What I Need From You

by Calico_Cat_TIVA_Fan

Summary

Post-Somalia, Tony and Ziva are rebuilding their friendship. Rated M for the final chapter; all others are K/K+ rating. Part of the "You Complete Me" universe.
What I Need From You

Post-Somalia Tony and Ziva discussion on their friendship.

Ziva curled into Tony's side, his arm around her shoulder. His hand was absently fingering her curls that cascaded down her shoulder and arm. Both were focused on the classic film playing on Ziva's new television.

Tony had bought her a DVD player and when he presented it to her when he arrived for dinner after work, she had thanked him profusely and then reminded him that she did not have a television. Two hours later, after the dinner was consumed, they had carried the new forty inch TV through her front door. Together, they had set up the screen and DVD player. Oddly, Ziva had been the one to read the directions that came with both electronic devices, whereas Tony started pulling things out of boxes and jumped right into the set up. When he did encounter a snag, Ziva had the answer ready. They worked as a team just as they always did.

When Ziva hit the power buttons on the remotes, both TV and DVD player lit up. Tony grinned at her.

"And we didn't even have to call McGeek for help!"

Ziva grinned back at him, "No we did not; we are a good team." He slipped the disc for the movie they planned to watch into the player and both settled on the sofa to watch the classic film.

About two thirds of the way through, Tony realized that Ziva was asleep, using his chest as a pillow. He grinned as he turned his attention back to the screen. Things were getting back to 'normal' between the two since their chat in the men's room at work. He liked that; a lot...

He must have dozed off as well; the next thing Tony knew, Ziva was thrashing against him and whimpering. At first he was startled, and then he realized that she was having a nightmare.

"Zi," he called to her softly. "Ziva, it's okay. You're having a bad dream. I'm here..." She jumped up and had a deer in the headlights look on her face.

"I... I..." she looked around the room, clearly not one hundred percent sure where she was.

"Hey, you're in your apartment in DC. With me, Tony, your loveable office idiot," he grinned at her. She nodded and ran a hand through her hair. He patted the sofa cushion next to him and met her gaze. "Come sit with me again..."

"Tony, I..." she crumpled into his side as he wrapped his arms around her. "Toda," she whispered so softly he barely heard her. She sniffled.

He waited as she continued to cling to his side. The two remotes were within reach so he powered down the DVD player and TV. He could feel her tears soaking through his shirt. He waited...

Ziva sat up about ten minutes later, "I am sorry." She met his gaze and then looked down at her hands, which were in her lap.

"Hey," he lifted her chin to meet her gaze again. "You never have to apologize about that with me. And if you want to talk about it, you know I'll listen."
"I know. I do not want to talk about it."

"Okay; what do you want?" He'd get her anything she needed; all she had to do was ask.

Ziva hesitated; then put her hand on his arm. "I do not want to be alone tonight."

"Okay; I can sleep on the couch," he offered.

"No. With me," she stood up and pulled him to his feet. "I slept more in your arms than I have in many nights." He followed her to the bedroom, watching her moves. He was not quite sure what she had in mind, but he'd let her lead the way.

She disappeared into the bathroom after motioning for him to sit on the bed. She came back in a pair of pajamas that covered her arms and legs. He got up to use the bathroom. When he came back, Ziva was under the covers, with the empty side pulled down for him.

"Are you going to sleep in your clothes?"

"I, um, really don't have any choice," he commented.

"You can strip to your boxers; that is okay with me," she replied and patted the empty space on the bed. He quickly shed his jeans and shirt and climbed into the bed next to her. He looked over and met her gaze.

"Are you comfortable?" he asked. "I can get another blanket or make more room for you or…"

She put a finger on his lips. "Tony, be quiet. What I need from you is the comfort of your presence. Hold me, please?" She moved against his side and laid her head on his chest, over his heart. He wrapped an arm around her and listened to her contented sigh.

"Whatever you need my Ninja," he spoke softly thinking she was almost asleep. He felt her smile against him.

"Toda; and laila tov," she whispered back.
Chapter 2: Tony – It Hurts

The case was supposed to be a simple one; in and out, questioning two young teens who had stumbled across the remains of a Marine who had been missing for ten months. Tony had the luck of the draw on this one and was sent out to interview the boys alone. He smirked as he left the bullpen; Tim and Ziva were working cold case files. They had all been reviewing cold cases before the call came in.

Three hours later, a noticeably quiet Tony came back into the squad room. He placed his backpack by his desk and sat down in, moving the mouse to wake up his computer. He glanced up at Ziva, who was watching him with a question in her eyes.

"You are quiet, Tony; usually you come back from one of these assignments chatting up a downpour," she commented.

"Storm, Ziva," Tony corrected her tersely. He diverted his gaze to his computer screen and began typing. Ziva looked at Tim who shrugged. She got up from her desk and walked over to her partner.

"Are you in a bad mood?"

Tony shrugged without looking up, "Got a lot to do, Ziva." He continued typing as she gave him a look of concern.

"Dinner?" she mouthed at him. He nodded and she went back to her desk, still concerned. She watched him out of the corner of her eye for the rest of the afternoon. She tried not to make it too obvious, but he caught her looking several times.

Gibbs finally sent them home for the night around 1900. Tony grabbed his backpack and bee-lined for the elevator. Ziva had to run to catch up to him before the doors slid shut.

She turned to her partner, and was about to ask him what was bothering him when he cut her off.

"Not here." She gave a slight nod and stayed silent for the ride to the ground floor. They each got into their own cars, the unspoken understanding that they would meet at Ziva's apartment.

"Hey, Zi?" Tony called out. "Red or white?"

"I am making chicken," she replied just before closing her door. He gave her a thumbs' up as she drove past him to the gate.

An hour later, Ziva was putting plates of chicken cutlets, rice with broccoli, and baby carrots on the table as Toy poured white wine into two glasses. Ziva noticed that he was not as talkative as usual, but decided not to comment. She knew something was bothering him, but she also knew that pushing him to open up would have just the opposite effect. In that respect, they were birds of a feather.

After dinner, Tony cleared the table, washed the dishes, and thanked Ziva for the meal multiple times. "That was delicious; you can cook for me anytime!" he grinned at her. "How about we take the rest of the wine into the living room and watch a movie?"
"Fine with me," Ziva picked up their wine glasses and followed Tony into the living room. He looked over her ever-growing collection of DVDs. She watched his brow furrow as he sought out a title. He ran his finger over the case spines, and his face lit up like a child on Christmas when he found the one he wanted. Ziva had to bite her lip to keep from laughing out loud at his expression. She thought about how that very face had kept her from going insane in the cell in Saleem's camp. She shook her head slightly to clear her thoughts. She would not open that line of thought tonight.

Tony powered up the DVD player and TV, inserting the shiny disc into the slot and walking backwards to sit next to Ziva on the couch. As he pressed play, Ziva realized that he had picked one of her favorites to watch; Pirates of the Caribbean. As he sat down, she pulled him back against her and scooted sideways so that he could put his head on her lap.

He sighed and put the remotes on the coffee table and turned slightly so he could see the screen. The sigh did not go unnoticed by Ziva. She watched the opening scene unfold and her hand absently wandered to Tony's hair. She threaded the fine hairs through her fingers and gently massaged his scalp, using a very light touch. She happened to glance down and the look on his face made her grin. If he were a cat, he would have been purring loud enough to drown out the soundtrack!

"That kid today got to me," Tony spoke suddenly.

"How so?" Ziva gently prompted him to open up.

"The older one; he could be me twenty five, thirty years ago…" Tony trailed off lost in his thoughts. "He said something that dredged up old memories. Father is the sole surviving parent, never home, kid relies on a housekeeper slash cook slash nanny most of the time. He has very few friends because he's been in a different school every year. The other kid, the younger one, is a neighbor kid who sort of befriended him.

"Anyhow, the older kid said that he could disappear from the face of the Earth and no one would miss him…” Ziva could see the pain in her partner's eyes, he tried to hide it, but she could read him as well as he could read her.

"I told him that his buddy would miss him, and the kid started crying, Ziva. Sobbing. I just sort of reached over and pulled him into a hug, you know? It was like I was hugging my younger self… I shouldn't have touched him, but it was so weird. It was like I couldn't stop myself from hugging him."

"You gave him comfort and understanding, Tony. He needed that."

"Yeah, I guess. But why that kid? Why did he of all the kids and others we've interviewed and worked with on cases affect me like that?" Tony locked gazes with Ziva; she could see tears in the corners of his eyes. She ran her hand though his hair again, gently massaging his scalp with her finger tips.

"Perhaps it is because you saw yourself in him, yes?" When he nodded, she continued, "You know his pain and his loneliness firsthand, Tony. You could offer him comfort in a way no one who did not understand could." She let her words sink in and put little spikey tufts into his hair with her fingers. She could see him thinking and digesting what she said.

The pair continued to watch the film, Ziva's hands still playing in Tony's hair. Every so often she glanced down at his face, the contented smile and near drowsy eyes made her smile. If she could give back even a fraction of the comfort he gave her…
"Thank you, Ziva," he spoke as the closing credits started rolling. "Even though it hurts to think about the past, you somehow make talking about it bearable." He flashed his Ziva-only smile at her and her insides just about melted.

"Al lo davar," she whispered and smiled in return.
Chapter 3 – Winding Down, Together

Tony walked from Gibbs' front door to his car. His belly was full of cowboy steak and beer; just enough beer to fuzzy the memory of his father's recent visit. His father; god, how the mere thought of the man could totally change the mood of his day. Senior had a tendency to create havoc in his son's life without even trying. Swoop in like a falling meteor, create a tornado of emotion within the younger man, and leave just as abruptly.

Tony braked to stop at the red light ahead. He noticed that the intersection was where he should turn to go to his apartment and that he was currently in the wrong lane to make the needed turn. Lost in thought while driving was not a habit to which he subscribed; assessing the current lane told him that he could just continue and wind up at Ziva's apartment in seven minutes. Not a bad option considering the other was to go to his own place; alone…

No, tonight he would much rather sit on his partner's sofa and watch a DVD, even, god forbid, The Sound of Music or a chick flick. He really did not desire to be alone with his thoughts and the memory of his father's recent visit to DC. The light changed to green and he continued towards Ziva's place. He parked next to her Mini and trotted to her door. He was about to knock when she opened the door, startling both of them.

"Ziva!"

"Tony!" She held up a full trash bag. "I was just headed to take this to the dumpster."

"If you let me watch a movie with you tonight, I'll be your trash man," Tony grinned at the Israeli. "Please?"

She handed him the trash bag, nodding, "It is a deal!" He quickly deposited the bag in the dumpster and went back to her door, which she had left slightly ajar for him.

"Done," he called out as he stepped into the apartment and closed the door. He slid the security latch into place and put his jacket on the hook next to Ziva's. He turned towards her living room to see her moving books from the sofa into a stack on the coffee table. So, she had been reading before he arrived; that meant one of two things. Either Ziva was trying to keep her mind off of something by the distraction of a book; or she was trying to lull herself to sleep; or 'd' all of the above.

She noticed him watching her and smiled apologetically, "I tend to get books everywhere when I am on a reading binge."

"No need to apologize; you know I do the same with DVDs when I binge," he grinned at her. "You pick the movie tonight."

Ziva nodded as she moved to her shelf of DVDs; the collection was growing in leaps and bounds. It
seemed as though nearly every time they planned a movie night, Tony brought her two or three new ones to add to her library. She skimmed the titles, and finally chose *The Usual Suspects*.

He powered up the TV and DVD player with the remote and Ziva popped the disc into the player. Tony pressed play as she moved towards the sofa. He put the remote on the arm of the sofa by his right side. His left arm stretched across the back of the sofa as he leaned back; Ziva sat on Tony's left side and leaned into him. Her right hand rested on his left thigh as her head rested against his upper chest and shoulder. As the opening credits rolled, she felt his left arm lower around her shoulders and his hand started playing with her hair. Both sighed and then smiled.

About thirty minutes into the film, Tony shifted slightly. He ran his fingers over Ziva's upper arm as he played with the loose curls that cascaded over her shoulder and arms. He sighed again.

"Something on your mind?" she asked quietly.

"Trying not to think about Senior showing up and getting in the middle of our case," he replied. "Do you think children become their parents?"

"How so?"

"Well, the thought of kids scares the crap out of me; I wouldn't want to mess up a kid like my dad did to me," he explained.

Ziva sat up slightly so that she could look Tony in the eyes, "Are you talking about kids in general or your own kids?"

He frowned and shuddered, "The thought of having my own kid terrifies me. I have no clue if I could even be a good father."

Ziva thought back to cases where they had kids involved. She remembered Carson, the kid with the red Ferrari bed and the love of movies and trivia. The kid that everyone but Tony saw as a miniature version of the SFA.

"You were good with Carson," she said and then added, "The kid with the Ferrari bed," when she saw his momentary confusion. "You were a natural with him. I think you would be a wonderful Dad, Tony."

"I don't know. Fathers are so…"

"Complicated!" Ziva finished the sentence.

"Not the word I was going to say, but it fits. I mean, how would I even know what being a good dad is all about when I didn't have a role model?" Tony reflected on some of the less than stellar memories of Senior's parenting. "All I saw was a male who was supposed to be my father treat me as an inconvenience…" he trailed off.

Ziva locked eyes with him as he continued, "A man who promised he'd be there and then left me in a boarding school. Left me waiting for him to come get me for the holiday break. Left me to eat Thanksgiving dinner with the school janitor and two of the teachers who had no family. Do you know what that's like?"

Ziva nodded, "Unfortunately, yes, I do…"

He put his right hand on top of hers, "Sorry, that was a rhetorical question. I didn't mean to drag out your memories of Daddy-dearest David."
"Eli is dead to me," Ziva's tone of voice was flat and unemotional. The look in her eyes told him to drop the subject right now, right there, no further discussion. Ziva stood up as Tony paused the movie with the remote. He followed her to the kitchen where she took two bottles of beer from the fridge. She handed him one. Both removed the caps.

Ziva tilted her bottle towards Tony's, "To fathers who are bastards."

"To fathers who should not have been," Tony added and took a long swig of his beer. Ziva also took a large gulp and then reached into the fridge for two more bottles.

"Let us finish watching the movie," she suggested and turned back to the living room. Again the pair sat side by side, watching the movie and downing their beers. When both had emptied the original two bottles each, Ziva gathered the empties and padded to the kitchen. She returned with two more each.

By the end of the movie, both were feeling the effects of the beer. Both were also fighting sleep as the final credits started.

"You are not in any condition to drive home, Tony," Ziva observed.

Tony smirked at her, "Nor are you, Miss David."

She smirked back at him, "Maybe so, but I am already home! Stay here tonight." He nodded, knowing that he was impaired and driving home would not be a good idea. He used the remote to turn off the TV and DVD player and then followed Ziva into the bedroom.

She rummaged in a drawer and tossed a pair of his sleep shorts at him, "Your toothbrush is in the holder; it is red." He caught the shorts; when had she managed to take these from his place? She noticed his look, "Two weeks ago when I helped you fold laundry. I slipped them in my jacket pocket when you were in the bathroom."

"Oh!" He started undressing as Ziva pulled her own sleep clothes out of another drawer. Ziva used the bathroom first while Tony stripped and put on the sleep shorts. She came out in her pajamas; he moved in to the bathroom to complete his bedtime routine. He came out to find her under the covers waiting for him. He slid under her Egyptian cotton sheets and down comforter.

Tony lay on his back and Ziva snuggled into his left side, placing her head on his chest over his heart. He wrapped his left arm over her; his left hand resting on her upper arm.

"Laila tov," he whispered.

"Buona notte," she replied in a similar whisper.

Fifteen minutes later, the sound of matched snores could be heard throughout the room. The pair on the bed were wrapped together, sleeping the best sleep either one had in many nights. The comfort of the best friend a warm cocoon for a cold night….
Ziva slowly opened her eyes; it had to be morning judging by the light coming in around the blinds on her bedroom window. She snuggled into her down comforter a bit deeper and bumped into a body next to hers. A warm body…

She felt the arm around her waist pull her to the body behind her; she felt the heat coming off the man who was spooned into her and smiled. Tony… the one who not only kept her warm, but also kept her sleep from being invaded by the nightmares and monsters of her dreams.

TONY! Shit, if it was morning, they should be getting ready to go to work, not lounging in the nice warm bed under the Egyptian cotton sheets and down comforter.

"Tony," she tried to turn to face the man who was now nuzzling her neck.

"Mmm?" he mumbled sleepily.

"It is morning; we should be getting up for work!"

He helped her turn to face him and then grinned at her. "Nope, everything is shut down for the day because of the blizzard," he explained.

"What blizzard?" she questioned with a slight glare. "Are you making this up just to stay in the bed with me?"

"Nope, Gibbs called about 0430 and told me to stay home. He asked me to contact you to get the message to you. I didn't tell him where I was…" he tucked a strand of curls behind her ear and pulled the comforter up to their ears.

"But why did my alarm not sound at 0530?" Ziva started to turn to the night stand on her side of the bed.

"Power went down about twenty minutes after Gibbs called," he responded. "Based on the apparent room temperature, I'd say it's still out."

Ziva rolled onto her back and stretched her left hand out of the covers to feel on the night stand for her phone. She grasped it after feeling around the top of the stand and quickly pulled her arm back under the covers. She moved the phone where they both could see it just under the comforter. 0752; they had slept in later than she would have thought.

Tony shifted under the covers; he was cozy and warm, but darn it, he had to get up to use the bathroom. Considering that he had crawled into the bed in his sleep shorts and a t-shirt, he knew he would be cold as soon as he left the warmth of the bed.

He spotted Ziva's fuzzy blue robe draped over a chair near the bed. He would get out of the bed, grab the robe, put it on and make a mad dash for the bathroom. Hopefully, he could then return to the warmth of the down comforter and Ziva.

He rolled towards the edge of the bed and groaned, "Gotta make a dash to the bathroom, be right back. Keep the bed warm for me!" He swung his legs out to the side and felt the chill air immediately. He stood up and grabbed Ziva's robe, pulling it around him. It didn't quite close, but
it was better than nothing! He dashed into the bathroom, took care of his needs, and ran back to the bed where Ziva was still snuggled under the warm coverings.

He just about dove back under the covers, and rolled towards Ziva, who watched the entire incident with amusement. "Damn, it's chilly!" he remarked as he tried to get closer to his partner to warm up. His feet brushed against her leg.

"La'azazel!" Ziva jumped as his cold feet touched her skin. "Get your cold feet away from me!"

"Sorry, I can't help it; they got cold when I had to get up," he apologized. He looked at her with his best contrite look, "Help me warm up, please?"

"Okay, but keep your feet from touching me until they warm up!" she snuggled to his chest and he wrapped his arms around her. They stayed that way for almost half an hour when Ziva shifted.

"My turn!" She slid out from under the comforter and ran to the bathroom. She came back as fast as she could and crawled under the warmth of the bed covers again. She snuggled to Tony and her feet touched his legs.

"DAMN, Ziva!" he moved his lower legs away from her feet. "La – az – a – zel… did I get it correct?"

She grinned at him, "Yes, you just learned how to say 'damn' in Hebrew." She giggled and snuggled closer to him to share the heat from his body. "I like this; nice way to stay warm on a snowy day."

"Mmm, me too, but what are we going to do when we get hungry?"

She chuckled, "Only you would think of food, Tony!" She snuggled closer as he pulled her to him.
Chapter 5: The Innocence of a Child

It had been a horrific case; three children left abandoned and terrified by a deranged killer. The man had beaten the mother senseless in front if the two girls and boy and then shot the father as he came into the house during the beating. Both parents were active duty Navy officers, assigned to the Pentagon. The kids were nine, six and three years old, the boy was the youngest. Every one of the team had been affected by the case in some way. Gibbs went into papa bear mode the minute the MCRT arrived at the house. He spotted the three children huddled together in a corner watching the locals and paramedics hovering over the parents. He barked orders to his team and then herded the kids out of the house.

Ziva had gone out to get more evidence bags from the car's trunk when the younger of the two girls let out a blood-curdling scream and pointed to a face in the crowd of onlookers. The child ran to Ziva, clinging to her. Ziva had managed to get enough out of the six year old to understand that the child spotted the killer in the crowd. By that time, Tony had come out of the house to see what was keeping Ziva with the evidence bags and also to determine the source of the screaming.

Gibbs motioned one of the local cops over to stay with the girl as Tony and Ziva chased the suspect through the yards in the normally tranquil suburban subdivision. At the end of a cul-de-sac, they had collared the man when he jumped a fence into a yard with two large Rottweilers. The dogs cornered the man and when Tony and Ziva entered the yard, the man was practically begging them to 'save' him.

They cuffed the guy while reading him his rights; as they led him out to the street, Gibbs pulled the Charger into the driveway and roughly shoved the suspect into the back seat. He headed back to the crime scene, leaving Tony and Ziva to walk back.

"I am glad we got him," Ziva remarked as the pair walked to the house of the victims. "Although, if those dogs had bit him or worse, I would not have stopped them."

"Me, neither," Tony answered.

Back at the active crime scene, Ducky and Jimmy were loading the bodies into the autopsy van. The three children stood near the front porch of the house looking lost. Tim came out of the house with the camera and looked around for the other team members.

"We got the guy," Tony informed him. "Fool ran into a yard with two huge Rottweilers. Dogs pinned him to the fence."

Gibbs came over to his team; "DiNozzo, Ziver, get those kids something to eat and take them back to the Yard to get Ducky or Palmer to check them over. McGee, with me; we'll finish up with processing the house and get the evidence to Abby."

Tony was about to make a smart-ass comment, but the look he got from the Boss shut him up. "On it, Boss!" He turned to look for Ziva, who was already over by the three children.

"Hi, I am Ziva. We are going to take you to get something to eat, and then you will go with us back to NCIS so Doctor Mallard can check you over for any injuries," she explained to the wide-eyed
kids. "This is Tony; he will go with us; okay?"

The little boy, just three years old, immediately walked over to Tony and took his hand. "I'm afraid, Mr. Tony. Will you hold my hand?"

Tony looked to Ziva but she just shrugged and took each of the girls' hands, "Come, we will go now." Tony and the little boy followed behind Ziva and the girls. Once the agents had helped the kids buckle up in the back seat of the Charger, they shut the rear doors.

Over the top of the car, Tony asked, "Where do we take them? What do kids this age like to eat?"

Ziva gave him a look and replied, "I do not know any more than you do; how about we ask them?"

Both climbed into the front seats, and Ziva turned to the children. The oldest was seated in the middle, her arms protectively around the younger two. "What would you like to eat?" she asked the girl.

"Whatever you want," the child replied. The younger girl looked at her sister and then at Ziva.

"Can we get Happy Meals?"

Tony grinned at the kids, "Works for me!" He headed to the nearest McDonalds for food. After ordering for the kids, he and Ziva also ordered burgers to go. Tony drove back to the Navy Yard as they all ate their food.

As they entered the gate, Ziva sent a text to Jimmy asking when would be a good time to bring the kids to Ducky for a quick once-over exam. Jimmy replied that Ducky would meet them in the bullpen. Ducky led the two agents and three children to one of the conference rooms. He checked each child for any signs of injury, but found none. He left the kids with Tony and Ziva in the conference room.

Ziva got the older girl talking as Ducky checked over the younger two. She got a name, phone number, and address of the children's grandmother in Richmond. Tony left Ziva with the kids and called the grandmother from his desk. She arrived about two hours later and took the children to her house.

As the paperwork for the case wound down, Gibbs sent the team home after nearly thirty five hours of nonstop work. Tim bid the other two a peaceful rest, saying he was going home and sleeping for a day at least.

At their vehicles, Tony and Ziva met gazes; neither one wanted to be alone with the memories of the looks on the kids' faces when they first arrived at the crime scene.

"Movie? My place?" Ziva suggested. Tony nodded and opened his car door.

"Meet you there," he replied.

An hour later, the friends were sitting on Ziva's couch, eating take-out Chinese food, and watching *Despicable Me*. They wanted a light no-brainer type movie that had some comedy to help counteract the negativity of the case and all the team had seen.

They sat side by side, Ziva leaning against Tony with his arm wrapped around her shoulder. His hand absently played with her curls. They gave each other silent comfort just by being together and having physical contact with the other.

"Do you think those three kids will be okay eventually?" Ziva asked softly.
Tony answered quietly, "I hope so; their grandmother seemed pretty close to them, so they at least have her as the constant in their lives now."

"Yes, but I wonder how they will cope when they realize that the parents are not coming back," Ziva knew the pain of losing a parent, just as her partner did.

"It's a tough call, Zi. No kid should have to witness the murder of a parent, much less both parents."

"Some days it just seems like the evil will never go away; why do the children have to be the ones to suffer?" Ziva could not get the look on the six year old's face when she spotted the monster out of her mind. "That little girl was so terrified when she spotted the man who killed her parents in the onlookers. Her eyes… I can still see the look in them. It was pure fear. Why, Tony?"

He pulled her just a bit closer to him, "I don't know, Ziva. I wish I had the power to make all of that hurt go away, but I don't. I guess we just keep fighting the bad one perp at a time."

"But some days it seems that they just keep growing in numbers. Like whatever we do is not enough," Ziva sighed against her partner's chest.

Tony wrapped his other arm around her protectively; he wasn't sure if she was talking about the case or about other evil things. "So we keep taking the bad guys down, one at a time. Each one we arrest is one less that is committing crimes. One less that is going to harm others.

"And at the end of the day, we go home, we recharge, and then we go back and do it all over again the next day," he continued.

"Tony?"

"Yeah?"

"I am glad that you are my 'recharge.' Thank you."

"Back at you, Sweet Cheeks."

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is a bit darker than the others. It just flowed when I started writing.
Chapter 6: Tag, You're It

"Go home and don't come back until Tuesday!" Gibbs barked at his team. He grabbed his coffee cup from his desk and continued towards the break area.

Tim looked at his watch and then at Tony. It was only 1530 on a Friday; why was the Boss sending them home already? Tony shrugged and looked towards Ziva. She had a puzzled look as well.

"Let's get the heck out of Dodge before he comes back and changes his mind," the SFA suggested to the other two agents. "Weekend here I come!" He started shutting down his computer and gathering his things together. "Last one to the elevator buys the first round of drinks!"

"Tuesday?" Ziva asked of no one in particular.

Tim looked up from his keyboard but before he could explain, Tony jumped in to the conversation.

"Three day weekend, Zee-vah. M. L. King Day on Monday is a Federal holiday," he reminded her.

"And we are not on call this weekend," Tim added. "I plan to make the most of the time off." He gathered his things into his backpack and stood up. Tony also stood with his backpack in hand and the two looked over to Ziva's desk. Where was the Israeli? She wasn't at her desk.

"I believe you said something about last one to the elevator buys the first round of drinks, yes?" Ziva called to them from the entrance to the elevator. She turned to press the call button as the other two scrambled to get to her first.

Ziva watched with amusement as Tony and Tim tried to beat the other to the elevator; it was a bit like watching five year olds vie to be the first in line for a snack. The elevator doors opened just as the two men came up to Ziva and Tony rushed forward into the elevator car. He grabbed Ziva's arm and pulled her in behind him. Tim was the last one on the elevator.

Tony smirked at the junior agent, "Guess you're buying the drinks, Timmy boy."

"I would have beaten you if you hadn't used your backpack as a block by swinging it," Tim complained.

"Face it, McTurtle, I'm faster than you are," Tony gloated. "I can outrun you any day." He grinned at Ziva; she just rolled her eyes in reply and pressed the button for the ground floor.

In the parking lot, the three decided to put their backpacks in their vehicles and walk to one of the team's favorite watering holes a few blocks from the Yard. Tim ordered three draft beers from the bartender while Tony and Ziva snagged an empty table. A waitress came by just as Tim placed the glasses of beer on the table. Ziva ordered an appetizer platter for the three to share.

"So, McGoo, what are your big plans for the weekend?" Tony asked trying to make conversation.

Tim shrugged, "Nothing big; probably play some online games, write a bit, and sleep. How about you two?" He watched as his teammates locked gazes; he felt that they were on another planet, in a world of their own. He looked down at his beer and absently picked up a fried mozzarella stick from the appetizer tray. How did he always manage to get into these situations?
The pair broke eye contact and Tony glanced around the bar. Finally, Ziva replied, "I think I will just enjoy whatever comes along; maybe read, maybe watch a few films. What do you think Tony?" She playfully nudged her partner and grinned at him.

Tony had been watching a group of obviously drunk men near the pool table while Ziva and Tim were discussing weekend plans. He turned towards his teammates, "What I think is that we finish up the beer and appetizers quickly and blow this joint." He nodded in the direction of the pool table group. "There's a fight brewing over there and I for one do not want to be anywhere near when it happens."

Ziva and Tim looked over at the group; Tony had a good eye for brewing trouble. Ziva nodded and grabbed the last baked potato skin. Tony picked up the last mozzarella stick. Each finished their food and beer and got up to leave just as several in the pool table group started talking loudly and angrily.

"Let's go," Tony led the way out of the bar, Ziva and Tim on his heels. As the door closed behind them, they could hear agitated shouts and the sound of something crashing. The three shared a look and headed back towards the Navy Yard.

"How do you do that, Tony?" Tim really wanted to know how Tony could sniff out trouble brewing.

"Years of experience on the beat, Probie," the SFA responded as the three passed the park area in the Yard. He turned suddenly and slapped his hand on Tim's shoulder, "Tag, you're it!"

Tony took off running into the park, leaving a confused Ziva and a shocked Tim in his dust.

"What is he doing, Tim?" Ziva was perplexed at Tony's odd behavior.

"It's a game, Ziva. Have you never heard of 'tag'? It's a chase game where one person is 'it' and has to chase the others to tag them to be 'it' next," Tim explained. "I'll count to ten and give you a chance to run. One, two, three, four,…"

Ziva ran after Tony into the park; she looked back to see Tim trotting behind her. She looked around for Tony, but didn't see him. She kept running towards some evergreen shrubs by the path.

"Psst, Ziva!"

Ziva stopped to look for her partner.

"In the evergreens, come on, hide with me!" Tony reached out a hand to Ziva and pulled her into the evergreen hedge. "Shh; if we're quiet maybe he won't find us right away!"

The two peeked out from the branches and watched as Tim stood on the pathway and looked around. He looked by some trash cans, behind a bench, and by two large trees near the waterfront.

"Come on, guys, I really don't want to play hide-and-seek!" Tim walked about, looking for any signs of either of his teammates.

Ziva turned to Tony to say something and the two locked gazes again. Their faces were only inches apart. Tony looked at Ziva's lips, she looked at his. They started moving closer together, eyes still locked in a stare that shut out everything else.

"Tony," she whispered so softly he could barely hear her over his pounding heart.
"Ziva," he whispered back; she just could hear him over her beating heart. She moved closer and their lips met in a soft brush of contact.

"There you are!" Tim pulled the branches of the evergreen shrubs aside, revealing the pair. He did a double take; had they just been kissing? Tony and Ziva quickly pulled apart and both looked over at Tim.

"Um, I, um, I… " he stammered as he tried to backpedal and give the pair their privacy. "I think I need to go now…"

The other two stepped out of the bushes and onto the walkway. Tony grinned at Ziva as he helped her step out of the evergreens. The three agents walked on the path to the parking area; Ziva slipped her hand into Tony's as they walked. He interlaced his fingers with hers. Tim tried not to look at the pair next to him as they stepped closer to the vehicles.

They reached Tim's car first. "Good night, see you on Tuesday," he called to the other two. He unlocked his car and climbed in as his teammates continued across the parking area, hand in hand.

At Ziva's Mini, she squeezed Tony's hand in hers, "Tag you're it!" she grinned at her partner. "Pizza and movies at my place?"

"Yeah," he replied with that smile he kept only for her. He pulled their joined hands to his face and put a gentle kiss on the back of Ziva's hand. "Tag, you're it, sweetcheeks."
Sick Day

Chapter 7: Sick Day

Ziva looked up from the file on her desk towards Tony's desk. The team had been reviewing cold case files all week so far. The mood in the bullpen reflected the somber skies, drizzling sleet, and snow flurries of the outside world. Tony had his head down on his arms, apparently taking a mini-break.

She returned her gaze to the file in her hand and perused the contents; nothing jumped out at her in the case of three missing hard drives from a recruitment center. The office worker who had been injured in the armed hold-up was released from the hospital within a week of the crime and had given a statement at that time. Nothing stood out from the man's description and retelling of the robbery. Ziva put the file in the stack of others that she finished reviewing and turned slightly to pick up the next file. She noticed that Tony was in the same position as earlier.

Ziva looked over towards Gibbs and McGee's desks; neither one was sitting in his usual place. She glanced around; she and Tony were the only ones in the immediate area. She put the file down and stood up. Tony didn't move; was he asleep?

She moved across the gap between her desk and his quickly, "Tony?" When he didn't respond, Ziva moved around the side of his desk. She stood next to his chair and spoke again. "Tony?" He moved slightly and moaned, but kept his head on his arms.

"Are you okay?" Ziva put her hand on his shoulder. He moaned again, and turned so that she could see his face, but he still rested his head on his arms.

"Hurts, mmhead," he mumbled. Ziva moved her hand to his forehead after seeing his glassy eyes and slightly pink cheeks. He was burning with fever.

"I think you have a fever, Tony," she ran her hand over his cheek as he slowly sat up. He gave her a slightly dazed look. She glanced around, no one was watching. She pressed her lips to his forehead; he was definitely feverish. The man's forehead was hot.

"M'okay," he tried to protest. "Jus' wanna sleep."

"I am going to call Ducky to check you over," Ziva picked up Tony's desk phone. He reached over and placed his hand on her arm to stop her. She tried to shake him off, but he tightened his grip on her arm.

"Trash can," he pointed at the small trash receptacle behind Ziva. She took a look at his face and quickly grabbed the trash can, getting it under his mouth just as he vomited part of his lunch.

He looked up at her when he'd finished and smiled weakly, "Good catch." Ziva handed him some paper towels and a bottle of water from her backpack. He fumbled with the cap to the bottle and sheepishly handed it back to Ziva. She opened the cap and tilted the bottle slightly to dampen a paper towel.

"Here; wipe your mouth and face," she handed him the damp paper towel. He looked at her and then at the paper towel, not comprehending. Ziva took the wet towel from his hand and gently wiped around his mouth. She tossed the used paper towel in the trash, knotted the top of the bag, and turned back to Tony. She lifted the water bottle to his mouth, "Drink."
"Okay," he pushed her hand with the water bottle away after sipping some.

"We are going to go down to see Ducky," Ziva spoke in a tone that brooked no argument. "You are sick and we are going find out why." She helped him stand and the pair moved slowly towards the elevator. Tony was a bit unsteady on his feet and he leaned on Ziva for support. They got into the elevator and she pressed the button for the Autopsy floor.

"Ducky," Ziva called out as she helped Tony through the double doors into Autopsy. She helped Tony sit on one of the stainless steel tables and called out for the ME again.

"Ziva?" Ducky came through the doorway to his office and the restroom. "What have we here?" He glanced at Tony who was now lying on the table, curled on his side.

"He is feverish and he threw up just a few minutes ago," Ziva explained as Ducky put his hand on Tony's head. He walked over to his medical bag and pulled out a forehead thermometer to take the man's temperature.

"One hundred two point three; has he been ill?" Ducky turned to Ziva who suddenly had a greenish look to her face. She raised a finger and pointed towards his restroom, then took off running in that direction. Ducky turned back to Tony.

"My dear boy, are you in pain?"

"Mmhead… hurts; gut, too," Tony moaned as the sound of Ziva vomiting reached the two men. "Achy all over, now that I think about it…" He glanced in the direction the Israeli had gone. "She okay?"

"I will check on her," Ducky motioned for Tony to stay where he was and walked over to his office. "Ziva? Are you okay?"

Ziva looked up from where she sat on the tile floor with her head over the toilet, "I am fine. Is Tony okay?"

"You, my dear, are not FINE," the ME extended a hand to help Ziva stand up. She rose and seemed a bit unsteady; Ducky looked at her face. "Stand still a minute," he commanded. He placed a hand on her forehead. "Just as I suspected; you also have a fever. Come with me so I can take your temperature."

He led Ziva to the table where Tony was curled on one end and helped her sit on the other end. He ran the forehead thermometer over her head and hmm-ed.

"Just as I thought; you have a fever also; one hundred point eight. Have either of you been ill?" Ducky looked from one to the other. Both responded to the negative. "Well, from what I can tell, you both have that flu that has been making the rounds. I gather you shared the germs?"

"Shh, Duck," Tony admonished the old doctor. "No one knows that we spend a lot of time together outside of work…" Ducky looked over at Ziva who he would swear was blushing slightly, but it could just be her fever.

"Go home; get plenty of rest and fluids. I will write a medical excuse to Gibbs for you both. Do not come back for three to four days, understood?" Ducky instructed the pair. "Do you need a ride home?"

Ziva replied before Tony even processed the question, "I will drive us home."
Ducky nodded, "I will send Mr. Palmer upstairs to get your backpacks, phones, keys, and anything else you may need. Ziva, if you would, bring your car around to the entrance for the ME van and I will help you get Anthony into your car."

Thirty five minutes later Ziva and Tony were leaning on each other to get into Ziva's apartment. They put their backpacks and coats by the front door; Tony headed to the bedroom while Ziva put some water in a large glass measuring cup to heat in the microwave for tea. Ducky had suggested some hot tea along with the pain and fever reducing meds that he knew were safe for Tony to take. He gave Ziva enough for three days for both of them.

Tony kicked off his shoes and stripped out of his pants and shirt. He found his Ohio State hoodie and sweatpants in the closet. He pulled on both and face-planted on the bed. Ziva found him asleep that way when she came into the bedroom with two cups of tea with honey and the vial of medication from Ducky. She put the tea on the nightstand, and then gently put a hand on Tony to wake him enough to take his medication and get under the covers.

Ziva changed to her sweatpants and one of Tony's Ohio State sweatshirts and crawled in the bed next to Tony after she took one of the pain meds herself. The two drifted to sleep snuggled together under the warmth of the Egyptian cotton sheets and down comforter.

It was mid-morning the next day when both of them awoke. Tony felt as though he'd been run over by a fleet of tanks, every joint and limb ached. Ziva felt as though the Israeli desert had moved into her mouth; she too ached all over.

"Mornin'," Tony mumbled as he noticed Ziva's eyes were open.

Ziva licked her dry lips and tried to ignore the dryness in her mouth, "Is it? I feel as though I could sleep for a week." She rolled to check the clock on the nightstand on her side of the bed; 1023.

Tony picked up his phone from the nightstand, "Almost ten thirty; next day, I think." He wasn't quite sure if they had slept through an entire day or not; the events since he started feeling crappy at his desk around 1430 were fuzzy. He noticed a new text message had come in while they were sleeping. He tapped the message icon and read the text from Ducky.

'Gibbs not happy that he is two down. Gave him the medical excuse for both of you; he raised an eyebrow but said nothing. DHM' Tony showed the message to Ziva.

"Do you think he suspects that we are together?" she asked.

"Dunno; but if he shows up banging on your door, we'll have an answer!"

"I hope not!"

"Yeah; could be ugly!" Tony stretched under the covers; he hated the feeling that all of his joints were painful. "Got any more of that pain med? I hurt all over."

Ziva nodded and reached across him to the nightstand on his side for the vial of pills. "Ducky gave me enough for both of us for three days; he did say to take the pill with a full glass of water." She put her hand on Tony's forehead. "You still feel feverish to me."

"Yeah, my eyes burn and my head hurts as much as the rest of me," he replied, putting a hand on her forehead. "You're still warm as well. Do you have a fever thermometer?"

"No, I will get us some water," she sat up slowly and rose off the bed. She moved cautiously as the motion of sitting up had made her slightly dizzy.
"Are you sure you can make it to the kitchen?" Tony was worried as Ziva did not look too steady on her feet. He sat up and groaned, "Never mind; it's you or no water!" He fell back on the pillows with another moan.

"Are you okay?" Ziva's question was laced with concern.

"Just moved too fast; got a bit dizzy and light-headed," Tony felt better lying back. "I'll be okay while you get the water."

In the kitchen, she filled two thirty-two ounce sports bottles with water and ice. She screwed the lids back on and inserted the straws; at least they'd have the water to stay hydrated as Ducky ordered. She carried the bottles back to the bedroom and placed one on Tony's side and the other on her side night tables. Tony opened the vial and handed Ziva a tablet; he took one for himself and popped it into his mouth as he placed the vial back on the nightstand. He took a sip of water and swallowed. Ziva did the same with her med.

"If I gotta be sick, I'm glad I get to do it with you," he quipped as he pulled her to his side under the covers.

"Yes, misery loves company," she retorted as she snuggled into her favorite human pillow.
Deliberate Acts of Kindness

Chapter 8: Deliberate Acts of Kindness

It started when Tony left a bar of her favorite chocolate on her desk as a peace offering. He'd been joking around when the team was stuck on cold case files and started shooting rubber bands at her and Tim. Ziva had ignored his antics for the most part. His final rubber band shot at her had landed in her cup of tea. She had scowled at him and tried to grab the offending projectile from the top of the tea mug and caught her hand on the rim. The entire mugful of tea spilled onto the file that she was reading at the time.

She glared at him; he felt the venom in that glare and quickly rose with paper towels in hand that he took out of his bottom desk drawer. She snatched the wad of paper from him, blotting the papers on her desk to absorb the spilled tea.

Tony ran to the men's room and grabbed an entire roll of paper towels intended to go in the wall dispenser. He tore off a length of paper towel and began wiping the desk top. Luckily, they were able to save the file papers from damage. Just as Ziva wiped the last of the liquid from her desk, Tony shifted to grab the roll of paper towels at the same time Ziva turned to put the last used piece of towel in her trash can. They collided and Tony put his hand out to steady himself on her desk. It landed on a stack of file folders; the entire stack fell on the floor with his shifting weight.

"You are such a child, Tony," she hissed at him. "I am taking the stack off your desk and the stack that WAS on my desk is now yours." She huffed and strutted over to his desk and grabbed the neatly stacked folders that were on the desk top.

The rest of the morning had been silent; Ziva glared over at her partner between files. He kept his face down, not looking at her, but feeling every bit of her anger in the glares she shot his way. When she had her head bent over a file in concentration, he dared to peek around the side of his computer monitor. She chewed her bottom lip and fidgeted with her Star of David necklace as she read.

Crap; she was still angry at him. He had to find a way to make it up to her. He stretched and headed to the men's room just to take a quick break from the deafening silence in the bullpen. On his way back, he nearly ran into one of the administrative assistants from accounting. She was coming from the break area with two candy bars and a can of soft drink. He noticed the chocolate bars; one of them was Ziva's favorite. That's when it hit him to buy her a candy bar as a peace offering.

He purchased the candy and slipped it into his jacket pocket; Ziva had to take a break at some point! He'd slip the candy onto her desk when she stepped away for a break. Thirty minutes later, he got the opportunity to do so. Ziva took her tea mug, now empty, to the break room for more tea. Tony jumped up as soon as she was out of sight and put the candy bar in the middle of her desk on top of the file she'd been reading. He turned around to go back to his own desk and noticed Tim watching him.

"Peace offering, McProbie; Ziva's favorite candy bar," he explained as he sat back at his desk and picked up the next file in his stack. He'd managed to get all of the pages back into the correct files, but some of the pages within the individual folders were still out of order from the earlier fiasco at Ziva's desk.

Ziva came back to her desk a few minutes later; she noticed the candy bar immediately. She
carefully put her tea on a pile of folded paper towels; no more spills today, thank you. She picked up the candy bar and looked over at Tony, who was trying to act like he wasn't watching her reaction. He glanced up and the two made eye contact. They locked gazes and Ziva smiled that smile she saved for him alone. Tony felt his insides do that flip-floppy thing they always did when she smiled at him. He grinned back, that grin he saved just for her.

Ziva noticed his grin and felt her insides do that little fluttery dance they did every time he smiled at her that way. All was forgiven; and she got a bar of her favorite chocolate too.

Two days later, Tony was the first one in to the bullpen. He even got there before Gibbs. He put his backpack down by his desk and put the large shopping bag on top of his desk. He reached inside and pulled out the box of pastries; a bear claw for Gibbs, an apple Danish for McGee, and a blueberry crunch muffin and a slice of baklava for Ziva. He sat at his desk checking his email and happily munching the cinnamon cruller that he bought for himself.

Gibbs arrived next and grunted in Tony's direction when he saw the bear claw. Tim and Ziva stepped off the elevator together, chatting about something.

"Good morning, Zee-vah; good morning, Probie," Tony called out cheerily.

"Someone is in a good mood," Ziva ribbed the SFA. She spotted the treats on her desk and glanced over to Tony. "From you?" she pointed to the goodies on her desk.

"Yep, got something for everyone."

"Thanks, Tony," Tim held up his apple Danish with a large bite already gone.

"You're welcome," Tony replied without breaking the eye contact with Ziva. He grinned at her and she smiled back at him.

"Toda, Tony. I shall have the blueberry muffin now with my tea, and save the baklava for lunch."

Gibbs came back with his coffee and the team settled in to working on the cold case files again. All of them were hoping they would catch a case soon; anything but the monotony of case files. No such luck though; they spent the morning at their desks, noses in files.

Tony glanced over at Ziva every few minutes; several times he caught her looking his way or she caught him looking her way. Each time they smiled and then looked back at the files on their desks. Tony thought how much he liked seeing Ziva's smile. Ziva thought how much she liked Tony's grin.

At lunch time, Ziva headed to the break room; she came back about ten minutes later and stood in front of Tony's desk.

"Need something, David?" he asked, not looking up from the file in front of him.

Ziva leaned forward over the desk, "You!" She motioned for him to follow her; he got up and walked after her in the direction of the break room. As he rounded the corner, he heard the microwave beeping. Ziva opened the door and pulled out two covered plates.

"Sit," she nodded at a table that had been set with two place settings of flatware, beverage cups and napkins. "I made lasagna last night for the support group and had some left over. Here is your lunch." She set a plate in front of Tony and then the other plate at her place.

Tony removed the vented plastic lid from the plate; the lasagna looked delicious and smelled
heavenly. He gave Ziva the special grin he had just for her as he took his first forkful of food. His taste buds lit up; oh, my, god; this had to be the best lasagna he had ever tasted since his childhood.

"Ziva! This is so good; thank you." He put another bite in his mouth and hummed. Ziva laughed at his antics.

"I am glad you like it," she gave him that special smile. He felt as though he'd died and gone to lasagna heaven…

He finished chewing that bite and swallowed before he replied, "You can make this for me any time at all; I'd eat lasagna every night if you made it this good." He grinned at her again; Ziva's insides fluttered and she smiled back. Tony's insides did their flip-floppy thing. He put his hand on hers and spoke softly, "Thank you sweet cheeks."
Tony pressed the play button on the remote and *The Black Pirate* started playing on the screen in the squad room. He turned to Ziva as she sipped her large drink.

"So, what are you doing on a Friday night watching a movie with me at work?"

"You are my friend," she replied.

Tony looked over at the Israeli, "Really?"

"No, my date canceled," she responded with a slight smirk.

"Mine, too." Tony turned his gaze to the screen.

Ziva looked over at her partner, opened her mouth as if to say something and then closed it again. The internal conflict was raging inside her head; should she say what she really wanted to say or let it go?

Tony glanced sideways, "Something on your mind?" He could see the typical signs that Ziva made when she wasn't sure if she should say what was on her mind or not.

"I… um... I," she hesitated; did she really want to go down the thought path that was in her head at the moment? The realization that Tony was the best friend she'd never had before had hit her like a ton of bricks when she looked over at him earlier. Did she dare tell him so?

The pair watched the classic film in silence, sharing the large bowl of popcorn as they viewed the black-and-white movie. Several times Ziva turned to Tony as if she was going to say something and then changed her mind. Tony noticed each time but said nothing.

As the closing credits rolled on the screen, he turned to her, "What's on your mind Ziva? And don't say 'nothing;' I saw you thinking about saying something each time…"

Ziva swallowed hard, "I… I… was thinking…" She paused trying to get the courage to say what she wanted and to gauge Tony's reaction.

"That can be dangerous," he quipped with a grin. "Thinking about what? Or who?"

"I was thinking about best friends," she blurted out. She watched his expression as they locked gazes; he could probably see the thoughts floating around in her head. He had an uncanny knack for reading her mind at times.

He held the gaze, "What about best friends?"

"Have you ever had one?"

"Have you?"

"I asked first!"

Tony broke the gaze and looked down at his hands, "Not as a kid; nope."
"I did not either… what makes a best friend?" she wondered out loud.

"Someone who is always there for you, I guess," he replied. "Always got your six."

"Cares about you without judging; drops everything if you need them," Ziva added. "Looks past your flaws and challenges, and helps you get better as a person."

He thought about it some more, "Someone who likes the real you..." He looked at her again, and grinned, "Someone like you are to me!"

"Are you saying that I am your best friend, Tony?" she whispered.

He nodded slowly, thinking about the words he was about to say, "Yeah, Ziva, you are the best friend I've ever had!" He reached over and put his hand on hers; she turned her hand palm upward and interlaced their fingers.

"Well, that is good, because what I was going to tell you earlier is that you are my best friend, Tony," she smiled that smile that made his insides do the flip-floppy thing. He gave her his best 'Ziva-only' smile in return and she felt the fluttery feeling inside.

They leaned toward each other, eyes locked, hands still intertwined. Their noses touched at the tips; Ziva ran her tongue over her lips as Tony sucked his inward to dampen them. Their lips brushed together; both closed eyes to savor the kiss...

A loud whooshing sound startled the pair apart; the night cleaning crew had arrived in the bullpen area to vacuum carpets and empty trash cans.

Tony turned off the large TV screen and ejected the DVD from his computer as Ziva tossed the empty drink cups in a trash can and wiped the empty popcorn bowl with a paper napkin. She put the bowl on her desk and grabbed her backpack. Tony logged off his computer and grabbed his backpack.

He walked to her side, "Let's go find some place a bit quieter and with less people. And practice this best friend thing some more."

She grabbed his hand in reply and tugged him in the direction of the elevator, "I like that idea!"
Chapter 10: Domesticity

Saturday afternoon; Tony was parked on Ziva's sofa watching a basketball game on TV. Ziva was alternating between cooking in the kitchen and doing loads of laundry. To his credit, Tony had vacuumed the entire apartment and cleaned the bathroom earlier, as Ziva stripped the bed and started the first load of laundry.

Tony stretched and made his way to the kitchen during a commercial break; whatever Ziva was preparing smelled delicious. She was nowhere to be seen, so he lifted the cloth covering the bowl on the counter. Looked like bread dough rising; he leaned over to sniff and sure enough, the smell of yeast hit his senses. Two pans were soaking in the sink, but he couldn't tell from them what had been cooked. There was a distinct citrusy smell though mixed with garlic and spices unknown.

He opened the fridge to refill his glass of iced tea and spotted a baking pan covered with foil. He put the pitcher of tea on the counter by his glass and lifted the corner of the foil. He could see what appeared to be chicken breast cutlets marinating in a darkish liquid. He was about to lean in to sniff when Ziva came into the kitchen.

"Trying to peek at dinner?" she teased as he stood up quickly.

"Um, yeah," he decided to be truthful. "Bread, I think chicken in some sort of marinade…"

"Very good," she grinned at him. "But you will still have to wait until dinner time to find out exactly what I am making!"

He made puppy eyes at her, "If I am a good boy and help with the laundry chores, will you tell me? Please?"

She laughed and patted his arm, "Food. That is enough information for your stomach, is it not?"

"Hey! I resemble that remark," he grinned at her as she tugged him in the direction of the laundry area. He followed her, enjoying the view of her ass as she walked. She knew what he was doing and added a bit of extra swing in her hips. "Oooh…" he sighed.

Ziva turned around and he nearly bumped into her; "Like what you see, yes? You are so predictable."

"I am not!"

"Are too," she waggled her finger at him and then shimmied her hips to tease him. "Put your tongue back in your mouth, Tony." She handed him a basket of towels fresh from the dryer. He carried it to the living room and started folding towels as the game continued.

Ziva moved a load of clothes from the washer to the dryer and started the last load of clothing. She then went back to the bedroom to finish making the bed with the clean sheets from the first load of laundry. After that was completed, she went to the living room to take the folded towels from Tony so she could put them away.
She checked the rising dough for the bread; almost ready to be formed into loaves. She just had time to turn the chicken in the marinade before the washer and dryer signaled the end of cycles. She emptied the dryer load into the laundry basket and carried it into the living room. She placed the basket by Tony and he started folding clothes as Ziva returned to put the last load from the washer into the dryer.

She peeked into the living room as she headed to the kitchen to do the next steps with the bread dough. Tony was folding clothing and also watching the TV. The thought that they had become so domestic struck her. She smiled; she could get used to this domesticity very easily. She uncovered the bowl of bread dough and punched it down.

Tony finished folding the clothes and carried the basket of folded laundry to the bedroom. He put Ziva’s underwear and socks in her dresser drawers. He put his own underwear and socks in another smaller chest. He took the empty basket to the laundry area and placed it on the still-running dryer.

He walked towards the kitchen; Ziva had her back to the doorway busy kneading the bread dough and forming loaves. He paused; when had they gotten so domestic? Not that he minded; he could be happy with this domesticity, especially with her. He grinned to himself as Ziva turned around.

"What are you thinking, Tony?"

He moved closer to her, "Just thinking on how domestic we've become."

She nodded, "I thought the same earlier; and I like it." She leaned towards him and put a soft kiss on his cheek. "Especially with you."

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter in this work; I have a multi-chapter Christmas story in process.
This chapter contains some dark and disturbing material related to Ziva's captivity in Somalia. The M rating is for what she shares with Tony and for the final scene in the chapter.

Chapter 11: Paris

"I'm going to shoot McGee," Tony announced as the taxi pulled in front of what appeared to be a residential building on a quiet Paris street. "Are you SURE this is the address he gave you?"

Ziva looked at her text messages on her phone and confirmed the address, "Yes it is correct." She tilted her phone so he could read the screen. "It does not look like a hotel; that is certain."

Tony paid the cab driver as Ziva walked to the entry door to the building. She stopped to read a sign about guests checking into the building. Tony soon joined her; she pointed to the sign.

'All overnight and short-term stay guests should sign in with the building manager in Apartment 100 on the ground floor.'

Ziva pulled the door open and carried her large duffle bag inside; Tony quickly followed her with his own bag. Ziva looked in both directions in the main entry area and noticed an elevator, two hallways leading to other parts of the building and a sign with an arrow that directed them to apartment 100.

"Come, Tony," she started in the direction the arrow pointed. "Let us see what this is all about and if this is where we are supposed to be staying."

"Okay, but if McGee screwed this up again, this is the LAST time I will let him make hotel arrangements EVER!" he huffed.

She rang the bell at the door to the apartment; an elderly man answered, "Puis-je vous aider?"

"Oui; mais, parlez-vous anglais? “ Ziva replied.

"Yes, how can I help you?" the man spoke in heavily accented English.

"I believe we have a reservation for three nights," Tony spoke up. "DiNozzo and…"

The older man interrupted, "Ah, oui, Monsieur et Madame DiNozzo. Let me get you the key for your flat." He shuffled into another room as Ziva looked at her partner. He shrugged and locked gazes with her.

He held up his hands, "I have no clue." He was about to add more when the old man returned from the other room with keys and a printed set of pages.

"Your key, and the agreement for use of the flat for four days and three nights," he handed the key and papers to Tony with a smile. "Enjoy your stay in Paris."
He turned to Ziva, "Madame, enjoy your stay; you are in apartment 421."

The pair bid farewell to the old man and headed to the elevator. They rode in silence to the fourth floor; when the doors opened, Ziva led the way out into the hallway. She looked both directions, noticing the apartment numbers closest to the elevator on both sides.

"This way," she turned towards the end of the hallway with their flat and Tony followed her with the key in hand. At the door, he slid the key into the lock and opened it.

"After you, Madame DiNozzo," he teased. She gave him a look, but then chuckled as she sashayed past him. He grinned at her teasing back, thoroughly enjoying the view of her swinging hips and ass.

The flat had a living room, small dining nook, efficiency kitchen, laundry nook, full bath, and two bedrooms. The larger bedroom had a queen-sized bed, nightstands, and two dressers. The smaller bedroom had two sets of bookshelves, a chair, and a desk with a docking station for laptop computers.

"One bed," Tony commented.

"It is not as though we have not shared a bed many times before, Tony," Ziva patted his cheek as she placed her duffel on the end of the bed.

"But only WE know that; McSnoop does not need to know that we shared this one."

"Agreed," she moved to the closet in the room. It was small but functional, having several empty hangers on the rod for them to use if needed. An extra set of sheets and two pillows were on the top shelf in the closet as well.

Tony checked out the TV and DVD player in the living room; a card near the remotes claimed access to nearly 150 channels via satellite. The list showed nearly twenty movie channels from all over the world. He wondered if any had English subtitles or were in English. He was just about to say something to Ziva about the television channels when she popped her head around the corner from the kitchen.

"Do we want to eat out or go get some groceries and cook here?" she asked. "Since we are here for several days, we could make a list to go shopping."

"I was hoping to do some of the tourist things since we don't have to report in until the day after tomorrow and then pick up our witness the following morning," Tony replied. "If we are sightseeing, we will probably be eating some meals out."

"We are here for work Tony, not to play tourists," she scowled at him.

"Ziva, we have two days to do whatever we want. I'm not going to sit here doing nothing when we have all of Paris at our doorstep," he grinned at her. "Besides, there's nothing wrong in having some fun."

"I suppose; however, we do need to get some food soon," she patted his stomach as she moved nearer to him. "I am surprised your stomach is still quiet."

The pair decided to walk to a café they had passed coming from the airport to get a midafternoon meal. From there, they walked to a market and purchased food to take back to the flat. When they returned with the bags of groceries, Tony turned on the TV and found a movie channel that was showing John Wayne westerns. Ziva put the food away and then sat with Tony.
After watching two movies subtitled in French, they went together to the kitchen and made a simple supper. Another movie and then the time difference caught up to them and they headed to bed. Ziva snuggled into Tony and the two slept for nearly ten hours.

The following morning, they went to the café for croissants and coffee. Tony found a place to rent a Vespa and the best friends played tourist for the day. At dinner time, Tony checked the river dinner cruises and found an open spot. They boarded the boat on the Seine and enjoyed a roast beef dinner. Afterwards, they went out on the open deck and viewed the lights along the river. A slight breeze made the deck a bit chilly and Ziva shivered. Tony wrapped his arms around her and pulled her to him.

The pair locked gazes; the lights of Paris and the sights on the river banks faded to gray. Tony leaned towards Ziva and brushed his lips on hers. She pulled him closer and returned the kiss.

"Ziva," he whispered.

"Tony."

"I think there is love in the air tonight."

"Shut up and kiss me again," she locked her lips on his. When they broke for air, the dock was in sight. Others were coming on to the deck to prepare to debark. Ziva threaded her fingers into Tony's and they walked off the boat hand in hand to the Vespa.

Tony parked the motorbike in the parking lot for the building and then took Ziva's hand as they walked to the entrance. He held the door for her; once inside, they intertwined hands again. In the elevator, Tony pulled Ziva to him for another kiss.

As they cuddled in the bed, Ziva smiled. "Thank you for tonight, Tony. I really had fun with you all day, but the dinner cruise was special."

"Yeah, I liked being with you too, Ziva," he placed a kiss on her curls. "Paris with my best friend is the best way to be a tourist!"

Soon both were asleep; Ziva curled into Tony's left side with her head on his chest and his arm around her.

Tony wasn't sure how long they'd been asleep when he was awakened by Ziva moaning and thrashing. It had been a while since she'd had a nightmare when he was with her; he'd really hoped that the bad dreams had stopped.

"Ziva, it's okay; you're having a nightmare." He spooned her into his arms and spoke softly into her ear as she thrashed and moaned. Slowly she returned to the present and turned to face him.

"Toda," she said simply and locked gazes with her partner. He was more of a comfort that she was willing to admit.

He gazed back, "Want to talk about it?" He always offered; he wanted her to know that when she was ready, he would listen.

Ziva nodded and began telling him about her nightmare and about some of the things that happened to her in Somalia. Tony listened, never breaking eye contact, as Ziva poured out the horrors.

She told him about the beatings, when Saleem and his men would hit her with their fists or whip
her to get her to break. When they figured out that she would not give up with beatings and whippings, they began to do other things to her. One of Saleem's henchmen tried burning her with cigarettes. She flinched at first, but once she stopped flinching, the men tried other ways to get her to break. She was put in a dark cell with no food or water. Her arms and legs were shackled and there was only the stone floor to sit or lie on. Her food and water consisted of a mash of some type of grain meal mixed with water which they brought to her twice a day in a metal pie pan. She was not given any utensils nor were her hands unshackled, so she had to eat what she could by placing her face in the pan like an animal. After hours of sensory deprivation, three of the henchmen would put a bag over her head and drag her to a flea-infested pile of hay covered with a tarp. At first they would strip her clothes from her body and just touch her skin. Then one of them used his fingers to penetrate her private area. They began finding other objects to insert and watch for her to react. The one that Ziva considered the worst of the three; the one who smelled as though he'd slept in camel dung; was the first to rape her. The three would take turns on top of her. She would escape into her mind, often picturing Tony's face and his grin as she mentally escaped the horrors that were being done to her body. She trembled as she remembered and told Tony the terrible things they had done to her.

When she started sobbing and shaking badly, he pulled her to him, placing kisses on her head as she clutched his shirt.

"Ziva, oh, Zi..." he whispered, tears streaming from his eyes. She curled into him and they fell asleep in each other's arms.

Four hours later, they awoke in a tangle of limbs. Ziva put her hand on Tony's face and looked into his eyes. "Thank you for always having my back." She placed her lips on his. Tony decided to let her lead, but returned the kiss.

Kisses turned to desire, desire turned to more. They removed each other's clothing, discarding it on the floor. Both felt the heat of desire burning strong. He reminded her that she could stop any time she needed and he would understand. He let her set the pace as they made love for the first time since the whole Rivkin fiasco and Somalia. Ziva rolled him to his back and straddled his hips.

"Are you sure, Zi?" he whispered as she lowered herself to meet his body. "If you need to stop at any time, it's okay."

"I am okay; make love to me Tony," she breathed out softly. "I want to feel you inside me; I want to..."

He cut her off by pulling her down to him and fusing his lips on hers; their bodies joined. Tony was gentle with her at first. She started grinding into him, pushing him to move faster and harder.

"More," she bit his ear lobe after pleading in his ear. "I want more..." He pushed her closer and closer; he felt her tighten as she sat up and threw her head back. "Oh, yes..." She tumbled over the edge and he followed thrusting deep into her.

"Zee-vah," he moaned as he spilled his release into her.

She leaned forward onto his chest and they felt each other's hearts racing; ragged breaths were punctuated by kisses. She slid to his side and he turned to face her; limbs tangled together. He moved his hand to brush her hair out of her face.

"You are beautiful," he whispered. She smiled and kissed him softly. They fell asleep in each other's arms.
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