-only for you.”

Probie slumped down at that, and started whining as he placed his paws on his nose. Tony and Gibbs shared a look, and both started chuckling.

“Ok. Kibbles plus a can, that better?” Gibbs grinned.

“Now you’re just being mean,” Tony laughed out right when Probie whined even louder at Gibbs’ comment.

Gibbs couldn’t remember the last time he was this at ease, simply enjoying spending time with another person. None of his ex-wives had this kind of connections with him. Fornell, well they’d always been strictly business, except for sharing an ex-wife. Ducky came close, but both of them had been through so much in their own lives that it was sometimes hard to ignore the demons that haunted them. With Tony, it just felt so effortless, and it made him regret not befriending the younger man outside of work sooner. It felt like what he’d had with Shannon, and maybe that similarity in their demeanor was what attracted him to the younger man in the first place.

When they got back to Gibbs’ place, Tony set out to get food ready for Probie, while Gibbs put the rest of their purchases away. The dog eagerly devoured the chow, even though Abby had fed the poor pup plenty of kibbles earlier at her lab.

“Whoa, slow down there, Probie,” Tony had to laugh when he walk back to Probie’s food bowl
with a dish of water. “No one’s going to fight you for the food buddy.”

“See I told ya. The two of you are two of a kind. Probie even eats like you,” Gibbs just couldn’t help himself with the teasing as he walked back into the kitchen.

“I do not eat like that!” Tony pouted as he looked up at Gibbs from where he squatted on the floor, looking entirely too adorable for a man his age.

“Right, like the sun doesn’t rise from the east,” Gibbs scoffed light-heartedly as he crouch down to pat Probie, who gave his hand a good lick before going back to attack his mountain of kibbles.

“Okay, fine. But I don’t dribble all over like that.”

“If you do I’d kick you off the dining table,” Gibbs grinned as he got up to wash his hands before getting plates for their pizza. “Come on, leave the dog alone. Grab the beers and go see what’s on the tube.”

“Aye, aye, Capt’n.”

Dinner was an easy affair.

They found the Godfather marathon playing on one of those classic movie channels so they settled down to watch.

“What’s the matter with you?” Tony just couldn’t resist doing the Don Corleone impressions. He literally recited the dialogue of that entire scene, and could probably do it for the whole movie too. Gibbs had to head slap him to make him stop talking so Gibbs could concentrate on the movies - until Tony found another favourite scene or quote that was. The pizza was washed down with a couple of ice-cold beers each, and before long, they were both sprawled out on the couch, too full to move.

“That was some really good pizza,” Tony sighed, patting his own stomach. “What was the place called? Joe’s? I need to go back there again some time.”
“Yeah,” Gibbs smiled as he turned to look at Tony. “Joe’s good people. Used to be a Marine, too. Said he got the recipe from his dad a long time ago, decided to open up a shop after he retired from the Corps.”

“Cool.”

Probie wandered into the living room and began nudging his big head at Tony’s legs before resting it on Tony’s lap. Tony nudged back with his socked feet, scratching Probie’s stomach lightly.

“Think it’s time we take the big guy for a walk,” Gibbs got up to collect the dishes and place them in a pile in the sink. “You coming?”

“I don’t think I have a choice,” Tony chuckled at Probie’s attempt in dragging him by his pant leg after hearing the word ‘walk’. “I could use a walk though. To help with the digestion.”

“Come here, boy,” Gibbs grabbed the leash that he’d left by the door, and hooked it onto Probie’s collar. He waited for Tony to start putting on his jacket before opening the door. Tony shivered slightly as a cool draft blew in the door; the sun was just about to set and it had gotten quite a bit chillier than it was earlier that evening.

“You warm enough?” Gibbs eyed Tony’s outfit with suspicion. With all the traveling they had to do that week, Tony had opted for more casual choices from his wardrobe – a pair of jeans with a long sleeve t-shirt, and a light spring jacket to top it off. It was fine when they were working because they were either indoors or driving, but it didn’t look like it was warm enough for a walk in the brisk evening air.

“It’s a bit chilly, but I should be ok,” Tony answered unconvincingly, and that had Gibbs frowning. Even though the plague had been years ago, getting sick still carried a risk for Tony.

“Here, hold this,” Gibbs passed the leash to Tony and ran upstairs two at a time. He came back down a couple of minutes later with an old USMC hoodie, and handed it to Tony with a shy smile. “Not the best choices fashion-wise, but should keep you toasty.”

“Aww, Boss, didn’t know you cared!” Tony grinned as he shrugged off his jacket and pulled the hoodie on before donning the jacket again. Probie was turning in circles around the two of them happily. “And for your information, I do prefer warmth over fashion. Most of the time.”
Gibbs had to snort at that. “Whatever you say, Valentino,” he reached out a hand to ruffle Tony’s hair jokingly, but ended up reveling in the feel of soft strands through his fingers as he withdrew his hand. He was surprised to find Tony leaning slightly into his touch. Maybe his affection for the younger agent wasn’t as one-way as he thought?

“Alright, let’s go,” Gibbs reopened the door after putting his own jacket on, and held it for the other two.

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TBC
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Tony does some thinking while walking Probie with Gibbs.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to silvertales for the speedy beta!

Chapter 3

Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.

Gibbs took them down his street and onto the main street, towards the Potomac. Probie trotted faithfully alongside the two men, his head held high and tail wagging happily. He would occasionally turn his head to whatever sounds or smells that protruded into his senses, or he’d look up and back at the two men, like he was having the best time ever. It was strangely… harmonious to see Gibbs walking a dog like this, Tony thought. The pair just looked so right together.

The sun had almost set completely, and the western sky glowed a hazy amber. It was starting to get dark, the streetlights coming on one by one. Tony was grateful that Gibbs forced that hoodie on him, because just as they were walking down the main street, the wind started to pick up. The sweater gave him just enough thickness to remain warm without overheating. Gibbs’ thoughtfulness surprised him, and it made him smile.

That and the fact that it was Gibbs’. Tony could catch a whiff of Gibbs’ scent every once in a while from the hoodie, and it made him feel like he was surrounded by Gibbs’ arms in a tight embrace.

It made him feel safe.

Yes, safe. That’s what Gibbs embodied to him – safety, dependability, comfort, trust. He’d always felt more grounded with Gibbs around. Nothing – no one – ever came close to it. That, more than anything, was what drew Tony towards Gibbs. The man was like the ever burning Sun, radiating heat and warmth and reassurance, and his little blip of a planet couldn’t help being pulled into Gibbs’ orbit, circling but never getting closer.
Tony looked up, beyond the rows of houses towards the river. Across that long expanse of water would be the delta where the Navy Yard stood. He thought about all the years he’d worked for the former Marine. They’d been through a lot, the two of them. There was that case that brought Gibbs to Baltimore and into his life, then Kate – his heart ached at the thought of her – and that whole debacle with Ari and Ziva, Gibbs’ amnesia, Jeanne and Jenny’s death... He’d gone afloat, came back, and then stumbled into that other mess of Rivkin, Eli David and almost losing Ziva to some over-cafeinated terrorist. The cases they’d worked on would make most Hollywood movies pale in comparison. No wonder McGee was able to write their lives into a bestseller.

Somehow, even through all of the craziness, the two of them never once lost their faith in each other. In the ten years they’d worked together, they’d always been there for one another, always watched each other’s six. They were partners in the truest sense of the word – of this Tony had no doubt, regardless of what their paystubs said.

God. Ten years! Most people’s marriage wouldn’t even last half that long. Tony wondered if that was something of significance to the older man. He wondered if Gibbs had ever given it some thought – about the history they shared, about the bond between them that sometimes felt thicker than blood. How long would this – could this – last?

He shuddered at the very thought that all of this would one-day end. Gibbs would eventually retire, and he – God only knew where he would end up – would move on, like everyone else. Or they’d die in the line of duty. Either way, he had to consider the very realistic possibility that all this could be gone in the blink of an eye.

Like it almost was five years ago.

His gut clenched at the realization of eventuality.

He couldn’t help wondering if the older man would ever consider something… more? Something beyond the friendship they seemed to, now, share?

“Penny for your thoughts?” Gibbs’ voice penetrated through the foggy thoughts in Tony’s head, bringing him back to the present. The older man smiled faintly, but he had the look of worry in his eyes. “You feeling okay, Tony?”

“Yeah, I’m okay,” Tony cleared his throat. “Why wouldn’t I be?”
“You looked a bit… distant,” Gibbs was frowning. Something was clearly bothering the younger man, and he didn’t like it. He stopped, and felt Tony’s forehead with the back of his free hand. “Feels normal. You sure you’re warm enough?”

“Gibbs – Jethro, I’m fine, honest,” Tony rolled his eyes and resumed walking. “If I don’t look fine it’s because we just had one hell of a week.”

“Yeah, I know,” Gibbs sighed, tilting his head to loosen some of the kinks in his own neck.

They ended up walking to a park by the waterfront. There weren’t too many people around because of the chilly evening, just the occasional jogger and fellow dog-walkers. Gibbs steered them towards the river, where a small trail ran along the shore.

Tony walked over to the edge, leaning his frame over the railing with his forearms resting on top. He liked the view – just a wide expense of water, flowing calmly and majestically. The river must look amazing basking in the rising morning sun. To the north end of the park was a marina, and the National Mall was just beyond the river, past the small airport. Everything felt so calm, so serene, and just being there was enough to make Tony relax completely.

Probie was busy assessing their surroundings, sniffing, listening. Gibbs walked up, leaning over the rail next to Tony, right into his personal space. He waited, patiently, for the younger man to organize his thoughts.

“Back there, when I spaced,” Tony started, eyes focused at a random spot of the ever-flowing river. “I was thinking about us.”

Gibbs nodded, unsure of what Tony meant or whether he should say anything at all.

“Us, the team, NCIS, whatever. It just struck me that this would all end someday. Maybe sooner, maybe later, but it will end.” Tony looked distant again, and Gibbs couldn’t help huddling closer, hoping that his presence would be enough to ground the younger man.

“So much of what we do carries such great risks that it’s a miracle we are still standing here,” Tony’s voice hitched slightly, and Gibbs just knew Tony had thought of Kate. And Paula. And Pacci. Those whom they’d lost to the job. “If not today, then the next week, the next month, the next year… it’s just too easy to lose it all in the blink of an eye.”
Gibbs placed a hand on Tony’s shoulder and gave a comforting squeeze. Tony finally looked at him, his eyes hollow and sad. Gibbs wished he could do something – anything – to soothe the hurt he could feel emanating from the younger man. He wanted to pull him into a tight embrace, to tell him that he’d be there, that he’d never be alone – he’d try, come hell or high water.

“We almost lost you once, Jethro. I almost lost you,” Tony shook his head. “I don’t think I could go through that again.”

“Tony, what are you saying?” Gibbs grabbed hold of Tony’s arm, unaware of the concern that was seeping into his voice. “You wanna quit? Gonna give up?”

“What? No! Jethro-” Tony turned to gawk at Gibbs incredulously. “I’m not quitting. Why would you think that I’d want to quit?”

Because you said you couldn’t go through that again? Gibbs thought to himself. “Then what’re you saying?” Gibbs eased up on his hold, his thumb unconsciously rubbing against the material underneath.

“I just want you to promise me that you’d be careful. It’s not unreasonable for a friend to be concerned for your well-being, is it?” Tony sighed in exasperation, emphasizing the word ‘friend’. “Look, you’re not forty anymore. You’re not even fifty anymore.” Gibbs frowned at the mention of his age. “Every time I see you run headlong into some volatile situation I get scared that this time we’d lose you for good. I know we’d always have each other’s six, but-”

“Tony, you’re more than ready to lead this team if anything were to happen to me. You know that. You’re the best agent I’ve ever worked with, and I’m sure you’d do a great job leading the team.”

“That’s not the point, Jethro,” Tony was happy for the praises, but…

“Then what is?” Gibbs was now staring at Tony with the kind of intensity usually reserved for interrogations.

“The point is that I get worried,” Tony stared right back at Gibbs, unconsciously challenging the older man to rebut. “Because I care about you.”
“Ah hell, Tony,” Gibbs sighed, wrapping his free hand around Tony’s shoulder, hauling the younger man into a one-armed hug.

Tony cares about me. Gibbs reveled in the realization that Tony really did care. Many people had claimed to care about him, but not many actually meant what they said. Does that mean Tony might want something… more? His heart fluttered at the possibility.

“I care about you too, you know?” Gibbs said quietly as he released Tony from his arm, looking intensely into Tony’s eyes. “I worry too.”

They were standing close. Too close. Their breath mingled as they stared into each other’s eyes, seeing their own reflection looking back at them. Green meeting blue, each becoming entranced by the other.

Something – a bird or a squirrel – ran through the grass, and Probie began barking loudly, breaking the spell. The two men sobered at the commotion and looked away from one another. Tony was sure he was blushing like a virgin bride on her wedding day.

“C’mon, it’s getting dark. We should head back.” Gibbs refused to look at the younger man, and instead, tugged Probie’s leash lightly, silencing the dog effectively.

“Yeah,” Tony stretched his arm upwards, stifling a yawn at the same time. He looked at the river once more, and decided one of these days he would come for a run early in the morning just to watch the sunrise.

The trek back was a much more lighthearted affair. The conversation flowed easily between them. Tony complained to Gibbs about OSU Buckeye’s premature defeat at the hands of the UKentucky Wildcats. Gibbs talked about the kennel he was going to build for Probie. Probie was running forward, chasing some invisible thing, then running back to his humans, jumping around them in circles and looking very pleased with himself.

“I wonder how old Probie is,” Tony watched Probie’s playful spirit in amazement as they walked up Gibbs’ front steps. “He’s just so… big, but he acts like a puppy all the time.”

“We’ll find out tomorrow at the vet, I guess,” Gibbs chuckled at Tony’s comment. “Dogs don’t grow up. They get bigger but they’re always going to be puppies at heart.”
“You seemed to know an awful lot about dogs,” Tony held on to Probie’s leash as Gibbs went into the kitchen to grab a rag for wiping down Probie’s dirty paws. He watched as Gibbs released Probie, who walked over to his water bowl, lapped a couple of times then ran across to the living room. He walked towards the dog bed, sniffed it for a second with reservation then circled the thing before finally settling down.

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“Used to work with them in Kuwait,” Gibbs replied from the kitchen. “Sniffer dogs working with the bomb techs clearing IEDs and mines. Got a squad of them stationed where my men were.”

“Cool,” Tony yawned again as he deposited himself into the couch, finally feeling the fatigue from the past week settle in.

“Many of us who’d been on tours owe our lives to those dogs, even now,” Gibbs came back into the living room with two tumblers and a bottle of bourbon. Pouring a finger or so into each glass, he asked. “Drink?”

“Sure,” Tony nodded, accepting a tumbler. It wasn’t too late yet; he could have a quick sip, unwind some more at Casa Gibbs before heading out. It’s Friday after all, with no work the next day so he could sleep in if he wanted to. Probie was resting his big head on top of his front paws, looking in the direction of the couch. “I still find it amazing that Probie would obey your every command just like that.”

“Been wondering about that myself. I’m good with dogs but not that good,” Gibbs plopped himself down next to Tony. “With most dogs, the trick is in the intonation. Get that right and establish yourself as an alpha in their hierarchy then the rest is easy.”

“Well, I thought that only works on the perps and the probies?” Tony chuckled at Gibbs’ description of dog training.

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“Touché,” Tony tossed his head back against the couch, smiling as he sipped the drink in his hand.

They sat there in companionable silence, neither of them felt like talking, until Gibbs felt a weight against his shoulder. He looked down and found the younger man leaning against him, fast asleep. Gibbs thought about waking him, but just couldn’t bring himself to do it. He looked exhausted, and it’s probably not a good idea for him to drive home in this state. So Gibbs carefully removed the
glass from Tony’s hands and placed it on the coffee table before gently shifting out from under Tony as to not disturb him. He then slipped upstairs quietly and grabbed a blanket from the guest room.

Gibbs couldn’t resist carding his fingers through those soft locks again as he tucked the blanket securely around the younger man. Tony gave a quiet moan at the touch, nose rubbing against the blanket near his face, and let out a satisfied sigh.

“Sleep, Tony,” Gibbs whispered as hesitantly placed a kiss on Tony’s hair. “Sweet dreams.”

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TBC
Chapter 4

Sometimes the doctor can be a friend.

He was on the deck of the boat, sitting next to Gibbs. He leaned over and whispered something into Gibbs’ ear. Gibbs quirked an eyebrow, as if challenging him to make good on his promise. He was feeling naughty, so he leaned in again, purposefully rubbing his chest against the older man’s arm, and whispered something else into his ear. It must’ve been something down right dirty, because Gibbs actually blushed after hearing it. This time, he ended with a nip and a lick of Gibbs’ ear, and danced away quickly before a callused hand could grab hold of his ass.

He called out to Gibbs from the bow, taunting him with a wiggle of his butt, but Gibbs was faster this time. Gibbs moved with speed that was inconceivable for a man his age and quickly subdued him, pulling him down into a roll on the deck, then pinned him under.

Gibbs grabbed hold of one of his hands, and began lapping at his palm.

What the…?

He frantically tried to get out from under Gibbs, but then Gibbs began to lick his face. He tried to fight it off by rolling away and-

The sound of something falling was so loud that it woke Gibbs from his sanding trance in the
It had better not be Probie knocking something over. He might like the dog, but if Probie’s going to cause trouble every time his back was turned, there was no way he could keep him.

Gibbs came up the stairs into the living room, only to find nothing disturbed. Instead, what he saw almost had him burst out laughing.

“Ow…” Tony was on the floor between the couch and the coffee table, and still tangled up in the blanket Gibbs had tucked him in with. Probie was happily licking away at one of Tony’s hands.

“What the hell happened, DiNozzo?” Gibbs shooed Probie away and moved in closer to help the younger man up and sitting on the couch, barely suppressing a chuckle. “Ya fell off of the couch?”

“Something like that,” Tony winced as he sat down, his head and backside in pain because of its earlier confrontation with the floor. “Probie was licking me, probably to wake me, and I was dreaming so I got confused and tried to get away…” and it had been such a nice dream too, Tony thought regrettably.

Gibbs didn’t know what to say except for giving Tony a lopsided smile and a pat on the shoulder. “Ya ok now? Didn’t hit anything too hard? That was a pretty loud crack back there,” Gibbs made Tony bow his head so he could thumb around the back of Tony’s head for any thing more serious than a bump. It was probably a bit heartless, but he was secretly enjoying the opportunity to touch Tony and mess with Tony’s hair.

Tony hissed as Gibbs’ fingers touched the area that made contact with the floor. “Lemme grab you something cold,” Gibbs backed off after finding nothing else of concern. He went into the kitchen and returned with a bag of peas wrapped in a tea towel. “Here.”

“Thanks,” Tony grabbed the bag and held it against the back of his head. “Uh, sorry about falling asleep on your couch last night, by the way, Bo- Jethro.”

“Nah, it’s not a problem. Not like you haven’t slept there before,” Gibbs sat down next to Tony. Probie crawled back to the sitting men slowly, as if feeling guilty, and when neither man made a move to chase him away, he settled down beside Tony and rested his big head on Tony’s lap. “It was late, and you were tired. Wouldn’t have been safe letting you drive home anyhow.”
“Thanks, I guess,” Tony looked at the older man and smiled, free hand patting Probie’s softly furred head.

“You’re welcome,” Gibbs’ smile got wider and reached all the way to his eyes, making him look warmer, more approachable. “You know you’re always welcome here, right?”

“Really?” Tony’s eyes lit up at that, and the excited expression on his face spoke of unexpected surprise. “You know, Jethro, you should smile more,” he commented as he leaned in unconsciously to study Gibbs’ smiling face.

“Oh?” Tony was close enough for Gibbs to get a whiff of his scent that was making his mind go places it shouldn’t. “Is that so?”

“Yep,” Tony nodded slightly, his eyes never leaving Gibbs’ blue. “Makes you look less like a second-b.”

“Would be bad for business,” Gibbs almost whispered the words out.

Tony let out a low chuckle. “Do it for me then?”

Do it for me. The words rang loud in Gibbs’ ear and he couldn’t help gazing into the other man’s eyes, searching for any hint of them being a joke and finding none. Tony simply looked back at him with a shy smile playing at the corner of his lips.

Probie’s whines broke the silence; the dog was looking up at Tony with his puppy eyes, clearly wanting something.

“What time is it?” Tony asked, clearing his throat.

“Almost 0900,” Gibbs glanced quickly at his watch. “You hungry? I’m gonna make some breakfast. You can get cleaned up while I’m at it.”

“Sounds good,” Tony got up and stretched, scratching his belly as he went. “Just gotta grab my go-bag from the car.”
“You do that, I’ll get breakfast started,” Gibbs got up as well. “C’mon, Probie.” He called out to the dog on his way to the kitchen.

Tony shivered in the cool spring morning air as he stepped outside, so he made for a quickly run to the car and back. As he stripped himself down to step into the shower, he couldn’t help thinking back to the conversation that had just taken place down stairs.

*Do it for me then. What were you thinking DiNozzo?*

It was all kind of stupid saying things like that, and Tony winced as he remembered the exact words that he’d said to the former marine. He blamed it on the dream he had before he fell off the couch.

*The Bossman didn’t really have any negative response from that, did he?*

*But then that didn’t mean that he was interested, you idiot.*

Tony berated himself as he quickly showered and went through his morning routine. No use thinking about that now. What’s been said had been said. If Gibbs had a problem with it, then…

He sighed, putting on fresh clothes before trotting downstairs.

Gibbs walked into the kitchen with Probie at his heel, a bag of half-thawed peas in his hand. He threw the peas back into the freezer, and went about getting food ready. He got out bacon, a carton of eggs, mushrooms, cheese and a couple of onions. Scrambler and toast sounded like a good idea; a filling, hearty breakfast before going about the day’s business. He put on another pot of coffee after finding the one he made earlier cold, and then started with the slicing and dicing.

While the pan was heating up he put out a few scoops of kibbles for Probie, and watched the pup eat as he gathered his thoughts.

He wasn’t sure what to make of what Tony’d said. *Do it for me then.* Was he reading him correctly? Gibbs was sure he’d saw something when they were looking into each other’s eyes.
He didn’t want to make a move and find out he’d gotten it wrong. He didn’t want to lose Tony because he’d made a mistake.

Gibbs was just about to toss the eggs into the pan when Tony reemerged. Tony slowed to a halt at the entrance to the kitchen, looking decidedly stunned.

“Hey,” he’d never seen Gibbs so… domestic. It was a good look on him, Tony decided. “What’s cooking?”

“Scramblers,” Gibbs gave Tony a small smile, and pointed to the fridge. “Wanna help me make toast? Butter’s in the fridge.”

“Sure, you got coffee?” Tony wasn’t exactly an addict like Gibbs, but a cup in the morning wouldn’t go amiss.

“Fresh pot,” Gibbs nodded. “Sugar’s in the pantry if you need it. Don’t have hazelnut creamer, unfortunately.”

“I’ll be fine with milk,” Tony poured two cups, handing one to Gibbs before finding and adding sugar and milk to his own. He sipped on the hot brew as he waited for the toast to be done.

This is nice, Gibbs smiled to himself as he stirred the eggs. He missed making breakfast for others. He avoided eating at home alone, and it had been a long while since he last made breakfast for someone. He didn’t even make it for Hollis when they were seeing each other. There just wasn’t any reason for him to do that, not since Shannon. But now, with Tony here sitting at his table, it just felt… right. Gibbs found himself wishing that this was how he’d start the day everyday.

Tony brought over the coffee and buttered toast as Gibbs sat down with two plates at the table. Gibbs gave him a quick smile before grabbing a piece of toast and dug in.

“It’s edible, ya know,” Gibbs raised a questioning eyebrow, beckoning Tony, who was sitting with a plate of food in front of him but unmoving.

“Oh, sorry. I spaced,” Tony blinked before picking up his fork and shoving in a mouthful of eggs.
“Oh my God! This is amazing!” Tony spoke as he chewed.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full!” Gibbs cuffed Tony upside the head.

“No, really. This is really good!” Tony forced himself to swallow the big bite he’d taken so he could speak. “I haven’t had scrambler this good since I left Baltimore! There was this little diner near the precinct I used to go to all the time…”

Gibbs sat, listening to Tony regale them with the story from his Baltimore days as they ate. Gibbs would occasionally offer some comments, but mostly he listened. Tony had this energy about him when he got excited, and it was exhilarating to watch. Ducky often commented about how alike Tony was to Gibbs’ younger self – which he was right, although Gibbs would never admit in public – and it was oddly endearing to watch that energy vibrate out from the younger man.

After the meal, Tony insisted on doing the dishes. “Because you cooked. It’s a rule, those who cook, don’t clean. Go sit down, work on your boat, or something. Anything. I’ll be fine. I won’t break anything, promise!”

“You better not,” Gibbs replied jokingly. Tony rolled his eyes at that.

“When is the vet appointment?” Gibbs turned to ask as he got to the doorway.

“Receptionist said 1100,” Tony took a quick peek on his watch as he dried one of the plates. “Which is in about an hour. We should get going soon if we want to be on time.”

“Let me get changed, then we can leave after you’re done here,” Gibbs turned and went upstairs instead.

Twenty minutes later found Gibbs and Tony putting on their jackets in the front hall.

“Probie, c’mere,” Gibbs called out, the leash in one hand. “Time to go visit the vet.”

Probie was lurking in the doorway to the living room, whining his protest.
“C’mere, boy,” Gibbs demanded with what Tony could only describe as Gunny-Gibbs voice, and Probie slowly walked over, whining the entire time. “Good boy,” Gibbs commented as he secure the leash to Probie’s collar.

“It looks like someone doesn’t like visiting the doctor for his physical either,” Tony glanced mischievously in Gibbs’ direction, a smirk playing at the corner of his mouth.

“Shouldn’t have mention the word ‘vet’,” Gibbs shook his head. “I swear dogs actually do understand human languages; they just choose to ignore it most of the time.”

Tony just chuckled as he stepped outside with Probie’s leash, letting Gibbs shut the door. He was surprised to hear the door lock.

“You never lock your door,” Tony pointed out.

“Well, gotta start getting used to it. Don’t want Probie to get out too easily.”

“Good point.”

They took Tony’s car once again, and arrived at the vet with time to spare. Gibbs nodded towards the coffee shop at the end of the row. “I’ll just be a minute.”

“Sure, take your time,” Tony shook his head and muttered an ‘addict’ under his breath.

“I heard that!”

“C’mon Probie,” Tony directed the dog into the vet’s office.

“Hi there, how may I help you?” the chipper receptionist greeted the pair.

“We have an appointment, under the names Gibbs and DiNozzo,” Tony peered over the counter at
the appointment book. “Right… there, eleven o’clock.”

“Alright, if you can wait over there for just one minute, I’ll go get the doctor. My name is Melanie, by the way,” Melanie smiled shyly as she directed Tony towards the row of benches against the wall. “Here are some forms for you to fill out, just let me know if you have any questions.”

“Thank you, Melanie,” Tony gave her his trademark DiNozzo smile.

“Oh, and before I forget, what’s your dog’s name?” Melanie asked as she headed towards the treatment room.

“Probie.”

“Probie?” Melanie asked questioningly. “Seriously?”

“The only name he answered to when we found him yesterday,” Tony shrugged.

“I guess it could be worse,” Melanie chuckled. “I’ll be right back.”

Gibbs walked in the door, a large cup of coffee in hand, as Melanie walked away. “Something funny?”

“Nothing. Melanie here,” Tony pointed in the direction she left in with his thumb, “is having a hard time believing that his name is Probie.”

“Well, it is unusual,” Gibbs chuckled, sitting down next to Tony to scratch Probie’s chin with his free hand.

Tony was about to say something else, but a baritone voice interrupted them.

“Hi, my name is Craig Simmons. You can call me Craig. How’re we doing today?” Craig extended his large hand, greeting the two men as they rose from their seats. The man was about the same height as Tony and Gibbs, but looked much more solidly built. He looked like he belonged
on a beach in Miami or LA, with long wavy bleach blonde hair tied up into a ponytail and a dark tan, but Tony would bet good money that he was no more than thirty-five.

Gibbs exchanged a glance with Tony, both noting the vet’s appearance with a knowing smirk. Abby’s friends were never dull or boring. Gibbs had expected more weirdness, so he’s more than ok with a man who looked more like a surfer than a vet.

“Pretty good. Tony DiNozzo,” Tony shook the vet’s hand.

“Gibbs,” Gibbs said with a small smile. “Probie here needs to get checked out,” Gibbs nudged Probie forward, who had been trying to hide his big furry body behind Tony the whole time.

“Well, hello there, Probie,” Craig knelt down to greet the dog, letting Probie sniff him before approaching with his hand. “You’re a good dog, aren’t you? Good dog.”

In no time at all Craig had Probie licking his hand like he was an old friend. The other two men took it as a good sign.

“So, what can I do for you today?” Craig asked as he led the two agents into the back room. “All I heard from Abby was that you guys needed a vet.”

“Well, we found Probie around where we work yesterday. He had no tags on, and Abby couldn’t find a chip either, so there was no way to know whose dog he was. Abby managed to convince Gibbs here to ‘adopt’ Probie,” Tony made a quoting motion. “We just want to have him checked out, make sure there aren’t any serious issues that need to be taken care of.”

“Sounds like a good start. Congratulations,” Craig rubbed his hands in enthusiasm. “Let’s get started.”

“Looks like a Bearded Collie to me,” the vet casually commented as he looked over Probie. “About three years old based on his teeth. These dogs mature late, so he’s probably gonna be still pretty puppy-like for the next little while.”

Probie had been surprisingly calm and quiet, despite his earlier protests about coming to see a vet. Craig drew some blood and gave him the necessary shots before finally putting down his clipboard.
“Okay, I don’t see any obvious problems, except for a bit of malnutrition, likely due to his time on the streets, but everything else looks good. I drew some blood to send to the lab; I’ll give you guys a call if there is anything wrong from the blood test. He’s now up-to-date with shots, and Melanie can help you set up a schedule for him to come in for his boosters,” Craig said lightheartedly as he played with Probie, who seemed completely smitten with the vet now. “Bearded Collies can get really bad tangles in their fur. If you guys want, you can trim it back to puppy length so it’s easier to maintain.”

“Sounds good,” Gibbs leashed Probie again when Craig hauled the dog down from the table. “Thanks for everything.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” Craig shook Tony and Gibbs’ out-stretched hands as they walked out. “Tell Abby I said ‘Hi’.”

“Will do,” Tony gave the vet a bright smile before following after the older man.

After settling the schedules and payment, the trio was back on the road. The visit to the vet, while pleasant, had been longer than expected. Gibbs suggested grabbing a quick bite and stopping at the hardware store to pick up some supplies.

“Gonna go get some stuff for Probie’s kennel,” Gibbs grinned at Tony when the younger man asked why. “Been drawing up the plans all morning.”

“Man of action, huh?” Tony quipped.

“Yep,” Gibbs nodded with a smug smile. “Oh, and you’re helping.”

“Uh, you sure you want my help, Jethro?” Tony commented questioningly. “Putting Ikea pieces together is about as much experience as I have with building something.”

“You’ll be okay. I’ll teach ya, don’t you worry,” Gibbs wiggled his eyebrows mischievously.

“Fine. Probie, if your kennel falls down in the middle of the night, it’s not my fault, alright?” Tony looked to the rear-view mirror towards Probie, who was lying on the back seat. “You heard the
man. Gibbs made me do it, so it’d be his fault.”

The head slap that followed was entirely expected.

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TBC
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Tony helps Gibbs build a kennel, and Gibbs makes a startling realization.

Chapter Notes

Again, thanks to silvertales for the speedy beta!

Was reading the TVGuide article on MW, MH and ‘Baltimore’ before the airing. I totally had a giggly Probie moment when I read that MW’s dog Quantum jumped MH mid-thought. Aww… *g*

Chapter 5

On warm days, stop to lie on your back on the grass. When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.

Since the hardware store was closer, they made it their first stop. Tony stayed in the car to keep an eye on Probie, while Gibbs went into the store for parts.

“Hey, you hungry?” Gibbs asked as he got back into the car.

“Not particularly. We ate breakfast pretty late so I’m okay for now, but I could eat,” Tony shrugged, backing out of the parking space. Contrary to popular belief – and Gibbs’ teasing – he didn’t actually eat that much. Like most athletes, he was used to eating several small meals a day, a strategy that had worked well for him in law enforcement. Being a cop meant crazy schedules so three sit down meals was practically impossible most days.

“What do you say we go grab some stuff from the store and make lunch instead?” Gibbs suggested. “We’ve pretty much lived on takeouts for the past week, and I could really use some real food. Our breakfast was pretty much the last of the edible food in my fridge.”

“Sounds good to me,” Tony smiled; he was kind of getting sick and tired of takeouts too. “But I’m
making lunch. You made breakfast, so it’s my turn.”

“Didn’t know you cook,” Gibbs looked over to Tony with a surprised expression.

“Had to learn when I went to college. Can’t live on Kraft Dinner alone,” Tony mused. “Especially if you want to impress the ladies.”

“Right,” Gibbs scoffed.

“Hey! It works. You have no idea how many women out there like men who can cook,” Tony gave Gibbs an irrepressible grin. “I am half-Italian after all. It’s almost sacrilege for me to not know how to cook.”

“Who taught you?” Gibbs was curious. From what he knew about Tony’s family, there wasn’t anyone who could’ve taught him, and he doubt that the college kids Tony went to school with would know how either.

“Mrs. Coach. That’s what we used to call her. Her real name is Emily – Emily Winters – my old football coach’s wife. She probably knows how to make anything and everything, and made damn sure that the team all ate healthy. She’d terrorize the coach into checking up on us if we weren’t,” Tony chuckled. “The team was more afraid of her than we were the coach.”

“Sounds like a great lady,” Gibbs smiled. He was surprised that Tony was willing to talk about it at all, considering how fiercely private the young agent normally was.

“Oh, you have no idea,” Tony made a goofy grin on his face. “She pretty much adopted the whole team, since most of us were from out of town on athletic scholarships. She used to be a sports nutritionist – how she met Coach in the first place – so she taught everyone on the team how to eat properly. After Brad busted my leg, Emily made me stay at their place so she could make sure I was obeying the doctor’s orders. That’s when she started teaching me how to cook.”

Gibbs snorted. Tony was definitely one to make use of every loophole in the system when it came to doctor’s orders. It’s nice to know that someone had taken Tony’s wellbeing into their own hands. Gibbs silently sent a prayer up for Emily Winters for being there for Tony when he needed it most.
“So where’re they now?” Gibbs inquired casually with a bit of hesitation. He was never quite sure if he was treading on dangerous grounds where Tony’s past was concerned.

“Still in Columbus, last I heard. Tough old birds, those two. Coach retired a few years back, but Emily didn’t want to leave their friends behind so they stayed.”

“You’ve been back to visit them?”

“Did quite a bit back when I was in Peoria. It was close enough to drive up there on my off days. After I moved to Philly, once or twice. But I do call to check up on them whenever I get a chance,” Tony said, his smile open and easy, as they pulled up to the local Safeway. “Been thinking about going up there again some time.”

“You should. You’ve got more than enough time on the books for that, right?” Gibbs asked before opening the doors.

“Yeah. We’ll see,” Tony shrugged, changing the subject deliberately. “I’m thinking pasta, fast and easy. What do you think?”

“Sounds good,” noting Tony’s obvious intention to not discuss it further, Gibbs decided to let it go, for now.

Lunch ended up being a team effort, the two of them moving easily around each other in the kitchen. Gibbs was pleasantly surprised by Tony’s above-par cooking skills, after the younger man whipped up a big dish of seafood linguine within half an hour of them getting home. Gibbs was tasked instead to make a salad after he’d given Probie some water and let him out into the backyard.

He was even more surprised when he tasted the food.

“Huh. Next time you talk to Emily, tell her she’s taught you well. This is delicious,” Gibbs nodded as he ate fervently. The seafood medley was cooked just right in a light broth with basil and tomatoes and tossed with the linguine, and the dish was seasoned liberally to enhance the flavours of the ingredients.

Tony blushed, which he tried to cover up by ducking his head, pretending to eat hungrily.
“Thanks.”

After their late lunch, Gibbs took a detour to the basement to grab the plans for the kennel. Tony went out to the patio to check up on Probie, only to find the dog running all over the place, chasing God-knows-what, and as soon as he saw Tony, he came running back to the small patio, wagging his tail happily.

Learning his lesson from the day before, Tony took seat on the steps to the lawn before Probie could try to knock him down again to lick him. Instead, Probie trotted over to the steps, and as Tony held out his right hand, palm up towards Probie, the pup sniffed and began licking it. Tony gave a bright smile and brought both hands around Probie’s big furry head to give him a good scratching.

That was what Gibbs saw when he came out to the patio, drawings and measurements in one hand and a small toolbox in the other. He almost lost his hold on the pieces of paper in his hand as he traced his eyes over the bright but gentle smile on Tony’s face, his heart swelling with emotions he hadn’t felt in close to twenty years.

And Gibbs knew right then and there that he, Leroy Jethro Gibbs, NCIS agent and all-around bastard, was head-over-heels in love with Tony DiNozzo. He was finally willing to admit to himself the reason behind the feelings he’d had for Tony. All that longing, wishing and hoping came down to one irrevocable truth – he was in love with Tony, and had been for a very long time. Sure, it had started as physical attraction and, later, desire, but then it blossomed into something else entirely. Something wonderful.

Gibbs sucked in a breath all too quickly as the realization hit him. He stood there, unnoticed by Tony, and slowly exhaled the breath he found himself holding as he slowly processed the new information.

There Tony was, sitting in his backyard, playing with the dog like he belonged there, in his house and in his life, and there was nothing more Gibbs wanted.

But he had no idea if Tony wanted the same thing. They’d always shared a connection, even when they first met in Baltimore, but he’d put it off as something that was natural and shared between partners and teammates. There had been a lot of teasing and flirting and innuendos, but then Tony did that with everybody. Did any of that mean anything? Gibbs had never been so unsure of anything in his life, and he didn’t want to make the wrong move and scare the younger man away.

He quietly walked towards the younger man, having made up his mind to not think about it while
he enjoyed spending the day with Tony.

“Hey,” Tony looked back as Probie barked once at Gibbs’ approach. “So, what’s the plan?”

Gibbs set the tools down and sat next to Tony on the steps. Probie came up to him and began sniffing his hands. Gibbs opened and flattened the folded sheet he’d drawn the designs on. “What do you think?”

“Pretty classic,” Tony nodded. “What’s that?”

“That’s for attaching some fences that we could install later, in case we have the need to lock Probie in for a short period of time,” Gibbs pointed towards a spot next to the deck on the grass. “Was thinking about putting the kennel right there.”

“Looks good,” Tony smiled at Gibbs.

The two men spent the afternoon cutting and assembling the pieces together to form the base and walls of the kennel. Tony helped Gibbs move a few sawhorses out from the basement and set up on the patio so they could work outside.

After showing Tony how to mark and cut the planks, Gibbs set Tony to work while he took the pieces Tony sawed off and pieced them together.

“I’m gonna go grab a beer,” Gibbs said, straightening his back as he stood. He decided that it was time to take a break after finishing the base and three sides of the kennel. His stiff spine complained with a series of audible cracks. “You want one?”

“Sure, I could use one,” Tony stood up as well, stretching his legs and back. Gibbs couldn’t help ogling Tony’s trimmed, hard abs when Tony pulled up his t-shirt to wipe away the sweat on his forehead. Gibbs turned, swallowing hard and face flushing slightly, mumbled something about being right back and stalked into the kitchen.

Probie had wandered off chasing his invisible squirrels after the men had started working, and had his back on the grass, wiggling around. He poked his head up, watching Gibbs’ retreating back, and got up to give himself a good shake off before running right back to the deck. He sat in front of Tony and looked at him, his paw patting Tony’s shin.
“Hey Probster!” Tony bent down to wrapped his hands around Probie’s head, scratching him fondly. “Wanna go run around?”

Tony jogged out onto the grass, where Probie immediately tackled him to the ground. Tony laughed wholeheartedly as he play-fought with Probie, trying to wrestle out of Probie’s weight on him.

When he finally escaped from under Probie, Tony was panting and a bit out of breath, so he contented himself with just lying there on the grass. He watched as Probie went running around again, nose sniffing and paws digging at odd spots of the yard, before he turned to look to the sky at the fluffy cotton candy clouds. He closed his eyes, breathed in deep and sighed. The fresh smell of cut grass permeated his senses, and the sun was warm on his face.

Tony reopened his eyes when a shadow blocked the sun he was enjoying to see Gibbs standing over him, a couple of beers in one hand.

“Enjoying yourself there?” Gibbs chuckled.

“Oh yeah,” Tony grinned. “It’s comfy here. You should try it some times.”

Gibbs raised an eyebrow, a playful smirk hanging on the corner of his lips.

“Really! Come lie down,” Tony sat up briefly to grab the beers off of Gibbs’ hand, and pulled the older man down to sitting before lying back down, arms crossed behind his head. Gibbs had no choice but to do as he’s told and lay down next to Tony, his hands resting on his stomach.

For a while they laid, there in the sun, just enjoying each other’s company.

“See that one?” Tony pointed up at some cloud formation just above the top of the house after a long moment of silence. “Doesn’t that look like T-Rex? If you squint a bit.”

Gibbs moved his head closer to Tony’s shoulder so he could look along the out-stretched arm. “I don’t see it.”
“Geez, Jethro, you’ve got no imagination at all,” Tony rolled his eyes and teased.

“Kelly used to say that too,” Gibbs sighed, rotating his head slightly so he could look up at Tony’s face in profile, seeing and noting the shock, surprise, sadness and uncertainty in Tony’s expression.

“Jethro,” Tony paused briefly, as he strained to find the right words in his head, before looking towards Gibbs. “You don’t have to…”

“I want to,” Gibbs smiled, finding it surprisingly easy to open up to Tony. He found himself not minding, for the first time in his life, to talk about the memories of his dead wife and child. “It’s time. I shouldn’t have bottled their memories up like some scary secret for all those years. They deserve to be remembered and my memories of them deserve to be shared.”

Gibbs rolled over to his side, resting his head on his open palm, and looked at Tony. The mixture of shock and sadness had melted into a goofy shy smile, mingling with the surprise, uncertainty, and the slightest hint of happy.

“They’ll always be in my heart, but I think it’s time to let other things in there too,” Gibbs said quietly. “I’ve been wasting far too much time being miserable and feeling sorry for myself.”

“Like what?” Tony asked in a hopeful but somewhat dejected voice, uncertainty in his eyes mounting. Or who?

Gibbs just shook his head, smiling, but not answering the question. He fished the bottles of beer and opened both before shoving one into Tony’s hand. “C’mon, drink up and let’s go get the walls done.”

It was another couple of hours before they had the basic structure of the kennel completed. Gibbs called it a day, saying they’d finish the roof and install the fence the next day.

After a satisfying cowboy steak dinner, Tony found himself by the door, getting ready to head home as he shrugged on his jacket. Gibbs was putting on his jacket as well so he could take Probie for a walk before turning in.
“I’ll see you tomorrow afternoon?” Gibbs asked, which Tony confirmed with a quick nod.

“Thanks,” Tony said as he got to his car. He paused, and turned around to face Gibbs. “For everything.”

“You’re welcome,” Gibbs replied with a small smile, and then gave Tony a pat on the cheek. “Drive safe,” Gibbs added as he began walking down his driveway towards the street.

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TBC
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

After a day filled with laughter and surprises, the boys do a bit of soul searching on their own.

Chapter Notes

Again, thanks to silvertales for the speedy beta!

Sorry I haven't been updating this fic... RL kinda exploded in my face, and long story short, workload is now doubled, with no end in sight. On top of that I have been trying to finish my NCIS BigBang fic (which is coming along nicely now :), so Probie had to take a backseat. Sorry! *huggles Probie*

Chapter 6

If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.

Tony touched his face where Gibbs’ hand had been, and let out a shaky breath that he didn’t realize he was holding. He’d driven home in a daze, and only comprehending what Gibbs had done after he was inside his apartment door.

He let his eyes flutter shut, memorizing the touch. It was as if he could still feel the warm palm on his face, the digits rough from years of woodworking and gun-use, and the mere memories of the encounter was sending shivers down his spine. He was tempted to just brush it off as some kind of stress-induced hallucination, but he couldn’t.

And it wasn’t like Gibbs had never patted his face like that before, but this time it somehow felt like there was more. There was something else in Gibbs’ eyes when they stood by his car, Gibbs’ hand on his cheek; something he’d never seen before. He was at a loss, which he hadn’t felt since Jenny had offered him Rota, and before that when Gibbs left for Mexico.

Tony tried to recount the day spent with Gibbs as he went about putting his apartment into a semblance of order. He thought it went well, considering their new-found friendship outside of work. The day had been full of surprises, too. Taking Probie shopping and then to the vet had been an experience – what he told Gibbs was the truth; he’d never had a pet before. He’d surprised
himself when he found himself answering Gibbs’ question about his past. He knew he’d surprised Gibbs as well.

He never thought it’d be that easy to talk about it, and he never thought he’d have this kind of easy banter with his hard-ass marine of a boss. It was like Gibbs was a complete different man off the job. Well, not completely different, just… another side of the multi-faceted enigma that was Leroy Jethro Gibbs. Tony was pleasantly surprised that Gibbs willingly lay down on the grass to watch the clouds with him, and he was even more surprised by Gibbs’ openness to talk about Shannon and Kelly.

As he stripped and step into the shower to wash away the day’s grime, with hot enough to scald water beating down his back, his mind wandered back to Gibbs’ warm, rough palm on his face and he just couldn’t help wonder. What would Gibbs do if he’d leaned into his touch? Or if he’d turned and kissed his palm? Or… if he’d been brave enough to just kiss the man?

*You’ve got it bad, Tony.* He shook his head as he finished his bedtime routine and dragged himself back to the bedroom, ignoring the part of his anatomy that was lengthening and hardening at the thought of the many ‘what-ifs’.

Tony sighed, climbing into bed, and burrowed deep in a cocoon of blankets. His mind was swirling with the little moments between him and Gibbs as he shut his eyes, trying to sleep. His thoughts finally settled back onto the thought of Gibbs’ hand on his cheek as he drifted off to slumber.

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Gibbs straightened his back and winced when he heard the loud cracks of his spine, complaining of him overworking himself. Again.

He glanced at the clock he had on the wall behind him, surprised to find that it was actually quite late. He’d been working for a while it seemed. Gibbs sighed as he began packing everything up and putting his tools away. He’d hoped that the wood would put him into a more relaxed mood to sleep in, but that hadn’t been the case. It merely delayed the inevitable return of the memories from the past day and a half.

If he were truthful to himself, he’d say that it had been one of the best days. Unexpected, but great nonetheless. He never would’ve guessed that his one good deed of letting Probie stay and into his life would end the day with him a lot closer to Tony on a personal level.
He looked down at the dog that was dozing at the foot of his stool. It was a good thing he wasn’t building a boat anymore. Sawdust and dog fur definitely didn’t mix.

Gibbs was sure he’d surprised both of them by opening up that afternoon. He couldn’t help it; not after he finally realized what Tony meant to him.

A second chance.

A chance to love again, with the whole of his being.

Gibbs could feel the swell in his heart from the love he had for the younger man. He could still feel the cool cheeks under his palm and the vulnerability in Tony’s demeanor when Tony bid his goodnight.

He was slightly lost. Lost in the wonder he felt as he acknowledged the fact that he was in love with Tony.

Rummaging through the drawers under the workbench, Gibbs found what he was looking for.

The wood was old. It was easy to tell that the piece had been hand crafted. The markings and carvings could only have come from an experienced hand. The layer of dust on the inset glass was carefully wiped away to reveal a picture.

Gibbs cradled the frame carefully in his hands, the smiling faces of Shannon and Kelly looking back at him. He ran his fingers over their faces, the smile on his face tinged with sadness.

“It’s been a while, I guess,” Gibbs’ voice cracked as a sudden bout of emotions welled up. “I missed you guys.”

He had to stop and tilt his head back, breathing deeply with his eyes closed, just to reign in the emotions that were running amok. Sniffling softly, he looked back down at the picture frame.

He’d crafted it just before leaving for that last tour to Kuwait. The picture was taken around that time in Stillwater, the three of them taking a trip up to visit Jack on a weekend.
“I don’t know how to say this,” Gibbs continued. “I think… I know I’m in love.”

He leaned his arms on the workbench, holding the picture frame in front of his face.

“Remember when you made me promise, if something were to happen to either one of us, that the other should live on and try to find happiness again?” Gibbs let out a lopsided smile. “Well, I think I’m finally going to fulfill that promise.

“It’s Tony, Shan,” Gibbs shook his head. “It’s Tony. I love him. I don’t know why I only realize that now, today, but I love him. Have for a long time, too, I just never realized that I do. Too stubborn, maybe.

“Guess I just didn’t think I’d be able to find someone that I could love like I loved you, after… you know… but, God, Shan, Tony is…” Gibbs sniffed as he said, smiling. “Ducky always said Tony reminded him of how I used to be, but he was wrong. Tony reminds me so much of you, Shan. So much life, so much energy – it’s infectious. He makes me laugh, Shan, like you did.

“And he gets me. He really gets me. Tony actually likes the basement – can you believe it? You used to be the only one. It’s so easy being around him. I don’t need to be what everybody else wanted me to be, don’t need to pretend.

“Can you believe that I adopted a dog because of him? Well, it’s really more because of Abby but you should’ve seen the look on his face. He was actually upset that he couldn’t take the dog, and when I told him I’ll take Probie – yeah, he only answers to that – it was like Christmas came early for him,” Gibbs smiled fondly, remembering the previous day. “We’re building a kennel together. God! He’s only been gone for a few hours but I miss him already.”

Gibbs’ breath hitched as he realized how invested in Tony he really was, and it scared him for a moment.

“What should I do, Shan?” he asked. “I don’t want to scare him away. I think he feels the same but I’m just too… I’m just not sure what he’d say. I can’t lose him. I’d rather never tell him than risk losing him.”

Go slow, he could almost hear Shannon tell him, could almost feel her hand on his shoulder. And Gibbs realized that she was right. He had to try. He had to know.
“You’re going to laugh at me. I know – you told me so,” Gibbs snorted. “All those ex-wives, trying to replace you. Should’ve listened.”

He smiled, shaking his head, and made up his mind.

“Thank you,” he said as he placed a gentle kiss to the frame, and looked at it one last time before putting the picture down on the bench. Gibbs got up, and patted himself down. Probie sobered up, his head snapping up as Gibbs moved off the chair.

“Come on, boy,” Gibbs commanded as he made his way towards the stairs. “Time for bed.”

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“Boss?” Tony’s voice rang out as the front door opened. “Jethro?”

“In here,” Gibbs poked his head out from the kitchen, giving the younger man a bright smile.

“You know your front door’s unlocked, right?” Tony pointed behind him with his thumb as he approached the entrance to the kitchen. “Thought you’re locking that now, with Probie around?”

“I left it open so you wouldn’t have to knock. I was in the basement,” Gibbs said, looking back at Tony over his shoulder. “You want something to drink? Coffee? Beer?”

“Coffee’s fine,” Tony smiled as he took off his jacket and went to hang it up by the door. “You eaten yet?”

Gibbs shook his head. “Been doing house chores all morning. Was gonna make something before you came but I got distracted by the boat.”

Tony chuckled. “Gotta do laundry even if you’re the boss?”
“Something like that,” Gibbs smiled back, handing Tony a big mug of coffee.

“Well, I brought lunch. I was going to make some stuff to bring over but I ran out of time,” Tony pointed to the small bag he’d left on the dining table as he doctored his coffee with milk and sugar. “Went to the farmer’s market to stock up, so I got some fish sandwiches for lunch. Their curly fries are to die for.”

Gibbs raised an eyebrow. “That so?”

“Betcha can’t eat just one?” Tony grinned.

“We’ll see,” Gibbs snorted. “Wanna eat outside? It’s beautiful out.”

“Sure,” Tony followed Gibbs out to the patio with the bag and his coffee. “Where’s Probie?”

“Over there,” Gibbs nodded towards the far corner of his backyard, where Probie was busy digging up a hole.

“What is he doing?” Tony looked at Probie, the concern on his face apparent.

“No idea,” Gibbs shrugged. “If he just wants a hole to hide stuff, I’m ok with it, but if he digs more than one, then we’re gonna need to have a serious talk.”

“You do realize that he’s a dog right?” Tony shook his head in amusement. Serious talk?

“Oh yeah,” Gibbs nodded, completely oblivious to Tony’s cynicism.

“Oh my God, you’re an alien. What have you done with the real Gibbs?” Tony couldn’t resist making the pod joke. Gibbs just glared at him and smacked him on the back of the head.

Lunch was consumed with coffee and chitchatting.
“So, what? He just ran?” Gibbs’ eyebrows shot up. Tony had been regaling Gibbs with a case from when he was with Baltimore PD.

“Yep,” Tony nodded, a smirk playing at the corner of his lips.

“What a dumbass!” Gibbs shook his head laughing, his eyes shining with delight as he tilted his head to look at Tony. At some point Probie had gotten tired or bored or lonely and came trotting to the patio. After both men made it clear that he wasn’t getting any of their food, the pup snuggled down next to Tony and promptly fell asleep with Tony stroking his fur slowly.

“I know!” Tony joined in the laughter. “But most of the time I’m just thankful for stupid criminals. Makes our jobs easier.”

“I don’t think I have anything that could top that,” Gibbs crumbled the wrapping paper of his sandwich and tossed it into the bag it came with.

“I don’t think we’ll ever be able to,” Tony toss his own wrappers into the bag as well, letting Gibbs take the garbage into the kitchen. “That takes a special kind of stupid.”

“That was really good, by the way. Thanks,” Gibbs said, smiling, after returning from the kitchen. “You ready to get started on the rest of the kennel?”

“Yep,” Tony got up and patted the dirt off of his jeans. He had been really surprised to find that the two of them could fall right back into that comfort and ease from the day before without much effort.

It was like they’d been friends with each other for ages. But then maybe they had been friends all this time that they’ve known each other. Tony thought back to all the time that Gibbs had offered him his couch, and when they’d shared meals at the end of some cases… Maybe they’d really been friends to each other all this time, just not recognizing it until now, and acknowledging their friendship was simply the logical next step to their relationship.

Tony smiled to himself at the revelation.

“Tony! What’re ya doing standin’ there?” Gibbs’ yell woke Tony from his thoughts.
“Be right there!”

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TBC
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Gibbs hosts a barbecue and invites everyone over, and makes a startling discovery.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to gibbsgirllabby for the beta!

Sorry it took me so long to get to this point. RL issues with work and just general craziness of my life sucked my creativity dry. After being stuck on a bus for a grand total of 20 hrs this past weekend to go visit slashscribe, I've reclaimed some of that creative spirit and Probie decided to make an appearance. I'm trying to make good use of this and finish the fic sooner rather than later. I'm estimating that there will be 10 chapters in total, but there might be an epilogue to tie everything off. Thanks for sticking with me, and happy reading! As per usual, comments and feedback are always welcome :)

Chapter 7

_Run, romp, and play daily. On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree._

“Hey Probie! Miss me already?” Abby’s cheerful voice rang out from the front door. There was a shuffle of claws on floors then something landing before the sound of Abby’s giggling filled the front of the house.

“Abs? Is that you?” Tony’s head poked out from the entrance to the kitchen, only to find Probie with his front paws on Abby’s shoulders, licking her to within an inch of her life. Abby was lying on the floor giggling as she played with Probie’s big head and furry body.

“Probie! No!” Tony said sternly.

Probie whined loudly at Tony’s disapproving tone, getting up reluctantly from licking Abby to sit on his haunches next to her, tail tucked between his legs.

Laughing as she got up, Abby greeted Tony with a bright smile. “Hey Tony! It’s not a problem,
really! I love it when dogs say ‘hi’ to me like that!”

“We’re trying to house train him, so please don’t encourage him. Can’t have him ‘attacking’ every house guest that comes by.” Tony sighed, making a quoting motion. “He gets excited too easily.”

“Aww, but that’s why Probie is so adorable! He’s like a puppy! Haven’t you ever heard of the saying ‘a dog can grow bigger but they never grow up?’” Abby quipped with a grin, and then tapped her chin. “Or was that about men?”

“Abby…” Tony gave her a mock glare, and the two of them burst into laughter. Probie let out a few healthy barks, joining in with his tail wagging.

“C’mon, we’re in the back. Gibbs is just starting up the grill.” Tony motioned towards the double French doors as he led Abby through the kitchen. “Thanks for dog sitting Probie this past week, by the way.”

They’d been working overtime on a fraud case. It was mostly legwork for the team, but there were so many witness statements and way too much financial data to sort through, none of them had gone home for more than a shower and change of clothes in four days. And since there wasn’t too much actual forensic evidence, Tony had asked Abby to help take Probie for walks before and after work, keep him company and make sure he was taken care of. Needless to say, Abby and Probie had become fast friends, and Tony was a bit afraid to think what Abby was saying to or teaching Probie.

Vance had taken them off rotation for three days, unless anything urgent came in, effectively giving them a long weekend. They all spent the first day relaxing at home, except for Tony, who had gone over to Gibbs’ to help with some secret woodworking project in Gibbs’ basement. He’d casually mentioned that it was too nice a weekend to not have a barbeque, which Gibbs had agreed and proceed to call up everyone to meet at his place for dinner the next day.

Tony could hardly believe his own eyes and ears when Gibbs quirked an eyebrow and gave an amused smirk before asking Tony. “How about tomorrow? Invite the whole gang for dinner?”

“Oh that’s no problem at all!” Abby said cheerfully as she followed Tony through the kitchen, with Probie running past them and out the door. “I take care of Jethro for Timmy all the time when he had to stay late so it’s not a problem!”
“God! I can’t believe Probie’s been with us almost a month!” Tony stretched his arms up as he stepped through the threshold onto the deck. His eyes fell automatically to the man standing over the grill, and he couldn’t help the smile when he saw Gibbs taking a break to wipe sweat off his forehead.

After that first weekend, Tony would drop by in the evenings after work to walk Probie. Sometimes he and Gibbs would have dinner before walking down to the waterfront together, chatting about whatever—the current case, politics, woodworking and sometimes, even popular culture trivia. Tony was worried at first that it’d be boring for the older man, who seemed more interested in current affairs than celebrity gossips, but he’d surprised Tony. Gibbs turned out to be quite knowledgeable about some movies—mostly stuff from the seventies and eighties, but some more recent ones as well.

Other times, Tony would walk Probie by himself and let Gibbs be alone with his basement for a few hours. He was never sure what Gibbs was doing down there—he’d finished the boat and stopped building more. But Tony secretly wished that the older man would build another one. He would’ve loved to help sand the wood, to just get lost in the repetitive motions. He very much admired the way Gibbs could create something that massive, that magnificent, out of nothing but a pile of wood and a vision. Tony had always imagined that the meditation-like trance Gibbs seemed to get into was one of the reasons why he kept building them.

Tony would drop by on the weekends too, to help Gibbs with smaller woodworking projects. Gibbs had begun teaching him about the craft after Tony had mentioned how he loved the way the wood felt so smooth after Gibbs was done with it.

This whole “arrangement” they had felt so… *domestic* to Tony, and he just couldn’t help coming back for more. It had helped ground him in more ways than one, and it’d showed at work. He focused better and was less prone to going off on tangents. He’d still occasionally go into work in the middle of the night, but now it had more to do with having breakthroughs, rather than the insomnia that often plagued him at night.

If only there was more to it than just friends hanging out.

Tony sighed. He was well aware of the fact that Gibbs didn’t have a lot of friends. Gibbs had deliberately kept his social circle small, so Tony was probably just the convenient choice to hang out with—they worked the same hours, got along fine and they shared a dog.

Gibbs had been sneaking peeks at Tony as soon as the younger man came back out onto the deck, accompanied by Abby and Probie. He had been acutely aware of Tony’s presence, even more so than normal when they worked side by side. He couldn’t help staring secretly from behind the small towel he was using to wipe sweat off at the small sliver of toned abs under the hem of
Tony’s t-shirt when Tony stretched. He swallowed hard, forcing himself to concentrate on finishing wrapping the potatoes for the grill.

Tony looked relaxed and happy, Gibbs decided, if the bright grin on his face as he and Abby chatted away was anything to go by. It was the one thing he treasured about the younger man—the genuine smiles and real emotions that weren’t obscured by the masks he wore at work. Gibbs took time to watch and remember each and every single one of them. He felt smug—and maybe just a bit prideful—that he had been the cause of a great number of these cherished moments lately.

He could hardly believe that it’d been a month since Probie came into their lives. He didn’t think it’d work, but somehow they made it work. The added bonus of having Tony at his house practically every evening, sharing a meal—whether it was take-out or either of their cooking—had made him look forward to coming home every day. The younger man had this uncanny ability to detect his moods, better at it than anyone ever had—except for Shannon, maybe—and knew just when to drag him out to walk Probie together and when to let him hide out in his basement.

They talked about everything, whether it was worked related or pop culture references that Gibbs was slowly becoming acquainted with. It had given Gibbs a rare glimpse into just who Tony DiNozzo really was. Underneath the skirt-chasing jock was someone who was well spoken and smart, had a vast interest in economics and psychology, and a wicked sense of humor.

Occasionally, when a case was especially hard on either of them, they wouldn’t talk at all, sometimes for the entire night, but that was okay. Tony just got him. The younger man would sit on the bottom stairs of the basement, watching him work the wood and his emotions through.

He was charmed by the way Tony found his hobby interesting, and he couldn’t believe that Tony had taken up on his offer to teach him woodworking. Now they spent time on the weekends to work various projects.

Gibbs often wondered what kept Tony coming back. He’d thought that Tony would find his life too boring and opted for other, more interesting things to do outside of work. But Tony hadn’t. Gibbs couldn’t be happier about the fact that Tony found him worth spending time with. He had noticed that he felt more relaxed at work, less prone to snapping at people—generally not as much of a second-b as he had been.

The only thing troubling him was the increasingly graphic dreams he’d been having. He found himself staring at Tony more often than not, and imagining the hard body he knew was under the fancy suits and ties. He’d woken in the middle of the night on more than a few occasions, achingly hard, from dreams of him in various positions with another man, and he just knew that it was Tony in his dreams.
Stealing another glance at the firm ass jutting out as Tony leaned forward, resting his arms on the back of one of the deck chairs, Gibbs sighed. He was just hopeless when it came to resisting the temptation named Tony—that was for sure.

“Gibbs, I’m gonna go bring in the potato salad and the dinner rolls. McGee texted me, says he’s on his way. Would Probie be okay with other dogs?” Abby asked, looking up from her phone.

“He seemed fine when we went to the dog park the other day,” Tony pointed out with a shrug. “Why?”

“McGee was wondering if he could bring Jethro. I left Toni with him as well, and he was going to get one of his neighbor’s kid to dog sit but the girl called this morning and canceled because she forgot she has soccer practice.” Abby bit her lip, looking worried.

“As long as they’re okay with another large dog, I don’t see why not.” Gibbs thought for a moment before replying. “Anyone who gets too excited gets a timeout in the kennel.”

“Great! Thanks so much, Gibbs! I’ll be right back.” Abby ran over to Gibbs to peck him on the cheek before rushing out the door for her food, hands typing rapidly on her phone to fire-off Gibbs’ reply to McGee.

The rest of the afternoon passed in a flurry of activities. McGee, Ziva, Ducky and Palmer had all brought their own contributions for food and beverages, and Palmer had brought a small football as well as other games at Tony’s request.

Probie was at first a bit shy and growly towards the four-legged new comers, but once Gibbs had told him to stand down and Tony had given him a pep talk, he seemed to get along just fine with the German Sheppard and the Jack Russell.

Tony had gotten a bit emotional when he saw Toni. She was a reminder of Kate that none of the team had the heart to get rid of. Abby had ended up adopting Toni—Kate was her best friend after all—since Kate’s parents couldn’t take the little dog. Toni still didn’t like Tony much, but he was okay with that. The little dog brought back the happy memories.

“Ya okay?” Gibbs had pulled him into the kitchen and asked him quietly.
“I’ll be fine,” Tony answered with a quick nod.

“Kate?”

“Yeah.” Tony looked out the doorway at the dogs playing in the yard. “I still miss her.”

“I know. Me too.” Gibbs reached out a hand, intending to cup the younger man’s face but stopped himself at the last minute and squeezed Tony’s shoulder instead. “Coming?”

Tony smiled, leading the way back out.

“Tony! Where did you go? We’re gonna start!” Abby dragged Tony out onto the grass, where the gang had set up to play touch football. Gibbs smiled, watching Tony call out the play as he tended the grill. The days had been getting hotter, now that summer was approaching, and Probie was lying in the shade, panting with his tongue out and Toni tucked at his side, after Gibbs had fed them with kibbles and water.

The day couldn’t have been any better, Gibbs thought to himself.

After a satisfying dinner and plenty of fun and games, the guests began to bid their good nights, wanting to get some more long overdue rest. Tony had stayed to help Gibbs clean up the place before they headed out with Probie for their daily walk. When they arrived back at Gibbs’ place, it was already past twenty-three hundred.

“Ya wanna stay for the night?” Gibbs tossed out as he packed up the garbage bag to throw into the can in the garage. “It’s late, and you’ve had a couple of beers. You can borrow the guestroom this time, instead of crashing on the couch.”

“Oh, God! That would be great!” Tony groaned his appreciation as he stretched his back and legs. “I’m beat. Who knew running around with three dogs would be so much work!?”

“No one told you to run with them.” Gibbs chuckled, shaking his head, and gave Tony a tap on the back of the head then ruffled his hair. “The guest bed is made up already. Go and get some sleep.”
Tony smiled brightly when Gibbs played with his hair, and Gibbs’ heart skipped a beat. He couldn’t help the small smile that appeared at the corner of his lips, or the hand that slid down to Tony’s face, giving the younger man a quick pat on the cheek. Gibbs could feel the bits of Tony’s five o’clock shadow under his fingers, as he looked into the brilliant green of Tony’s eyes.

There was a brief flash of uncertainty in Tony’s eyes before his eyes shined with joy. Gibbs felt his breath catch, his fingers lingering over Tony’s cheek as he moved his hand back, and Gibbs had to remind himself to slow down, fearing that he’d scare Tony off.

“C’mon.” He cleared his throat, turning back towards the kitchen. “Go get some rest. I’ll be up in a minute, just gotta shut off the lights. Holler if ya need me.”

Tony nodded, letting out the breath he didn’t realize he was holding as Gibbs moved his hand away. “Sure,” he said, clearing his throat. “Can I borrow a pair of sweats?”

“Yeah, bottom drawer in my room, help yourself.”

Tony made his way up the stair, his mind still swirling around the feel of Gibbs’ hand on his cheek. He found his way into Gibbs’ bedroom, hesitating only a brief second before curiosity took over and propelled him into the room. He saw the USMC hoodie that Gibbs had let him borrow once in a small pile on the bed and he smiled, having a hard time believing that Gibbs would be the type to just leave clothing in a pile like that. He picked it up, and buried his face into the fabric, breathing in deep.

There was the smell of sawdust, a bit of sweat and coffee, but mostly a clean, masculine scent that was almost overwhelming. Gibbs had been wearing it the day before as they worked in the basement, and Tony had to force himself to put the shirt down, folding it out of habit. There was too much temptation to just pull the sweater over his head so he could surround himself with Gibbs’ essence and pretend he was in Gibbs’ arms.

That was what Gibbs saw as he approached his bedroom, and it stopped him in his track. Was Tony…? He saw the way Tony was sniffing his sweater, looking at it with longing. Leaning against the wall outside of his bedroom, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He couldn’t stop the silly grin that was creeping up his face, the scene of Tony’s face buried in his sweater playing repeatedly in his mind.

Breathing deep again, Gibbs schooled his expression to something barely resembling his normal
before turning towards his bedroom again. Tony looked up as he entered the room, hands fishing out a pair of sweats from the drawer.

“Ya finding everything okay?” Gibbs asked.

“Yeah.” Tony straightened up. “Thanks,” he said as he met Gibbs at the doorway. “I…uh, I’m gonna wash up and head to bed. I’ll see you in the morning?”

Tony was close, close enough to touch—close enough to kiss—but Gibbs held back.

“G’night, Tony,” he said, his voice low, trying not to let the lust and desire bleed into his tone.

Tony nodded, giving him a smile in return.

“Good night, Jethro.”

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TBC
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Awkward mornings, frustrating cases...it's not easy being Leroy Jethro Gibbs

Chapter Notes

Thanks to gibbsgirrlabby for the beta!

Chapter 8

*Be loyal. Never pretend to be something you're not. Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.*

It took Tony a while to fall asleep, trying not to think about Gibbs’ sweatshirt. And when he woke to his phone’s alarm from a very graphic dream, it felt like he had only slept for a few hours.

He blamed Gibbs, because that man had invaded his dream, with that sexy voice and intoxicating scent. Tony didn’t have to look to know that he was harder than he normally was in the morning. He threw on his t-shirt and sweats before getting out of bed for the bathroom, yawning and stretching as he stumbled towards the end of the hallway.

“Gibbs, you in there?” Tony knocked on the locked door, yawning again, rubbing his eyes at the same time.

“I’m done. Ya need the bathroom?” Gibbs said as he yanked the door open.

“Yeah, I need to…” Tony’s voice trailed off as the steam from the bathroom cleared somewhat and he could see Gibbs clearly. The man was wearing nothing but a towel around his hips, and Tony could feel heat rising in his face and towards another part of his anatomy.

“Tony?” Gibbs moved closer, concern clear in his eyes. “You okay?”
Tony couldn’t respond; he just stared at Gibbs, his eyes darting between the muscular chest, toned abs and Gibbs’ face.

After his dream from the night before, and the secret fantasies he’d always had about Gibbs, this was simply too much, seeing Gibbs in his almost naked glory. Gibbs’ hair was sleeked back, darkened by wetness. Tony should be used to seeing half naked men coming out of showers, after all those years of playing varsity, but he couldn’t help following, with his eyes, the drop of water that fell from Gibbs’ hair onto his shoulder then slid down his arm.

He didn’t realize he’d moved until he felt Gibbs’ body pressing against his, the moisture still evaporating from Gibbs’ body soaking through his shirt. His hands were on Gibbs, cupping his face and their lips were barely touching.

Oh. God.

What had he done?

Tony pushed away from him, and was down the stairs and out the door before Gibbs could say or do anything.

“Ah hell!” Gibbs swore under his breath as he watched Tony flee, but it was too late to keep Tony from leaving. He couldn’t help touching his own lips, on the spot Tony’s lips had touched his. Tony had surprised him, kissing him like that. It was too brief, ended too soon before Gibbs had a chance to savor the sensation of being kissed by the man that he’d wanted more than anyone.

He needed to get Tony back, in his life, in his bed, under his body and kissing him back, for all of the foreseeable future. He was sick and tired of waiting for the right moment, now that he knew Tony wanted him just as much as he’d wanted Tony.

Gibbs got dressed, put Probie into the kennel before calling a neighbor to keep an eye on the dog. Then he was on the road heading to Tony’s place.

“Tony?” Gibbs asked, a bit loudly as he banged on the door, hoping that Tony would open the door, but he didn’t. “C’mon, open up.”

Tony could hear the loud banging and Gibbs calling his name as he slumped on his couch with his
head buried in his palms. He’d fucked it up. He’d let his brain listen to his heart and had gone and done something stupid.

“Tony, are you all right?” Gibbs’ voice sounded worried, but Tony simply didn’t have the courage to open the door and face the music. Tony didn’t trust himself enough to not simply pin Gibbs to a wall and kiss him to within an inch of his life. “Tony, open up. Please!”

Gibbs had said “please.” Gibbs never said please. Maybe it wasn’t as bad as he’d thought? Tony shook his head. Yeah, right. He’d screwed it up, big time.

Receiving no response whatsoever, Gibbs rested his forehead on Tony’s door, the hand banging on the door unfurled, lying flat against the door next to his face. He didn’t know what to do, how to reach Tony. He had a backup key to Tony’s place, but he didn’t want to invade the younger man’s privacy.

Gibbs sighed. “Tony? Listen to me. I’m not angry, but we need to talk. When you feel calm enough, you come to me, and we talk. Okay? Nobody is in trouble here.”

Deciding that he should give it a rest for the day, Gibbs forced himself to turn around. He wanted to stay right there until Tony was ready to talk to him, but he knew it wouldn’t be now. He just had to be patient. He was determined to get through to Tony, however long it would take.

He just needed to find a good time to get Tony alone and show Tony just how much he would have enjoyed that kiss if Tony had stayed.

And more.

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Ducky frowned as he looked towards Gibbs, who strode into Autopsy quickly. His old friend was looking more…grumpy than normal, Ducky decided.

“Got something for me, Duck?” Gibbs demanded. Palmer was nowhere to be seen, and Gibbs assumed that Ducky had sent him to run errands.
“Not quite yet,” the doctor replied, turning his attention back to the corpse he was cutting into. “I’ve only begun my preliminary assessment, so I don’t know more than what I’ve told you already.”

“Then what did you call me down here for?” Gibbs couldn’t help glaring at the old doctor.

“You know, Jethro, nothing would be helped by you snapping at everyone and everything,” Ducky stole a quick look at Gibbs. “And that’s what I wanted to talk to you about. Is there something bothering you?”

“I don’t have time for this.” Gibbs sighed, rather exasperatedly, turning on his heels to leave.

“I’ve been watching you. I’ve seen the way you look at young Anthony for the past little while,” Ducky began, waving his scalpel around as he spoke, stopping Gibbs dead in his track. “And don’t bother telling me you weren’t looking at him. I’ve known you too long and far too well. You’ve got that fool’s smile plastered on your face when you’re looking at him.”

Gibbs glared back at the old doctor, who went about peeling back the flesh after the Y-incision.

“It’s the same damn smile you had when you met Diane, and Stephanie, and what’s her name, the first one,” Ducky continued, his eyes left the corpse briefly to glance at Gibbs over his magnifying glasses while pointing a bloody blade at Gibbs. “But I saw something… more. Jethro, I know it’s none of my business, and certainly not my place to say so, but I care about Tony as well and I really rather not see him hurt.

“Are you sure about this? Absolutely sure? I can’t stop you from falling in love with him, or him with you, but if you hurt him…” the doctor threatened.

“I won’t, Duck.” Gibbs sighed. He knew Ducky meant well, but he didn’t want to force the issue with Tony.

They’d been called out later that night to a dead Marine just outside of Quantico, after Gibbs left Tony’s apartment. Part of Gibbs was glad for the call, knowing that Tony would never abandon his post and would at least be around so Gibbs could see for himself whether Tony was okay. And maybe find a good time to have that talk with Tony.
But that hadn’t been the case. Gibbs could tell Tony had a lot on his mind by the way Tony had been avoiding him the entire time they were out at the crime scene. They barely spoke a dozen words, and when the evidence had been collected, Tony had elected to drive them back with McGee, leaving Gibbs with Ziva.

He knew that the younger man would need time to work through whatever was freaking him out, but Gibbs wasn’t sure he had the patience to wait.

Rubbing a hand over his face, Gibbs decided that if he was going to tell anyone, it might as well be Ducky. At least the old doctor would understand, and would keep it quiet. Ducky didn’t get to be his oldest friend for nothing.

“It’s…complicated,” Gibbs began, shaking his head, not sure how to continue. “We started to hang out, after we got Probie, and things were going well—at least I thought so. He seemed happy at the barbeque, didn’t he?” Gibbs looked over to Ducky for confirmation, getting a nod from the doctor.

“He kissed me, Duck,” Gibbs spoke, his gaze settled on some sheets of paper with Ducky’s elegant handwriting on it. “Yesterday morning. I was getting out of the shower, and he kissed me.”

Breathing in deep then letting it out, Gibbs continued. “I’d felt something from him, but I could never put my finger on it. I thought maybe, just maybe, he wanted more too. The kiss told me he wanted me like I wanted him, but then he ran.” Gibbs looked over to Ducky. “He ran, Duck. I went over to his place to try and talk to him but he wouldn’t open the door.”

“Hmm,” Ducky mused with a chuckle. “I would’ve thought he’d do that sooner.”

Gibbs arched a brow, waiting for Ducky to explain himself.

“Oh, come on, Jethro. Anyone could see Tony has feelings for you. Don’t tell me you haven’t noticed.” Ducky rolled his eyes in defeat. “I can’t tell you for certain how long, but he’s been in love with you for a long time. It was rather obvious, the way he looked at you with longing whenever he thought you weren’t looking.”

Ducky pulled out his face shield, making his final comment. “Just tell him how you feel. Trust your gut. Now if you’ll excuse me, my patient requires my full and undivided attention.”
Gibbs felt frustrated.

They’d been on the case of the dead marine for the past two days, making no headway whatsoever. And to make matters worse, Tony had decided avoidance was the best strategy. He hadn’t made an appearance at Gibbs’ house since that morning, and had made sure to have no unnecessary contact with Gibbs outside of required, work-related conversation.

He missed Tony’s presence. He could tell that Probie missed Tony too, by the way the dog looked to the door and whined when it didn’t open at the usual time Tony would normally come waltzing in.

Gibbs couldn’t find a single opportunity to get Tony alone with him so they could have that talk, and it was making him snappy and edgy.

“What do ya have for me, Abs?” Gibbs asked tersely, and Abby’s head snapped up.

“Gibbs!” Abby’s lips had begun to curl into a smile, but it froze when she saw the tension and frown on Gibbs’ face. “You okay?”

“Do you have anything for me or not?” Gibbs was slowly losing his patience. This was unlike him, and he knew it. He had a short fuse but he wouldn’t snap at Abby for no reason.

“Our victim the marine had been shot three times point blank in his back by a nine millimeter bullet, which pierced his heart and he bled out. One of those bullets became lodged in a rib. It was still intact so Ducky was able to retrieve it.” Abby typed on her keyboard, bringing up a comparative microscopy image before handing a file folder to Gibbs. “I’ve traced the bullet to a similar unsolved homicide of a civilian in DC a year ago.”

“Send the complete case file to McGee,” Gibbs ordered as he skimmed through the case file Abby just gave him.

“You sure you’re okay? You’ve been very snappy the last couple of days.” Abby crossed her arms in front of her chest, pouting. “Tony is acting strange too, like he was troubled about something.”
“We’re fine.” Gibbs refused to comment further as he strode out of Abby’s lab, afraid of what he might say. The entire way up to the bullpen from the elevator, all he could think about was how to get Tony alone so they could talk.

“McGee?” Gibbs barked as soon as he exited the elevator.

“Yeah, Boss?”

“Abby just sent you a Metro PD case file. Pull the evidence and go through it with Ziva. Cross-reference any connection between that case and our dead marine. Abby found a match for the gun that killed our vic.”

“On it, Boss,” McGee answered quickly, hands flying over his keyboard.

“With me, DiNozzo,” Gibbs barked, with more force than intended. He winced internally when he saw the slightly dreading look on Tony’s face as the younger man followed him into the elevator.

Tony was uncharacteristically silent on their way to the car, not even bothering to ask where they were going. Gibbs handed Tony the case folder after they were seated. “We’re gonna re-interview the witnesses from the Metro case, see if any of them know our dead Marine.”

After pulling out of the Yard, Gibbs began. “Tony, about the other day—”

“Boss, can we not talk about this right now and focus on the case?” Tony almost begged.

Gibbs sighed, giving Tony a brief but serious look. “Fine, but we will talk after.”

It wasn’t a question, wasn’t a request. It was a statement, and all Tony could do was to nod his agreement. He knew Gibbs wasn’t going to let it go.

The first witness they interviewed had been a bust. It was an elderly woman who had lived close to the crime scene at the time and had recently passed away. According to her granddaughter, who’d
been taking care of her for the past two years, the old woman was diagnosed with dementia and had steadily gotten worse in the past six months, so she wouldn’t have been able to remember much of anything even if she was still alive. Tony politely thanked the young woman, and followed Gibbs out the door.

Their second witness was a bystander who’d seen the perp flee the scene. Gibbs knocked on the door of the small second floor apartment in Arlington, and they both presented their credentials when the door opened a slit, still chained to the frame and a woman’s face appeared.

“Agents Gibbs and DiNozzo, NCIS,” Tony identified themselves, slipping his foot in the door. “We’re here to talk to a Douglas Burman.”

“He’s not here,” the woman said nervously with a tremor in her voice as she tried to close the door on them. The shifty eyes told the two men that she was high-strung on something. Behind her, a loud crash sounded before the window screeched and the sound of feet meeting metal was heard.

“Got a runner!” Tony shouted, and Gibbs was down the stairs, running after Burman before Tony had even finished the sentence.

“I’ll cut him off in the alley!” Gibbs shouted from the landing.

Tony kicked in the door and went out the fire escape after Burman, catching up with him after jumping off the fire escape. He could see Gibbs running towards them.

“Freeze! Burman! You’ve got nowhere to go!” Tony yelled and gave chase with his gun drawn, until Burman skidded to a stop and turned towards Tony.

Gibbs was running from the other side of the alley towards Burman, who was reaching behind his back.

Gun! Burman had a gun!

Gibbs ran, faster than he should while ignoring the complaint from his knee, and tackled Burman as he pulled out his weapon.
“Tony!”

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TBC
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A night at the hospital, emotions run rampant.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to gibbsgirllabby for the beta!

Chapter 9

When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.

Hospitals. He hated hospitals.

Hospitals always reminded him of the times when he did things wrong that got himself hurt, or when he’d failed to protect others that got them hurt—or killed, his heart sank—or when he’d had the plague. Now that was an experience he never wanted to repeat, ever again.

His dislike for hospitals was the only thing Tony could focus on sitting there on a stiff plastic chair in the waiting area of the emergency room. He’d tried to think about something else, but his mind kept flashing back to earlier that day, the entire chain of events played out in his head in slow motion. He kept catching himself examining the whole thing frame by frame, trying to tease out what went wrong.

His body was stiff and tired now that the adrenaline had subsided, but he couldn’t stop his entire body from shivering.

He could hear his phone ring, but he was shaking too much to take it out of his pocket and pick up the call. He looked down, staring at his hands. They were still covered in blood. Like the rest of his clothes.

He had his gun trained on Burman, who’d turned to face him. He yelled for Burman to put his hands up, but Burman didn’t listen. He could see Gibbs coming from behind Burman, running,
Gibbs was yelling something. His name. Gibbs yelled something else as he tackled Burman to the ground, but Tony couldn’t hear clearly because it sounded at the same time as the gun shot that still rang in his ears hours later.

He ran over to Gibbs, who was lying on top of Burman. He eased Gibbs off of Burman and cuffed a groaning Burman before checking on Gibbs, only to find Gibbs clutching his right shoulder, blood flowing profusely from under his hand. He remembered shouting Gibbs’ name, to keep him conscious and responsive while he took off his jacket, rolling it before pressing it to Gibbs’ wounds. He pressed hard, applying pressure with one hand while the other frantically dialed for an ambulance and backup.

He remembered how Gibbs was coughing hard, gasping for breath through the pain and trying to speak. He remembered how Gibbs held out a bloody hand to his face and stroked his cheek gently.

“Boss! Come on, Gibbs!” he remembered shouting. “Stay with me, Jethro! Stay with me! C’mon, keep those eyes on me! I am not losing you! Jethro?”

And then the EMTs were there, pushing him away to work on stabilizing Gibbs.

A warm hand squeezed his shoulder, bringing him back from the memories that would surely turn into a nightmare later. Tony looked up to find Ducky’s soft blue eyes looking at him with concern.

“Tony, are you with me?” Ducky asked, frowning when Tony barely gave him a nod.

“Doctor Mallard?” A nurse stopped next to Ducky with a pile of fabric. “Here are the scrubs and blanket you asked for. Let me know if you need anything else.”

“Thank you, my dear.” Ducky gave her a reassuring smile and watched her walk away before turning his attention back to Tony. “Here, dear boy.” Ducky hauled Tony up, pushing him towards the direction of the washroom.

“You need to get yourself cleaned up and changed.” Ducky handed him the pair of scrubs, pushing him into the room and closed the door behind him. When Tony came out in the fresh scrubs, bloody clothes in hand, Ducky guided him back to the waiting area and wrapped the blanket
around him before stuffing a Styrofoam cup full of tea into his hands. “There, that should keep you warm.”

Tony nodded dumbly, a hand coming up to tug the blanket tighter around himself as he sat and sipped his tea.

It was late, but the ER was surprisingly calm. Tony had been sitting there by himself for a few of hours. Had been since he’d wrapped up the case.

After the EMT had rushed Gibbs to the hospital, Tony had stayed on scene, waiting for the backup to arrive, automatically assuming Gibbs’ duties. He called McGee and Ziva, told them what happened and to get their asses down there to process the scene.

It wasn’t until the scene had been processed, evidence collected and their now-suspect taken into custody, did Tony allow himself to stand down. And as soon as the adrenaline faded, the shock and fatigue began to set in.

He had been standing stiffly behind his own cubical, staring at Gibbs’ desk from a distance, when Ducky found him.

The elderly doctor didn’t say a word. He merely wrapped an arm around Tony, guiding him gently to the elevator and went on to driving Tony to the hospital.

“Duck?” Tony asked quietly after he’d down a few sips of the tea. He was shivering less, but still feeling numb all over. “How is he? They wouldn’t tell me.”

Tony remembered the gun being a pistol, and at point blank range—he kept flashing back to the body of the dead marine on Ducky’s slab.

“They’re still operating. He’s lost quite a bit of blood, but Jethro is strong. He’ll pull through.” Ducky patted Tony on the shoulder. “He will be okay, Tony.”

“Why? Why did he…” Tony swallowed around the lump in his throat. He stared at his hands. They were clean now, but he could still feel the blood on them.
“Doctor Mallard? I’m Doctor John Gregory.” The doctor shook Ducky’s hand before turning to Tony. “You must be Agent DiNozzo.”

“Call me Tony. How is he, Doctor Gregory?” Tony asked, shaking the man’s hand.

“Well, the bullet was a through and through, didn’t hit any bone. But he’s lost quite a bit of blood. The bullet nicked an artery in his right shoulder. We managed to stop the bleeding and repaired the damage. He is unconscious right now but he is stable, breathing on his own.” Gregory looked through his charts. “We’re gonna have to keep him in ICU overnight for observations, but once he regains consciousness tomorrow we can move him to a regular ward.”

Tony breathed a sigh of relief at the doctor’s words. “When can we see him?”

“Not until we’ve transferred him out of ICU.” Gregory shook his head. ICU was family only, and even then it was well past visiting hours. “Have you notified his family?”

“I suppose I can give Jackson a ring. Thank you, Doctor Gregory.” Ducky nodded, thanking the doctor.

“Just doing my job. Donna will take care of the paperwork.” Gregory tilted his head towards the nurses’ station. “And she will give you a call tomorrow when Agent Gibbs has been transferred.”

“That would be most appreciated.” Ducky smiled at Gregory before he began to steer Tony towards the door. “Come on, my boy. You heard the doctor. You’re going home to get some rest.”

“But—” Tony protested. He wanted—needed—to visually confirm that Gibbs’ alive and breathing.

“No ‘buts’, Tony. There is nothing you can do right now. Jethro needed to rest, and so do you.” Ducky gave him a stern look, gripping Tony’s shoulders firmly, refusing to let him go. “I’ll make
sure to give you a call tomorrow as soon as I hear from the hospital.”

Knowing he wouldn’t win the argument, Tony reluctantly allowed Ducky to drive them both back to the Yard. McGee and Ziva gave him an update as he picked up his backpack. They’d searched Burman’s apartment and found large quantities of a variety of narcotics and brought the girl in as an accessory. Abby had processed most of the evidence, and a few more tests would be running overnight. Tony dismissed McGee and Ziva for the night and left instructions to run backgrounds on Burman and the two murders when they got in the next morning. He’d let Burman stew in holding overnight, and interrogate him once he was sure Gibbs was okay.

He hadn’t dared to think about the alternative.

Instead of heading home, Tony drove aimlessly after leaving the yard, until he realized that he’d stopped in front of Gibbs’ house. He had no recollection of how he’d gotten there.

He let himself into the house, turning on the lights in the kitchen and went into the living room. Probie was dozing on the couch, instead of his dog bed. Tony couldn’t remember how many times they’d tried but Probie would always claim the couch while they were out, and only return to his own bed reluctantly when they ordered him off after getting home.

Probie seemed to sense that something was wrong. The pup immediately jumped down from the couch and trotted over to Tony, nudging his fisted hand before licking it gently.

It was as if Tony had lost all of the strength he’d been desperately holding on to the entire evening, sinking down onto the floor, right there in the middle of the living room. Probie sat down right next to Tony, nudging Tony with his big head until Tony slung an arm around the dog, burying his head into Probie’s soft fur.

Tony heard the sound of quiet sobbing, and it took him a while to realize that it was he who was sobbing into Probie’s coat.

He felt his anger bubbling to the surface—the anger towards Burman, the anger towards himself. It’d been his fault that Gibbs was shot. He was distracted, he wasn’t fast enough, didn’t see the gun until it was too late. It was followed by all the worries and fears that he might lose Gibbs for good this time, that he might never get the chance to say to Gibbs all the things he never got around to say.
If he was less tired, he would’ve been kicking and scream and punishing himself until he was bloodied and bruised, just so he wouldn’t feel so numb. He was too mentally exhausted to do anything but let his worries and fears come in waves like the roaring tides, bursting through his walls and his masks and his defences in quiet tears.

He couldn’t stop it.

He held on as tight as he could without hurting Probie, gasping for breath as the tears flowed. He could hear Probie’s whining, as if the dog had felt that something was wrong and was in mourning.

“He’ll be okay, Probster,” Tony mumbled through the words of assurance, unsure of whether he was saying it to Probie or trying to convince himself. “He’s gonna be okay.”

He didn’t know how long he’d sat there like that, Probie curled up next to him, when he heard the front door open. He didn’t bother looking up.

“Tony?” Palmer’s voice echoed through the living room. “Is that you?”

Tony sighed, ruffling Probie’s big head as the dog slump down onto his lap. “Hey, Jimmy.”

“You all right?” Palmer knelt down next to the pair, a hand lay gently on Tony’s shoulder.

“I will be,” Tony lied through his teeth. “What are you doing here?”

Palmer stared at Tony from above his glasses, seeing right through Tony’s half-truths. The blood-shot eyes and the red rims and the puffy skin around the eyes told him all he needed to know. Shaking his head and sighing, Palmer stood up and offered his hand to Tony. “I, uh, came by to check up on Probie. There wasn’t much to do for me in Autopsy at the moment, and both Abby and Tim were tired so I volunteered. Come on, up you go.”

Taking Palmer’s hand, Tony stood up from the floor, wobbling slightly before he got his balance back. “Thanks.”

“My pleasure,” Palmer answered with a dip of his head. Depositing Tony into the couch, he padded
over to the kitchen, filled Probie’s bowls with kibble and water before checking the fridge, pulling out two bottles of beer.

“Here,” he handed one to Tony after twisting the tops off, sitting down next to the man.

“Thanks.” Tony clinked his bottle with Palmer’s before taking a long drag.

“You’re not okay,” Palmer stated as a matter of fact.

“No, I guess I’m not.” Tony sighed, slumping into the seat, his eyes watching absently at Probie eating hungrily out of his bowl. He felt guilty for not remembering to feed Probie because he was wallowing in his emotions.

“And you’re in love with Agent Gibbs,” Palmer said cautiously as Tony drank from the bottle.

Tony nearly choked on the mouthful of beer. He coughed as he tried to get the words out.

“What?!”

“You’re in love with him, aren’t you?” Palmer looked at Tony, a smirk played at the corner of his mouth.

“I swear you are slowly turning into Ducky. Only Ducky is allowed to blurt out this psychobabble, ya know?” Tony glared at the culprit of his near-choking.

“But you do love him.”

Tony sighed, rubbing a hand over his tired eyes, fingers pinching the bridge of his nose. “I guess I do. How did you—”

“For someone who’d done as much undercover work as you had, I’m surprised you never noticed the way you looked at Agent Gibbs.” Palmer shook his head, nudging Tony in the arm with his elbow. “Just because I live down in Autopsy doesn’t mean I don’t pay attention.”
“Touché.” Tony shook his head, huffing out his mild protest. “I’m that obvious, huh?”

“A little bit, if one knows where to look. I’m pretty sure Doctor Mallard noticed it too.” Palmer looked over to Tony before continuing. “He’ll be okay, Tony. He’s tough, tougher than any of us. He’s going to be fine.”

“I know…I know,” Tony groaned. “I know he’s going to be fine. I just… I can’t stop thinking about it. I kept wondering if I’d done anything wrong, or if I’d missed something I shouldn’t have…”

Tony swallowed, trying to loosen the lump in his throat as he stared into the wall just behind Gibbs’ ancient TV. “After they took him, I kept thinking to myself—what if that was the last time I saw him? I couldn’t stop the bleeding; his blood was everywhere. The only times I’ve been this scared in my life was when he was in that coma and when I had to stop CPR on him to work on Maddie Tyler. And to be honest, I wouldn’t even care if I never get the chance to tell him how I feel as long as he’s all right.”

Feeling the reassuring pat on his shoulder, Tony looked over to Palmer, giving him a weak smile.

They sat silently like that for a while, sipping their beers, and Tony couldn’t help to wonder if he and Jimmy were developing some sort of relationship like Gibbs had with Ducky over the past few years. He shook his head bemusedly. Probie had finished eating and trotted over to sit on his haunches next to Tony, resting his furry head on Tony’s thigh as he always did. Tony stroked Probie’s fur absentmindedly, wondering if Probie knew that Gibbs would be gone for a few days and whether he could comprehend it.

“Oh, look at the time! Tony, I… uh, I’m gonna have to get going. Breena’s waiting for me at home…”

“Go, get out of here already.” Tony smiled. “Tell Breena I said ‘hi.’”

“You’re gonna be okay here?” Palmer asked as he walked to the door.

Tony rolled his eyes, following behind Palmer. “Not the first time I’ve stayed over.”

“All right then. Uhm…” Palmer hesitated for a moment before giving Tony a pat on the shoulder.
“Good night, Tony.”

“G’night, Jimmy. Drive safe.” Tony waved Palmer off at the door, watching as his friend climbed into the car and drove off before shutting the door and locking it.

After checking that everything was in order, Tony made his way upstairs to wash up and to try and get some sleep, even though he knew he probably wouldn’t get any. Coming out of the bathroom, he paused in front of Gibbs’ bedroom door. It wasn’t like he’d never been inside before, but he felt…like he was intruding.

In the end, the need to feel connected to Gibbs, even if it was through the things he owned and used, had won out. He entered the bedroom, found a pair of sweatpants to change into, before he walked over to the bed, leaving the scrubs pooled on the floor.

The USMC sweatshirt was still there, in a pile on the bed, and Tony couldn’t help it this time to pull it over his head, allowing the scent that he’d been missing and craving since that awkward morning surround him like a comforting embrace.

He lay down on Gibbs’ bed, the utilitarian bed sheet rough under his skin but he barely noticed as Gibbs’ scent enveloped him.

As he drifted off, he made a promise to himself. He was going to tell Gibbs. He would tell Gibbs that he loved him.

Before it was too late.

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TBC
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

With the case closed, our boy finally says the words to each other that matters.

Chapter Notes

"Probie: An NCIS Tail" is finally finished! Wow! It's the single longest story I've written to date, and I had so much fun writing it. Thank you all for being so supportive of my work, especially the few (you know who you are) that urged me on and made me laugh so I can continue. Probie's story doesn't stop here, though! I do plan on continuing to write smaller bits and pieces of their home lives. (In fact, I already have some stuff written that was supposed to be an epilogue but had decided it wanted to be fic instead!) So stay tuned!

Thanks to sunsaralyn/thecookiemomma for the speedy beta!

Chapter 10

When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.

He woke groggily from a haze of confusion by a ringing sound. It took him a while to recognize that it was his ring tone. Glancing briefly at the alarm clock Gibbs kept by the bed, Tony cursed softly to himself before picking up the call.

“DiNozzo.”

“Hey, Tony.” It was McGee. Tony rubbed his eyes with the heel of his palm.

“Hey, Tim. Sorry, I overslept. Didn’t hear my alarm, I’ll be there in about an hour,” Tony said apologetically, a trace of fatigue audible in his voice. “How’re you guys doing?”

“No rush, Tony, we’re still working on the background but we’re almost done. Abby’s got the ballistics back. The bullets from both cases matched Burman’s gun,” McGee read from his notes.
“Tony…”

“What, Tim?” Tony sighed.

“Are…are you okay?”

“Why is everyone and their mother asking me that question?” Tony tried to joke, trying to be as nonchalant as possible. “I’m fine! Now get that background done before I get in so I can go make that mother fucker cry like a baby and close this case.”

“Okay, Tony.” Tony could hear McGee’s chuckles over the phone. “I’ll see you when you get in.”

“Later.”

Tony slumped face down on the bed, giving himself another moment. It hadn’t been restful sleep last night. He kept finding himself waking up with a start in the middle of the night, the feeling of panic lodged in his gut, before he willed himself back to sleep. He breathed in deep, hanging on to the scent of Gibbs’ bed before he sighed and got up.

He stripped himself out of the sweatpants and sweatshirt he was wearing and tossed them into the laundry pile with the scrubs so he could wash them later before padding to the bathroom. On the way there, he noticed that Gibbs had washed the pair of jeans he’d left there the last time, and left them on the guest bed. He thought for a moment before grabbing the jeans along with one of Gibbs’ undershirts and headed to the bathroom for a shower.

Tony made it into Abby’s lab an hour later, after a stop at home to change into something more presentable, Probie in tow.

“Tony!” Abby rushed over and slammed into Tony, wrapping her arms around him tightly. “I was so worried. How is Gibbs? I couldn’t go to the ER last night because I had to get the ballistics done and Major MassSpec was having a fit so I had to get him to cooperate to analyze the drugs from Burman’s apartment. How are you? You must’ve been worried sick—”

“Abby… can’t… breathe…” Tony barely managed.
“Oh, sorry!” Abby finally let him go, which was when she noticed her other visitor. “Probie!”

“Can I leave him with you for the day? I haven’t had the chance to feed him or take him for a walk. If you don’t mind…”

“Of course!” Abby nodded. “Abby Sciuto, Dog Sitter, at your service.”

“Thanks. Good work on the ballistics, by the way.” Tony pulled her in for a hug, knowing that she needed it as much as he did. Gibbs and Abby had always been close, and he knew Gibbs getting hurt was affecting Abby as much as it was affecting him.

“Thanks Tony… How is Gibbs?” Abby mumbled into Tony’s suit jacket.

“He’s lost quite a bit of blood, but the doctor said that he’ll be fine. They said they’ll call when he’s awake.” Tony pressed a kiss to Abby’s forehead. “I’ll let you know.”

“Okay.” Abby nodded again, taking the leash from Tony. “Come on, Probie, let’s get you some breakfast and we’ll go for a walk.”

“Thanks, Abs.” Tony gave her a wave as he headed for the elevator.

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The rest of the day passed quickly.

The evidence, in addition to the background Ziva and McGee compiled on Burman, revealed that he had been dealing in everything from prescription narcotics to designer street drugs. It took all of an hour for Tony to crack Burman, after Tony had told him that he was definitely be looking at the death penalty for felony murders unless he reveal his sources—the ballistics reports and the drugs they found would be convincing enough to any jury and Burman knew it.

It turned out that both their dead marine and the Metro victim had been simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Burman had been meeting with his suppliers in both cases, and was interrupted by the victims. Burman had shot them after they had refused to just walk away.
The case was forwarded to the DEA so they could further investigate the drug connections, and Metro police was informed so they could close their cold case. Tony would’ve congratulated himself on a job well done if Gibbs hadn’t been injured.

Ducky had called, right after he finished the interrogation, telling him that Gibbs had been transferred out of the ICU and now was sleeping in his new room. Tony found himself rushing to the garage after briefing Vance on the case and sending the team home with a “good job”. They could deal with the reports tomorrow.

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Tony made it to the hospital in record time.

The hallway outside of Gibbs’ room was eerily quiet with everyone speaking in hushed tones—another reason why Tony hated hospitals. The unnatural silence always felt like a perpetual cloud of bad omens to him.

Tony knocked lightly on the door before entering only to find the lights dimmed and the sole occupant of the room asleep in bed. He grimaced as he looked to the bed. Gibbs seemed sickly and pale, lying there propped up in the hospital bed, and Tony could feel the worry and fear from the previous night resurfacing even though he knew Gibbs would be good as new in a couple of weeks.

He deposited himself in a chair next to the bed, repositioning it so he was sitting as close to Gibbs as possible. He reached out, hesitantly at first, and grabbed onto Gibbs’ hand, feeling the rough pads of Gibbs’ fingers in his palm.

Tony could feel the tension he’d been holding for the past day and a half bleed out of him, now that he was sure Gibbs was alive and well.

Holding Gibbs’ hand in his, Tony leaned forward to rub his cheek on the back of Gibbs’ hand before pressing his lips to it.

“You had me worried, Jethro,” Tony scolded fondly, even though he knew Gibbs wouldn’t hear it in his sleep. He reached out with his free hand to brush a stray strand of hair away from Gibbs’ face. “Didn’t I tell you to be more careful? Gotta stop worrying me like this.”
Flashing back to the day before with Gibbs lying on the ground and his hands bloody, then to the coma, and then that day at the docks...Tony let out a shuddering breath as he kissed the back of Gibbs’ hand again, their fingers now entwined. “I was so scared. So scared that I’d lose you forever this time. So scared that I wouldn’t get a chance to tell you—” Tony paused, the enormity of what he was about to confess hitting him. He was suddenly glad that Gibbs wasn’t awake to hear it.

“I was so fucking scared that I wouldn’t get a chance to tell you that I love you,” Tony finished in a barely audible whisper, his voice shaking with emotion. “I love you, you bastard. I need you to wake up so you can either fire me or kiss me senseless.”

Tony looked up when the hand in his began to pull away to find Gibbs staring at him.

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Gibbs began to wake as soon as someone had touched him. And then Tony’s voice drifted into earshot.

The pain from his chest wound began to make itself known, but Gibbs ignored it. Tony was here, wasn’t running away, and that was all that mattered to Gibbs.

The way Tony kissed Gibbs’ hand, it made Gibbs’ stomach clench and his heart ache. He could hear the pain and hurt in Tony’s voice. He never meant to upset the younger man, never meant to hurt or worry him. He just needed Tony to be safe, even if it meant giving his own life.

And then he heard it.

Tony said...he loved him.

Gibbs felt his heart swell even though he’d known it since that morning, the smile that began at the corner of his lips grew impossibly wide. He opened his eyes, just in time to catch Tony’s last few words.

He pulled his hand from Tony’s, watching the younger man’s eyes grew wide as they met his own,
and, quick as he’d always been, gave Tony the biggest headslap he could muster from a hospital bed.

“Now why would I want the first option?” Gibbs asked, his voice scratchy and gravelly, as Tony rubbed the back of his head. Wrapping Tony’s skinny tie around his hand, Gibbs pulled Tony closer by the thin strip of silk. “C’mere.”

Gibbs sealed his lips over Tony’s as the younger man got up and leaned forward to meet him, sitting on the edge of the bed. The kiss was almost chaste, Tony responding pliantly to the movement of Gibbs’ lips. Gibbs let his tongue sweep over the slit between Tony’s lips, and Tony opened up, letting Gibbs in, giving control over to the other man.

When they parted for air, Gibbs sighed contently after breathing deep. Finally.

“Missed you these last few days,” Gibbs brought his hand up to cup Tony’s face, his thumb stroking Tony’s cheek. “Missed you when you didn’t come over. I thought I’d fucked it up again.”

Holding Tony head closer to his shoulder, Gibbs kissed Tony’s temple and hair gently, breathing in the familiar scent that he’d grown used to having around him.

“And here I thought I’d messed everything up by kissing you first.” Tony pouted, looking up at Gibbs, his upper body practically plastered over Gibbs’ left side. He let a hand trail to Gibbs’ right shoulder, fingers gently caressing the thick gauze that covered the bullet wound.

“Thank God.” Tony shivered slightly, flashing back to the alley again. “You gotta stop scaring me like this.”

“It’s okay, Tony. I’m okay.” Gibbs tightened his arm around Tony, murmuring assuring words into Tony’s hair, feeling the soft strands under his fingers. “Sorry I had you worried.”

“I thought that was a sign of weakness?” Tony looked up at Gibbs again, surprised at the apology coming from the older man.

“Not when it’s someone I care about,” Gibbs said, eyes gazing into Tony’s. “Not when it’s someone I love.”
Tony could feel his breath catch at Gibbs’ words, and a bright grin lit up his face for the first time since the barbecue.

That very moment, in Gibbs’ mind, couldn’t have been more perfect.

They stayed like that for a while with Tony tucked at Gibbs’ side enjoying the calming comfort of each other’s company. They didn’t move until they heard a knock at the door. Tony straightened up and moved off the bed just in time to see Abby’s head poke in the door.

“Hey, Abs,” Gibbs greeted, tilting his head slightly to motion Abby over. “C’mere.”

“Hey, Gibbs,” Abby returned hesitantly before Gibbs gave her a look that said a non-verbal okay. She flew across the room to hug Gibbs, carefully avoiding Gibbs’ injured shoulder. “God, I’m so glad you’re okay!”

Gibbs let out an exasperated smiled, looking over to Tony, who gave Gibbs a shrug and a smirk. Gibbs rolled his eyes in reply.

“Abby?” Tony cleared his throat, trying to distract Abby from tackle-hugging Gibbs. Abby’s hugs were great, except when you were injured. Tony had first hand experiences with that. “Where’s Probie?” He’d asked Abby to bring Probie with her, knowing she’d want to come visit Gibbs as well.

Abby turned at Tony’s question, finally letting Gibbs go, and replied sheepishly with a blush. “Oh, shoot! He’s in the car. I left the windows cracked for air but we should probably go get him.”

“Come on, let the man rest. I’ll buy you dinner.” Tony moved to steer Abby towards the door.

“Oh, all right.” Abby sighed, hugging Gibbs lightly once more before heading out the door. “Bye, Gibbs. I’ll drop in later, when you’re more rested.”

“Bye, Abs.” Gibbs pressed a kiss to Abby’s temple before she pulled away.
“I, uh, I’ll come by after work tomorrow?” Tony waited until Abby was out the door before asking.

“You better,” Gibbs nearly growled. He held up his hand to give Tony the “come hither”, and pulled the younger man down for a lingering kiss.

“Love you,” Gibbs whispered against Tony’s lips when they parted, slightly surprised that it was so easy to say, out loud, to Tony.

“Love you, too.” Tony smiled, squeezing Gibbs’ hand lightly before leaving the room to find Abby. “See you tomorrow.”

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“I’m not an invalid!” Gibbs growled when Tony went around to the passenger side and gingerly helped Gibbs out of the car as soon as Tony had shut the engine off. His further protest died in his throat when he saw the slightly hurtful look on Tony’s face. Gibbs sighed as he allowed Tony lend him a hand to ease his large frame from his seat. He understood Tony’s instinctive need to help him, protect him, keep him from harm. He had done the same thing when Tony had been injured.

The doctor had made Gibbs stay for nearly a whole week at the hospital, citing bed rest was needed to recuperate from his blood loss. They had only reluctantly agreed that he could go home to continue his recovery after Gibbs had glared them into submission. No coffee was making Gibbs a very grumpy Marine.

Gibbs made his way inside with Tony trailing behind, his good hand gripping the cup of joe Tony had gotten him after springing him from the “joint” earlier that afternoon.

Gibbs could hear the sound of Probie’s claws on the floor as the dog ran through the kitchen towards them. He made a loud whistle and Probie skidded to a stop in front of him. He knelt down, patted and ruffled Probie’s head as the pup sat down obediently. “Good boy.”

“Why is it that he never does that for me?” Tony asked with a pout, staring at Probie in disbelieve, as he set Gibbs’ bag down next to the living room entrance. “He usually just tries to tackle me.”

Gibbs snorted. “I told you, dogs obey the alpha dog. And that’s me,” he replied with a grin, reaching for Tony and tugging him into his arms. Burying his head into the crook of Tony’s neck,
Gibbs breathed in then out, tightening his arms around the small of Tony’s back. He couldn’t understand how he could “miss” this, if they’ve never actually done the whole hugging-welcome-home thing.

“It’s good to be home,” Gibbs said, emphasizing the word “home” slightly as he tightened his arms around Tony, hoping the other man would catch his drift of what he really meant.

“It’s good to finally have some privacy,” Tony nearly growled as Gibbs turned his head slightly to kiss Tony’s jaw. “I swear those nurses were talking about us.”

Tony had been dropping by the hospital before work and staying for hours after work, keeping Gibbs company. They’d chitchat, like they normally do, but now and again, Gibbs would steal kisses from Tony when they were alone. Tony had been around so much that the nurses had begun to talk. Gibbs thought amusingly at the conversations he overheard when the nurses thought he was asleep.

“Let ‘em talk,” Gibbs mouthed the words onto Tony’s neck, his breath moist and hot, making Tony’s skin tingle. “Not like it isn’t mostly true.”

“Mmm,” Tony groaned when Gibbs sucked at a spot on Tony’s neck, nipping at the bit of skin under his lips, working it between his teeth. “God! How is it that we’ve never done this welcome home thing before, and yet I miss it?” Tony spoke in a near whisper, his voice taking on a gravely texture.

Gibbs chuckled, his body swaying gently with Tony’s. “Ya know? I was just thinking the same thing.”

Bringing a hand back up, Gibbs let his fingers slide through Tony’s hair, massaging the back of Tony’s head gently with his fingertips before cupping Tony’s face with his palm. He stroked Tony’s cheek lightly with his thumb, straightening his head and gazing straight into Tony’s eyes before bringing their lips together. Gibbs’ other hand began to slide up and down Tony’s back, making the other man groan in appreciation.

“Bed. C’mon,” Gibbs said quietly, backing Tony towards the stairs. It was the middle of the afternoon, of a bright, sunny, early summer day. Good weather dictated that they should at least go out and enjoy the outdoors, but Gibbs couldn’t think of better things to do than to spend the rest of the day in bed getting to know Tony in a more physical way.
It wasn’t just lust, but also something more basic, more primal. It was the need to connect, to feel, to drown himself in the essence of the younger man—the sights, smells, tastes and sounds.

They kept their lips locked, even as they made their way up the stairs to Gibbs’ bedroom. Somewhere along the way, Tony’s t-shirt was pulled over his head and out of the way, and two sneaky hands had found their way underneath Gibbs’ polo.

Gibbs could feel his hard length, trapped in his pants, brush against Tony’s clothed erection as they moved. Gibbs could hear the moans of the younger man as he ran his hands down the length of Tony’s spine, could feel the way those strong muscles rippled and turned under his hand as Tony moved.

They stumbled into the bedroom, both skimming out of the rest of their clothing as they went. Gibbs held out a hand to Tony and pulled him to the bed.

“Christ, you’re gorgeous,” Gibbs couldn’t help commenting as he surveyed the landscape of Tony’s body, stretched out in the centre of his king-sized bed.

“Not looking too bad yourself,” Tony quipped, rearing up to pull Gibbs onto the bed next to him before rolling on top of Gibbs and straddling him around the thighs. Their hard lengths brushed against each other, and both men groaned at the sensation that sparked.

Tony leaned forward, watched Gibbs with a bewildered interest before moving one hand from beside Gibbs’ head on the bed to slowly stroke Gibbs’ face, down the jaw, along the neck to the chest. He followed his strokes with kisses—tender, lingering kisses, like he was worshiping the man beneath him. Gibbs groaned in appreciation, his body responding to the touches in earnest.

Gibbs reached out a hand to cup Tony’s face, bringing him up for a deep, long kiss, then with one quick move flipped Tony onto his back. Slowly but surely, Gibbs mirrored Tony, stroking and kissing the younger man’s body, cataloguing every shiver and sigh. They were both hard and leaking, but neither of them felt the need to hurry.

Gibbs kissed his way down, moving slowly to the edge of the bed, and took his lover’s dick into his mouth, his tongue brushing over the slit. He chuckled with his lips around the head when Tony gasped loudly. “Jethro!”

The tangy, salty, slightly bitter taste of Tony exploded on Gibbs’ tongue, making his mouth water.
Giving Tony a long look, he took more of Tony into his hot mouth, humming and sucking his way down. The wanton look on Tony’s face was… Gibbs moaned loudly around Tony with appreciation.

Running his tongue up and down the underside of Tony’s cock as he bobbed his head, Gibbs gripped Tony’s hips to prevent him from moving too much. He could feel the tensing of the thigh muscles, the twitching of the cock in his mouth. He could hear the way Tony was making tiny noises at the back of his throat, could smell the musky scent of arousal as he took Tony deep, his nose buried into Tony’s pubic hair. Gibbs could see the way Tony was arching his back off the bed, the way his balls began to draw up. He was close.

“Jeth…” Gibbs’ name ended on a moan as he sucked harder on his way up. “I’m… close…”

Gibbs glanced up at Tony, looking straight into his eyes, into those mesmerizing green eyes he loved.

Gibbs could almost pinpoint the exact moment ecstasy over took Tony, and the younger man came with a long, drawn out groan, falling over the edge with Gibbs’ mouth still fused to his cock.

Gibbs took it all, swallowing it down. He licked Tony clean before kissing Tony’s inner thigh, leaving a small bite mark.

“God, Jethro,” Tony exclaimed as he breathed heavily. He tugged at Gibbs, forcing the older man to move back so they lay next to each other. Tony rolled onto his side to nuzzle at Gibbs’ shoulder.

Tony could taste himself on Gibbs’ tongue as he drew Gibbs into a slow kiss. Snaking a hand down to Gibbs’ still hard cock, he began to stroke him, nibbling at Gibbs’ strong jaw. It didn’t take long for him to come, exploding in Tony’s hand with a grunt.

“That was…” Tony paused, searching for the right word. “Phenomenal.”

Gibbs chuckled, drawing the other man into his arms so Tony was plastered over Gibbs’ side. “Yes, it was.”

They lay there, spent and naked. They didn’t need more words; the touches and looks more than enough to convey their feelings. Gibbs couldn’t help the smile on his face as he tightened his arms,
bringing Tony even closer.

*Life really doesn't get better than this,* he thought to himself as he drifted off into a light doze, his lover in his arms already asleep.

~FIN~

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