**Blink of An Eye**

by **NCISVU**

**Summary**

It was bound to happen one of these days. Their jobs were too dangerous for it not to but seeing Tony lying there, in a pool of his own blood, not moving, barely breathing… that was almost more than Gibbs could bear.

**Notes**

This was written for the NCIS Big Bang on livejournal. Check out the AMAZING art by kj_svala here: http://over-thehills.livejournal.com/91470.html
Jethro drew Tony’s body closer to his as the man bounced up and down in his lap, controlling the pace of their lovemaking. His fingers dug into the strong muscular planes of the younger man’s body as he stretched to suckle against Tony’s neck. Tony’s head fell back, revealing more of his neck to Jethro without slowing his pace his at all. Each time he rose his well lubed dick was thrust into the tight space between their bellies and each time he rocked back Jethro’s pushed against his prostate. He was barreling towards orgasm much quicker than he would’ve liked but there was no slowing down.

Jethro, for his part, was just sitting back on the couch; touching and kissing and pushing his hips out and upwards ever so slightly each time Tony sat back. He loved to let Tony use him; to take what he needed from him and use his cock for his pleasure. He loved the expression on the man’s face, the way his body moved, watching the strong muscles flex and move beneath tight, tanned skin, hearing the soft grunts and pleasurable groans come out of his slightly parted lips as the sensations forced his eyes closed so he could focus.

“Use my cock. It’s nice and hard for you. Fuck yourself, Tony. Take whatever you need from me.”
Jethro mumbled the words softly into Tony’s ear then captured Tony’s earlobe between his teeth and tugged at it just enough to make Tony’s body shiver.

Tony started rocking back even harder as Jethro’s words spurred him on. He reached between their bodies and fisted his cock, quickly going to work on it but Jethro gently moved his hand out of the way and replaced it with his own.

“I’ll worry about this,” he said in the same low, seductive tone.

“Fuuuck,” Tony growled.

“Yes, Tony,” Jethro encouraged, “fuck and don’t stop. Don’t ever stop.”

Tony’s breathing pattern changed and his movements got more and more erratic. He didn’t know whether to focus on thrusting into Jethro’s hand or rocking back onto the man’s cock but a switch in his brain seemed to flip and his body started moving on pure instinct. His slammed himself against Jethro’s body harder and faster, his groans growing in volume each time Jethro tightened his grip on his shaft. His mouth fell open as he threw his head back and came with a loud, satisfied yell.

Once Tony was done Jethro rested his hands against the man’s hips and rolled his hips, pushing into him with great purpose. Tony clamped down around him, dropped his head to Jethro’s shoulder and started kissing the sensitive hot spots he’d discovered when they’d first started making love. Soon Jethro was squeezing his eyes closed tightly and pushing firmly into Tony until, with one final thrust, the world went black and his body moved on autopilot, guiding him through his release.

He felt Tony collapsing against him, both their bodies worn out and completely and utterly exhausted, covered in a sheen of sweat that made their skin slippery to the touch. Jethro’s hands involuntarily slid down to Tony’s ass where he let them rest while he tried desperately to get his breathing under control. He could both hear and feel Tony doing the same thing above him.

It wasn’t until sometime later that he found his voice and the energy to use it. “You still with me?”

“Uh-huh,” Tony grunted tiredly. “Think we could just sleep on the couch tonight?”

“No,” Jethro answered gently. “We’ll both end up sore tomorrow if we do that.”

“I’m already sore,” Tony mumbled, “and too tired to move.”

Jethro gave Tony’s ass a firm whack, the crack echoing through the living room. “Come on,” he encouraged, “before you fall asleep.”

As tempted as he was to nestle in deeper, Tony knew Jethro was right. He carefully lifted himself up, releasing Jethro before standing up and stretching. “How about for your next project you take out the staircase and install an elevator.”

“Tempting,” Jethro replied, “but no, not gonna happen.”

“You could carry me upstairs,” Tony suggested.

“If your legs were doing as much work as your mouth was, you’d already be upstairs,” Jethro teased lightly.

“My legs are too tired to do any work, hence the reason for this conversation.”

“Did you really just say hence?” Jethro asked with a chuckle.
“I did.”

“If you were so tired, maybe you should’ve waited till we got to the bedroom to crawl into my lap.”

“Hey, all I wanted to do was watch a movie with you!” Tony said defensively.

“We were watching a movie,” Jethro replied, “until you crawled into my lap.”

“I can’t help it if you’re more entertaining that whatever we were watching.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” Jethro said, “but we’re still not getting an elevator and I’m still not carrying you upstairs.”

“You’re no fun anymore,” Tony mock pouted.

“You just wait till tomorrow morning and I’ll show you how ‘not fun’ I can be,” Jethro threatened playfully.

Tony wiggled his eyebrows and grinned from ear to ear.

---

Tony groaned, flopped from his back to his stomach and buried his head under the pillow in an effort to get away from the incessant pounding on the door. The sun was not yet visible but the early morning light was just starting to creep into view on the horizon. Tony didn’t know what time it was exactly but what he did know was it was far too early for someone to be pounding on the front door.

A couple minutes later when the knocking didn’t stop he threw himself out of bed, trekked down the stairs and yanked the door open, not realizing he was still at Jethro’s house or that he didn’t have a stitch of clothing on. “What’re you doing here?” he grumbled, unable to process why FBI Agent Tobias Fornell was on his doorstep. Didn’t the guy usually show up at Gibbs’ house when he needed something? “Shiiiiit,” he said muttered when realization hit.

“Did I interrupt something?” Fornell asked when the shock of a naked Tony answering the door passed.

“Huh?”

“ Took you long enough to answer the door and I can only think of one thing you might be doing dressed like that,” Fornell snarked.

Tony looked down and realized, for the first time, that he was naked. “Son of a—” His voice trailed off as he moved his hand to cover himself. “What do you want?”

“Jethro around?”

“I think he’s in the shower.”

“Was in the shower,” Jethro replied, coming down the stairs behind him, rubbing a towel over his freshly washed hair. “Go put some clothes on, Tony. Don’t you have any manners?”

“Not this early in the morning,” Tony muttered as he turned and headed for the stairs.

Fornell watched Tony go until Jethro moved between him and his lover, completely blocking the man’s view. Once Tony was at the top of the stairs, Jethro stepped aside and invited his FBI counterpart in with a wave of his hand.
“When did you get a boy toy, Jethro?” Fornell teased.

“Enough out of you,” Jethro warned. It was too early and he hadn’t had enough coffee to deal with his friend’s smart comments. On top of that he’d been caught completely off guard by them being outing like that. No one knew about his and Tony’s relationship yet. Well, no one except for Fornell. “What’s so important that you’re here at 6:00 in the morning, Tobias?” he asked as he started a pot of coffee.

Fornell leaned up against the counter, grinning from ear to ear and watched as his longtime friend started a pot of coffee, processing the new information he’d just learned. He didn’t snap out of it until Jethro turned around and glared at him. “Need your help,” he said. “One of my cases just ventured into your jurisdiction.”

“I didn’t get a call,” Jethro commented, checking his phone to make sure he hadn’t missed anything.

“Just happened last night,” Fornell said. “I wanted to come to you directly.”

Jethro held up a single finger as he pulled a coffee cup out of the cabinet and poured himself a cup mid-brew. He took a long drink of the hot liquid, ignoring the burning sensation as it went down, then put his cup on the counter, grabbed another one out of the cupboard and poured his friend a cup. “Alright,” he said, “I’m ready.”

“We’ve been investigating a string of kidnappings,” Fornell said. “Four kids in the last three weeks.”

“I’ve been following that one on the news,” Jethro said. Three little girls and one little boy had vanished without a trace. “You’re dealing with a sick SOB.”

“You are too now, Jethro,” Fornell said. “A mother of two woke up this morning to find her eight year old son’s bed empty. She’s the wife of a sailor; kid’s a Navy brat.”

“Son of a bitch,” Jethro muttered as images of his eight year old daughter, gone much too soon, flooded his mind. “Do you have any leads?”

“Nothing from the first four scenes. Whoever’s behind this is a pro. We’re hoping whoever took Ethan last night slipped up and left us something. Right now we’re at their mercy and it’s really pissing me off.”

“I’ll get my team together,” Jethro said, “meet you over there. We’ll get this guy.”

“You know how it pains me to admit this, Jethro, but I’m happy to have you onboard.”

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

After passing by several news stations double parked just beyond the police perimeter, Gibbs navigated NCIS’s MCRT truck past cars and SUVs with flashing red and blue lights that lined the street in front of the home little Ethan Lucas had been taken from. The Lucas family didn’t live on the Navy base so Metro PD, the FBI and NCIS had all responded to the crime scene and it was a zoo. Just the sight of it had Gibbs’ blood boiling, Tony focusing on the task ahead and McGee worrying about the effects of Gibbs’ temper.

Bishop watched the scene unfolding from her window in the backseat, just taking everything in. “Have you guys ever seen anything like this before?” she asked. “Every law enforcement agency in the tri-state area’s here.”

“Not exactly every agency,” Tony said, even though he knew Bishop had purposely exaggerated.
“Just follow my lead and be prepared to get creative.”

A smile appeared on Bishop’s face at the thought and Tony winked at her in the rearview mirror.

“You guys get to work,” Gibbs said as he parked the truck as close to the Lucas residence as he could get. “I’ll take care of all these people.”

Tim and Ellie each peered around one of the back doors, watching as their boss went to work clearing out all the nonessential law enforcement personnel and agencies while Tony gathered the gear from the back of the truck. Even Bishop had learned that every extra law enforcement officer that didn’t need to be there did more harm than good. They added to the chaos, contaminated the scene and distracted from the primary case. More was not always better.

“You heard the man, ladies,” Tony said, holding out equipment for both of his partners to carry, “let’s get to work.”

The two junior agents followed Tony into the house where they spoke briefly with Ethan’s distraught mother and thoroughly confused four year old sister before Tony and Tim headed down the hall of the one story ranch style home to the boy’s bedroom while Ellie stayed with the family to try to keep them calm and coax every detail she could out of them.

“I hate kidnappings,” Tim muttered as he unpacked the gear while Tony inspected the window in the room that had very obviously been pried open.

“Yeah,” Tony agreed, “it’s a cruel world we live in. Will you bring me the tweezers and an evidence bag? I think I’ve got something here.”

“What’d you find?” Tim asked, digging through the case in search of an evidence bag.

“A fiber, hopefully from whatever our kidnapper was wearing but maybe from Ethan’s pajamas,” Tony answered. “Better bring a swab too. I think I’ve got some blood here.”

Tim handed Tony a couple swabs and the tweezers. “I’m gonna have to run out to the truck and get some more evidence bags,” he said. “Whoever stocked the kit last missed those.”

Tony looked over his shoulder at Tim with a guilty smile on his face.

“Yeah, I figured it was you,” Tim said with a teasing roll of his eyes. “Be right back.”

Tony turned back to the window and focused his attention on collecting what appeared to be blood samples from the frame. He had a feeling it would come back as Ethan’s blood but he was hopeful it was the kidnapper’s. There wasn’t enough blood to be alarmed if it did end up being the boy’s but he’d rather have the child uninjured and some DNA might be just what they needed to break the case open and put an end to it before another child was taken.

“Last night’s dew might’ve been heavy enough to give us a shot at getting a footprint,” he said when he heard someone enter the room behind him. “It’s a long shot but worth a try. You wanna go ahead and comb the yard before we lose it? I can finish up in—”

Before Tony could finish his sentence, a burning pain tore through his back, dropping him to the ground instantly. It wasn’t until after he felt the pain that he heard the sound of the gunshot and mere seconds after that his world faded to black.
Twenty two year old Brett Mackey stood silently in the growing crowd of onlookers, watching the many officers from different agencies as they debated over jurisdiction and the best way to solve this string of crimes. The fact that Ethan was the fifth child to vanish in such a short amount of time only complicated it even more. Everyone wanted a piece of the action; everyone wanted the credit for solving the high profile case that had local families living in fear. Everyone wanted their name, face and agency on the news.

In the midst of the chaos and confusion, Mackey spotted an open car trunk of one of DC Metro’s police cruisers. He watched and waited until the attention of the officer in charge of crowd control was diverted elsewhere then casually strolled over to the cruiser like he had every right to be there and looked inside. He pulled out a bulletproof vest and suited up then saw a field jacket with METRO printed across it in bold, white letters and slipped that on over the vest. A hat completed his look and with the black tactical pants he was already wearing you couldn’t tell the difference between him and the other Metro PD officers at the scene.

With an air of confidence that all police officers held, he headed towards the house, making eye contact with anyone he crossed paths with and giving a curt but friendly nod to keep from looking suspicious and each person returned the nod, too occupied to even give the man a second look.

He stepped into the house and peered down the hall into the dining room where coffee was percolating and two women were talking quietly then slipped down the hall to his right and into the bedroom he’d snatched Ethan from the night before. He immediately spotted the cell phone he’d lost tangled in the sheets on the far side of the bed as the agent standing with his back to him started talking.

“Last night’s dew might've been heavy enough to give us a shot at getting a footprint,” the man said.

Mackey reached behind him and pulled the weapon out of the waistband of his tactical pants and pointed it at Tony as he continued talking.

“It’s a long shot but worth a try.”

Killing a cop was the last thing he wanted to do but at this point it was the only way to keep from getting caught. There was no way he could retrieve his lost cell phone and get out of there without the cop noticing or the other one returning and he was confident with all the other uniforms running around outside, news media and onlookers that there was enough chaos to allow him to slip away unnoticed.

“You wanna go ahead and comb the yard before we lose it? I can finish up in—”

Mackey didn’t even let Tony finish his sentence before he pulled the trigger and watched him drop to the floor in a lifeless heap. He could hear the commotion outside escalate and the lady cop in the dining room telling Ethan’s mother to get down and stay down as he grabbed the cell phone. He quickly slipped out of the bedroom and headed for the family room where there was an exit that lead into the backyard, the same exit he’d carried Ethan out of the night before and the exact opposite direction of the dining room.

Mackey stepped outside into a scene more chaotic than the one he’d come in from only moments ago. In the midst of all the people running around screaming and yelling and trying to get organized, he made his way back to the police barrier and slipped away as silently as he’d arrived.
It was bound to happen one of these days. Their jobs were too dangerous for it not to but seeing Tony lying there, in a pool of his own blood, not moving, barely breathing… that was almost more than Gibbs could bear. He pressed against the hole in Tony’s back, desperately trying to stop the bleeding and when the blood seeped through his fingers, he pushed even harder. The pained moan that came out of Tony’s mouth broke Jethro’s heart but at the same time the sign of life gave him hope.

“Where are the medics?” he yelled desperately.

“They’re coming, Jethro,” Fornell answered. “McGee’s waiting for them out front. How is he?”

“I don’t know.”

Frustration was clearly audible in Jethro’s voice. He would do anything for Tony but given their current situation there wasn’t anything he could do and after figuring out just how close of a relationship the two men shared that morning, Fornell understood Jethro’s desperation even better.

“What do you want me to do?” the FBI agent asked sympathetically.

“I don’t know,” Jethro responded sullenly.

It felt like an eternity before the sirens finally reached the house and McGee could be heard yelling at them to hurry and pointing them in Tony’s direction. Jethro stayed put, keeping enough pressure on Tony’s wound to keep the bleeding under control until the medics stabilized Tony as best as they could and moved him out of the way so they could load Tony onto the stretcher and get him into the ambulance. With a firefighter behind the wheel of the ambulance and the back of the ambulance full of both EMTs and firemen working desperately to keep Tony alive, Jethro was left standing in the middle of the street, covered in Tony’s blood, watching as the ambulance moved farther and farther away and the sound of the sirens faded into the distance.

“Do you guys have a back-up team, McGee?” Fornell asked quietly, watching Jethro carefully.

“Huh?”

“You’re down an agent and Jethro’s gonna be no good to you for now,” Fornell said. “Is there another team that can assist you?”

“Balboa’s team,” Tim answered. “I’ll call him now.”

“Good,” Fornell said. “I’m gonna take Jethro to the hospital, then I’ll be back. I’ve got a team working on tracking the shooter. You guys focus on the scene here. Collect evidence and talk to anyone who might’ve seen anything. Find the person that shot Tony and we’ll most likely find the person that took Ethan.”

“Ohkay.”

“You good?”

“I’m good.”

“Good. I’ll be back shortly.”
“This is all my fault,” Mrs. Lucas cried into Bishop’s shoulder. “Ethan asked to sleep with me last night. He begged but I said no. He’s been having a hard time ever since his father deployed last month. I’ve been letting him sleep in my bed but I decided it was time to put my foot down and make him sleep in his own bed. If I’d just let him sleep with me, none of this would’ve happened.”

“You couldn’t have known,” Bishop said, doing her best to comfort the distraught woman despite her own social awkwardness. She wasn’t very good at handling emotional people who’d been touched by the crimes they investigated but she was learning and improving and there was no one else to sit with the woman so it all rested on her shoulders.

“But now your agent is shot and someone broke into my house again,” Mrs. Lucas continued. “I can’t stay here. I don’t want to be here anymore. Please.”

“We’ll find somewhere safe for you and your daughter to stay,” Bishop assured her. “Don’t worry.”

“But what if the kidnappers call and I’m not here to answer the phone? What if Ethan comes home and no one’s here?”

“We’ll take care of it. We can reroute your phone and have someone sit on the house in case Ethan or the bad guys come back again.”

“Ma’am, Agent Fornell sent me to escort you and your daughter to the Hampton Inn,” an FBI agent said. “We have a room there for you. If you’d like I can help you pack a bag.”

“Thank you,” Mrs. Lucas said. “Thank you both.”

“You’re welcome,” Bishop said with a relieved smile.

Once Mrs. Lucas left with the FBI agent, she headed off in search of McGee. All of the woman’s emotions were starting to take a toll on her and she was thankful for the break and looking forward to the opportunity to lose herself in the evidence and facts of the case. That was where she felt most useful; that was where she was most comfortable but all expectations went out the window when she stepped into the room and found a large pool of Tony’s blood and a mountain of medical debris left over from the first responder’s lifesaving effort.

Bishop swallowed hard and pulled herself together as best as she could, refocusing on the task at hand. “Find anything?” she asked quietly.

Tim turned around and looked at her for a moment before holding up a handful of blood samples. “The blood samples Tony collected. One of them was contaminated but the rest are good. I also collected the fiber Tony found.” He held up the evidence bag he’d gone out to the truck to get just before the shooting. “If I woulda double checked the kit and made sure it was stocked, this never woulda happened. I woulda been in here and had Tony’s six.”

“I should’ve been paying better attention while I was talking to the mom,” Bishop said.

“That’s enough out of both of you,” Balboa said firmly, startling both agents with his sudden presence. “Tony wouldn’t want to hear you guys talking like that and Jethro would never put up with it.”

They both turned and looked at the agent that McGee respected and Bishop feared. Balboa was an authoritative man, always fair but his very no nonsense way of doing things could sometimes be intimidating. The expression on the man’s face softened when he took in the defeated looks on Tim and Ellie’s faces.
“I just talked to Ducky,” Balboa said. “He’s at the hospital with Jethro. Tony’s stable for now but he’s got a long road ahead of him.”

“Stable for now?” Tim asked.

“As in not out of the woods yet?” Ellie added.

“It’s still early,” Balboa said. “All I know is he’s breathing on his own. Tony’s strong, guys. Let’s worry about getting the bastard that did this to him. Okay?”

“Alright.”

“Okay,”

Balboa made eye contact with Fornell as he stepped out of the bedroom and the two nodded at each other. After a brief discussion they’d decided to keep McGee and Bishop close so they could keep an eye on them while they continued working the case. That would allow them the opportunity to feel like they were accomplishing something and helping and it would keep them from feeding off of Gibbs’ nervous energy or adding to it. It would also keep them out of his line of fire. Ducky was a pro at dealing with Gibbs’ many moods but neither McGee, nor Bishop were very good at handling the man in certain situations and Tony injured was one of them.

They would keep Jethro’s baby agents close to them while Jethro stayed at the hospital and focused on Tony. That seemed like the best option for everyone.
Dazed and Confused

No matter what he tried, Jethro could not get comfortable. He wasn’t happy sitting idly in the waiting room, waiting for who knew what. News about Tony’s condition? Word that the man had woken up? A miracle? Perhaps just an opportunity to see him. He also wasn’t happy pacing around and around and never really getting anywhere. All he could do was wait patiently, the one thing he wasn’t very good at. The one thing he despised.

“Let me see if I can find out anything from them,” Ducky said as he stood and straightened his shirt. “I think an hour is much too long to leave someone wondering in the waiting room. I’ll be back momentarily.” Technically they hadn’t even been there for forty five minutes yet but Jethro wasn’t going to say anything.

Jethro nodded, the expression on his face unchanging. He was done waiting. Done talking and wondering. He just wanted to go back to that morning when he’d gotten up early and stepped into the shower and stayed in bed that time so when Fornell knocked on the door he could stop Tony from answering it and none of the horrible events that had happened since would’ve happened. His decision to reach for his shorts instead of Tony’s dick when he’d awakened could prove to be a fatal one for Tony.

After several moments of beating himself up over Tony’s condition, Ducky returned with a doctor in tow. The doctor’s hair was a mess, his clothing disheveled and the expression on his face told the story of someone who’d just struggled through a very trying morning. He certainly hadn’t looked that out of sorts when Jethro had seen him shortly after arriving at the hospital.

“Give it to me straight, doc,” Jethro said. He couldn’t take anymore waiting or hem-hawing around the truth. He needed to know how Tony was, good or bad.

“Agent DiNozzo has an incomplete spinal injury,” Dr. Ian Park said. “The bullet went into his back and lodged itself dangerously close to his spinal cord. We can do surgery to remove it but there are risks.”

“Such as?” Jethro asked. He was Tony’s power of attorney so depending on how quickly they needed a decision, if Tony was still unconscious, he would be the one making it.

“Paralysis,” the doctor answered in a no nonsense tone.

“And the risks if you don’t remove the bullet?” Ducky asked.

The doctor looked away briefly before looking back the two men. “Paralysis,” he answered. “The bullet could move around and get lodged, do all kinds of damage or it could stay put and besides a little manageable pain, Agent DiNozzo wouldn’t even know it was there.”

“Is he awake?” Gibbs asked.

“No,” the doctor answered, “and he won’t be. We sedated him to help with the pain and because at this point we don’t want him moving around and risking anymore damage. It’s not just his spinal cord we’re worried about, Agent Gibbs. We have to make sure his liver and kidneys are protected as well. We’re running tests and taking scans now. As his power of attorney, you need to prepare yourself to make a big decision, Agent Gibbs, and unfortunately I can’t promise you any more information than I just gave you.”

Jethro felt even more dazed and confused than he did when he heard Bishop yell ‘DiNozzo’s down!’
on the radio and raced inside to find him face down in a rapidly expanding pool of his own blood. A spinal cord injury? His liver? His kidneys? Paralysis? And he had to make the call?

He vaguely heard Ducky thank the doctor and send the man on his way. His friend’s quiet presence next to him wasn’t as calming as it normally was. This was big. Too big. How was he supposed to choose? How could he know what Tony would want? Soon anger over being made the man’s medical power of attorney was growing as well as anger at himself for agreeing to it but he knew that wasn’t right. He wouldn’t want or let anyone other than Tony make a decision of that magnitude but why him? Jethro would’ve done anything to trade places with his lover. He’d lived his life, found true love twice, had the chance to adore an amazing and talented daughter. His father had passed, his mother was gone long ago, there was no one left that needed him. Why Tony? How had this happened?

“Can’t they wake him long enough to make the decision?” he asked Ducky. His voice came out more choked up than he would’ve liked but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

“That’s tricky, Jethro,” Ducky replied. “They’d have to take him off all of the pain killers for him to be competent enough to make an informed decision but taking him off any of the pain killers would be cruel. There’s also the concern of him moving around and further damaging his spinal cord and internal organs, like Dr. Park said. It’s safer and kinder to keep him sedated.”

“What do I do, Duck?” Jethro’s voice was a quiet whisper but not even the uncharacteristically soft tone hid the desperation.

Ducky reached over, rested his hand on Jethro’s arm and squeezed. “Anthony trusted you with that decision, Jethro. Unfortunately all the medical degrees in the world couldn’t advise you as to the right choice in this instance.”

Jethro’s muscles tightened as the tension moved through his body. What the doctor said hadn’t helped and nothing Ducky had said had helped. He preferred things to be black and white, right and wrong. Guess work was okay sometimes but not when it involved his partner, the love of his life. “How long do I have to make the decision?”

“Not long I would guess,” Ducky answered, “but there’s still time.”

Jethro sat tall and proud and looked Ducky in the eyes, looking as confident and determined as ever. “I need to see him.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Ducky replied, patting Jethro’s shoulder before heading off down the hall the doctor had disappeared down only moments ago.

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

The ride back to NCIS was quiet and somber. The NCIS MCRT truck was only returning with half the people it left with and to make things worse, both McGee and Bishop knew everyone at headquarters had most likely already heard about what had happened. Balboa pulled the sedan in and parked right next to the truck. His team helped McGee and Bishop pull the evidence out of the truck and load it onto a cart to take down to the lab then the man ordered his people to take care of that while he took McGee and Bishop with him.

“Heads up high, you two,” he ordered, in a no nonsense tone that almost rivaled Gibbs’. “We’re not gonna catch this guy by rehashing what happened and playing the ‘what if’ game. I need to know that you two are up to this. I need both of your heads in the game. Tony needs your heads in the game. Got it?”
“Got it,” McGee answered, standing a little taller. He had to be strong for Tony. It was time to bring his A game. He could do this.

“Bishop?”

“Got it,” Bishop answered with a humble but confident smile. She would do what she did best and they’d get the job done.

The elevator door opened and all three stepped off and with a sense of purpose and determination they found their desks and got to work.

Jethro stood over Tony’s bed in the hospital room, staring down at his partner. The man looked nothing like himself; nothing like he had that morning when they’d left the house. He was so pale and weak looking that Jethro was almost afraid to touch him but at the same time he couldn’t resist. He needed to be able to feel that connection, to cling to the closeness he had with his lover. He needed to know that Tony would forgive him for whatever choice he made and whatever outcome came of it. He needed to know that they would be okay no matter what happened; that Tony would still love him no matter how things turned out.

He stepped up to the bed and brushed his fingertips across Tony’s knuckles before carefully enveloping the man’s hand in his own. “Hey, Tony,” he said, “I’m here and everything’s gonna be okay.” He swallowed hard around the lump in his throat, hoping he wasn’t lying to his lover and trying to hide the uncertainty in his voice. “You just rest and I’ll take care of everything. I’ll always take care of everything.”

He leaned in a little closer and gently rested his forehead against Tony’s. “I love you, Anthony,” he whispered before kissing the man. A single teardrop slipped out of his eye and dropped onto Tony’s forehead before Jethro stood tall and quickly wiped the remaining moisture away. Crying wouldn’t accomplish anything and it wouldn’t do for Tony or anyone else to see him being weak. He had to stay strong and get all of them through this, just like he always did.

The door opened behind him and Ducky slipped into the room silently. He knew Jethro was well aware of his quiet presence and he knew his longtime friend was well aware of what he’d come in to say.

“Is it time?” Jethro asked.

“I’m afraid so,” Ducky answered quietly. “They need a decision, Jethro.”

The doctors had run all the tests they could and hadn’t gleaned any more information about which procedure would best benefit Tony—removing the bullet or leaving it. It was a risk either way. Either way could end in Tony being paralyzed from the middle of his chest down and the decision rested solely on Jethro’s shoulders.

“Tony’s a fighter,” Jethro said as he gently stroked his lover’s hand. He didn’t see Ducky narrowing his eyes as he watched the scene play out in front of him. It was no secret that Jethro was Tony’s power of attorney but no one thought anything of it. The two were friends, partners, they put their lives in each other’s hands every day and had for the past several years. On top of that, Tony’s tumultuous relationship with his father was well known. The man was often distant and hard to reach and had a very different set of priorities than Tony did. It made sense for Jethro to be the one making the important decisions like that; someone who’d grown up in a completely different set of circumstances than Tony but who shared a much more similar set of values.
What Ducky was witnessing in front of him though, wasn’t what he’d expected. The way Jethro was
stroking Tony’s hand, the emotion written all over the man’s face, the complete and utter heartbreak
in his voice. There was definitely something more to their relationship than simply being friends and
partners. “Jethro?” Ducky hesitated, waiting for a response, a confirmation of some sort but it didn’t
come. “You two aren’t…” He let his sentence trail off and simply waited.

Jethro didn’t answer verbally but his body language was clear. Still it was a difficult thing for Ducky
to wrap his head around. How had he not seen it?

“How long?” the older M.E. asked.

“I put in for two weeks vacation next month for both of us,” Jethro said. “Tony’s been wanting to go
to California, visit some wineries, learn how to surf, nap in a hammock under a palm tree.”

“A surprise trip?” Ducky said. “Is it a special milestone for you two or are you just pulling him away
for a break from DC?”

“Our one year anniversary,” Jethro answered. “Next month, July 7th will be exactly one year since
Tony showed up on my doorstep halfway to drunk, walked into my house and kissed me without
permission or explanation.”

As if Ducky wasn’t taken aback by everything he was learning, the story of how the two had gotten
together really left a shocking mental image in his head. “That’s quite the bold move on Anthony’s
part.”

“The date was 07/07,” Jethro said. “Tony’s not really superstitious but he’s always thought seven
was a lucky number. He said he knew nothing could go wrong if he made his move on the seventh
day of the seventh month. How ridiculous is that?” The smile on Jethro’s face was evident in his
voice. He loved all the silly little quirks that made Tony Tony. He was always doing crazy things but
he always had a perfectly logical explanation for whatever it was that he was doing and Jethro
absolutely loved his creative mind.

“You really love him,” Ducky noticed. The sincerity in Jethro’s voice was something he’d never
witnessed before.

“I do,” Jethro whispered.

“You may have to put it off until Tony has some time to recover, but you take him on that trip you
have planned, Jethro,” Ducky said. “I think a trip out west, away from everything here would be
good for both of you. Don’t let Tony get away, Jethro. He clearly makes you happy and thinking
back on this past year, I’ve never seen him happier.”

“He’s been begging me to learn how to surf with him,” Jethro said. “I keep telling him I’m too old
but now? Now…” His voice faded off as tears threatened to take over again.

“You’ll learn how to surf, Jethro,” Ducky said confidently. “You and Tony both. Don’t give up on
him.”

“Never,” Jethro said with a sense of ferocity.

Several moments passed in silence before Ducky spoke again, bringing them back to the original
topic of their conversation. “The surgery?”

Jethro squeezed Tony’s hand a little tighter and didn’t take his eyes off of him as he spoke. “Tony’s a
fighter,” he repeated. “He wouldn’t want to leave it up to fate. He wouldn’t want to sit by and do
nothing. He’d want to fight and give it everything he had. Anything less would feel like quitting too
soon or giving up too easy. Do the surgery.”

Ducky nodded and squeezed Jethro’s shoulder in a show of support. “I’ll let the doctor know. There
will be some paperwork for you to sign but it won’t be long before they come for him.”

Jethro nodded as he reached out and rested his big hand on Tony’s stomach. He could feel the faint
beat of Tony’s heart, despite how far away from Tony’s heart his hand was and once again was
reminded of Tony’s strength. He would make it through this surgery and this obstacle in his life and
they would make it as well. There was no doubt in his mind.

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

Fifteen year old Mackenzie Clayton didn’t let her phone out of sight as the security guard at NCIS
headquarters inspected it along with her other belongings. She stepped through the metal detector
and gave a friendly smile to the guard who thanked her and pointed to the bucket where she could
pick up the rest of her belongings. She grabbed her beloved phone first before collecting her purse
and the gold chain her grandparents had given her after she’d come out of open heart surgery almost
two years prior.

A short elevator ride took her up to the third floor where her guard escorted her through a maze of
desks and agents, all hard at work.

“Someone here to see you, Balboa,” the guard informed a rather intimidating looking man.

Balboa looked up and offered the teenager a reassuring smile before speaking in his deep voice that
often frightened suspects into submission. “Can I help you?”

“I have some information on a case,” Mackenzie, Mac for short, replied.

“Which one, sweetheart?” Balboa asked.

Normally Mac hated being called sweetheart but this guy kind of reminded her of her father. There
was something fatherly about him that made her feel at ease, despite his size and commanding
personality. “The one from yesterday,” she answered. “The one where the ambulance came and took
that cop away.”

Balboa stood and glanced into the bullpen where Tim and Ellie were hard at work. “Bishop,” he
called, “with me.” He thanked the security guard and dismissed him then led the way to the
conference room with Mac and Bishop in tow.

“Whatcha got?” he asked when they were all seated. He really wasn’t expecting much from a skinny
kid with a pimply face and an obviously curious demeanor but she’d gone to the trouble of coming
all the way down to NCIS to speak with them so he’d listen to what she had to say.

“I kinda wanna be an FBI agent when I grow up,” Mac said. She kept her eyes on the table, not
wanting to see the doubt in their eyes and spoke quickly, before they had the chance to laugh at her.
People always laughed at her when she told them about her dream of one day being an FBI agent. “I
know it sounds wrong but all the police activity yesterday kind of excited me. I recorded it on my
cell phone and when I was watching it last night I saw something that seemed off.”

“What’s that?” Balboa asked, as patient as ever. He wasn’t as good with kids as Gibbs was but he
was patient and that went a long way when dealing them.

Mackenzie pulled up a video clip on her phone and handed it across the table to the agents. “Just
“Push play,” she instructed.

Balboa and Bishop watched the snippet but neither were quite sure what they were supposed to be looking at.

“Come around here and show us what you see, honey,” Balboa instructed.

Mac was at their sides in a moment, pushing play and pointing out what looked like a Metro cop. “This is just after the gunshots,” she said. Everyone else is taking cover or running towards the house and everyone else looks tense and maybe a little frazzled but this guy is calm and just casually walking away from the house. He doesn’t seem to fit in and his behavior is just off. At least in my opinion.”

“You might be onto something, kid,” Balboa said. “Can you zoom in on him and play it again?”

“Sure.”

Mackenzie zoomed in and played the video a couple more times for the agents. Once they’d seen it several times, she played a longer clip that included the gunshot and agreed to give them a copy of all the footage she’d shot on her smartphone.

“I went back to the beginning and spent all night trying to figure out where this guy came from but I can’t find him anywhere on the video except coming out of the house,” she informed them.

“That’s okay,” Bishop said. “This is a huge help.”

“This is actually our first break,” Balboa said, his voice oozing pride as he winked at the teen who was now smiling brightly. “Why come here?” he asked curiously.

Mac shrugged and nibbled on her lower lip. “I called DC Metro but I don’t really think they took me seriously. They said they’d have someone get back to me but it might be a few days. I know NCIS was at the scene yesterday too and when I called here they said there would be an agent here I could talk to so I came right over.”

“I’m glad you did, Mac,” Balboa said, “and if things at the FBI don’t work out for you in the future, we could certainly find a place for you here at NCIS.”

“Don’t you have to join the Navy though? ’cause I really don’t wanna do that.”

“You actually don’t. We’re a civilian agency. All you need is a bachelors degree and we’ll take care of the rest of your training.”

“Really?” Mac perked up at that. “The FBI has so many requirements it’d take forever for me to get in and it seems like it’d be a lot of hassle.”

“That’s the feebs for you, kiddo,” Balboa joked. “We gotta get back to work but I can set you up with someone who’ll give you a tour and answer all your questions if you’d like.”

“Oh my gosh, I’d love that!” Mac said. “Thank you! Thank you so much!”

It took Abby less than a minute to capture a screenshot of the face of the man impersonating a DC Metro cop. She sent it to an email to Fornell as she called him to let him know it was coming and set it up in her facial recognition program as well. She would find this guy and he would pay for what he
did to Tony. Tony… she wondered how the surgery was going. She was getting constant updates from Ducky and passing them along to the team and the last one had been that he was being taken into surgery. She hoped it was going well. The nuns were praying for him and she had every single finger and toe on her body crossed. If hope could heal, Tony would be up and walking around and perfectly fine by that evening but she knew things didn’t work like that.

“I don’t remember him, Abs,” Fornell said into the phone, “but we have a record of every agent, cop and detective that was sent to the crime scene yesterday. I’ll check that and ask around and get back to you when I know something.”

“Thanks.”

“How’s DiNozzo?”

“He’s in surgery,” Abby answered. “We won’t know much until he wakes up. The doctors say at this point things could go either way.”

“But if I know you guys, none of you are accepting that,” Fornell guessed.

“You know us well,” Abby said, trying to smile. What she really wanted to do was hide under a rock until everything was okay again.

“I’ll keep him in my thoughts,” Fornell said. “Let me know if there’s anything more I can do.”

“I will.”
Jethro was really, really starting to hate the bland colored walls and abstract art that decorated the waiting room. The chairs seemed to get harder and even more uncomfortable every time he sat down and he was surprised he hadn’t made a rut in the floor from all the pacing. Seconds felt like minutes and minutes felt like hours as he waited for news on Tony’s condition. He’d decided to skip the ‘prepare for the worst’ part and just ‘hope for the best’.

The doctors told him about the preliminary tests they could do once the anesthesia wore off but that they wouldn’t really know anything until Tony came around and they weren’t sure when that would be. There would no longer be a need to sedate him but the pain pills would make him drowsy and the trauma he’d been through might continue to keep him unconscious so he could heal. In short, even when he got out of surgery there wouldn’t be much more information but at least he’d have his Tony back. He could look at him and touch him and talk to him. Tony wouldn’t have to be alone or surrounded by strangers.

Ducky watched helplessly from the chair he’d been occupying ever since Tony had disappeared behind the doors clearly marked ‘Medical Personnel Only’. He knew there was nothing he could say or do to calm Jethro down or make things any easier so he just stayed with him, his quiet presence offering all the support for him.

“How long will it take?” Jethro asked.

“I’ve seen the x-rays,” Ducky replied. “It will take some care and precision to get the bullet out so that will slow them down a little but it still shouldn’t take that long.”

“They’ve been back there forever. You don’t think something happened, do you?”

“They haven’t been back there that long, Jethro,” Ducky replied, “and they would come tell you if something happened. I know it’s difficult but try not to get yourself all worked up. That won’t help anything. Would you like me to go get you some coffee?”

“No, I’m fine,” Jethro answered. “Yes, actually, coffee would be nice, if you wouldn’t mind?”

“No at all,” Ducky said. “I’ll be back momentarily. If you’re not here I’ll just look for you on the floor below.”

Ducky smiled softly at his friend when he stopped pacing and looked over at him self-consciously. Jethro sat down and rubbed his hands together nervously. Why was it taking so long? How long had it even been? How was Tony doing?

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

All the emotional ups and downs of the day had left Abby exhausted. That and not having Gibbs around to bring her Caf-Pows or the time to go get herself one left her sitting at her desk, barely awake when the facial recognition program on her computer dinged, alerting her to a match. She nearly fell out of her chair as she woke from her uninvited sleep and grabbed for the computer mouse, mentally berating herself for falling asleep and losing time.

She clicked through a couple screens and windows before the personal information of Brett Mackey popped up next to his photograph. The man wasn’t in the system for committing a crime; he’d been fingerprinted, photographed and voluntarily given a DNA sample almost a decade prior during a
canvas to rule himself out for a crime committed near his home at the time.

“Who are you, Brett Mackey?” Abby asked to herself as she pulled up a record of everyone who’d run the man’s prints in the last five years. She found a couple agencies that had inquired about his background in reference to a job, a church he’d most likely volunteered at had run him through the system and one of the local charter schools had done a background check. Her mind was so wrapped up in Tony that it took a moment before all the pieces clicked into place. She pulled out her phone, grimaced as she scrolled by both Gibbs and Tony’s names on her call log and touched the little phone icon next to McGee’s name.

“Which case did you say you guys were working with Fornell on?” she asked, cutting off his ‘hello’.

“All those child abductions,” Tim answered.

“The person on the recording Mackenzie brought in is Brett Mackey,” Abby replied. “His information was put into the system ten years ago when he voluntarily gave it up to rule himself out as a suspect.”

“A suspect for what?” Tim asked.

“A little boy that lived down the street from him went missing.”

“That sounds familiar.”

“He was later found in the woods behind their neighborhood,” Abby replied, “dead.”

“And Mackey was ruled out?” Tim asked.

“Yeah,” Abby said scrolling through the information on the screen in another window she’d just opened up, “but the case is still open. I have a hinky feeling, McGee. I think the investigators in that case might’ve missed something.”

“See if they want a fresh set of eyes,” Tim suggested. “They might send you their case information.”

“Yeah, but what about our case?” Abby asked, “the child abduction case. You know how Gibbs feels about coincidences.”

“I do, but that’s a bit of a stretch, don’t you think?”

“No! Timmy, he’s a football coach at a charter school and a church ran his background check a couple years ago. Churches usually only run background checks on the people that work with the children.”

“Well why’d you leave that part out, Abs?” Tim asked, annoyed. Everything that had happened had everyone on edge. Frustration was building and, despite their close relationships, overflowing onto each other.

“I was getting there!” Abby snapped back. “Sheesh, McGee.”

“See what you can dig up on the cold case and I’ll call the charter school and church,” Tim said.

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

The two hung up but Abby’s phone started ringing again almost immediately. “What, McGee?”
“I’m sorry,” Tim said. “It’s been a rough day but I didn’t mean to take it out on you.”

“I’m sorry too,” Abby said. “I love you, McGee. You know that.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Say it back.”

“I love you too, Abs.”

Abby smiled for the first time all the day. “I’ll call you when I know something.”

“Thanks.”

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

Fornell knocked on the door to the split level home that sat almost right in the middle of a quaint little neighborhood on the outskirts of Bethesda, Maryland. The yard and front of the house was immaculate and looked perfect for an all American family but there was no record of Brett Mackey having a wife or any children. He seemed more like the type that belonged in a bachelor pad in the middle of all the party scenes rather than a quiet suburban neighborhood but Fornell would save his assumptions until after he’d met the man.

Mackey answered the door wearing a pair of nice plaid shorts and a polo that had the name and logo of the charter school he worked at embroidered on it. He looked the part of a young man who could lead the local football team to a championship perfectly and even Fornell had to admit the man’s smile was alluring.

“Can I help you?” Mackey asked.

“Agent Tobias Fornell, FBI,” Fornell said, showing the man his badge. “I’d like to ask you a few questions, if that’s alright.”


“No,” Fornell replied, refusing to let himself be drawn in by the man’s charm, “thank you. This is a nice home you’ve got here. Big for a single guy.”

“I like to have room for family and friends,” Mackey replied, leading the way to the kitchen. “Besides, I enjoy the quiet of this neighborhood.”

“Have you already outgrown the bachelor lifestyle at 28 years old?” Fornell asked, pretending to be surprised.

“I’m a firstborn,” Mackey said, “and my father raised us to be hard workers. That doesn’t leave much time for partying.”

“So you’re the responsible type.”

“I like to think of myself as responsible,” Mackey agreed.

Fornell studied the man in silence for a moment before he spoke again. “Where were you this morning, Mr. Mackey?”

“You can call me Brett, Agent Fornell,” the man replied, “and this morning I was over at my
brother’s house. He’s been doing a little remodeling and I’ve been helping him. May I ask why?”

“Where does your brother live?”

“He lives a couple blocks from here,” Brett answered, “on Alpine Drive.”

“So you weren’t in Washington DC, abducting a little boy?”

Mackey seemed genuinely taken aback by the accusation. Fornell was almost impressed with the well-rehearsed act the man was putting on.

“No, Sir,” Mackey answered. “I was a good half hour drive from there.”

“A half an hour drive from where, Brett?” Fornell asked. “I never told you where the boy was taken from.” He’d finally caught him and was curious to see if it would trip him up. Maybe this guy wasn’t as smart as he’d originally thought.

“I just meant DC in general,” Mackey answered.

“Uh-huh,” Fornell replied skeptically. “Can you explain a photograph of you at the crime scene then?”

“There are no photographs because I wasn’t there.” Mackey was doing his best to maintain the appearance of being calm, cool and collected but he was starting to break. Sweat was beading on his forehead and some of the confidence was draining from his voice.

Fornell reached into his breast pocket, pulled out an image of the screen shot Abby had sent to him and handed it to Mackey. “Are you sure? Because that looks an awful lot like you, my friend.”

“I agree that guy looks like me but I must have a look alike or something because I was not there. I’m sorry, Agent Fornell, but you’ve got the wrong man.”

“Forgive me if I don’t take your word for it,” Fornell replied. “Would you mind coming with me and answering a few more questions?”

“I can’t right now,” Mackey answered. “My sister’s kid is turning ten. We’re having a big birthday party for him this evening.”

“Tomorrow then?”

“You know, I feel like I’ve been more than helpful. If you’d like to talk again I think it’s best we do so at my lawyer’s convenience.”

“If that’s how you want to do things, Mackey, then that’s how we’ll do things,” Fornell said, noticing the way Mackey was holding his breath as he waited for a response. The man was obviously rattled by something but as much as Fornell wanted to stay and press him until he broke, he’d said the magic word and that meant it was time for their conversation to end. “Thanks for your time.”
“Mackey did something,” Fornell said, leaning against the table in Abby’s lab. “I don’t know what yet but he’s involved. I’d put money on it.”

“He just runs the sound at the church,” Tim reported. “They’ve always run a background check on all their volunteers. That’s the only reason they ran him. He coaches football at Eagle Pointe Charter School. The team’s made up of fourth and fifth grade boys and girls.”

“Nine, ten and eleven year olds,” Fornell said, “same age range of the missing kids.”

“They always have a type,” Bishop said.

Abby walked into the room and put her phone on her desk next to her computer while McGee, Fornell and Bishop looked expectantly at her. She’d just gotten off the phone with Gibbs and they were all anxious for an update on Tony’s condition. “Tony made it through surgery,” she reported. “They won’t know more till he wakes up and they’re not sure when that’ll be.”

“That’s promising,” Fornell said. “Tony’s a fighter. He’s gonna be just fine.”

“I hope so,” Abby said. “Gibbs didn’t even ask about the case and that worries me. What if Tony’s worse off than he’s telling us?”

“Jethro wouldn’t lie about that to you guys,” Fornell said confidently. “It is strange that he didn’t at least ask about the case but he’s got a lot on his mind right now so I wouldn’t put too much stock in it.”

“Well, he asked for you so maybe he just wants to ask when he can see you and read your body language,” Abby said, looking at Fornell. “He is the human lie detector.”

“He asked for me?” Fornell asked. “Does he want me to bring him anything?”

“His go bag,” Abby answered, “and he didn’t say anything about coffee but you can never go wrong bringing Gibbs coffee.”

The corners of Fornell’s mouth twitched up into a smirk as he thought about his good friend’s coffee addiction. “You guys keep at it,” he said. “I’ll be back in a bit.”

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

A firm handshake between Jethro and Fornell turned into a brief, manly, one armed hug. Fornell held out the cup of coffee he’d brought with him but kept Jethro’s go bag slung over his shoulder.

“You look like crap,” he told his friend gently.

“Feel worse,” Jethro replied, accepting the coffee and taking a short sip. He’d had enough coffee to keep him awake for days while he was waiting for Tony to come out of surgery but that didn’t stop him from ingesting more. He hoped the familiar liquid might soothe him and keep him calm but so far it wasn’t working like he wanted it to. “Thanks for coming.”

“I’m surprised you called,” Fornell said. “How is he?”

“I don’t know,” Jethro replied.
Fornell studied his friend for a minute. He’d never seen him quite so vulnerable and out of control. “And you’re a nervous wreck,” he guessed softly.

“What if I made the wrong decision, Tobias?” Jethro whispered. “What if Tony would’ve done it differently? What if he ends up paralyzed? What if he never forgives me?”

“He obviously trusts you, Jethro,” Fornell said. “Otherwise he never would’ve made you his power of attorney. Sometimes we just have to make the best decision we can and hope for the best.”

“That’s the thing. I don’t know if I made the best decision.”

“I’m assuming you went with your gut,” Fornell said. “It’s never steered you wrong before.”

“It’s different when it’s someone you love.”

“Love?” Fornell asked, visibly surprised by the comment. “First I catch you doing the nasty this morning and now you’re talking love?”

“You didn’t catch us doing anything, Tobias,” Jethro said, starting to relax a little. “We did that last night.”

“Oh! Too much information!” Despite the dramatic scene, Fornell had a fun, playful smile on his face.

“And just because you just found out about us this morning doesn’t mean we just got together this morning.”

The playful smile on Fornell’s face softened into a sincere expression. “You really love him?”

“Yes, I do.”

“And he loves you?”

“I think so.”

“You think so? That boy worships you, Jethro.”

"I just wanna go back to this morning and do this whole day over again,” Jethro said.

"We all have days like that, Jethro." Fornell patted his friend's shoulder sympathetically. "Do you wanna go get some dinner or get a shower or something? I'll sit with Tony while you're gone."

"No. I've got a change of clothes in my go bag. That and the coffee you brought should hold me for a while."

"I can run out and get you some dinner. What would you like?"

Jethro held up the coffee in his hand. "This is more than enough for now." The truth was he didn't feel like eating but he'd been on the other side of the badge long enough to know he'd get a lecture about how he needed to eat so his body would be strong if he admitted that so he kept his mouth shut.

"What'd you do with Ducky? I thought he was keeping you company."

"I sent him home," Jethro answered. "There wasn't any reason for him to stay after Tony got out of surgery."
"To be a friend," Fornell said. "To support you."

"Best way you guys can be there for me right now is to catch the bastard that did this to Tony."

"Alright," Fornell conceded.

"And make it hurt, Tobias."

"I can do that."

The only sound in the room for the next several seconds were the monitors registering Tony's vital signs. "I know everybody wants to help," Jethro said, "and I know you guys wanna be here with Tony but I'm being selfish. I want Tony to myself right now and I really need you guys working the case."

"They don't know?"

"About Tony and I? No."

"I'm not sure how much longer you're gonna be able to keep that from them, Jethro," Fornell said hesitantly.

"I know," Jethro admitted quietly, "I'm just not ready yet."

"I'll see if I can hold them off a little longer."

"Thanks, Tobias."

Jethro watched as his friend put his go bag down by the door then turned and headed off down the hall and realized he had a whole new situation to deal with. He and Tony hadn't talked much about coming out except for when they'd gotten together, when they'd decided not to advertise their personal business to everyone. Now not only was Tony going to wake up and possibly be paralyzed, he'd most likely be outted as well. As much as Jethro wasn't looking forward to having that conversation with Tony, he still would've given anything in the world for his lover to just wake up and look up at him with those piercing green eyes and that undefeatable smile.
Fears and Realizations

Jonathon Mackey watched as his older brother paced back and forth, mumbling under his breath about something or the other. Something obviously had him on edge but whatever it was, Brett was keeping it to himself.

“Wanna go to the batting cages, BJ?” Jonathon asked. “Might take your mind off whatever’s bothering you; help you calm down.”

“No,” Brett answered sharply, “and nothing’s bothering me. I’m fine!”

“You’ve been my brother for twenty two years, man,” Jonathon said. “I know you and I know you’re not fine. You don’t have to tell me what’s bugging you but don’t lie to me.”

Brett shot an angry glare over at his brother before storming out of the room and into the kitchen to grab an ice cold beer. Shooting that cop had been a bad idea but even in hindsight he couldn’t see any way around it. Now they had a picture of him at the crime scene and the FBI was sniffing around and all because he’d dropped his cell phone when he’d snatched Ethan. That was the first mistake he’d made since he’d started snatching kids but it was proving to be a costly one. He was spinning out of control and if he didn’t get a grip fast, he was going to find himself behind bars.

Out in the living room Jonathon Mackey flipped the TV on as he flopped down onto the couch. His brother may not be talking to him but there was no way he was going to leave him alone in the state he was in. If he knew Brett, the man would be ready to talk eventually and they’d figure out a way to solve whatever the problem was together, just like they always did.

Jonathon changed the station to one of the local channels to watch the midday news. In his profession it was very important to keep up on what was happening in the area. He didn’t have to watch for very long before the story of the now five missing kids came on, the focus being on Ethan, the latest victim.

Jonathon relaxed into the couch and watched with a smile on his face until the newscasters changed their focus to the NCIS agent who’d been shot at the crime scene. Suddenly his brother’s behavior made sense. Their deal had only ever been to take the kids. Nobody was supposed to get hurt. Ever. His breath caught and his body tensed as he stared through the dining room towards the kitchen.

“Oh no,” he mumbled quietly. “What did you do, BJ?”

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

The sound of Abby’s boots clomping down the hall woke Jethro from an uninvited sleep. He sat up and took a deep breath as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes. His attention immediately went to the monitors recording Tony’s condition. He wasn’t completely sure what all the numbers meant but there were no alarms going off and everything sounded normal which helped Jethro relax. Tony, however, was still completely out of it.

Jethro was so frazzled he’d already forgotten what had awakened him until he felt Abby’s arms around his neck and her head resting on top of his. “Hey, Abs,” he mumbled in a sleepy haze.

“You sound as bad as Tony looks,” Abby said gently. “Are you taking care of yourself?”

“I’m fine,” Jethro replied. “What’re you doing here?” The question was curious, not uninviting.
“I wanted to check in with you guys,” Abby answered, “and I thought I’d bring you something to eat.” She put a paper bag with Chinese takeout cartons in it on the empty TV tray next to Tony’s bed.

Her eyes traveled to Tony’s weak, motionless body, getting a good look at him for the first time since the shooting. It was so strange to see him so still and so quiet and devoid of that spark that made him so very special. Even stranger was the way Gibbs was holding Tony’s hand. He wasn’t just resting his hand on top of Tony’s or lightly wrapping his fingers around Tony’s hand. Their fingers were meshed together intimately and Gibbs was holding on for dear life.

“Oh, Gibbs,” she whispered, barely loud enough for him to hear.

Jethro’s eyes followed Abby’s line of sight and he realized what she was looking at but he didn’t move his hand. He wasn’t willing to give up that connection.

“How’s he doing?”

“He’s hanging in there,” Jethro answered. “The doctors did some preliminary tests and said they’re hopeful but they won’t know anything for sure until he wakes up.”

“Did they do the tickle the bottom of his feet test?” Abby asked.

“Yeah, he flinched a little bit.”

“That’s a good sign.”

“I just want him to wake up,” Jethro said.

“Do the doctors have any idea when that’ll be?”

Jethro shook his head. “He’s still on some pain meds that might keep him drowsy but other than that it’s just the trauma keeping him under.”

“Tony’s always been kind of a rebel,” Abby said. “He’ll wake up when he’s good and ready,” a soft smile crossed her face, “but if you’re getting impatient you could always give him a head slap.”

Gibbs smiled as best as he could. “I wish it was that easy, Abs,” he said quietly.

“Me too.”

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

“Did he see you?” Jonathon Mackey asked his brother angrily.

“What? Who? What’re you talking about?”

“You know what I’m talking about, BJ,” Jonathon said. “It’s all over the news.”

“Son of a bitch,” Brett cursed.

“You’re taking too many risks,” Jonathon scolded.

“I didn’t have a choice!” Brett snapped.

“What happened?”
“I dropped my phone when I grabbed Ethan,” Brett explained. Jonathon shook his head in disappointment as he listened to his brother. “When I went back to get it, the place was swarming with cops,” Brett continued. “Please tell me you didn’t,” Jonathon begged, even though he suspected he already knew what happened. “I had to!” Brett insisted. “If they got my phone it woulda all been over for both of us!” “Did you have to shoot that cop?!” “Yes! I didn’t have a choice or I wouldn’ta done it!” Jonathon took an exaggerated deep breath, trying to calm himself down before continuing the conversation. “Did anybody see you?” “I didn’t think so.” “But?” “But the cops were here earlier.” “Shit.” “I know,” Brett agreed, “but I didn’t tell ‘em anything.” “What’d they say?” “They have a picture of me at the kid’s house.” “Shit, BJ!” “I told ‘em it wasn’t me!” Brett said, starting to get angry again. “I told him if he wants to talk, he can call my lawyer.” “They have your picture, BJ!” Jonathon said. “It’s only a matter of time!” “What’re we gonna do? I don’t know how to fix this!” “You’re not gonna do anything. You’ve done enough. Just, sit tight. I’ll think of something.”

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

Fornell turned and looked at the team of NCIS agents standing behind him on Brett Mackey’s porch. He’d worked with NCIS countless times in the past but not having Gibbs and Tony there made it feel very different. Instead he was using Gibbs and Tony as his motivation; getting justice for Tony and revenge for Gibbs. “You guys ready?” he asked quietly. After getting nods from each of them, he turned and pounded on the door. “Brett Mackey, open up! We have a search warrant.”

It wasn’t long before the door creaked open revealing a disheveled appearing Brett Mackey. Instead of the neat, well put together man Fornell had talked to the day before, Mackey looked like he’d just waken up after a long night of too much drinking.
“Trying to drink the guilt away?” Fornell accused. “Why don’t you just tell us where the kids are, Brett? That’s the only thing that’ll ease your conscious.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Mackey sounded tired and worn down which made Fornell curious about what had happened since he’d seen him last. Surely he hadn’t rattled him that much the previous day.

“We have a warrant to search the premises,” Fornell said, producing a copy of the warrant for Mackey to see. “Go ahead and put your shoes on. You’re going downtown to answer some questions. You can call your lawyer on the way.”

“Do I have to?” Brett asked.

“Unless you wanna tell us what we need to know here,” Fornell answered.

“There’s nothing to tell.”

Fornell, Balboa, McGee and Bishop spent the next few hours searching Mackey’s house from top to bottom with a handful of crime scene techs from the FBI and NCIS. Neither team leader had any doubt about the man’s involvement but an intensive search didn’t turn up any evidence.

“The kids were never here,” Balboa concluded.

“Where else would he have taken them?” Fornell asked.

“I don’t know but we’re running out of time,” Balboa said. He turned to McGee and Bishop with a look of determination in his eyes. “You two head back to NCIS and go over everything again. Track down relatives and known associates, any property or money he might’ve tried to hide, anything that could lead us to these kids. Go over everything again.”

“And get every news station in DC together for a news conference,” Fornell added. He looked over at Balboa. “I think it’s time we make a statement of our own.”

Balboa considered the idea for a moment then nodded. “I agree,” he said. He looked at his team and dismissed them with a nod of his head.
Minutes were turning into hours and hours into days but everything was running together for Jethro. Time seemed to be standing still but at the same time it felt like it was flying by. Why wasn’t Tony awake yet? When would he wake up? The wait was really starting to take its toll. As hard as Jethro tried, he couldn’t keep the dark thoughts and worse case scenarios out of his mind.

He was sitting in the chair next to Tony’s bed staring out the window in a daze, nearly asleep after a long night of no sleep, when he felt Tony’s fingers twitch in his hand. His body jerked to attention and his eyes opened wide as he trained them on Tony, wondering if this was a false alarm or if his mind was playing tricks on him.

Tony’s breathing pattern changed and his fingers twitched involuntarily again. He was trying to wake up and Jethro felt like his heart had stopped beating in his chest as he tried desperately to coax his lover back to the present.

“Come on, Tony,” he said. “Wake up. You can do it. Open your eyes for me.”

Tony wrapped his fingers around Jethro’s and held on and his lips parted slightly. “I hurt,” he murmured. His voice was dry and raspy, pained but unmistakably him and suddenly Jethro’s heart was beating again, this time so fast that he wondered if it might beat right out of his chest.

“I know,” Jethro said, “and I’m sorry but I’m so glad you’re awake. Open your eyes, Tony. I wanna see your eyes.”

Tony’s eyelids just barely parted and his eyes slowly found Jethro’s. “Where’m I?” he asked.

Jethro smiled and lovingly ran his hand across Tony’s forehead. He sounded so relieved, giving Tony some hint of how bad things had been, and possibly still were. “You’re in the hospital.”

Before Jethro could continue, Tony interrupted him. “How bad is it?”

“You’re awake!” The voice behind them was one of Tony’s nurses who saved Jethro from having to answer Tony’s question.

“Welcome back, Agent DiNozzo,” the doctor who’d followed the nurse in greeted.

Jethro leaned over and rested his forehead against Tony’s and his lips against Tony’s lips for a prolonged, relieved kiss while the nurse recorded something in Tony’s file.

“Jethro?” Tony’s eyes were open more now and tears were forming in the corners of them as fear built. “Please.”

“What do you remember?” Jethro asked.

“I was collecting evidence,” Tony said after a moment. “McGee went to get an evidence bag because I’d forgotten to stock them. He came back. I was talking to him and then I got shot.” His eyes found Jethro’s, glistening with tears. “Did he see who did it?”

Jethro’s eyes narrowed in confusion as he tried to remember the events of the previous day clearly. “McGee was outside when you got shot, Tony,” he said. He was sure of it.

“My back was to him,” Tony said. “I guess I just thought it was McGee. Someone shot me in the
back,” he realized. He tried to concentrate on where the pain was the most prevalent but his entire body ached. “Where’d they hit me?”

Jethro tightened his grip on Tony’s hand and looked him in the eyes. “In the back,” he answered. “The doc got the bullet out. You’re gonna be just fine.”

He’d been shot in the back? That wasn’t good. That wasn’t good at all. Was he…? Had he been…? Could he…? “A-Am I…?” He couldn’t finish the sentence; couldn’t say the word, couldn’t even think it.

“Let’s find out,” the doctor said. “Can you close your eyes for me?”

After a hesitant look at Jethro, Tony closed his eyes and held onto Jethro’s hand tighter. He may have perfected the art of hiding his fear but Jethro could see right through it. He could always see right through Tony.

He leaned down and pressed a kiss to his temple. “Everything’s gonna be okay,” he promised in a soft whisper in Tony’s ear.

“Can you feel this?” the nurse asked, squeezing one of the toes on Tony’s left foot.

“I-uh, I think so,” Tony answered.

“Which foot am I touching?”

Tony thought he knew the answer but he couldn’t stop himself from opening his eyes for a split second to make sure and the nurse didn’t miss it. “My left foot.”

“Good,” the nurse replied. She ran her finger across the bottom of Tony’s right foot and smiled at Jethro when Tony flinched. “Did you feel that, Tony?”

“Yeah.”

“Good. Can you wiggle your toes for me?”

“Which foot?” Tony asked as a stall tactic. Maybe he didn’t want to know.

“Both feet, baby.”

Tony wiggled his toes but kept his eyes closed tightly, not wanting to see if they were actually moving or not.

“Good,” the nurse replied again.

“Are they moving?” Tony asked hesitantly.

“Yep,” the doctor answered. “They’re all moving and your reflexes look good. I need you to do something for me, Tony.”

“Okay.” Tony’s voice shook and he still sounded terrified.

“Keep your eyes closed. You might feel a little poke.”

“I have a better idea,” Jethro said. He rested his hand against the side of Tony’s face and moved it so Tony was facing him. “Focus on me, Tony,” he said. “Just look at me.”
Tony’s eyes opened and he took a deep, calming breath. With Jethro’s hand still resting on the side of his face he couldn’t see the nurse or his feet and he wouldn’t be able to turn his head and look, no matter how tempted he was but that didn’t matter much because Jethro’s finger rubbing his cheek was pretty much the best feeling in the world at the moment.

While he was wrapped up in his lover, he felt a sharp pain in his left foot and pulled it towards him and away from the source of the pain. Jethro glanced down then smiled at Tony and moved his hand away so Tony could see what he was looking at. Tony looked down and saw his knee sticking up, tenting the sheets. He’d moved his whole leg all on his own. He carefully pulled his other leg up into the same position, despite how much it hurt and a sob of joy escaped his mouth.

“It’s not going to happen overnight, Tony,” the doctor said as he finished scribbling notes in Tony’s file, “but everything’s looking good and I don’t see any reason you won’t make a full recovery.”

“That’s a relief,” Tony said. He tried to turn it into a joke and play down the gravity of the whole situation but his mind still needed a minute to process everything. He couldn’t help but think back to breaking his leg in college and how difficult that had been on him. The idea of adjusting to a permanent immobilization was nothing short of scary.

“We woulda handled it either way,” Jethro said. “I’m glad things turned out the way they did.”

The doctor poked and prodded at Tony a little more and recorded a few more things in his file before leaving him and Jethro alone in the room again.

Jethro couldn’t take his eyes off Tony. He rubbed noses with him and kissed him repeatedly, knowing exhaustion was taking over quickly and Tony would soon be asleep again.

“Will you hold me?” Tony requested weakly.

“Always,” Jethro answered as he slipped into the bed next to Tony. He carefully tucked one arm behind Tony’s head and wrapped the other around Tony’s midsection before resting his head on the pillow next to Tony’s, kissing him sporadically and processing how thankful he was for how everything had turned out. Not long after Tony dropped off into another calm, peaceful sleep, Jethro closed his eyes and followed him.
Even at the young age of eight years old, Ethan Lucas was a firecracker. He was as smart as his mother and as good looking as his father. On top of that, he had such an admiration for his father that he did everything the man did. The Navy sailor often let his son do PT with him, everything from running and pushups to showing him some of the combat training moves he’d been taught and teaching him all about the discipline and responsibility that went along with it. Together the parents were teaching their son all about the good in the world and preparing him for the bad, lessons that were coming in handy in his current situation.

The boy fingered the bars on the window in his room. He’d tried more than once to find a way out, through or around them but hadn’t been successful. At least not yet. He hadn’t given up though. He was determined to find a way to escape. He heard the lock on the bedroom door being turned but didn’t turn around to see who it was until the door was opened.

“I already told ya, kid, those bars don’t come off of that window,” Jonathon said. “As soon as you stop trying to run off, you can come out and play with the other kids.”

“I’ll never stop trying to run away,” Ethan said defiantly.

Jonathon walked over to the twin size bed in the room and sat down. “Come sit down for a minute, kiddo,” he said, patting the bed next to him.

Ethan shook his head as he watched the man carefully.

“I hate to tell you this, Ethan,” Jonathon said sympathetically, “but your mommy and daddy died and now you have to live with us.”

“You’re lying,” the little boy said confidently.

“I wish I was. There was a really bad car accident.”

“My daddy’s on a ship in the ocean,” Ethan said. “There are no cars on it.”

“He came home.”

“He can’t come home till November.”

Jonathon stood and walked towards Ethan, reminding himself patience was vital when gaining the trust of children. If he lost his cool, Ethan would never trust him. “He came home early.”

Ethan cocked his head to the side as Jonathon took one final step towards him then kicked him as hard as he could between the legs and took off in a sprint. Jonathon opened his mouth to yell for his wife but nothing would come out as he sank to the floor in unbelievable pain.

Ethan quickly and quietly found the front door only to discover it was locked and the key to unlock it was nowhere to be found. Panic rose as he tried to figure out another way out of the house before Jonathon got to his feet again or his wife discovered what had happened but his determination prevented him from giving up. The other kids were in the living room watching TV while the lady who was supposed to be his new mother was in the kitchen cooking dinner so Ethan took a chance and took off back down the hall. He ducked into the master bedroom and saw that there were no bars on the windows.
“Ethan!” came Jonathon’s voice from down the hall. “Ethan, get back here!”

Ethan scurried over the window and struggled with it for a moment before finally releasing the latch and opening the window. Jonathon appeared at the door just in time to see him wiggle out to the backyard.

“Laura, Ethan’s in the backyard!” Jonathon yelled.

Ethan could hear all the yelling inside the house and moments later heard a dog barking and realized he was in the backyard with him. Ethan glanced to the left and right his heart sank when he realized the yard was fenced in. The property was far enough out in the countryside that there weren’t any neighboring houses close by. There were woods behind the house and a road out front. Ethan knew the woods would offer good hiding places but if he had any chance of being rescued before Jonathon found him again he needed to get to the road.

He ran towards the chain link fence, exciting the dog who decided to charge him, and screamed as he scurried up and threw himself over, cutting up his torso and limbs before landing on the ground on the other side with a thud. Adrenaline erased the achy pain from landing on his back and the eight year old was on his feet and racing down the road in a matter of seconds. He knew he was in trouble when he discovered there was no traffic on the road, no one to help him. Jonathon wouldn’t be far behind and there was no way he was going back to the house with him so he kept running as fast as he could.

Not far down the road he could see a cornfield on the opposite side of the street. He raced across the road and moved his little legs as fast as he could until he reached the safety of the tall cornstalks and knew it was safe to rest for a moment. It wasn’t until he finally felt like he was out of immediate danger and he realized what he’d done that tears started streaming down his face. He knew he needed to be brave but he was all alone, he didn’t have a clue where he was or what to do next and it was starting to get dark.

Not long after he’d awakened, Tony was moved from ICU to another room on a different floor. There was space for visitors, less interruptions from nurses and not nearly as many probes, wires and machinery hooked up to his body. It was as comfortable as possible for a hospital room but didn’t even come close to the comforts of home. Even still, both Jethro and Tony were thankful for how well Tony was doing when things could’ve been so much worse and to be surrounded by their friends. Fornell and Balboa had sent Tim, Ellie, Abby and Jimmy to the hospital to visit, knowing a break would do them good.

Hugs and handshakes had been exchanged before the group spread out and lounged around, just like they were in one of their living rooms, enjoying some time off together. There was talking and joking, teasing and laughing and all the while Jethro sat back and watched with a smile on his face.

“You’re quiet, Gibbs,” Bishop pointed out. She hadn’t yet learned ‘not to poke the beast’ as Tony would say.

Jethro smiled and nodded slightly at her before looking over at Tony. They’d talked about Ducky and Abby finding out and decided to just go ahead and come out to the team. There was no reason to hide and neither wanted to be careful about being affectionate just because the others were around.

“Actually there’s um, there’s something Jethro and I need to come clean about,” Tony said. “We—how should I put this? Jethro and I have been breaking rule 12 for a while now.” He studied the looks on his friends’ faces and was surprised to see that none of them looked surprised. “Did Abby
already tell you guys? Ducky? Fornell?"

“None of us said a word, Tony,” Abby replied. “It’s kind of obvious. We’ve known you two belonged together for years. The only surprising thing is that you got over your stubbornness and actually got together.”

“We’re not stubborn,” both Jethro and Tony insisted in unison, making the group laugh.

“Whatever you guys say,” Abby said with a soft smile.

“Congratulations, you guys,” Tim said.

“We’re really happy for you,” Bishop added. “You both deserve to be happy and it’s easy to see you make each other happy.”

“See?” Abby pointed out. “Even the newbie can see it. Just don’t screw it up or I’ll head slap both of you.” She offered a genuine smile as she continued. “We love you guys.”

“Thanks, guys,” Tony said. “We weren’t trying to keep anything from you.”

Jethro moved over to Tony’s bedside and reached for his hand. “We were just being greedy,” he finished.

“You’ve never been that great at sharing, Gibbs,” Abby teased.

Jethro raised an eyebrow at Abby but exhaustion and all the stress of the past couple days made it impossible for him to keep up the façade for long and his face broke into a smile, giving the others the freedom to laugh. Apparently they all needed the break. A chance to relax, laugh a little and have a little fun might be just what was needed to solve their case.

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

The sun had just disappeared below the horizon, leaving behind very little light that was also fading fast. Ethan had been sitting in the cornfield for quite some time watching a red minivan that he was pretty sure belonged to Jonathon drive back and forth, sometimes slow, sometimes fast. Other than that there wasn’t much traffic and fear had prevented him from showing himself to the only other car that had driven by. What if it was Jonathon’s wife? Or the guy that had actually kidnapped him? How could he know who to trust? He felt so alone but the little voice in his head told him he had to at least try to find help before darkness set in completely.

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

Thirty three year old Jake Compton stopped in the middle of the riff he was playing on the guitar his father had given him years ago when he heard the alarm on his surveillance camera go off. Vandalism in nearby fields had encouraged him to do everything he could to take precautionary measures and part of those measures were security cameras.

Jake put his guitar aside and made his way over to the closed circuit TV to check it out. So far he’d only caught wild animals setting the system off but what he saw this time surprised him. In the fading daylight there was a young boy, barefoot and cut up, making his way past one of the cameras. Jake knew his neighbors well enough to know none of them had children. There was no reason for any child to be out in the cornfields at that time of night. Wild animals and cool nighttime temperatures made it too dangerous, not to mention the risk of getting lost or hurt.

The man grabbed his phone and dialed 9-1-1 as he pulled his work boots on and grabbed a warm
flannel shirt to wrap around the child. He made his way across the street to his cornfield as he talked to the emergency dispatcher and hung up the phone to search for the child once he was sure help was on the way. He’d worked the fields since he was a boy and knew them like the back of his hand which allowed him to easily find the spot he’d first seen the boy in. As quickly as day was fading to night he knew time was running out. It would be nearly impossible to find a small child in a giant cornfield in the dark.

When he didn’t find the boy at the last location he’d seen him on the camera, Jake started heading east, the same direction the kid had been heading. He could only hope his long legs and big strides helped him catch up to the little boy. He walked lightly and listened carefully for any sounds that could point him in the right direction and it wasn’t long before he caught a glimpse of the child.

“Hey, kiddo,” Jake called.

Before he could say anything else, the shocked little boy took off at a sprint. His bare feet and lack of familiarity with the area slowed him down enough that it didn’t take Jake long before he could reach out and get ahold of his arm. The child screamed and fought but he was no match for the strong hand on his arm.

“It’s okay,” Jake assured him, “it’s okay, buddy.”

Still struggling to get away, the boy stumbled and fell to the ground and immediately started kicking. Jake released his arm and grabbed his leg right before he took a foot to the groin.

“Easy, kiddo,” he cooed but when the boy continued fighting Jake used his power to gain the upper hand and restrain the child before one of them ended up getting hurt. “Relax,” Jake said hugging the boy tightly from behind. “You’re okay.”


“What’s your name?”

“I don’t have one.”

“Everybody’s got a name. Mine’s Jake. I live in the house across the street from this field. I have a puppy names Samson and a cat that keeps the mice away. Her name’s Gracie.”

“Do you know Jonathon?”

“Sure,” Jake said. “He lives up the road a bit. Are you visiting him? Did you get lost?”

“No!” Ethan answered quickly, his body tensing up again.


“Somebody kidnapped me and gave me to him. He said he’s my new dad but he’s not. He’s not my dad!”

Jake loosened his grip slightly and turned the boy around, suddenly realizing why the child looked so familiar. “You’re Ethan Lucas,” he said. “Your picture’s been all over TV.”

“It has?” Ethan asked, sniffing as he wiped away the tears.

“Uh-huh,” Jake answered. “Your mom and dad have been looking all over for you.”

“He said they were dead,” Ethan replied, studying Jake closely.
Jake released Ethan’s arm and shook out the flannel shirt before wrapping it around the boy’s body. He was pretty cut up and starting to shiver in the cool night air. “He lied to you.” Jake held his hand out, hoping Ethan would trust him and accept his help. “What do you say we get you home, Ethan?”

Ethan swallowed hard as he studied the hand being offered to him. He felt like he could trust this stranger and reluctantly decided it was the only option he had. He slipped his hand into Jake’s and smiled up at the man when he gave his hand a comforting squeeze.

“How about a piggyback ride,” Jake offered, looking down at Ethan’s bare feet.

Ethan thought it over for a moment before nodding and climbing onto Jake’s back when the man squatted down. For the first time since he’d been snatched from his bed, he finally felt safe.
It wasn’t long before whispers of Ethan’s rescue reached Jethro and Tony’s ears in the hospital room. A phone call from Fornell confirmed the rumors and when he heard the boy was in the same hospital as Tony, he made his way down to the emergency room to see for himself. A nurse who remembered him from when Tony came in pointed him in the direction of Ethan’s room where he stood back and watched and listened from the door. He nodded at the doctor as the man walked by him and smiled at Ethan’s mother when she turned and looked at him.

“Agent Gibbs,” the woman said.

“I just wanted to check on Ethan,” Jethro said.

“He’s doing great, thanks to you guys,” she said thankfully. “Ethan, this is one of the men who helped find you. Can you say thank you?”

“Thank you,” Ethan said.

“I’m glad you’re safe and sound, bud,” Jethro said.

“How’s your agent?” the mother asked.

Jethro smiled and nodded. “He’s gonna be just fine.”

“Have they found the other children yet?”

Jethro shook his head. “They’re searching the area Ethan was found. One of my agent’s will be in shortly to ask him some questions. Just answer them as best as you can, bud, okay?”

“’kay.”

“Good boy.” Jethro smiled at the family and ruffled Ethan’s hair before heading towards the door. He stopped when he reached it and turned back around to face the family. “Your dad got a seat on a flight out tonight,” he said. “He’ll be home tomorrow.”

“Thank you,” the mother said. “Thank you so much, Agent Gibbs.”

Every available FBI and NCIS agent was scouring the area around where Ethan was found. Fornell was interviewing Jake Compton while McGee and Bishop were on their way to the hospital to talk to Ethan. With four kids still missing it was all hands on deck. They were hopeful the children would be found alive but they’d been missing for quite some time and every agent out there searching knew Ethan’s escape could scare the kidnappers into trying something foolish like getting rid of the kids.

“My security camera alerted me that someone was in my field,” Jake explained as he rubbed the thick fur on Samson’s chest. The golden retriever puppy slept happily on his back while his owner ran his fingers through his fur. “When I saw it was a kid I knew something wasn’t right. I caught up with Ethan and it took me a minute but I finally realized he was one of the missing kids who’d been all over the news.”

“Any idea where he came from?” Fornell asked.
“He mentioned something about Jonathon,” Jake said. “He said someone kidnapped him and gave him to Jonathon and that Jonathon said he was his new dad.”

“Do you have any idea who Jonathon is?”

“Sure,” Jake said, pointing, “he’s the neighbor up the road a short ways. Jonathon Mackey.”

“Mackey,” Fornell repeated. “Any relation to Brett Mackey?”

“They’re brothers. Did they take those kids?”

“We’re sure as hell gonna find out,” Fornell replied.

“Do they have kids?”

“None that I’ve ever seen.”

“Anything about them ever strike you as off?”

“No, nothing,” Jake answered. “They’re friendly, involved in the community, they can carry on a conversation, they’re both as normal as anyone can be these days.”

“Who else lives in the house?”

“Just Marcia, Jonathon’s wife and the brother doesn’t live there. He just visits sometimes. In fact, I think I saw his truck pass by earlier so he might be there now. I could take you guys up there if you want.”

“I appreciate it, Jake, but that’s too dangerous,” Fornell said. “You’ve been incredibly helpful though. We’ll be sure to let you know how things turn out.”

“The kid,” Jake said, “Ethan, is he gonna be okay?”

Fornell nodded. “Thanks to you.”

“He was terrified. He almost took me out. I had to restrain him. You don’t think…” the man hesitated as his eyes found the FBI agent’s. “Did I make things worse for him?”

“You did what you had to do,” Fornell replied sympathetically. “If you hadn’t, he’d still be wandering around there in the dark, all by himself.”

Jake nodded, trying to shake the terrified look in Ethan’s eyes from his mind. He’d never seen a child look like that before and he never wanted to see one with that look again.

“Hey, Jake,” Fornell said before walking out the front door.

“Hmm?”

“Ethan’s at Washington General if you’d like to visit. I’m sure he’d love to see you again and I bet his mom would like to meet you.”

Jake smiled softly and nodded. “Thanks.”

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

Fornell and Balboa led the way to Jonathon Mackey’s house, a short drive up the road from Jake’s.
They pulled into the driveway with their strobe lights flashing and their spotlights on, lighting up the dark sky, and what they saw surprised them. Jonathon, Brett and Marcia Mackey were loading a group of children into the red minivan parked in the driveway.

“No way,” Balboa said in disbelief as the car screeched to a halt.

“You don’t think those are the missing kids, do you?” Fornell asked.

Both men were leery of getting their hopes up. The other kids had been missing without a trace for the past three weeks. They may have been hoping for the best but they were expecting the worst. The two men got out of the car with their guns drawn followed by the group of agents behind them and quickly surrounded their three suspects.

Before they even knew what was happening, Jonathon, Brett and Marcia were on the ground in handcuffs and Fornell and Balboa were pulling the four missing children out of the van that was packed to the brim with everything the group could fit into it. It was clear they were trying to run and quickly became obvious that if they’d been even a minute or two later arriving at the house, they might’ve missed the group completely.

“Can you believe what we’re seeing?” Balboa asked in shock.

“Four missing kids alive and well, unharmed and fed?” Fornell said. “No. What am I missing?”

Their conversation was interrupted by Marcia screaming and wailing. “My babies!” she cried, struggling against the cuffs. “Please! They need me!”

“They’re not yours, lady,” Fornell ground out harshly.

“They are. I feed them and clothe them and take care of them. I’m their mother.”

“It takes a lot more than that to be a mother,” Fornell said. “And what makes you think you can steal someone else’s kids and keep them as your own?

“Get her outta here,” Balboa said.

Marcia continued struggling and begging as she was dragged away in handcuffs but her pleas fell on deaf ears and the agents easily had the upper hand. Fornell and Balboa watched her go as ambulances for the kids were escorted in.

“She didn’t deny it,” Balboa said. He turned and faced the FBI agent, a curious look on his face. “How’d you know?”

“That Mackey was snatching the kids because he didn’t, or couldn’t, have any of his own?” Fornell replied. “I got suspicious when Ethan showed up well cared for, except for getting scratched up during his escape. I was only a little off. He was snatching them for his sister-in-law, not himself. I bet she can’t have any kids of her own.”

“We’ll find out,” Balboa said. “What do you say to a shared interrogation? See this case through to the end?”

“Your place or mine?” Fornell asked.

NCIS | NCIS | NCIS | NCIS

July 07
Tony studied the building waves on the horizon as they made their way towards him. He subconsciously rubbed at his legs, hanging off either side of the surfboard he was sitting on, and mentally prepared himself for what came next.

“You sure you’re ready for this?” Jethro asked. He was sitting on his own surfboard right next to Tony and his calm, reassuring voice gave Tony the courage he needed to nod his head confidently.

“I’m sure,” Tony answered. “I’m ready. I can do this.”

“You can do anything you set your mind to,” Jethro replied.

Tony chuckled a little and turned back towards the never ending Pacific Ocean, pushing back the nerves that threatened to send him paddling for the shore on his belly instead of surfing there on his feet. Was he strong enough? Could his back handle this? These days he ached a little more than he used to, especially during the long, cold DC winters but his doctors and therapists had given him a clean bill of health and assured him that he was as strong as ever. There was no need to pass on things he’d always loved to do or miss out on opportunities for new adventures. So there he was, in the Pacific Ocean, with his lover by his side, learning to surf, something that had been on his bucket list for quite some time. It was a new adventure courtesy of the man he loved more than words could express.

A wave approached, one that somehow just felt right, and Tony readied himself. He turned and paddled towards the shore, waited until he felt the power of the water surging beneath him then cautiously stood. Adrenaline pumped in his veins as the wave propelled him towards the beach. He was doing it. He was surfing!

It didn’t take long before he lost his footing and ended up in the water. His head poked up out of the water behind the wave and the unmistakable sound of him laughing filled the air. He’d done it. For a few glorious seconds he’d ridden a wave and there was absolutely nothing stopping him from doing it again. And again and again. Another achievement, another giant step forward on his road to recovery, another boost of his confidence—he was okay and he was free to continue living his life to the fullest. This day, like so many others in the past year, was one to be remembered.

It was Tony’s favorite day of the year—July 7th. If seven was a lucky number then the seventh day of the seventh month must be doubly lucky, a hypothesis that had proved to be true two years prior when a very drunk Tony had given Jethro the shock of his life. It was the best thing that could’ve happened to either of them.

The shooting the previous year and Tony’s long road to recovery had forced them to change their one year anniversary plans but that was no longer an issue so the day before Jethro had surprised Tony with a plane ticket to the opposite side of the country and promised him sunshine and palm trees, salty ocean air and warm waves crashing against the shore.

If the previous year had taught him anything it was how short life was and he was determined to make the most of it and fill every single one of Tony’s dreams so they’d spend the next two weeks in a sunny seaside town in California, visiting wineries, napping in hammocks under palm trees and even learning to surf, something Jethro had adamantly insisted he wouldn’t have any part of only one short year ago.

Jethro stood on his board as a wave approached. He got up a little too early but managed to stay up almost until he’d reached Tony and the wave dumped him into the water. The adrenaline rush that came along with the small success was addicting and made him want to try it again.
“That was crazy!” Tony said excitedly as he paddled towards him.

“Yeah,” Jethro agreed, “it was.”

“Let’s do it again.” The younger man’s eyes widened in excitement and his tone was almost pleading. He was having the time of his life and the thought made Jethro’s heart swell. The surprise trip had been a good idea. Getting out of town was good for them and the destination he’d chosen had been perfect and they had two weeks of it to look forward to.

Jethro smiled a devious smile and before Tony could process what was happening, he was watching the man’s backside paddle away while his lover yelled “beat ya!” over his shoulder.

“You cheater!” Tony yelled good-naturedly as he paddled after him.

He caught up to Jethro, grabbed onto his ankle and managed to pull his lover backwards and propel himself forwards. He was just getting ready to brag about his victory when Jethro reached out and flipped him off his board and he ended up with a mouth full of salt water. A half a second later Tony got his revenge when Jethro landed in the water as well. The smile on his face when he surfaced had Tony leaning in and stealing a kiss, unable to resist.

“You don’t play fair,” Jethro accused as he climbed back onto his surfboard.

“Me?” Tony asked incredulously. “What about ‘beat ya’ without even giving me a chance? I do have a bad back, you know.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Jethro said innocently.

“Uh-huh,” Tony grunted playfully. He rolled onto his board and sat up tall, wiping the water from his hair and face.

“How is your back?” Jethro asked seriously. He knew Tony hated it when he asked but he couldn’t help it. Despite what the doctors had said, he still worried about Tony overdoing it.

“It’s fine,” Tony grumbled. “I’m fine.”

“I can’t not worry about you, Tony,” Jethro said.

“You didn’t seem too worried this morning when you were pounding me into the mattress,” Tony said with a gleam in his eye.

One corner of Jethro’s mouth turned up into a smirk as he glanced over at Tony, memories of making love that morning fresh in his mind. “I had other things on my mind.”

“As soon as this little surfing lesson’s over, maybe we can get back to those… other things again,” Tony said with a quirk of his eyebrow.

Jethro leaned over, tugged Tony closer and kissed him. “I think that can be arranged,” he said against Tony’s lips.

“Maybe we should forget the rest of the surfing lesson,” Tony mumbled into the kiss, “make some memories back in our hotel room.”

“And we should,” Jethro agreed. Their lips separated but Jethro kept his forehead against Tony’s and brushed his fingers across Tony’s cheek. “I don’t want us to forget anything, Tony. If this past year’s taught me anything, it’s that I want to fill our lives with moments, make memories, share
everything from the silly to the serious. I wanna mark everything off our bucket lists, do everything we ever dreamed of and experience it all together. I don’t wanna miss anything, don’t wanna pass up any opportunities. Today is the day we really start living.”

“I like that,” Tony said with a grin. “This one was too damn close and with our jobs there’s always a chance of it happening again. I don’t wanna waste any more time. There’s so much I want to see and do and experience and I wanna do it all with you.” His smile had never been brighter as he framed Jethro’s face with his hands and guided his face into a kiss that conveyed all the love, emotion and words he couldn’t quite vocalize. Not everyone got a second chance but he and Jethro had and they sure as hell weren’t going to waste a single second of it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!