Summary

Gift request: Green card wedding: Gibbs is forced to marry Tony (who was born in Italy and due to a clerical mistake never became a US citizen) in order for Tony to retain his position at NCIS. This is on SecNav's orders. Tony can be as reluctant as Gibbs about getting married, or not. They squabble at home, friction, drama. Everything is fine at work though. Same-sex marriage can be the norm or not at that time. Slash.

Notes

Merry Christmas! I hope you enjoy. (Sorry, I didn't get to everything, I'm too wordy, I guess.)
“Sacks, come on. Back off!” Tony focused on his nemesis as he twisted to pull his arm from the man’s grip.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way, DiNozzo. I know which I’d prefer.” The agent sneered as his colleague took advantage of Tony’s focus on Sacks to slam into the NCIS agent forcing him to lean over the desk.

“This is ridiculous, Sacks and you know it. Take these off.” Across from the scuffle, Tony could see McGee frantically dialing the phone on his desk while alternating between texting and emailing. “Do something.”

“Vance is in a meeting and I can’t find Gibbs. I’m trying, Tony.”

“Let’s go!” Sacks yanked back on Tony’s cuffed arms forcing him to stand.

“McGee!” Tim jumped as his name was shouted in stereo.

“Make this damned thing stop.” Gibbs threw his cellphone at McGee as he exited the stairwell.

“Gibbs. Thank-god.” DiNozzo tried to pull away from the Sacks.

“Boss, we have a problem.”
“Ya think?” Gibbs said wryly. “Do you want to tell me what the FBI wants with my agent now, Sacks?”

“He’s not FBI anymore, boss.” McGee shut up when Gibbs glared at him.

Gibbs turned his glare back to Sacks. “Un-cuff my agent.”

Leon Vance descended the staircase from his office shooting a look at McGee. “SecNav was not impressed that you broke into a secure communication. For clarification, I believe that is my agent you are holding, Agent Sacks.”

“It’s Special Agent Sacks, Director Vance. This is Agent Maison.” Sacks pulled his ID and flashed his badge. “Department of Homeland Security. Mr. DiNozzo is being detained pending the outcome of our investigation.”

“Investigation in to what?” Gibbs angrily tossed his now empty coffee cup.

“Mr. DiNozzo is being detained as a threat to national security; on suspicion of terrorist involvement.”

“This is ridiculous; DiNozzo is not a terrorist threat.” Leon reach for another toothpick. “Just a threat to my sanity.”

Gibbs had his fill of the whole business. “This has gone far enough. Turn DiNozzo loose.”

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible. Mr. DiNozzo is being detained.” Sacks nodded to Maison who picked up the papers Tony had thrown on his desk and extended them to Gibbs. Without another word, the two officers manhandled Tony into the elevator.

“As you can see by the warrant; the least penalty for Mr. DiNozzo as an illegal alien will mean deportation.” As the doors shut, Tony could still be heard protesting that he was an American.

“What the hell do you mean an illegal alien?” Gibbs shoved the papers at Vance who began scanning them. “McGee?”

“Pulling Tony’s birth certificate now, boss.”

Vance turned to stomp up the stairs. “SecNav now, McGee.”

“Yes, boss…boss’ boss…Director…”

“Now, Agent McGee.” The sentence was punctuated by the slam of the Director’s office door.

“McGee, I want everything there is on DiNozzo from the moment he was born until he had breakfast this morning. I’ll be in MTAC.” It was the second time a statement was punctuated by a slamming door in just as many minutes.

Tim took a deep breath and tried to slow his heart rate. His panicking was not going to help Tony. He needed to focus. He glanced at the display on the phone next to him as it rang. Grabbing his laptop, he headed off to find an empty interrogation room; just because he needed to focus he rationalized. He wasn’t deliberating hiding from Abby, he thought as he silenced his cellphone.

Section 2

“Boss.” He peered into MTAC and found both Vance and Gibbs in a heated discussion with SecNav and the head of the HSO. At Gibbs nonverbal command, he came to stand to the side of the
“With all due respect, Secretary Johnson, Senior Special Agent DiNozzo is a valued member of the NCIS of the MCRT."

“He is also an unregistered alien, Director. As I understand, there have been other irregularities involving the utilization of illegal alien in the staffing of your MCRT going back to your predecessor, Director Shepard. A full review of NCIS personnel should take care of any other outstanding issues. I believe you have other staff whose immigration status who may be in question, including a Dr. Mallard, I believe. In wake of the detainee’s trip to areas known to be frequented by terrorists as well as the current terrorist and military actions around the world, I would have expected your full support, Secretary Mabus. Now if you will excuse me, I am expected for a briefing at the White House. Good-day, gentlemen.”

Gibbs swore as the one side of the screen went black with the DHS insignia. SecNav winced but took the opportunity to escape before Gibbs could get up a full head of steam. “I’ll look into this from my end, Leon. I’m going to call Secretary Hagel. Let me know, if you uncover anything. We will not lose Agent DiNozzo.”

Gibbs swore again as the other side of the screen went blue with the Navy emblem. “Leon, this is…”

“My office, now. You and McGee. I want to get to the bottom of this.” Leon bit back his own curse as he opened the door to exit MTAC and found himself face-to-face with Abby Scuito.

“They took Tony. Why did they take Tony? We need Tony, director. I need Tony. You’re getting him back. I mean, you are going to get him back.”

Leon sidestepped leaving Gibbs on the frontline. “Five minutes, my office.”

“Gibbs, what’s happening? You have to fix this. Fix this now.” She stomped her platform boot. “Now.”

“Abs, calm down.” Gibbs motioned with his head for McGee to go on to Vance’s office. “I need you to calm down. SecNav, Vance, McGee and I are on this. We will get Tony back. I need you to stay calm.”

“Calm. I can do calm. See this is me…calm.”

“Abs…”

“Sorry, Gibbs. It’s just…it’s Tony.”

“I know, Abs. But I need you to help Ducky.”

“They took Ducky? We need Ducky. We have to…”

“Abs. Stop. We just had a conference call with Secretary Johnson. This looks like a witch hunt. He mentioned Ducky and alluded to Ziva’s employment when Director Shepard was in charge.”

“But, Ziva’s gone…”

“But obviously not forgotten, Abs. I need you to pull a list of any non-US Citizens employed here. I want their current immigration status, any issues that they’ve ever had, everything you can put your fingers on. I need to know what they are hunting for. Can you do that?”
Abby nodded. “I’m scared, Gibbs.”

Gibbs dropped a light kiss on her forehead as he moved past on his way to Vance’s office. “So am I, Abs. So am I.”

Section 3

Gibbs took the cup of coffee Vance’s secretary held out as he stormed past her desk and into Vance’s office. “What have we got?”

Vance nodded at McGee who opened his laptop and turned the display around for them. “Well, I pulled Tony’s birth certificate and at first glance, it appears to be straightforward. Everything seems to be in order. All his school records, everything.”

“We know what’s right, McGee. What did you find wrong?”

“Uh, I might have accidentally tried to access his file through an unsecured DHS system. I couldn’t get a lot of information but I did find reference to Italy and citizenship. I thought it meant Tony has dual citizenship.”

“DiNozzo never indicated he had dual citizenship.”

“He doesn’t. Once I had that info, I started looking into his birth more closely. Tony’s mother and father were visiting Senior’s family in Italy when Tony’s mom went in to labor. He was born there.”

“So they want to deport him because he can claim dual citizenship?” Leon could feel his headache grow.

“No, director. It’s because technically Tony isn’t a US citizen.”

“His parents are US citizens, McGee. That makes Tony a US citizen.”

“No, boss, it doesn’t. See, here is where Tony’s parents applied for a passport to bring Tony home. It predates his birth certificate that his parents filed in New York.”

“Get to the point, McGee.” Gibbs crumpled his empty cup and lobbed it at the trash can.

“In order to establish US citizenship, Tony’s parents had to fill out a form requesting citizenship by registering his birth abroad and asking the consulate to validate his citizenship or once they had returned to New York they could have filed the form at the local embassy. It never happened. Therefore, technically, Tony isn’t a US citizen.”

“How the hell was this not caught before, Agent McGee?” Vance grabbed the bottle of AspirinTM from his bottom drawer shaking several into his hand before offering the bottle to Gibbs who declined with a shake of his head.

“I could only speculate.” At Gibbs’s glare, McGee hurried to continue. “I believe it’s because of his passport. When the embassy in Italy issued the passport, it was marked US citizen in anticipation of the other paperwork. Each time it came up for renewal, they carried the citizenship forward.”

“So, we file the form and get the citizenship conferred.”

“We can’t, boss.”

“Why not, McGee?”
“Well, I checked that. It had to be filed by his parents or rather Senior since his mom is deceased but it had to be before he turned 18. Now the only one that can apply is Tony; but since he is now considered an illegal alien…He has to be a citizen to have the rights to file to be a citizen, boss. It’s a Catch-22; there’s no way around it. Tony’s stuck in limbo.”

“Ya think, McGee? Want to explain that to DiNozzo?”

McGee’s “No, boss” was only a fraction ahead of Leon’s “Gibbs.”

“Agent McGee, get that information to legal ASAP. I want all our options.”

“Yes, director.” McGee fumbled as he gathered up his notes and headed for the door. “Gibbs…”

“Go on, McGee. Tell them to call Vance directly.”

Leon’s one eyebrow raised in surprise as Gibbs deferred the call to him. “Not to you?”

“Nope. Someone’s got to tell DiNozzo what’s going on.”

“Gibbs, don’t…” His office door slammed before he could add…”…antagonize them further.” With a sigh and wishing for something stronger than Aspirin™, he pushed the intercom button and his secretary responded. “Get me SecNav. Gibbs is about to declare war on the DHS.”

“Right away, sir.”

Section 4

Vance took a deep breath and stood straight as the elevator doors opened and Gibbs was escorted off by two MPs.

“Friends of yours, Leon?” While Gibbs tone was mild, his eyes displayed his rage.

“At ease, gentleman. That’ll be all.” When Vance dismissed the two MPs they were quick to evacuate the area. “The DHS is currently holding Agent DiNozzo at an undisclosed location with no access permitted. No confrontations until we know what is going on here. SecNav’s orders, Gibbs.”

“So in the meantime, we just leave Tony to rot?”

Vance pushed the elevator button and waited silently for it to arrive. As the doors opened, he motioned for Gibbs to precede him in to the elevator. “Your office, this time.”

Gibbs barely held his temper until the elevator started to move and then slammed his hand onto the stop button. “This is a setup, Leon, and you know it. Someone dug deep to find this technicality. DiNozzo needs to know he’s not alone in this.”

“DiNozzo knows we’re not going to let this pass, Gibbs. He’s be a member of your team for how many years? He knows you’re in his corner. We have to play this smart. While you were out for a drive, I had McGee flag all of our personnel files accessed by the DHS. There were just three: Dr. Mallard, Anthony DiNozzo, Jr. and Ziva David.”

“They targeting my team. Why, Leon?”

“I don’t know. Neither does SecNav.”

“Ziva?”
“She’s safe. In order to arrest her, they would have to request extradition and I have it on good authority; the request would not be enforced.”

“Ducky?”

“Everything’s in order. When Ducky decided to take the position here at NCIS, he called in a few markers from the CIA over the Afghan incident. They pushed through citizenship but it ended up buried in a highly confidential file. If it had gone missing, it could very well have led to issues for Dr. Mallard. I read Fornell in and he managed to unearth the file and had the information made accessible in several venues.”

“No chance of it disappearing.”

“No.”

“So where does that leave us, Leon?”

Vance shook his head. “I don’t know, Gibbs.”

“This isn’t looking good for DiNozzo, is it?” It was more a statement than a question.

“No, Gibbs. It isn’t. We have to play this straight. Give SecNav some more time. No playing into their hands.”

Gibbs didn’t reply. He simply released the elevator and hit the button to return to their floor. As he exited, he said flatly. “Forty-eight hours, Leon. That’s it. Then I call in every damn marker I have in this town.” He didn’t even bother to look for Leon’s nod of agreement. “McGee.”

“Boss.”

“Anything from legal?”

“Not yet, boss.”

“Call them. Get the name of the top immigration lawyer in DC.”

“But you … lawyers…”

“I know how I feel about lawyers. Just get him on the phone and put him on retainer. Tony needs the best defense we can get.”

“I can’t put them on retainer, boss.”

“Didn’t DiNozzo give you a power of attorney or something for emergencies?”

“They froze his accounts, boss. All of them, even his trust fund. For all intents and purposes, Tony’s broke.”

“Then use my account.”

“Boss?”

“Now, McGee.”

Section 5
“I wondered when I’d be seeing you, Jethro.”

“Had a few things to take care of first, Ducky.”

“How is Anthony?”

“Didn’t get to see him. SecNav had other ideas.”

“Ahhh…Mr. Palmer has left for the day. What say you and I have a nice cup of tea?”

“I can’t, Ducky.”

“Ahh…I understand. No rest until our young Anthony returns.”

“Something like that, Duck.”

“I…uh…” Ducky looked up at the security cameras before proceeding. “I may heard from some contacts that this situation has been in the works for a good while and that Anthony may have not been the only target.”

“You’re safe, Duck.”

“Of course I am, Jethro. I’m not worried about my situation. I learned long ago not to place my full trust in the Alphabet as it may be called.”

Gibbs smiled wryly. “Always on your toes, hey, Duck?”

“Indeed. No it seems this, for lack of a better word, this investigation was originally aimed at Jenny.”

“La Grenouille?”

“I can’t say for certain; but I believe perhaps a certain young lady who may hold a grudge against Jenny and Anthony.”

“Dammit, Ducky. Jeanne Benoit?”

“As I said, I can be certain. However, an old acquaintance may have hinted that she is no longer Ms. Benoit. She has married well, as they say.”

“Will that damn situation ever stop haunting us?” Gibbs looked at Ducky who sadly shook his head. “I better give Vance the heads up.”

“Jethro, when you see Anthony, please tell him…” Ducky for once seemed at a loss for words.

“I will, Duck. I will.”

As Gibbs emerged from the stairway, Vance stepped off the elevator into the bullpen. “Sitrep.”

“Your office or mine, Leon?” Gibbs asked drolly. “McGee, with us,” he added following Vance to the stairs.

“Hold my calls; unless it SecNav.”

“Yes, sir.” The secretary automatically held a cup out to Gibbs as he went by.
“She’s my secretary and yet she provides you with coffee.”

“Must be my charm.”

“I’m sure.” Leon said dryly. “So, gentlemen, where are we?”

“After you.” Gibbs saluted McGee with coffee cup before taking a long sip.

“I’ve been trying to find Senior. I thought it might help if we had him here; but he’s gone.”

“Gone where, Agent McGee?”

“I don’t know, sir. He flew to France two weeks ago and checked into a hotel in Lourdes. From there, his trail just disappears.”

“That’s too big of a coincidence. Gibbs?”

“It seems an old acquaintance of Ducky’s mentioned certain Ms. Benoit may have married into connections. McGee?”

“Oh, one minute, boss.” McGee let his fingers fly over the keyboard. “According to the latest information, after Jeanne Benoit resigned her residency; she moved to Los Angeles. After…”

“Wait, we are tracking Ms. Benoit’s movements with no investigation to base it on?”

“Well, yeah, Leon. After the way she tried to frame Tony? Go on, McGee.”

“Uh, yeah. She was accepted at Cedar-Sinai Medical Center where she completed her residency. After completing, she moved to Europe.”

“Where in Europe, McGee?” Gibbs sat up as his gut twisted.

“Um, she spent several months in Paris before settling in…Gibbs?”

“Where, McGee?”

“Lourdes, France.”

“No coincidence, Leon.”

“McGee, contact our office in France. I don’t care how many rocks they have to turn over. Tell them to find Mr. DiNozzo, Senior and get him back here. Now. I’ll be in MTAC briefing SecNav. Gibbs, you’re with me.”

“Good-work, McGee. Now find them.”

“Yes, boss.”

By the time, Gibbs entered MTAC; he found Vance arguing with SecNav’s secretary.

“I’m sorry, Director Vance. Secretary Mabus has turned off his cellphone. According to his wife, he got a call and left saying he had an urgent meeting. He did not indicate to her where he would be. Unfortunately, I have no way to contact him. I will let him know that you are trying to reach him. Good-night, Director.” The feed was then disconnected.

“I don’t like this, Leon.”
“I don’t either but there doesn’t seem to be anything we can do at the moment. Send them home, Gibbs. We’ll get a fresh start in the morning.”

“I don’t like having to leave DiNozzo in lockup overnight. Not after what happened before.”

“I know, Gibbs.” Vance looked at his agent. “Go home, Gibbs. We don’t even know where they’re holding Agent DiNozzo. Just go home.

“Forty-eight hours, Leon.”

“I know, Gibbs. I know.” Some days there wasn’t enough Aspirin™, Leon thought to himself.

Section 6

“Mr. Vice-President, thank your for seeing me on such short notice.”

“I admit, you have me curious, Hagel. I know you have alluded to Secretary Johnson’s involvement. I’m sure you are aware that this administration has enough on its plate without having to referee a pissing contest between two of his cabinet members.”

“Yes, sir. Trust me, I wouldn’t have contacted you, if I had felt it wasn’t necessary.”

“It makes me wonder why you declined to have Johnson involved in this little pow-wow and what could be so important to you to necessitate this meeting place.” The vice-president gestured at back room of a small local restaurant.

“I simply felt a less populated venue was the best option. Given the sensitivity of the situation, I felt it best to err on the side of caution.”

“Now I’m really intrigued and concerned; what’s this about, Hagel?” The vice-president leaned back in the arm chair.

Hagel took a deep breath. “It involves NCIS, sir.”

“Not Gibbs, again. Anything else I can deal with, just tell me this isn’t about Gibbs.”

“Not exactly. Just indirectly, sir.” Hagel sighed and shook his head slightly. “In the interest of full-disclosure, sir, I have been informed by Mabus that Director Vance was…informed by Agent Gibbs…that as of 3 pm this afternoon, Agent Gibbs has given us forty-eight hours to handle this situation without his…assistance.”

The vice-president motioned for one of the Secret Service. “Get me a drink. Make it a double.” He paused for a moment. “In fact, just bring the bottle and a couple glasses.” They waited in silence until the Secret Service Agent returned. Taking a long, slow drink to fortify himself, the vice-president set his glass on the table. “Let’s quit beating about the bush. If this ‘only indirectly’ involves Gibbs, just who does in involve directly?”

“It involves another member of the MCRT.”

“Spit it out, Hagel.”

“It’s Agent DiNozzo, sir.”

“Yes, sir.” Hagel answered reluctantly.

The vice-president emptied his glass and motioned for the Secret Service again. “Call my wife. This could be a long night.” Pouring another glass, he glared at the amber liquid for a moment. “Since I am sure that we agree as to our feelings should Agent Gibbs decide to handle this inter-departmental situation on his own, spill it. What the hell is going on?”

This time Hagel busied himself taking a slow drink from own glass. It might be time for a tour of the foreign bases, he thought before answering, a very, very long tour. “Secretary Mabus contacted me this afternoon after being informed by Director Vance that DiNozzo had been taken into custody while at work. He is currently being detained by DHS, sir.”

“On what grounds?”

“Being an illegal alien and possible collusion with terrorists.”

“Son of a bitch.”

Hagel cringed as the vice-president’s glass smashed again the wall. He felt the vice-president’s sentence very much in accord with his own opinion.

This time the vice-president didn’t even summon a Secret Service Agent to the table. “Get Secretary Mabus here. Now!”

“Yes, Mr. Vice-President.”

Section 7

It was unusual for Leon Vance to be in early enough to meet Gibbs in the elevator when it was being used for its real purpose. It was more unusual for Gibbs to let the occasion go by without speaking his mind. Having him silently sipping one of the two cups of the coffee he held was even worse, Vance decided. At least, if Gibbs said something you knew how deep it was piled before it hit the fan. It could however get worse Vance realized as the doors to what should have been an empty bullpen opened and SecNav was standing there.

“Gentlemen, with me.” SecNav lead the way up the stairs and into Vance’s office where he seated himself behind the desk leaving Vance to join Gibbs in the visitors’ chairs. “My wife and I had a lovely evening planned last night to celebrate our anniversary; dinner at our favorite restaurant and a visit to the theatre. Instead, I spent our anniversary with Secretary Hagel and the Vice-President. My wife is…not pleased. Which is definitely an understatement as I’m sure you can imagine.”

“Sir…” Vance was silenced as SecNav held his hand up.

“Save it, Leon. I have had way too little sleep, way too little Aspirin™ and way too much bourbon.” Without a word, Gibbs pushed his second cup towards SecNav. “I’ve tried your coffee, Gibbs. My stomach is angry enough already.” Mabus declined. “First off, gentlemen. The Vice-President did not appreciate your threat, Gibbs.”

“Not a threat, a promise.” Gibbs’ tone was even.

“You can find out who’s bigger later. What’s important is how to get out of this situation with minimal damage all around. Those are the Vice-President’s words not mine, Gibbs.” SecNav closed his eyes for a second. “Once I shared the information that Leon sent me; the Vice-President happened to get a message from a friend of yours in the CIA.”
“How’s Kort involved in this?” Anger tempered Gibbs’ tone.

“He’s not.” SecNav said flatly. “However, he was able to let Secretary Hagel know that DiNozzo is listed on the next transport to GTMO for interrogation. Don’t start, Gibbs! Hagel had him yanked from the manifest. That doesn’t mean the DHS cannot move him to another location or have him deported. The administration does not want this turning into another media fiasco with a drawn-out public battle between the DOD and the DHS.”

“The Vice-President and Secretary Hagel were quite definite on ending this situation as quickly as possible. To that end, they have outlined a very specific course of action.” SecNav reach for one of brown envelopes that he had laid on the desk and handed it to Vance. Leon paused for a second before opening the envelope. After thumbing the first documents, Vance lifted his head and Mabus looked directly at him.

“This is how they want to play this?” Vance asked. There wasn’t enough Aspirin™ or bourbon to drown the headache this would cause.

Mabus didn’t answer; just leaned back in his chair and stared at Gibbs. “I understand that you and Agent DiNozzo are very close. In fact, he’s stayed at your house on many occasions.”

“DiNozzo never met a concussion he didn’t get.” Gibb said dryly. “Or a bullet or the plague. What’s that have to do with anything?”

“There have been many occasions where you were observed behaving in a somewhat familiar manner leading to rumors that you favored DiNozzo. I believe former Agent David had expressed concerns over the matter to Director Shepard. There were any rumors that you were more than boss and subordinate.”

“That’s bullshit and you…”

SecNav cut Gibbs off. “Relationships between personnel don’t usually draw the attention of the director as long as it does not interfere in performance of the employees’ duties. Since the solve rate for MCRT has risen during DiNozzo’s tenure and remained stable even during your…sabbatical; I’m sure Director Vance has documented that there has been no disruption. That being said it would not be any of my or the director’s business if there were a relationship. In fact, even before the repeal of don’t ask; it still wouldn’t be any of our business as no one was serving as a member of the military services. In fact, if whatever wasn’t our business, was to be expedited; it would be impossible for DHS to transfer Agent DiNozzo prior to the end of the investigation. Do we understand each other, Director Vance?”

“Crystal, sir.”

“Gibbs?”

“No, sir.” Gibbs growled. “I don’t understand this at all. What the hell are you trying to pull?”

SecNav stood up. “We are trying to pull Agent DiNozzo’s ass out of the fire. The DHS has some pretty damning circumstantial evidence, Gibbs. While the citizenship could be waived off as a simple misunderstanding, when coupled with DiNozzo’s trip last year…”

“He was tracking down a member of my team.”

“A former member. Agent David had already resigned. That aside, they have documentation of meetings between Agent DiNozzo and a known member of Mossad as well as the new head of Mossad. Given the political climate in that area, they are questioning who else Agent DiNozzo has
been in contact with...Let me finish, Gibbs.” SecNav cut him off as Gibbs stood up. “The Vice-President, Secretary Hagel and I have been up all night trying to iron out a solution. Our priority is to get Agent DiNozzo out of custody and back under our control. We are well aware of the debt that this country owes to Agent DiNozzo and I assure you that we will get to the bottom of this eventually. This will not be swept under the rug. In the interim, we have called in favors and used every bit of power we had. You will not derail this, Agent Gibbs. You will follow my instructions to the letter. Do you understand me, Gibbs?” The two men glared at one another. “I said, do you understand me, Agent?”

“Yes, sir.” Gibbs ground out.

“Good.” He handed Gibbs the other envelope. “All the licenses and forms you will require are in here. Director Vance will brief you on the pertinent details.” Mabus looked at Gibbs. “Go home and change. I expect courtroom attire for both you and DiNozzo. You will be in the judge’s office on time, Gibbs. This is not optional. You will follow the instructions or it won’t be DiNozzo’s ass in the fire. I’ll see myself out.”

“Leon...”

Vance gritted his teeth at the sound of Gibbs’ voice. He wished he had a nice bottle of bourbon to drown in or a nice long undercover mission in Greenland. Anything was preferable to the conversation he was about to have with Gibbs.

Section 8

“Boss.” Tony’s voice reflected his relief as he was escorted into the courthouse. His life had been turned upside down in the last twenty-four hours. After Sacks had drug him out of the office, Tony had been taken to the DHS office, processed and tossed in an enclosed cell. The interrogation that he expected never materialized. They wouldn’t even elaborate on why he was being detained. What was worse for Tony, was that he was in placed in an enclosed cell; no fellow detainees for conversation. After being locked in with no human contact or even a magazine to cure his boredom, Tony was jumping out of his skin. At every sound, he had jumped up certain it was team Gibbs riding to the rescue. It was long after the lights were dimmed in his cell that Tony realized that Gibbs wasn’t coming that night. He decided to finally give in to his exhaustion and managed to get a couple hours of sleep. The long hours he had pulled for the case that was just wrapped up helped.

Tony had been woken before sunrise, handcuffed, hustled from his cell, and escorted outside the building. On the street, he was turned over to two agents who he suspected were not from the DHS. The agents escorted him to a nearby office where the handcuffs were removed. Tony was given a set of clothes he recognized from his own closet and instructed to change. They even produced a razor for a quick shave. All in all they had been very accommodating except they wouldn’t tell him a thing. No matter how Tony cajoled; the agents stonewalled. He was beginning to think he should get their badge numbers; after all, Gibbs would be looking for a replacement.

A short ride in a dark, nondescript sedan brought them to the courthouse. It puzzled him as it was too early for the courthouse to be open. Rather than waiting to be taken in the normal entrance; the sedan pulled around to a side entrance. A security officer let them in an unmarked door and he was hurried up the stairs to the second floor. It was an immense relief when he saw Gibbs waiting in the hallway. The agents kept a hold of his arms preventing Tony from rushing to his boss. The trio came to a stop in front of him.

“Agent Gibbs?” At his nod, the agent pulled an envelope from inside his coat. “These forms officially release Agent DiNozzo into your custody.” Without another word the two agents turned
and left.

“Boss, what’s going on? No one will tell me a thing. This is a mistake. I’m an American citizen. This is ridiculous. They can’t…”

“Not now, DiNozzo.” Gibbs looked around the empty populated highway. “We don’t have time to get into this now. I’ll explain everything later. All I can tell you here is that we are following instructions outlined by those much higher than Vance’s pay grade. Just follow my cue and don’t…”

“Gibbs? DiNozzo?” The office door opened. “The judge will see you now.”

“Judge? Gibbs, what’s…?”

“Later, DiNozzo.”

With no other choice Tony started to follow Gibbs into the office.

“Gibbs, Gibbs…Wait…”

“Not now.” Gibbs groaned under his breath.

“Tony, oh Tony, are you okay?”

Abby made it from the elevator to Tony faster than expected. Before he could anchor himself, hurricane Abby slammed into him knocking into the door frame and wrapping him in a hug. Behind her he could see Ducky and McGee approaching at a more reasonable pace. McFlorist appeared to be fumbling with what appeared to be flowers that Abby must have shoved into his arms.

“Need to breathe…” Tony managed to gasp out.

Gibbs helped pry her off his senior agent. Although if she did suffocate him by accident, Gibbs thought, this ridiculous plan wouldn’t be needed. He immediately felt guilty. Tony hadn’t done anything to deserve death by Abby; at least not today. “Abs, what are you doing here? How did you get in?”

“Vance called us at home and told us how to get in. It really should have been you who called. Did you think we wouldn’t want to be here? And witnesses, you have to have witnesses…and flowers…” Abby snatched the flowers from McGee and shoved them into Tony’s chest. “They aren’t the best…I mean, Ducky wouldn’t stop and I had to take what I could get from a street vendor…Then McGee said that since you’re both men, he’d didn’t think you would have flowers… but I thought I’d give the flowers to Tony…not because I see him as a female…because it’s his first and he’s younger…not that you’re old…but…”

Helplessly, Gibbs looked over Abby’s head to Ducky for assistance. Bravely, he stepped forward taking Abby’s arm. “Abigail, perhaps I could explain to Jethro and Anthony while you and Timothy let the judge know we are on are way.”

“Right…We need to let him know we’re ready…well, they’re ready…Come on, McGee…Hurry up, we don’t want him to think they’ve changed their minds.”

Ducky waited until they entered. “Director Vance thought it prudent to call us in early. He informed us of the plan and suggested that our presence would add a sense of validity to the auspicious occasion. Of course, I do not believe dear Abigail has fully grasped the implications of the plan.”
“Could someone let me in on the plan?” Tony’s confusion was coupled with the awkward grasp that he held on the flowers.

Ducky drew in a sharp breath. “Ah. Jethro, you haven’t had a chance to explain to Anthony about the upcoming nuptials?”

“Nuptials?...Flowers?...Female?...men…”

Gibbs watched in resignation as his senior agent connected the dots. It was a sight he was very familiar with and typically he looked forward to it as it usually meant the end of another grueling case. Today, Gibbs wished his agent was a little slower.

“I’ll…uh…leave you to explain. I’ll just tell the judge you’re on the way.” Ducky escaped gratefully shooting Gibbs a sympathetic look.

“No…no…no…” Tony shook his head rapidly, panic making him breath fast. “Boss, tell me you aren’t planning what I think you’re planning.” Tony looked around frantically for an escape route.

Before his senior agent could take a step, Gibbs grabbed Tony’s left arm with one hand and delivered a firm swat to the back of his head with the other. “Get ahold of yourself, DiNozzo.”

“Sorry, boss.” Tony replied automatically; then pleaded with Gibbs. “Don’t tell me I have to get married. I’m too young…Think of all the women…it wouldn’t be fair…please, boss, tell me I don’t have to get married.”

“You don’t have to get married.” Gibbs watched Tony slump against the door frame in release. He knew his next words would have a different effect. “We,” Gibbs stressed, “have to get married.” It was a good thing the door frame was there or he might not have got DiNozzo before he hit the ground.

Section 9

“After you,” Gibbs gestured for Tony to enter the house first. When Tony didn’t make a move, he added, “Do I have to carry you over the threshold?” That question seemed to light a fire under his senior agent’s feet.

The door had no sooner closed behind Gibbs when Tony turned to face him. “I’d like to know what idiot thought of this asinine plan.”

“That would be me, Agent DiNozzo.”

Tony froze when someone other than Gibbs answered him. “Tell me you’ve been studying ventriloquism, boss.”

Gibbs didn’t even bother to glare at this agent as he brushed past him and entered the living room. Temporarily ignoring their visitor he took quick look around the living room; noting the glass of His bourbon next to man occupying his favorite chair. “Make yourself at home,” he said sarcastically.

“No one answered my knock, so I let myself in. Good bourbon, by the way.”

“Maybe no one answered because we weren’t home. As I remember, we were at the courthouse on your orders.”

“Take it down a notch, Gibbs.” SecNav drained his glass. “Quit hovering and get in here, DiNozzo. I think it’s time we discuss this, what was it you called it? Asinine plan?”
With Mabus in Gibbs’ chair, Gibbs and Tony were forced to sit together on the couch.

“Sorry, sir.” Tony kept his tone professional.

Mabus waved his hand dismissing the apology. “I am aware that you had very little time to process the details.”

“Try no time…Sir.” DiNozzo tacked on belatedly.

After Gibbs’ little bomb and DiNozzo’s episode, after all DiNozzos don’t faint; all Gibbs had time to say was that they were on a very tight timeline. Gibbs said it was vital that the ceremony be finished before the court house opened for the day; that SecNav had called in a big favor to have Judge Rosemal meet them early. His mind still whirling, Tony had let Gibbs drag him before the judge sans flowers that he had hastily shoved back into Abby’s hands. Fifteen minutes later they were out of the courthouse, said good-bye to their witnesses and per Vance’s urgent text on their way to Gibbs’ house. During the ride home, Gibbs gave him only a quick overview of the plan; saying they would talk in depth when they got to the house. He wanted to strangle the person who came up with the plan, but much, much more that that he wanted the last two days to be a dream.

“I wanted to stop by to assure myself that you followed my directives.” Reaching inside his jacket, Mabus withdrew an envelope and tossed it on to the coffee table in front of Tony. “That packet contains your temporary green card, a work visa and your NCIS ID. I’ve taken the liberty of placing your gun in your gun safe.”

“My gun safe?”

“The vice-president graciously offered several of his Secret Service and house staff. They took the opportunity to retrieve your belongs from your apartment. Your clothes, gun safe and personal items are upstairs in Gibbs’ room. They took the liberty of placing the majority of your electronics and other items in the garage and basement.”

“You moved me out of my apartment. Why?” Tony started to rise in anger; but Gibbs’ hand on his need stopped him.

“It is customary for spouses to live together, Agent DiNozzo. If you were living separately; it wouldn’t appear that you had planned this wedding long before the DHS situation cropped up. You had even invited your colleagues to witness the ceremony long before the DHS got involved.” SecNav paused before continuing. “That reminds me. A friend of my will be here in about an hour with some wedding rings. You will wear them when you return to work after your honeymoon.”

“There is no need for a honeymoon and I have never worn a wedding ring, Mabus.”

“Could be why your marriages failed, boss.” Tony didn’t even wince from the headslap. “Thank-you, boss.”

“Nevertheless, Agent Gibbs, you and DiNozzo will wear rings. That is non-negotiable.”

“It seems that there’s a lot that is non-negotiable, sir.”

“Oh, it was negotiated; by Secretary Hagel, the vice-president and myself.” Mabus corrected Tony. “I don’t think you appreciate the political effort that this asinine plan required. I’m sure that Gibbs will elaborate on the finer details later; but understand this, DiNozzo. You were 24 hours from being sent to GITMO. The evidence that DHS had would have ended your career permanently. This marriage is the only thing giving us time to deal with the situation and find out who is behind this.” SecNav paused a minute. “You have been released into Gibbs’ custody, DiNozzo. It’s not just your
Rising from his chair, Mabus looked down at the two men. “Keep this in mind, gentlemen. The vice-president, Hagel and I have put ourselves on the firing line for you. There will be no screw-ups. You will sleep in the same house. You will go out and be seen dining like other couples. In other words, you will be a committed married couple! You will not give DHS any reason to suspect this marriage is anything but real. Now, if you'll excuse me; I’ll show myself out.” Mabus paused at the front door, “Oh and by the way, congratulations on your nuptials.”

Section 10

If Tony thought the conversation in the car had been awkward, it was nothing compared to the silence that followed SecNav’s parting comment. The two men sat side by side on the couch like many other times but this time there was an uneasiness between them. Tony’s mind began to race. This was different. They weren’t hanging out after a bad case. Gibbs wasn’t doing concussion checks. They were married. He was the fifth Mrs. Gibbs. He’d bet no one had predicted that in the office pool.

“DiNozzo!” It was the smack on the head more than Gibbs’ raised voice that yanked Tony out of his thoughts. Satisfied that he had his senior agent’s attention. “You need to calm down or you’re going to hyperventilate,” he said handing him a beer. “It’s a bit early but it was this or bourbon.”

Tony blinked. He must have really zoned out. He hadn’t even noticed Gibbs leaving the room. “Thanks. I’d rather not get in the habit of bourbon before lunchtime. No need to make it easy for the Paddington curse.” Gibbs had settled in to the chair vacated by SecNav so he could look Tony in the eye. “You, okay?”

“Okay? Okay? I’m so far from okay it isn’t funny.” Tony snapped. “Yesterday morning all I had to worry about was making it to the office before you. Today I’m the fifth Mrs. Gibbs. I’m not even a red head.”

“DiNozzo.”

Tony acknowledged the warning in Gibbs’ voice. “Sorry, boss. I know it’s not your fault.” That was true he realized. It wasn’t Gibbs fault. Or Tony’s fault. It was his parents. He wondered which of them had screwed up. For all he knew, his mother had a few too many and left the paperwork in a liquor bottle somewhere. Of course, Senior didn’t have a good track record for keeping up with issues relating to family.

“DiNozzo.”

“Sorry, boss. Zoned again. Wondered which parent slipped up this time.”

“Does it matter?” Gibbs asked rhetorically. “The important thing is that we get this straightened out. Your attorney is investigating the situation.”

“My attorney, boss?”

“McGee hired him. Supposed to be the best.”

“What happened to rule 13? You know about never involving lawyers.”

“New rule. When someone else makes a mess and you’re being screwed over by DHS, hire a lawyer.” Gibbs answered simply.
“Could they really send me to GITMO? Or deport me?”

“Green Card, remember?” Gibbs gestured to the envelope on the coffee table.

Reluctantly, Tony opened the envelope tipping the contents out. In addition to the objects SecNav had listed, the envelope also contained his personal items confiscated when he was detained. As he busied himself tucking his new permanent residence card into the wallet, he wondered where they had gotten the photo that was used on his card; it was different than his NCIS ID photo. The last object he picked up was his cellphone and no sooner that he turned it on than it began flashing incoming texts.

“Damn.” Gibbs sat his beer down and fumbled for his phone. “I told McGee to fix this thing. It wouldn’t stop ringing yesterday.”

“It’s the Bat Signal.” Tony said.

Gibbs glared at him as he finally managed to silence his own phone. He didn’t have to ask for clarification.

“It’s from McGee. It’s a signal we worked out, used only in the most important instances like someone sneaking up on you with a gun or Gibbs is out of coffee.” Tony’s attempt at levity fell flat. “Sorry, boss.”

Gibbs just grunted as his phone went off again. “This better be an emergency, McGee.”

“I prefer Director Vance, Agent Gibbs.”

“What do you want, Leon?” Gibbs watched as Tony answered his own phone.

“You and DiNozzo out of the area.” Vance allowed his words to sink in for a minute. “There’s been a leak.”

“What kind of leak?”

“A picture of you and DiNozzo leaving the courthouse as well as confirmation of your marriage. Press will be all over this. If they can get to you or DiNozzo, they’ll have a field day. Two top agents of the MCRT marrying. We do not need this now. Secretary Hagel has ordered you out of town until this blows over.”

“How are we supposed to get to the bottom of this if we aren’t here to work it?”

“Gibbs, this is not a request, this is an order. You and DiNozzo are to go to ground immediately. McGee is on his way with your go-bags to pick you up. ETA 5 minutes.” Vance disconnected to call.

“Boss, that was Abby. We’ve got problems.”

“So Vance said.”

“Boss. Tony.”

“In here, McGee.”

“I’ve been trying to get ahold of you. Director…”

“Leon brought me up to date.” Gibbs interrupted. “DiNozzo, grab your gun.”
“What about clothes?” Tony asked sprinting for the stairs.

“Go bags are in the trunk.”

Gibbs walked to the wall and lifted a picture off. There was a small wall safe hidden behind it. He removed a small key from the back of the picture and used it to open the safe. He grabbed a small bag and a wallet. Opening the wallet, he checked to be sure it was ready; before slamming the safe shut and returning the picture to the all.

“You know, boss, that’s not really safe…” McGee stopped as Gibbs glared. “Not the issue. Tony!”

“I’m right here, McPanic.” Tony followed McGee out the door and noticed that Gibbs stopped and actually locked the door. Deciding not to comment, he followed the other two to the car and climbed in the back of McGee’s car while Gibbs commandeered the driver’s seat. “So where’s our destination? Bahamas? Niagara? Vegas?”

“Stillwater.” Gibbs stated definitively then ignored the conversation to focus on driving.

“Vance is making you take us all the way to Stillwater. We could have saved you the trouble and taken Gibbs’ car, McChaperon.”

“Actually, Director Vance has suggested we use this time to our advantage looking into the situation; so I’ll be staying in Stillwater with you.” McGee said uncomfortably.

“I never saw that one coming.”

“What, Tony? The DHS?”

“No. It’s just never in my wildest dreams did I ever expect that when I went on my honeymoon it would be with you.” From the backseat, Tony watched as the back of McGee’s neck and then his face turned red.

“DiNozzo.” Gibbs growled.

With a smirk, Tony leaned back and relaxed. Yep, he still had it.
Section 11-12

Chapter Summary

In the back parlor...Geminiangel and her guests (trouvera, babykid528, a, gwynhefar, Jade1, ArianaFeileacan, rose_malmaison, NCISVU, jesco0307, Trevelyan and a few she didn't know as well) are relaxing in front of a fire.

Geminiangel: Shall we continue with the bribery....er, conversation? I believe that we had excused rose_malmaison as she provided excellent milk and cookies for Santa and her guests.

jesco0307: I have a lovely box of Virtual chocolate almond bars.

NCISVU: I could give you...how about a virtual Agent Sacks dartboard. If you hit his nose, the squares flash...

babykid528: How about a mug?

Geminiangel: Next...

babykid528: It's a special mug, really. It has Gibbs and DiNozzo on it. See Tony is wearing a suit and tie, but if you add hot cocoa, his clothes melt off. And let me tell you, if you add marshmallows, you won't believe what Gibbs does.

Geminiangel: I can feel my muse stirring. Do tell me more.....

SECTION 11

“Up and at’em, DiNozzo.” Gibbs opened the rear car door.

Tony groaned as he opened his eyes. “Not a dream, then?” Without waiting for an answer, Tony looked around. “Where are we?”

Gibbs handed him a cup of coffee. “We’re about two hours out.” He nodded at the nearest building. “McGee’s using their café for something and picking up some sandwiches.”

“Grandpa Gibbs know we’re coming yet?”

Gibbs looked at him with a smirk. “That would make me, Daddy? Sure you want to go down that path, Mrs. Gibbs?”

“What...no...Gibbs...Ick!”

“Ick, DiNozzo? What are you two?”

“If I am, you’re really a cradle robber.” Tony was somewhat relieved. Even incestuous banter was better than the silence between them. “So, does your dad know we’re coming?”

Rather than answer, Gibbs took a long drink of his own coffee.
“Boss, we can’t just dump this on him. You need to call and let him know we’re coming.” Silently, Gibbs pulled out his cellphone and flipped it to his SFA. “He’s your dad, why do I have to tell him?” Tony whined.

“You’d rather tell your father and I tell mine?”

There was no question in Tony’s mind. He quickly pulled up Gibbs’ contact list and pressed the button to connect.

“I thought that’d be your answer. Looks like McGee is finally getting the sandwiches; if you want to stretch now’s your chance.”

Tony exited the car and stretched feeling his vertebrae slip into place as he waited for Jackson to answer. “Mr. Gibbs, this is…”

“Leroy, great to hear from you.”

“This is…”

“I know, Leroy, but you shouldn’t be wasting your honeymoon talking to me.”

“Boss…” Tony hit the speakerphone button.

“I’m sorry that I wasn’t able to make the wedding. You know how busy it can be here. I hope you had lots of pictures taken. I’ll need a new one of you and Tony for on the mantle.” Jackson continued his one sided conversation. “I hope Tony understands.”

“He does, Dad. You’ve got company. The press?”

“Definitely. I hope you’re headed for someplace warm.”

“Damn. Look, dad, things aren’t as they appear.”

“I’m sure. I’m so happy for you both.”

“Can you get away? Pack a bag and we could met somewhere.”

“I understand. I wish you had enough time to come here but I know you only have a short break. You just enjoy yourself don’t worry about me. We’ll get together later. Give Tony a hug for me. I gotta get back to the register.”

“Alright, Dad, I’ll call you later tonight.”

“Boss, we’ve got problems.” Just as Gibbs disconnected, McGee hurried across the parking lot. “According to Director Vance…”

“The press is already camped out in Stillwater.”

“How did…” Tony waved the cellphone at McGee, before handing it back to Gibbs. “What now, boss?”

“I’ve got a credit card under another ID. We could find a motel somewhere.”

“No.” Tony straightened up. “Anyone could recognize our picture from the publicity and turn us in. I’ve got a place we can go. While I was in Philadelphia, I inherited a place from a relative in Italy. For some reason, she had the solicitor file it under the name Cristian Antonio Fabbri. I never had it
changed. Figured I’d have it if I ever needed a bolt-hole. “

“What’s it like?”

“A cabin. Set on the side of the mountain about 30 minutes to the nearest small town.”

“What about…”

“Has internet access, McGeek.”

“Let’s go.” Gibbs reach for the driver’s handle.

“Shotgun.”

“Seriously, Tony?”

“I know where we’re going, McGee. I think that earns co-pilot status.”

McGee acquiesced. He settled in the backseat and began distributing sandwiches as the others buckled in.

“Where to?” Gibbs asked as he started the motor.

“South.”

Section 12

“This is what you call a cabin?” McGee asked incredulously. The cabin was perched up on a slope of a hill overlooking the valley. The exterior was a traditional log cabin style with notched beams. It was the size that shocked him.

“What did you expect me to call it? Swiss cheese?” Tony said irritated. For the last few hours he had been feeling increasingly agitated. He was voluntarily allowing Gibbs and McGee into his safe haven; the only place where all the masks could come down. The only place that was safe for him. The only bolt hole from the world and Gibbs. Fiddling with the radio had helped the first couple hours but the last head slap had convinced him that Gibbs was near the end of his rope also.

“DiNoz…” Gibbs took a deep sigh as if finishing Tony’s name was too much effort. He had to admit that being shut up in a car all day with a bored DiNozzo must be one of the most effective means of torture known to mankind. The only respite he and McGee had was the short stop at a small grocery store to stock up. Both men had chosen not to accompany Tony on the shopping spree. Gibbs had suggested that it was too much of a risk for both to be seen together in public. McGee excused himself trying to find a signal that would allow him to receive any texts that had come in to his cellphone. If the two of them had to live on Tony snacks for the next few days; the quiet had been worth it.

“The sun’s going down; let’s get the stuff in before it gets dark.” Tony said almost reluctantly; or it seemed that way to Gibbs.

Exiting the car Gibbs took a deep breath. The air was clean and he could smell the hint of pine in the air. Grabbing his go back and a few sacks from the store, he stepped back waiting for Tony and McGee to load up before shutting the trunk, locking the car and following Tony up the path.

Tony fumbled with the key; finally pushing the door open and gesturing the others in. McGee followed Gibbs eager to see the interior.
Gibbs nodded his head in approval. Although the furniture fit the décor, it was obviously well-made and expensive. The entrance led into a fairly wide-open, very spacious floorplan. He could see the kitchen had updated appliances. There was a wide bar with stools creating a slight division from the open area. A large table sat in front of a large double window. Plenty of room for guests. To the left the area was a large open seating area. Chairs and tables were clustered to allow for board games; sofas begged to cradle you for a nice nap. The end of the cabin was a huge fireplace taking up most of the wall. On either side, built-ins held hefty sized logs with shelves above to hold a myriad of board games and books. This was a place a man like he could relax in, but it didn't really seem to fit DiNozzo and his Armani suits.

“Uh, Tony,” Gibbs turned to look at McGee who had an anxious look on his face. “Do you…uh…?”

“Sure, McGee. Out the backdoor, it’s about 300 yards down the path.” Tony gestured to a door that was adjacent to the bar area.

“Out…Out…” McGee stuttered.

“Well, you can use the one upstairs, if you’d rather.” Tony smirked as McGee threw him a dark look. “Might as well take your bag, guest room is second door on the left. First door is the bathroom.” When Gibbs’ looked at him with quirked eyebrow. “He seemed to like the cabin experience, I thought he might want the authenticity of it.”

“There’s really an outhouse?” Gibbs questioned.

“Yes. There’s indoor plumbing but I guess they wanted it authentic.” Tony prowled around the area trying to shake the excess energy. “Before I put the supplies away, I’ll run up and change. There’s good cell coverage if you want to give your dad a call. “

“DiNozzo, you don’t have to leave the room.” Gibbs stated.

“I’m still feeling a bit grimy from the holding cell. I thought I’d grab a quick shower.” Tony tried to sound nonchalant; but Gibbs wasn’t buying it.

“Tony…” Gibbs gave him a look of concern. They needed to talk about their situation and figure out where they went from here.

“Not yet, Gibbs. I need…” Tony recognized the look but just shook his head. He needed a shower and some aspirin before the talk he knew was coming. He headed for the steps. “I’ll be back.”

Left alone, Gibbs looked around the room but opted to leave the cabin for some fresh air. Exiting through the back door Tony had pointed out; he found a wonderful deck area complete with sturdy furniture. Extracting his phone, he flipped it open grimacing when he saw he did have all the bars just like Tony had promised. He wished he had thought to stop at a liquor store. This would be much easier with a glass of bourbon.
Geminigirl drools, er…smirks as she swirls the cocoa in her cup from babykid528. Her right hand leaves the keyboard to snatch another marshmallow from the bag. Her concentration is interrupted as she is unable to find one. Distraught she shakes the empty bag in vain. “NO! Marshmallows…I need more marshmallows…”

“You don’t want marshmallows.” ArianaFeileacan peeps over her shoulder to try to read the laptop screen. “Here have this mug of coffee.” ArianaFeileacan smirks coffee has more caffeine and should keep Geminigirl awake and alert. “Look when the coffee goes down so do the *Ahem* Gibbs Slaps go down Tony. Here you can enjoy it with these Godiva chocolates.” Sugar, caffeine and inspiration, this can’t miss ArianaFeileacan thought. Surreptitiously she continued placing dozens of bottle caps filled with milk and honey around the area; they were wonderful for attracting plot fairies and muses.

Section 13

“Dad…” Gibbs said as his dad picked up his phone.

“Leroy, what in the hades is going on down there?” Jackson snapped.

“Dad…”

“What’s this about you marrying that fellow that works for you?”

“Dad…”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were dating?”

“Dad…”

“Son, I’ve told you I’m no bigot. It may not be how it was in my day but I would have understood…”

“Dad!” Gibbs raised his voice interrupting Jackson’s rant. Maybe two glasses of bourbon, he reconsidered.

“No need to yell, Leroy.”

“Dad, I need you to just listen for a minute.”

“Well, get talking.” Jackson said impatiently. “Explain why my store was packed with reporters all day and I couldn’t get any work done.”

“Tony’s in trouble, Dad.” Gibbs listened to the blissful silence. “Someone is after him.” His father listened quietly as he recapped the past two days. Was it only two days, Gibbs pondered. It seemed so much longer.
“Is Tony okay?” Jackson asked. The boy was a bit hyper but he did like him.

“I don’t know, dad. We haven’t really had a chance to talk what with SecNav at the house and now McGee.”

“Can you protect him? He could stay with me a while.” Jackson offered.

“I don’t think they are trying to physically hurt him. It’s more that they are trying to destroy his life and his career. Christ, dad, they were sending him to Gitmo.” Gibbs ran a hand over his face.

“It this Sacks fellow involved.”

“I don’t know. He could be. He does hate DiNozzo, but I don’t think so.”

“What’s your gut saying, Leroy?” Jackson was concerned at his son’s indecision.

“I have to find Senior and Benoit.” Gibbs sidestepped.

“Where are you, Leroy? I’ll get Maxwell to watch the store a few days.”

“No, dad, there’s no need to come all the way down here.”

“Where is down here?” Jackson asked not to be denied.

“We’re about an hour out of Harrisonburg, Virginia, dad. Tony has a cabin in the woods, you’d never find us.”

“What about those reporters?”

“It’s under one of his relative’s names. They won’t find it listed.”

“That’s good, I guess. You need me, you call me. You understand?” Jackson demanded.

“Yeah, dad, I understand. Vance sent McGee with us; we’ll be fine.”

“I love you, son. You be careful. You watch out for you and Tony.”

“I will, dad. You take care.” With a sigh, Gibbs ended the call and let his head fall back against the chair. He opened his eyes when he heard the backdoor open.

“Tony thought you could use this.” McGee held out a mock mason jar mug half full of bourbon.

“Thanks.” Gibbs took the mug and took a long sip. His eyes closed in appreciation. It was definitely a better brand than he kept in the basement and it helped the tension building in his mind.

“He also sent these.” McGee held out his hand and showed him two white pills. Gibbs gratefully took the two Aspirin™ and swallowed them down dry; before taking another slow sip of the bourbon. “Boss…” McGee stopped.

“Spit it out, McGee.”

“I’m a little worried about Tony. He seems a bit more…”

“Manic?” Gibbs said wryly.

McGee replied. “Boss, is everything going to be alright?”
“We’ve got a lot of people on our side, McGee. From the VP and Secretary of Defense on down.” Gibbs took another drink. “I’ll feel much better about this when we find Benoit and Senior. You got all you need here?

“Yes. Tony told me to set everything up on that card table in the corner. It has plenty of plugs and everything.”

“Once you’re connected, get in touch with Abby. We need to know where this leak originated from and we need to find Benoit and Senior.”

“On it, boss.” McGee left Gibbs to enjoy the rest of his drink and the sunset.

“Gibbs.”

Gibbs opened his eyes instantly alert; it had gotten dark. He turned his head to see Tony in the doorway. “What’s up, DiNozzo?”

“Foods ready.”

“How long?”

“Only about an hour. You drifted off while I was showering.”

Gibbs stood up and turned to the cabin. For a minute, he paused to survey his SFA. Tony had ditched his suit and wore a pair of khaki pants and a polo shirt. He must leave some clothes at the cabin, Gibbs thought as they were not Tony’s typical go bag attire. The polo shirt ended just above his tailbone giving Gibbs a tantalizing glimpse of where the khakis were fit snugly defining the curve of Tony’s well-muscled … Gibbs gave himself a hard mental slab. This wasn’t some playgirl pinup, this was Tony, uh, DiNozzo, his hus… his senior agent. He blamed his sleep addled mind, regardless of the fact he was never sleep addled. “Why did…”

“I figured you could use the rest.” Tony cut off his question and led the way back inside where McGee was already waiting at the table.

Gibbs rubbed his hand over this face as he walked over to sit down at the head of the table his subconscious automatically assuming the alpha position. Taking a deep breath, Gibbs tried to catalog the smells. He hear sizzling and could make out onions and beef.

“Dinner is served.” Tony said setting a large iron skillet and a griddle onto the middle of the table. “Hope you don’t mind family style.”

“Hope you don’t mind family style.”

Gibbs’ mouth watered with one look. Beautiful rib eye steaks with dark sear marks still sizzled in the hot pan. On the griddle, large baked potatoes were already split and butter dripped from them. Before he could comment, Tony returned with bowls; one full of sautéed onions and mushrooms and the other covered with a heavy linen towel. Gibbs sniffed, it smelled like… Before he could fully focus; Tony lifted the towel and exposed hot rolls. Looking to his left, he caught McGee’s glance, this was so much better than Tony’s usually snacks. “You didn’t have to do this.”

Tony fingered the potholders somewhat ill at ease. “If you’d rather have something else…”

Gibbs noticed the self-consciousness in his normally self-assured SFA. “DiNozzo, sit.” Only belatedly realizing his choice of seat Gibbs made to rise when Tony’s hand on his shoulder stopped him. Tony jerked his hand back. The normal gesture feeling awkward in the wake of the recent
“Wow, Tony. Did you pick this up earlier?” Oblivious, McGee interrupted the awkward moment.

“In a way. The local store keeps some steaks and that for those of us in the cabins who want fresh meat. The rest came from the root cellar.” Tony motioned for them to help themselves and speared a steak for himself.

“Root cellar?” Tim queried. Gibbs was content to allow McGee to carry out the interrogation while he sliced off a bite of the steak he had smothered with onions and mushrooms. He bit back a moan as the flavors exploded on his tongue.

Tony pointed to a door next to the refrigerator. “That door leads to a pantry/storage area. It is one thing I really love about the cabin. One end has the hot water heater and a standby generator. The other end has a freezer and shelves. There’s also a trapdoor that goes down into a wine/root cellar.”

“That’s unusual, isn’t it?” Tim asked before taking another bite. “I mean to have a wine cellar in a cabin.”

Although the SFA’s face remained impassive, Gibbs could feel increasing slight vibrations in the table and concluded correctly that Tony’s left leg was nervously bouncing. A sense of almost protectiveness came over him and he deftly redirected McGee’s attention. “Anything from Abby?”

“Not yet, boss. I just got everything set up.” McGee said apologetically. “I did text her and indicated we would be available for a video chat in about,” he checked his watch, “thirty minutes.”

“Better eat up.” Gibbs effectively ended the conversation.
Section 14

Chapter Notes

She looks forlornly at her laptop keyboard. It wasn't easy to type with shaky hands. GeminianGel's muscles twitch as she pouts. Too much caffeine, the doctor said. Too much chocolate, the doctor said. Too many marshmallows, the doctor said. She glances up to where her Tony and Gibbs cup and mug were locked into a cabinet behind glass. It was for her own good, they said. Didn't they realize that she needed them for...uh, inspiration?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 14

Leaning against the back of a sofa set facing away from the area, Gibbs nodded approvingly at the electronic setup. Behind the corner table, Tony had opened the doors of a corner cabinet exposing a relatively large flat screen television on an extendable bracket arm. McGee had positioned it where all three could see the screen easily. McGee had three laptops open and logged in. Seeing this, Gibbs quirked his eyebrow and looked at his junior agent.

“This is from NCIS and this is personal. I always keep my personal up to date with NCIS’s software and protocols in the event I need to use mine as a spare in case of an accident.”

“The other is mine. McGee had to do a couple upgrades to connect.” Tony pointed to the state of the art laptop on the right as he joined the others. He had stuck the dishes in the dishwasher and quickly cleaned his iron cookware. “I keep that one up here at all times. One of the first rules I learned, rule three. Never be unreachable.” He smirked at Gibbs.

Before Gibbs could reply, the picture on the flat screen changed from the NCIS seal to a close up of Abby. He could hear her click a couple keys and the view expanded. To Gibbs’ surprise, Fornell and Vance had joined her.

“Gentlemen.” Vance nodded. “I’m assuming this is a secure communication.”

“Yes, Director.” McGee confirmed while Abby nodded vigorously. “I’m also scrabbling the signal to Abby to ensure it isn’t picked up by the press or anyone else.”

“Good.” Vance continued, “The press is having a field day already.”

“Find the leak yet, Leon?”

Abby interrupted babbling. “It really wasn’t a leak, Gibbs, I mean, the press did find out; but it wasn’t from me, well, us, so it was a leak but it wasn’t really a leak…”

“Abby.” Gibbs raised his voice.

“Sorry, Gibbs. Sorry, director.” Abby took a breath and let it out slowly. She waited for Director Vance to give her a nod before continuing. “It was just really, really bad luck. I mean, like the worst type of Karma. You know if you were cheating or…or…you killed someone in a previous life… ooh, ooh you were a serial murderer like Jack…”
“Abby.”

“Right. Sorry. The cleaning lady on the floor has a brother in the Navy. You and the team arrested him for drugs. Anyway she recognized Gibbs when he entered this morning. She got a couple photos of you and Tony leaving. Talked to Judge Rosemal’s clerk. Knew she had a scoop and she had a friend whose brother works for the Washington Post. From there, it just well, you know. But, look she got a great picture of you and Tony.” Abby held up a picture of the group in the elevator after the ceremony. “I’ll crop it and frame one for you. We didn’t get to do a real wedding photo before your honey...” Her voice trailed off at the look of thinly disguised horror on McGee’s face.

“Leon. Where are we?” Gibbs turned his focus to the director. The director looked down briefly to avoid meeting Gibbs gaze. “Leon.”

“Nothing new, Gibbs.”

“Leon, I said forty-eight hours.” Gibbs jaw clenched.

“Listen, Gibbs. The secretary of defense and the vice-president were not amused by your deadline. You wanted DiNozzo out of custody. He is. They met your terms now it is on their terms; SecNav was very specific regarding your involvement. We will put these pieces together.”

“Tobias, are you assisting or just visiting?” Gibbs ignored Vance entirely.

“I just wanted to offer you and DiNozzo, my sincere congratulations and best wishes for a long and happy life.” Tobias kept a straight face throughout his reply.

“Pack up.” Gibbs ordered turning away from the screen.

“Belay that order!” Vance barked. “Agent Gibbs, you will remain where you are. Direct orders from myself, SecNav and the Secretary of Defense. Do I need to go higher?”

“No, sir.” Gibbs bit out his reply as he did an about-face.

Tony glanced at the tight muscle twitching near Gibbs jaw. Years of experience had taught him that Gibbs was on the verge of a full-scale eruption. In an event to stave off his anger, he schooled his features carefully and stepped closer the camera; partially blocking Gibbs. “Director, if I may, I believe that Agent Gibbs is concerned that the investigation is not preceding as quickly as we hoped. I appreciate that the secretary and SecNav have permitted me to continue working on this situation; although I am personally involved. I hope you will convey my thanks.”

“Understood, Agent DiNozzo.” The two men looked each other directly in the eye; for a moment they might have been feet rather than hundreds of miles apart. In that moment, Vance did understand DiNozzo better than he ever had before; he recognized the agent’s actions and the effect it had on Gibbs. “I will pass on your gratitude. Back to the situation at hand, I asked Agent Fornell,” Vance glared at Fornell for stirring up Gibbs, “to attend this briefing; because he is assisting in the investigation on this end.”

Tobias cleared his throat quickly, now was not the time to rile his friendly foe up more. “After Vance talked to me, I did a little investigating at the office. That rule you’re always quoting about there not being any coincidences.”

“Rule 39,” was spoken in triplicate by Abby, McGee and DiNozzo. DiNozzo and McGee gave each other a discreet fist bump while Gibbs glared at them.

“What did you find?” Gibbs ignored his team members.
“It seemed strange that Sacks would be the one to arrest DiNozzo when he had only transferred a week ago. I dropped in to personnel and did some discreet checking. Sacks never notified them that he had applied to transfer to DHS.”

“They came to him?” Gibbs’ gut clenched. This was no convenience. Did Benoit have enough connections to have Sacks reassigned?

“Seems like it.” Fornell confirmed.

“It appears that whoever was involved was aware of the enmity between Agents Sacks and DiNozzo.” Vance said firmly.

“You think?” Gibbs snarled. “Everyone in a three state area knows that Sacks and DiNozzo hate each other. Is that supposed to narrow the suspect field?”

“Gibbs,” Vance cautioned.

“Director, has anyone located my father?” Tony again interceded.

“No, they haven’t, agent. We will find him. Our agents in France have asked for assistance from the French government. Secretary Hagel contacted Secretary Foxx regarding the situation and both Jeanne Benoit and Mr. DiNozzo have been placed on a watch list.”

“Pardon me, director. That will only find them if they attempt travel to the United States. I could set up an alert that would monitor any international flight.” McGee spoke up.

“Will it cause an international incidence?”

“No, sir.”

“Do it.” Vance authorized.

“What about a BOLO through Interpol?” Tony asked.

“No. We do not want this to generate further publicity by officially involving Interpol.”

Gibbs nodded his understanding of what Vance didn’t say out loud. Interpol was aware of the situation and would assist if possible. “What now?”

Fornell cleared his throat. “I’m calling in a few markers trying to find out who got to Sacks. I’m having to stay low on this, my director is taking notes from yours.”

“What is Secretary Johnson’s role is this?” Gibbs asked. “He was stonewalling over this issue.”

“I’m not an issue.” Tony interjected, before the obligatory head slap. “Thanks, boss.”

“The files…” Tim narrowed his eyes.

“What is it, McGee?” Gibbs asked impatiently.

“There’s something…” McGee tried to focus. “I can’t…”

“McGee…” Gibbs started.

“When you were arrested. I was trying to find out what was going on. I hack…was looking at DHS files on you…”

“Was there something in the file, McGee?”

“No, they were fragmented.”

“What causes that?” Tony prodded him along.

“The encryption was shredded.” McGee straightened in his chair and jerked his head to look at his boss. “Gibbs, someone else had already hacked the files.”

“Vance…” Gibbs looked at the Director.

“I’m on it.”

“I could…”

“Negative, Agent McGee.” The director cut him off. “I will brief SecNav and the Vice-President. We want this to stand up in a court, if necessary. You focus on finding Senior and Benoit.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tobias.”

“Yeah, Gibbs.”

“My dad.”

“I have a team in route to provide him backup, already.” Fornell assured him. “We’ll keep the press at bay and if necessary, we’ll do an extraction.”

“Thanks.”

“Gentlemen, I suggest we adjourn for this evening. We’ll meet again tomorrow.” Director Vance concluded.

“Gibbs, I could…”

“We need you there, Abs.”

“I could help McGee,” Abby whined.

“Abby, I know this is hard.” Gibbs glared at the slight smirks on Vance’s and Fornell’s faces. “But I need you to help Vance and Fornell. They are going to need a lot of support the next few days, professionally and emotionally.” Now the smirk was on Gibbs face with the glares directed at him.

“I’m on it, Gibbs. I’ll be with them every step.” Abby vowed earnestly and Gibbs signaled McGee to cut the feed.

“That was evil, boss.” Tony smirked at Gibbs.

Gibbs moved around the end of the couch and sank down onto the couch where he leaned back and relaxed. Yep, he still had it.
My wonderful beta USAFChief passed away this past August. I am grateful for his support and assistance in making me a better author. Now, I must confess that I am need of a new beta; if interested please let me know.

Thank-you!
Chapter 5 Section 15 & 16

Chapter Notes

She glared at the box of chocolates on the table. Valentine's Day? Boo Hiss! Sure, they said she could have one a day. She didn't want Valentine's Day candy. She wanted her mugs full of cocoa and marshmallows or coffee. She wanted to "see" Tony and Gibbs. Now that would be a Valentine's treat...sighs and looks back at the keyboard.

Section 15

Gibbs looked around the bedroom as he entered. He had done a final check around the cabin before turning in; ignoring Tony’s knowing smirk as he went upstairs after his final own final check. Like downstairs the furnishings were comfortable and well-made but in style of the cabin; particularly the king size bed with a sturdy wooden frame. Seeing his go-bag on the bench at the foot of the bed, Gibbs moved towards it already unbuttoning his shirt.

“I’ll be out of your way in a minute.” Tony said startling Gibbs. He gestured to the door from where he had just entered. “En suite.”

Gibbs looked at him. Tony had changed into a pair of loose sweat pants with a tight muscle shirt that hugged his chest and ab muscles. Tony opened the door to a large closet and as he leaned over, the sweat pants were drawn taut over a well-muscled and firm behind. Gibbs mentally head-slapped himself. This was his senior field agent who he was ogling. He firmly quashed the traitorous little voice which kept whispering “husband”. Gibbs hastily re-focused his eyes as Tony stood up he had a pillow and quilt in his arms.

“You cold?” Gibbs motioned to the bedding.

“I’m going to sleep on the couch.” Tony shuffled his feet nervously.

“Why?”

“McGee’s in the guest room.”

“We’ve shared a bed before.” The agency was known for double-booking rooms and Gibbs was used to sharing with his agents regardless of the bed size.

“I’m fine with the couch.” Tony didn’t meet Gibbs eyes as he moved towards the hall door.

Gibbs reach out to take Tony’s arm but he edged away.

“DiNozzo, what the hell is going on here?”

“Nothing. I’m just tired.”

Gibbs moved to block Tony from exiting the room. “There’s no reason for you to sleep downstairs.” Again, he put his hand out towards his agent and again Tony leaned away. “DiNozzo, what the hell is going on here?”

“I just don’t … I want to sleep on the couch.” He sidestepped to go around Gibbs, who countered his move. “Gibbs, step aside.”
“What’s is this, DiNozzo? Do you think because we’re married that I am going to suddenly be overcome with lust and attack you?” Gibbs felt his anger building at his agent’s irrational behavior. He was surprised at the flush that darkened Tony’s complexion. “What the hell? Tony? Twenty four hours ago, you trusted me to watch your back now you think I’m going what...rape you?”

“No.”

“You know me. We’ve worked together for years. Have I ever, ever done anything to make you mistrust me?” Gibbs raised his voice in anger.

A wave of emotion crossed Tony’s face. “Uh…”

“Dammit, Tony. Forget Mexico. I won’t apologize for leaving or keeping back like that again. ”

“Did you ever?” Tony said still bitter. Some wounds took a long time to heal. “Rule 6, right?”

“That has nothing to do with us now.”

“There isn’t an us.” Tony was agitated.

“Tony, we have been partners for years. Where in the hell is this coming from? This morning didn’t change that.”

“I… We… It…” Tony shook his head in frustration. He hated the flush he felt on his face and he hated the situation. “This…”

“Spit it out, DiNozzo. What’s your problem?”

“You don’t understand.” Tony raised his voice his own anger rising.

“Then make me understand.” Gibbs demanded.

“Gibbs…”

For a minute, Tony meet his eyes directly and Gibbs could see confusion, fear, anger and uncertainty. He reach for Tony again, but Tony yanked his arm from his grasp, slammed the door open and it hit the hall wall with a loud bang. Before Gibbs could react Tony had stormed out and was already to the stairs. A slight noise drew his attention away from Tony’s back and Gibbs saw McGee had opened the guest room door and was gazing between Tony and Gibbs in confusion. Catching his eye, Gibbs signaled him back into the guest room. Tim nodded and quietly shut the door.

Turning back to the staircase, Gibbs saw that Tony had successfully escaped. Reaching out he pulled the door closed. With a sigh, he sat down on the edge of the bed. He was tired but sleep would have to wait. He needed to figure out what was wrong with his agent. What he didn’t know was that his senior agent spend much of the night lying on the couch wondering the very same thing.

Section 16

Tim cautiously opened his door and peered out. When he had heard Gibbs’ and Tony’s voices raised in anger the night before, he had decided to stay out of it. It wasn’t often the two men ever showed any sign of conflict in front of the other team members preferring to present a united front. However, the loud bang had startled him and he had been concerned. Tim had only got a glimpse of Tony at the stairs, before Gibbs had motioned to him. Tim had retreated but was concerned about Tony’s frame of mind. He lay awake worried for a long time before falling asleep.
This morning he was awake and eager to get started. He had to find out who was setting Tony up. He moved quietly to the stairs and made his way downstairs. A folded blanket and pillow were stacked at one end of the couch but Tony was nowhere to be seen. Tim took a deep breath in appreciation of the smell of baking bread.

“Morning, McGee.” Tony greeted him as he exited the pantry.

“Hey, Tony.” McGee eyed Tony intently. “Sleep okay?”

Tony paused and placed the food he was holding on the counter. He realized that his teammate had overheard something. “As good as I could, I guess.”

“If you need someone to talk to, I’ll listen.” Tim perched on a stool at the counter.

Tony took in the earnest expression on McGee’s face. “Thanks. It’s just a bit strange.” Tony shook his head. “I keep thinking it’s a dream and I’ll wake up. Maybe that burrito from Stan’s the other day.”

“It’s going to be okay, Tony.”

“Thanks, McGee. So, I’m going to throw this bacon and ham in a skillet. How do you want your eggs?”

“Whatever’s easiest. You know you don’t have to cook for us all the time. I can help.”

“Don’t worry about it. I kind of enjoy cooking when I’m here. It relaxes me.” Just as he said it, Tony heard footsteps on the stairs and his body tensed. He turned away stiffly and threw the meat he was unwrapping onto an already hot griddle. He busied himself at the stove and avoided looking at Gibbs as he joined McGee at the bar.

“Morning, boss.” McGee studied the body language of the two other men.

“Morning, McGee, DiNozzo.” Gibbs noticed the rigid set of Tony’s shoulders. He was again dressed in khakis and a fresh polo shirt which actuated his air.

“So Tony’s special scrambled eggs alright with everyone?”

“What makes them so special?” McGee asked.

“Besides me cooking them?” Tony threw a quick smile at McGee over his shoulder. Gibbs gritted his teeth and felt angry at the easy byplay between them not realizing how hard McGee was trying to defuse the situation. “I use some onion, peppers, tomatoes and some various herbs and just before serving a nice layer of cheese.”

“Works for me.” McGee agreed. “How about you, boss?”

“Fine.” Gibbs said grumpily. “You about ready to get to work?”

Tony moved smoothly around the kitchen area grabbing a large stoneware mug, filling it and plunking it down in front of Gibbs. “Drink your coffee and quit being a curmudgeon. Breakfast’s all but ready. We’ll all be more productive with full stomachs.”

“I’ll set the table.” McGee took the opportunity slip away from Gibbs’ arm reach. Gibbs without coffee delivered harder head slaps for less reason. He preferred to keep a safer distance for at least two cups.
Gibbs sulked as he took a long sip of his coffee. It was strong and black just like he liked. “Here,” Tony set a full carafe down next to him. For a minute their eyes met, then Tony dropped his head and turned back to the stove. “Did you sleep okay?”

Gibbs took another long drink. “As good as I could, I guess,” he answered unconsciously echoing Tony’s words from earlier. “You?”

“About the same.” Tony leaned over to pull a tray of biscuits from the oven. When he stood, he found Gibbs had left his seat and was invading his personal space.

“Everything is going to be okay.” Gibbs held his senior field agent’s gaze. “Tony, we will fix this.”

“I’m sor…”

“Don’t apologize.” Gibbs shook his head and Tony braced himself for rule 6. “I shouldn’t have pressed you so hard last night. The last forty-eight hours have been hell. Let’s just focus on straightening your status out first.” He took the mitt and the tray from Tony’s unresisting hands, but before turning to the table, Gibbs touched Tony’s arm and looked him directly in the eye. “We will get through this. Together.”

McGee hurriedly laid the remaining silverware trying to hide the feeling that he had eavesdropped on something private. He stepped aside and let Gibbs toss the biscuits into the waiting bread bowl. When Gibbs stepped back he locked gaze with the younger man and Tim could see the resolve and determination in his eyes. He gave Gibbs a slight nod, letting him know that he was on Team Tony, too.
Chapter 6 - Section 17 & 18

Chapter Notes

"McGee has to leave the cabin." Panchajaviera insists.
"But he's helping them." Geminiangel protests. "Don't you want Tony cleared?"
"He will help them more by leaving the cabin. Trust me." Panchajaviera sighed at the look of stubbornness on Geminiangel's face. Okay, there was only one way to handle her. "Look here," she lifted a familiar yellow box lid.
Geminiangel drooled at the sight of the wonderful chocolates with the familiar embossed chocolate in the center. "Is that?"
"The Whitman sampler in all milk chocolate. Now, don't you think McGee should leave the cabin? Geminiangel looked from her laptop to the box, then nodded in resignation. Panchajaviera pushed her advantage. "You promise?"
"I promise McGee will leave the cabin in this chapter.

Section 17

As Gibbs took another sip of coffee he automatically checked work status. To his left, McGee was clicking away at his keyboard alternating his gaze between to screens. To his right, Tony…no… DiNozzo sat in an armchair with a file on his lap; his laptop on the table next to him. He wasn’t even pretending to work. He was looking towards the fireplace deep in thought.

“DiNozzo.” Gibbs called but it had no effect. “DiNozzo,” he said louder. Still no response. Crumpling up a page of his writing pad he launched it at Tony hitting him right on the side of the head. He smirked when Tony jumped. “You with us, DiNozzo?”

Rather than be embarrassed at being caught daydreaming, Tony tossed the file down in frustration. “This is…” He jumped to his feet and moved to the fireplace using his arms against the mantle to stretch his back.

“What’s going on, DiNozzo?” Gibbs closed his own file and laid it beside him on the couch.

“This whole thing doesn’t make sense.” Tony raked his hand through his hair.

“Why?”

“I don’t know it just…” Tony’s was aggravated at being unable to express himself.

“Talk it out.” Gibbs encouraged.

McGee turned slightly; the only sign that he was paying attention to the conversation. Though he had made fun of Tony’s campfires he couldn’t deny the success Tony usually had when talking cases through. He had a knack for finding loose threads.

“Okay. Let’s take the theory that Jeanne is behind this. She’s living in Lourdes, France. Who does she know that would have the clout? How does she move Sacks?” Tony began pacing back and front of the fireplace. “How did she find out I wasn’t a citizen? Ok, yeah, I mean, my dad disappearing in Lourdes is worrisome, but I doubt he knew. Besides, she would have had to know
well before he disappeared to set this all in motion. It doesn’t fit. Does it?”

“I don’t know. Once we catch her, we’ll get our answers.”

“Gibbs. Tony.” McGee interrupted his tone urgent. “We may have that chance sooner rather than later. Abby just messaged me. Our agents in France apprehended Benoit and your father last night and immediately put them on a military flight to DC. They’ll be there later this afternoon.”

Section 18

Leon shook his head as he looked at his cellphone. It was too much to hope that Ms. Scuito would sit on the news just a couple more hours. One day without Gibbs. Would it have been too much to ask? He reach in his jacket pocket retrieved a pack of Aspirin™ and tossed them back before answering. Gibbs was a guaranteed headache. He knew he was right when he didn’t even get to say hello.

“Leon.”

“Gibbs.”

“When did you plan to tell us that you had Benoit and Senior in custody?”

Just once, Leon wondered what Gibbs would say if he answered “Never.” Taking a deep breath he let it out slowly. “How far out are you?”

“We’re in the bullpen.”

“Damn.” Leon hit a button on his desk and the TV switched to Gibbs and company just exiting the elevator. Benoit and Senior were due any minute and he had hoped to get the interviews accomplished without bloodshed or law suits.

“Director,” his secretary’s voice called over the intercom.

With another muttered curse, he punched the intercom. “Yes, I’m aware that Gibbs and DiNozzo are in the bullpen.”

“Uh, yes, but you asked me to let you know when we heard from security. The team bringing Ms. Benoit and Mr. DiNozzo were just cleared by security.”

“Son of a…” Leon slammed his hands on his desk and headed for the door. Some days you just couldn’t catch a break. With a last longing thought for the bottle in his bottom drawer, he started down the stairs. “Gibbs, DiNozzo, my…” He was cut off when the elevator dinged. He cursed fate; but the elevator was only exited by a clerk from legal. It didn’t buy much time, but he’d take what he could get.

“Leon.” Gibbs slung his jacket on the back of his chair and met the director at the foot of the stairs. DiNozzo and McGee put their things and settled at their desks bringing up their computers. “Guess we made it.”

“Look, Gibbs, you can’t…”

“No, you look, Leon…” Gibbs fired back.

“We don’t have time for this.” Vance didn’t back down. “Benoit and Senior are on their way up now. This has to be done strictly by the book. If you remember, it’s more than yours and DiNozzo’s careers on the line.”
“It’s Tony’s life.” Gibbs shot back. “Whoever set this in motion has put his career and his life in jeopardy. He almost ended up in GITMO. He has a right to confront...”

The elevator dinged again. This time, Leon was out of luck and time. A team of three agents led their suspects off the elevator. Both men walked through the bullpen and stood waiting for the group to approach. Senior had an agent on both sides. They could catch glimpses of the third agent and Benoit bringing up the rear.

“I said to let go.” Senior was saying arrogantly. “You’re wrinkling the Armani.”

“It’s not Armani. It’s Tom Ford and a few years old at that.” Tony said flatly from his desk.

“Junior.” Senior went to step forward but was stopped by the agent. “Maybe you can explain to these gentlemen that they have made some type of mistake. Arresting us and putting us on that... that...” He shuddered at the thought of the military transport flight.

“You haven’t been arrested, Mr. DiNozzo. As I’m certain my agents have informed you, you were returned for questioning as a material witness. Once our questions have been answered to our satisfaction, you will be released.”

“Surely this could have waited.”

“Hasn’t it waited long enough, Senior?”

“I figured you were involved somehow, Agent Gibbs. What have you thought up to harass me about now?”

“Posturing, Senior? Or afraid I do know something?” Gibbs took a long, slow drink of coffee.

“I must insist that you release me at once.”

“And I must insist on knowing why you never filed my birth certificate.” Tony stood up unable to stay seated any longer.

“What are you talking about?”

“When you brought me home, you never filed my birth certificate with the state of New York.”

“This is what this is all about. You drug me halfway around the world over a technicality? Don’t you have important things to work on?”

“It’s actually pretty important to me.” Tony replied. “I was almost fired over that technicality for being an illegal alien.”

“Look your mother handled that stuff. You know what she was like.”

“So did you, so why not check on it?” Gibbs interjected.

“This is a family matter, Agent Gibbs. I’d appreciate you keeping your opinions to yourself.”

“He has a good point, dad. Why didn’t you check on it?”

“Look, your mother wanted you, I told her it was her responsibility.”

“You never could be bothered, you took the first opportunity to ship me off.”
“You are well aware of why you were enrolled in military school,” Senior said coldly. “Don’t try to make that my fault.”

“Darling, let’s don’t fight.” Ignored long enough, Jeanne pulled her arm from the agent’s and pushed her way next to Senior. “This is a celebration, remember. Didn’t you have something you wanted to share with dear Antonio?”

Senior took her hand, raising it to his lips. “Of course, my dear. Forgive me. Old wounds.” Tucking her into his side, Senior smiled broadly while Jeanne smiled at Tony with ill-concealed animosity in her eyes. “As I said we were on an extended vacation; which you interrupted. May I present my new bride, the lovely Mrs. Jeanne DiNozzo?”

“You married her?” Tony exclaimed in shock.

“Junior, I know about your infatuation. Jeanne explained it all to me. But now that she’s your stepmother, you’ll have to…”

Gibbs couldn’t help but notice the almost satisfaction in Senior’s eyes. This was definitely revenge for Benoit, but why for Senior?

“Are you crazy?” Tony snorted. “I wasn’t infatuated. I was on a job. My boss assigned me to get close to her so we could get her father? Jeanne looked at him in pure hatred as Tony faced her. “And you, this is your grand revenge. I mean, I gave you points for trying to frame me, but this is all you could come up with?”

“Jeanne is…”

“Oh, I know what Jeanne is. Been there. Done that.” Tony looked at her contemptuously. “If I’d know you were so interested in my leavings, I’d have given you a list. I’ve dated some sexy, smart and beautiful women. You didn’t have to settle for something leftover from one of my jobs.”

“You bastard…” Jeanne lunged at him but was caught by the agents.

“Put her in Interrogation 3.” Vance said bluntly. “Now.” For a minute, Vance thought he had a chance at salvaging the situation. That hope was vanished when another senior agent entered the bullpen. Fate could be a bitch.

“Gibbs. DiNozzo. I thought you were on your honeymoon. Congratulations to you both.” He stopped noticing the glare in the Director’s eyes. “I’ll catch you later.” He threw over his shoulder as he quickly retreated.

“You’re married? To him?”

“What? Are you upset you missed the ceremony? Oh, wait, maybe you wanted a double honeymoon. We could have done that, couldn’t we, Jethro?”

The agents were too late to catch Senior and he managed one good punch to Tony’s face before the wrestled him back. “You’re a disgrace. You were never fit to be a DiNozzo. I should never have allowed your mother to bring you here from Italy. I thought I’d settled this years ago, but I should have drowned you like the unnatural, filthy mongrel, you are.” Gone was the polished, aristocratic façade as Senior spewed his loathing in a bitter, vitriolic rant.

“Interrogation 2.”

The agents were immediately dragging the man away as he continued to yell. “You’re not my son.
You were never my son. You are an abomination…unnatural…” They could still hear his raised voice but Senior’s rant was cut off by the door closing.

Gibbs looked at Tony in concern. His nose was bleeding and running unheeded down his face. “Come on, DiNozzo. Let’s get that cleaned up.” Tony shuddered back to awareness but went docilely as Gibbs guided him to the men’s room.”

“Uh, Director…”

“Agent McGee.”

“I happened to have an app open that caught the exchange. Would you like me to transcribe the … uh…” McGee was unsure what to call the meeting.

“That would be fine, agent. When you’re finished, make a copy of the security footage. We’ll use them in the interview.” Vance gestured to a passing security officer. “We have people in interrogation 2 & 3. I want a guard on each door. No one enters without my authority. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Agent McGee, when Gibbs and DiNozzo are through. I want the three of you in my office.”

“Yes, sir.”
Chapter 7 - Section 19 -21

Chapter Summary

Panchajaviera held the chocolate box out of reach and pointed at the laptop screen. "No. Now erase the alien abduction."

"But you said I couldn't have chocolate unless McGee was out of sight and far, far away." Geminiangel said in defense. She pointed at the scene in question.

Suddenly there was a bright, blinding light in the bullpen. When the light cleared, McGee was gone. Meanwhile on a spaceship high above the earth, McGee woke up strapped to a table.

"You can't just throw in an alien abduction to get chocolate. You have to stick to your storyline." Jesco0307 spoke up.

"You wanted McGee gone, too." Geminiangel sulked and petulantly refused to teach the keyboard.

"Everyone wants a little Tibbs action." ArianaFeileacan explained, "but we don't want you to just throw something like that in. Think about how Kirconn, LeiLadleLei, JulieMH and all the others will feel if you sell out for a box of chocolate."

"I guess." Geminiangel said dejectedly; feeling a bit ashamed. Sheepishly, she began to erase the scene. When she had finished she looked up them again.

"Now," Panchajaviera said. "You may have one chocolate."

Section 19

Gibbs steered DiNozzo to lean against a wall next to a sink. Grabbing a handful of paper towels he ran them under cold water and then made a compress. Tony started when Gibbs took ahold of his chin. “Hold still.” Carefully, he cleaned the blood and then pressed his fingers along Tony’s nose. “It doesn’t seem broken. Can’t believe you let him sucker punch you.”

Tony shrugged loose. “Assaulting a federal agent, gives us more leverage.”

Gibbs looked at him with one brow raised. “You’re going with that?” Tony flushed. “Yeah, didn’t think so.” He watched Tony fuss over his shirt and tie in the mirror. “What got to you?”

“What?”

“You don’t let yourself get distracted in those situations. Something he said got to you.”

“My father is married to the bitch who tried to frame me for killing her father.” Tony glared sideways at Gibbs.

“Thanks for reminding me. ‘Been there. Done that’, DiNozzo?” Gibbs swatted Tony behind the head. “Rule 52.”
“There is no rule 52.”

“There is now.” Gibbs smirked.

“What is it?”

“Never let them drag you down to their level.”

“That’s a coffee mug saying, not a rule.” Tony protested.

“It was crude.” Gibbs retorted.

“Well, yeah.” Tony was forced to admit. “I had to improvise quickly.”

“You’re better than that.”

“I got it. One man’s trash, another man’s bride.”

“DiNozzo.”

“What about ‘Satan called. He wants his bitch back.’?” Tony played up his mockery receiving a head slap for his efforts.

“Tough crowd.” Tony rubbed the back of his hand.

“Don’t you ever forget it.”

As Tony moved to toss the used towels into the trash, he was forced to step closer to Gibbs. As he did he looked directly into his eyes. Tony felt as if Gibbs eyes were forcing their way past his defenses and laying his soul open. He dragged his eyes away lowering his head, but Gibbs took ahold of his upper arms.

“Talk to me.” Gibbs tone was almost pleading but Tony simply shook his head. “What did he say that got to you so badly?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“It does to me.” Shock accomplished what his begging couldn’t and Gibbs almost sighed in relief when Tony met his eyes. The relief disappeared when he really looked at him. Years of knowing each other gave Gibbs insight others didn’t and he could read the frustration, anger, hurt and weariness. “Let me in, DiNozzo. Let me help. Talk to me.”

“Not now.” Tony refused. “I can’t now. Not here. Not and do what I have to.” Tony was afraid that if Gibbs pushed on his defenses they would crumple. He was tired of hiding but even more afraid of not being able to hide.

“Alright.” Gibbs capitulated. “But when this is over, we’re talking; no joking, no pretenses, no backing out. Understand?”

Tony could feel the trap but was helpless in Gibbs grasp. “Understood.”

Gibbs looked at him reading the surrender in his eyes. “Good.” Letting go of DiNozzo’s upper arms, he straightened Tony’s tie for him. “Now, let’s go teach the newlyweds not to piss off an NCIS agent.” Knowing it would cheer Tony up, he waved his arm allowing Tony to precede him, announcing, “After you.”
When the two exited the men’s room, they made to exit the bullpen but paused when McGee hailed them. “Keep checking for a trail, McGee. We’ll be in interrogation.”

“Uh, no, you won’t.” McGee said rising and heading towards them.

Gibbs looked at McGee with a glare. “I beg your pardon.” It wasn’t a question, but a demand.

“Director’s orders, boss. He said he wants us in his office immediately.”

“After we have a little talk with our guests, McGee.” Gibbs was stopped by McGee clearing his throat. “What now, McGee?”

“You can’t get in to see them. The director put guards on the door.” McGee realized it would probably take a platoon of guards to keep Gibbs and Tony out if they decided to disobey; but orders were orders. “He asked me to bring you up, now.”

“Excuse me, could you tell me where to find Agent DiNozzo?” A smoothly polished voice interrupted the discussion.

“What?” Gibbs turned in irritation.

Tony had been caught up in the interplay between McGee and Gibbs. His little probie was growing up; he actually told Gibbs no. Well, he relayed the director’s no but it still took a pair to say it. In doing so, he hadn’t noticed a tall, European sounding man in an expensive business suit approach. He mentally head-slapped himself. “I’m Special Agent DiNozzo.

“You are Anthony Dimitri DiNozzo, Jr?” The man walked over to Tony.

Out of the man’s line of sight, Tony could see Gibbs’ eye roll. They both had him pegged; a lawyer. He’d dealt with being served many times. “Yes, I am Anthony Dimitri DiNozzo, Jr.”

“I understand you are now married to a Jethro Gibbs.” The stranger’s question was more a statement of fact. “Is this correct?”

Gibbs stepped closer to Tony. “It is. I am Special Agent Jethro Gibbs. And you are?”

“You are Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs?”

“Yes.”

“Very good.” Opening his briefcase, the stranger removed several large manila envelopes, he handed them to Tony. “My client asked that you consider these wedding gifts. May your union be long and happy.” The man turned and made his way on to the elevator.

“Wait a minute. What client? Who are…” Tony was unable to stop him from getting on the elevator.

“Gibbs.” A bellow from upstairs got their attention. Vance was standing at the top of the stairs. “DiNozzo. McGee. Now.”

“Well, you heard the man.” Gibbs shepherded his team towards the stairs. McGee grabbed his laptop and a couple files on his way while Tony seemed lost in his own thoughts absently fingering the envelopes.

Section 20

“I half expected to have to call security to drag you out of interrogation, Gibbs.” Vance said as the
trio entered his office and sat down opposite him.

“After McGee told me you wanted to see us?” Gibbs said innocently.

Vance simply glared at him not buying his innocent act. “Who was the suit?”

“He didn’t give a name. Said something about a… uh… wedding present.” Gibbs stumbled over the reminder that Tony was his husband. “What do you have, DiNozzo?”

“What the…” At Gibbs’ question, Tony had turned the envelopes over and found the top envelope labeled “Cristian Antonio Fabbri” in a bold black. “It’s the name the cabin is listed in.”

Gibbs felt his gut clench. “Fabbri?” He asked and Tony nodded.

Tony looked at the director reading the tacit approval in his expression. With a steadying breath, he opened the closure and pulled out a stack of papers. On top, someone had paper clipped a piece of blank stationary in the same bold black writing were the words “Citizenship Documentation”. Taking the clip off, Tony thumbed through a series of legal documents. “I don’t understand.”

“What is it, Tony?” Gibbs didn’t notice that he had used his SFA’s first name.

“It’s a birth certificate, passport, application for citizenship all in the name Cristian Antonio Fabbri. I think there’s a change of name to Antonio Dimitri DiNozzo but it’s all in Italian.”

“May I?” Tony handed the papers across the desk to Vance who thumbed through them. “Agent McGee, can you trace these?” Vance handed them to McGee who stole a quick look at Gibbs and DiNozzo before responding.

“Yes, sir.”

“Obviously someone is aware of your citizenship issues, Agent DiNozzo. Can you shed any light on this?”

“No, sir. The only ones who know are…well, us, Abby, Ducky, Fornell and Sacks and company. This doesn’t make any sense. Who is doing this?”

“It appears that someone else is aware and if I’m interpreting these properly, trying to assist you in documentation.”

“But who’s Cristian Antonio Fabbri?” McGee asked.

“I suggest you find out.” Vance looked at Tony. “What else do you have?”

Tony was half afraid to turn over the next envelope. Taking a deep breath, he looked at Gibbs for strength and flipped it over. It was labeled “Jeanne Benoit DiNozzo” and he carefully opened the envelope. Inside he found another stack of papers including a lot of pictures. As he thumbed through, his sense of shock increased.

Gibbs who was seated next to Tony had seen Jeanne’s name and caught glimpses of the pictures. If the information was right, the new Mrs. DiNozzo was a very bad girl. He automatically held his hand out as Tony extended some of the photos towards him.

“Mind sharing?” The director asked sarcastically as the two men thumbed through the information and kept exchanging glances.

With one last look, Gibbs waited for Tony’s small nod and then handed his information to Vance. “I
Gibbs nodded grimly. “It seems that Jeanne has decided to follow in her father’s footsteps. There are bills of sale, shipment information and pictures of the weapons and of Mrs. DiNozzo meeting with various international weapons dealers.”

Vance picked up his phone immediately. “Fornell, Vance. We have received some important information. How soon can you be in my office? I’ll see you then.” He hung up saying, “He was actually on his way here. Should be here within fifteen minutes.” He looked at Gibbs. “Are you sure you want to give up this case?”

Gibbs looked from Tony to McGee before looking at Vance. “We have more important issues right now. We need to find out who’s after Tony. Let Fornell handle Benoit.” McGee nodded in agreement.

“DiNozzo?”

Tony slipped the rest of the evidence back into the envelope and handed it to the director. “We don’t need accusations of a personal vendetta.”

“Do I even want to know what else you have?” Vance said.

As Tony went to flip the next envelope, Gibbs felt a shiver in his spine and shifted his chair closer to Tony. It was almost anti-climactic for him, when the front of the next envelope showed Anthony Dimitri DiNozzo, Senior. “Tony, let me open it.”

Tony’s gut was clenched and the hair on his neck felt like it was standing on end. Somehow he knew that whatever was in the envelope would change his world forever. “I got it.” His fingers were slightly shaky as he opened it finding a stack of papers similar to the stack on Jeanne. It took him two tries to remove the paper clip and started through the file. He held it together through the first two pictures but the third made him freeze. He stared at it with disbelieving eyes. Finally the need to breath forced him to take a shuddering breath.

“Tony.” Gibbs placed his hand on Tony’s knee. He also found it hard to believe what he saw in the photo. He reach for the stack with his other hand, not wanting Tony to go any further but Tony stubbornly flipped to the next photo.

Tony felt his stomach turn and in the next instant he was on his feet, the file spilling onto Vance’s desk and the floor as he headed for the door desperate to get out. Without regard for the file, Gibbs followed him to find him in the hallway being sick in a trashcan. Vance’s secretary was standing by her desk watching him in worry. She came to Gibbs immediately and after a quick conversation, she headed for the nearest restroom.

Gibbs walked up to Tony and began to rub his back comfortingly. His own stomach ached in sympathy for Tony’s painful vomiting. When Tony appeared to be down to dry retching, Gibbs pulled him to the side and helped him to slide down the wall till he was sitting with his back against it. Gibbs put one hand behind his head cupping his nape. “It’s okay, Tony, I got you.”

“Agent Gibbs.”

Gibbs looked up and took the damp paper towels and cup of water from Vance’s secretary as she knelt next to them. They spoke briefly before she rose, retrieved her purse from her desk and left the area.
Back in Vance’s office, McGee looked after his team but then turned back and picked up the papers. He stood and found Vance standing near him. Both men looked at the photos they held and then looked at each other. McGee found his stomach rolling in sympathy as the sound of Tony being sick reach his ears. “Director…” McGee was at a loss for words.

Vance found his own stomach unsettled. The pictures were graphic and based on what he could see the accompanied documentation seemed as complete and iron tight as Benoit’s file. He held his hand out for McGee’s pictures and then stuffed them into the manila envelope. He had seen enough to know he didn’t want to see the rest and could tell by the look on McGee’s face that he felt the same.

Tim was torn between staying in the office and following Tony. Gratefully, the decision was taken from him when Vance motioned McGee to sit. He placed the unopened envelope on the corner of Vance’s desk but not before thankfully noting that the remaining envelope did not have a name but just the word personal.

“Normally, Agent McGee, I would ask you and Ms. Scuito to see if you could confirm those accusations to be certain that they were not an attempt to attack the family member of one of our team. However, given the … subject … of those photos and the completeness of the file on Ms. Benoit; I am satisfied in taking them at face value. I don’t think it is necessary to expose Ms. Scuito or yourself to that. Do you agree?”

McGee did so thankfully. He was also thankful that Tony appeared to have finished throwing up. He could hear the low timber of Gibbs’ voice as he spoke to Tony. “How could he?” McGee flushed at the naive question. “I mean, Tony is in law enforcement. Didn’t he realize what this would do to him?”

Vance shook his head. “It’s obvious he didn’t care.”

“Is DiNozzo okay?” Fornell asked from the door looking over his shoulder at the two agents in concern.

Section 21

Back in the hall, Gibbs was wiping Tony’s face with the damp towels. He kept repeating in a low voice, “It’s okay, Tony, I got you. We’re going to get through this. Come on, Tony.” He was slowly getting Tony to focus.

Tony leaned his head back against the wall trapping Gibb’s hand against his neck. He drew strength from the contact. Grimacing from the sour taste in his mouth, Tony took the cup of water Gibbs’ handed him.

“With me now?”

“Gibbs…” Tony sounded broken.

“It’s okay, Tony. We’ll get through this. Come on, let’s get you up.” Gibbs helped Tony to his feet; steadying him when the younger man swayed a bit. He slid his arm around Tony’s waist for support and guided him back into Vance’s office.

McGee jumped to his feet and pulled Tony’s chair out a bit further; hovering as Gibbs helped him sit. “At ease, Probie.” Tony gave him a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “I’m okay.”

“Agent DiNozzo, if you want to take the afternoon off…”

Tony cut off Vance. “Director, I’d just as soon that we get this over.” Tony’s left hand moved on its
own and slipped under Gibbs hand where it rested on his leg seeking comfort.

Vance nodded. “I understand.” Movement by the door drew his attention and he saw his secretary approaching with beverage carriers. He waited while she handed cups out to McGee, Fornell and himself before stepping up beside Gibbs and handing him a taller cup which Gibbs pressed into Tony’s hand and began to urge him to drink. The beverage carrier with two other drinks was placed next to Gibbs. “Thank you, Helen.”

She nodded at him before turning to leave. She touched Tony gently on the shoulder and then walked to the door. “I’ll tell everyone you are in a meeting and cannot be disturbed. If SecNav calls?” she queried.

“Tell him I’ll call him back.” Vance took a sip of the strong black coffee and looked at the shocked expressions on his team and the concern on Fornell’s face. Sitting it down deliberately, he reach for the bottom drawer. He pulled out a bottle of bourbon from behind the hanging files and poured some into his cup before passing the bottle to Fornell. It was quiet as the bottle made its way from Fornell to McGee who poured a portion into the cups in front of Gibbs, who nodded his thanks, skipping Tony and then pausing for a moment before adding it to his own and then handing it back to Vance.

At Gibbs urging, Tony finally took a sip of his coffee. He was surprised to find that instead of coffee, Vance’s secretary had gotten him a large cup of rich, creamy hot chocolate with plenty of chocolate and sugar. He looked at Gibbs in pleased surprise.

“I told her coffee would probably just upset your stomach more.” Gibbs finally took a cup of coffee for himself and took a long drink enjoying the burn of the bourbon.

“I don’t think I was invited here for tea and crumpets,” Fornell said finally. “What’s up?”

Vance looked at his MCRT team before taking the lead. “As I’m sure that you aware, earlier this afternoon, Jeanne Benoit and Senior arrived. They are currently in interrogation under guard.” At Fornell’s nod, he continued. “Shortly thereafter this,” Vance picked up Jeanne’s envelope and leaned forward handing it to Fornell before continuing, “was delivered to DiNozzo.” He left out the wedding present comment.

Curious at what could shake the team so badly, Fornell sat down and opened the envelope. Inside he noted the thorough documentation. The case was a slam duck. “You want me to take this?” Fornell was surprised.

“Agent Fornell, when Jeanne and Senior arrived; it was announced that Ms. Benoit is now married to Mr. DiNozzo, Sr. Given her history with Agent DiNozzo, it seems prudent to have this handled outside of our agency.”

“You okay with this, Gibbs?” Fornell looked at his old friend for confirmation who nodded at him. “I’ll get a warrant.” He figured that DiNozzo had had a surprise but it didn’t seem to warrant the shock he was seeing. He became aware of an unspoken conversation going on around him. He watched Gibbs as he looked from Tony to Vance and McGee and then back to Tony. He settled back to wait taking note of the fresh bruise DiNozzo was sporting.

Finally, Tony held out his hand and McGee gave him a second envelope. For a moment, he simply held it before passing it down to Fornell. This time, Fornell looked at the name on the front and hesitated. “You sure you want me to open this, DiNozzo?”

“Want you to?” Tony laughed bitterly. “No.” He looked around at the others again. “But you need to.”
Aware that everyone was watching, Fornell deliberately took a long drink of coffee. He didn’t know what the envelope contained but it must be bad. Unable to stall any longer, he opened the envelope.
"Uh, hi?" I looked up to see Panchajaviera, Jesco0307, Bane_Huntress, Rose_malmaison and the others were looking way too serious. "I've got the next chapter ready."
"Good. We want you to meet your beta. This is Wolfnjag, she is going to keep you company while you write." Jesco0307 said.
"Don't let her pull anymore of those alien abductions," Panchajaviera warned Wolfnjag.
"She tries shortcuts for chocolate.
"I'll make a note of that." Wolfnjag pulled out a small notebook.
"Oh, and if you have trouble getting her to sit still and concentrate," Bane_Huntress slips her the glue. "Just a few drops to the chair. Royalelephant says it may help keep her from stalling."
"Thanks." Wolfnjag started to wonder about what she had signed up for.
"Oh and if she gets sulky, she can have a marshmallow." Rose_Malmaison said swiping the bag.
"Don't I get a say in this?"
"No." Came the chorus.
"Fine." I settled in with a growl. "Just see if I write."
"Have a marshmallow." Wolfnjag checked her list.
"Ooh, thank-you."
"Why don't you sit down at your keyboard awhile? The rest of us will sit in the parlor and talk a bit."
"Wait for me. Hey, I'm stuck!"

Section 22

The papers were no longer neatly stacked as Vance hadn’t been concerned with reorganizing them. Fornell pulled them out, looked at the other four men and put off looking down for a minute. When he did, he had the misfortune of seeing the third picture Tony had seen. He had been prepared to see Senior in the photo and recognized him instantly. What Fornell hadn’t been prepared for was the warehouse. Senior and another man appeared to be walking on an aisle through rows and rows of pallets. On each, a small child was chained like a dog. They were filthy, sparsely clothed and their ribs could be seen between the shreds of cloth.

It took all of Fornell’s years in law enforcement to keep his face impassive. Tucking the photo under the stack, he glanced at a copy of a flight manifest before moving it to the bottom and coming upon the picture that had so distressed Tony. It was Senior and a young girl from the warehouse. Fornell hadn’t been prepared for was the warehouse. Senior and another man appeared to be walking on an aisle through rows and rows of pallets. On each, a small child was chained like a dog. They were filthy, sparsely clothed and their ribs could be seen between the shreds of cloth.

As he thumbed through the evidence, the charges mounted: pedophilia, child pornography, rape and drugs. Photos of Senior in various warehouses and shacks made him both aware of and an accomplice to the illegal trade and trafficking of humans. Evidence kept coming; slavery, sexual exploitation of infants, toddlers, youths and women. Plus, the harvesting. Fornell could barely keep
from vomiting at the pictures of people cut open for their tissue/organs and left to bleed out. Finally with relief he came to the initial picture again. He stuffed the evidence roughly back in to the envelope; annoyed by the slight tremble in his hands.

Gibbs motioned to Vance for the bourbon intending to freshen his friend’s coffee. However, after looking at Fornell’s face, Vance reach down and pulled a stack of glasses from his bottom drawer and poured everyone a healthy measure of bourbon. He handed two glasses to Gibbs and passed the others out.

“Tobias.” Gibbs pressed the bourbon into his old friend’s hand.

Tobias took a grateful sip enjoying the burn, but it wasn’t enough to burn the images from his mind. Looking at the glass, he made a decision and emptied it. Placing it carefully on the edge of Vance’s desk, along with the envelope, he looked around the room. “Alright, gentleman, how are we playing this?”

Gibbs smirked at Vance’s reaction to Tobias’ query. “Your game, Tobias. We’re totally out.” The others nodded in agreement.

“DiNozzo… Hell, kid, you know if I file these or reporters catch wind of this…”

“Not if.” Setting his drink down, Tony pulled himself up straightening his backbone and faced Fornell. “He doesn’t walk from this… You promise me that. He does not walk after he… he…”

“I know it’s a shock, DiNozzo, but do you realize what your life will be like?” Tobias didn’t like cutting deals with scum but he also didn’t like screwing over friends. He wasn’t sure that DiNozzo was truly a friend but he had come to respect the young man. If he hadn’t thought Jethro would hunt him down and kill him; he would’ve tried harder to recruit the younger man. “I could go to the DOJ myself…”

“No,” Tony shook his head. “No deals, nothing under the table. Senior goes down for this, he deserves nothing less. I won’t be a party to covering it up.”

“If that’s the way you want to play it,” Tobias glanced at Gibbs and saw the approval in his eyes. “No deals. I’ll take this to a judge myself, get the warrant.” He looked at his watch. “I may not be able to get it tonight but I’ll try. In the meantime, can you hold him?” The FBI agent looked at Vance.

“Assaulting a federal officer,” Vance said dryly. “McGee has the security footage and a transcript of the altercation.”

Tobias looked at Tony’s bruise. He’d struck his own kid? Of course, Tobias realized. after what the man in the pictures had done, this shouldn’t be a shock. “You okay, DiNozzo?”

“Yeah, figured we might need leverage.” Tony had the grace to blush as Gibbs raised his eyebrow.

“I figured Gibbs here missed the back of your head in his old age.” Tobias tried to lighten the mood, smirking when Tony reflexively rubbed the back of his head.

“Trust me, he doesn’t miss.” Tony grumbled.

“You have copies of the footage?” Tobias asked. McGee handed him a disk and paper copies of the conversation to all of them. Tobias scanned down the words and then looked at Tony. “You got balls, kid, I’ll say that for you. You want a front row when we take them down?” Tobias offered.
"No." Tony shook his head.

"I understand." Tobias sighed reluctantly. "Well, I'm going to go work on these warrants. I'll let you know something as soon as I get it." He picked up both envelopes and headed for the door.


Vance placed the bourbon bottle back in his bottom drawer. "You realize that this is going to put MCRT back in the spotlight, gentleman? Might I suggest that you brief Ms. Scuito and Dr. Mallard prior to the reporters getting hold of this mess?"

"Ah, hell."

"It's my mess, I'll tell them." Tony said shrinking a little.

Surprisingly, the initial objection came from McGee not Gibbs. "No. I told you I had your six. We'll do it together."

Gibbs looked at McGee approvingly before delivering a swat to Tony. "We're a team. Not going to bail when it gets a bit rough. Okay, McGee, call them and then take off. Meeting at my house..." he looked at his watch. "...at seven. Add Palmer. We'll order in. Tony and I have some things to take care of before then." He rose from his seat and looked at Vance. "Make sure SecNav understands no deals when you brief him, Leon."

"He's going to be concerned about the effect of a scandal on NCIS, Gibbs. I can't guarantee..."

Gibbs glared at him. "No deals. This time, we do not compromise. I want to see their perp walk on tv within the next forty-eight hours or I will go to the press myself. Tony and I followed the plan to deal with Tony's arrest. This time, we do not compromise."

"SecNav is getting a bit tired of your threats, Gibbs." Leon stood.

"Not threats, Leon." Gibbs was steadfast. "Senior goes down. Hard."

"You can't use the system for revenge, Gibbs."

"You're going to tell me that, Leon? I worked with Jenny." Vance had the grace to look down when Gibbs retorted. "You saw what he did. Are you going to tell me he doesn't deserve it?"

"I'll do what I can." Leon acquiesced. "He may want to talk to you."

"We'll be at the house at seven." Gibbs looked at Tony. "Grab your bag, I'll meet you at the car."

"Yes, boss." Tony looked at Vance for confirmation. "Director."

McGee took the tone for dismissal and made to move past on the way to the door when Gibbs grabbed his arm. Turning, Gibbs made sure Tony was gone. "If it isn't on file, get a warrant from legal for Senior's DNA."

"On what grounds?" McGee questioned.

"Be creative." Gibbs picked up the hot chocolate cup and handed it to McGee. "Have Abby compare it to this."

"Boss?"
“Just do it, McGee.” McGee took the cup and left.

“What are you thinking?” Vance questioned.

“Just a hunch.” Gibbs shook his head. “I hope like hell I’m wrong.”
Tony sleeps with Gibbs. See, I can write a chapter summary.

Chapter Notes

“What on earth are you doing?” Wolfnjag asked in shock. She really wondered how one person could make such a mess in only a few minutes. Everywhere she looked there were maps of countries, continents, pictures of leaders. “Geminiangel!”

“Hmm…” Geminiangel peeps up over the desk at her beta. “Oh, great! There you are. Do you know where I put that nice gun the one guest reviewer sent me?” Somewhere in a safe to which I have the key thought Wolfnjag. “Why do you want a gun?”

“It’s for Elaine.”

“Didn’t Elaine leave you a nice review?” “Yeah.”

“Then why do you want a gun?” Were all writers slightly insane? Wolfnjag reach for her cellphone. Thank heavens the others were on speed dial. ArianaFeileacan answered on the first ring. “She wants a gun.”

“For Senior? I’ll go buy one. See you in a bit.”

“No, don’t…” Maybe it wasn’t only writers. Wolfnjag hit the next number. “She wants a gun for Elaine.”

“Why…never mind. Let me get LeiLadleLei, Babykid528, Bane_Huntress and BellaHickenbottom,” Jesco0307 said, “and we’ll be right there.”

“I brought more marshma…” RoyalElephant came bouncing in. “Wow! Is she okay?”

“She offered to have aliens abduct someone for eilidhdawn and now she wants a gun for Elaine.” Wolfnjag shook her head. “I need bourbon and aspirin and not the story.”

“Geminiangel, it’s RoyalElephant. Wolfnjag said you need a gun.”

“No, I don’t need a gun. Elaine does.”

“Why does Elaine need a gun?”

“Well,” Geminiangel popped her head up again. “She wants to join a cabal. So I looked up what that was to help her. Now, I’m researching countries to decide which government she should overthrow. Once I’m finished, she just shoots the leader and voila, she has her own country.”

RoyalElephant rubbed her forehead. “What have we told you about looking up word definitions? Didn’t we tell you that you shouldn’t stop after the first option?”

“Maaaybe.” Geminiangel drawled.

“If you had read on, you’d know that Elaine doesn’t want to overthrow a government. It can also be a group plotting…er… encouraging someone. She wants to join all of us in encouraging you to write. In fact, weren’t you to be working on a chapter?”

RoyalElephant asked as ArianaFeileacan came rushing in with a BB gun yelling for Senior.

“I finished it.” Geminiangel stood up grinning as the rest of the cabal arrived.


“She keeps telling me that,” Geminiangel said hiding behind ArianaFeileacan. “I think she wants the cabal to have an orgy. Can I play with the BB gun?”
“This isn’t the way home,” Tony said as he held on tightly to the dash when Gibbs took the turn in his regular style. The drive had been relatively quiet, neither man really wanting to talk about the earlier events.

“We’ve got a couple of stops on the way. Need to pick up a few things at the store and some beer.”

“Gibbs, I…” Tony searched for the right words. “I hate that they’re going to drag you through this.”

“Hey, you forgetting the rules?” Gibbs rapidly changed lanes before continuing. “You do what you have to for family.”

“We’re not…Ouch, Gibbs! That hurt.”

“It was supposed to. You want to tell Abby and McGee we’re not a family?”

“I wish we were, really.” Tony sighed.

“You aren’t responsible for what Senior did,” Gibbs said reading Tony’s thoughts.

“But, I am the one who turned him in.” Tony ran his left hand through his hair. “I was so angry, maybe…”

“I know you better than that. You didn’t turn him in for revenge.” Gibbs took his right hand from the wheel and captured Tony’s left before it could wreak more havoc on his hair. “Tony, you’re a federal agent, it’s your duty. More than that, you’re a good man. I don’t know how the hell you managed to become the man you are with Senior around; but I’m proud of you. It took a strong person to do what you did.”

“I don’t feel that strong.”

“You don’t have to be. You’ve got me to lean on.” He realized that he was essentially holding hands with Tony…his husband…no, his senior agent, Gibbs told himself. Withdrawing his hand, he realized thankfully that they were arriving at their first stop.

“Thanks, Gibbs.” No amount of money would have made Tony admit how much he missed the comfort of Gibbs’ hand. Thankfully, he was distracted by a sliding stop. Before he could complain about the suddenness, Gibbs had exited the car. With little regard for the passing traffic, he headed around the front of the car already digging for change. Tony looked at the store front; a jewelry store.

“Are you coming?” Gibbs stood by the parking meter. Tony looked from the store front back to Gibbs who motioned him impatiently. “Well, come on.”

Tony reluctantly unbuckled his seat belt and slowly climbed from the car. “Gibbs…”

“You remember what SecNav said. We’re married, we need rings.” Gibbs took hold of Tony’s arm. “Look put Senior out of your mind, focus on the end game.”
“You don’t think it was Senior or Jeanne, do you?”

“Do you?” Gibbs saw the understanding in Tony’s eyes. “I don’t know who is playing this game, but we will end it, together. Now, come on.”

The jewelry store fit quite well on the quaint street. Tony loved to spend time strolling along the streets in Old Alexandria and exploring the antique stores and quaint boutiques. Jewelry stores were not his normal haunt. “How’d you find this place, boss?”

Gibbs stopped before opening the door. “Not boss. We’re not on the clock, Tony.” Gibbs said his name deliberately.

“I don’t know what to call you,” Tony admitted, flushing.

“When we were chatting with your father, you called me Jethro.”

“Okay. How did you find this place, Jethro?” Tony felt ridiculously happy over Gibbs’ small smile of approval.

“The guy who started it was in Dad’s platoon. When he died, his widow was struggling to keep it going till their son could take over. Became a habit for the other members of the platoon and their families to buy from her if they could. Her son’s training the fourth generation now.”

“Did you get yours and Shannon’s rings here?”

“Yes, I was scared to death. A month’s pay in my pocket and no clue about diamonds. Ms. Irma helped me pick out a pretty oval solitaire. She said that it would be good around kids. No sharp edges to cut or snag them.”

“Did she like it?”

“Yeah, she did.” Gibbs smile was bittersweet.

“Mr. Gibbs, how are you?”

“What have I told you, Miss Sara?”

The young woman smiled. “Don’t call me Sir. Don’t call me Mister. But grand-dad expects a level certain level of respect.”

“Indeed I do. Hello, Jethro.”

“Richard, how have you been doing?”

“Just fine. Joan had a bit of a cold, but everyone else is healthy. How’s your dad?”

“Doing well, still running the store. Says they’ll have to carry him out.”

“I figured since Richard Junior took over you’d be spending a lot of time on the golf course relaxing.”

“He should have been.” A middle-age man had entered the store behind them. “But he insisted on coming in this week. Kept saying we’d be seeing you.”

The older man came around the counter and walked up to Tony. “So this is Tony. You described him pretty well, Jethro. Saw coverage about your wedding on the TV and figured you’d be by. I’ve
picked out some nice rings. Come with me.” Older Richard went back around the counter and pulled out a couple trays with pairs of rings. “See anything you like?”

“I don’t see prices.” Tony whispered to Gibbs.

“Don’t worry about it.” Gibbs whispered back.

“Let’s start easy. Do you want diamonds or another stone?”

Tony and Gibbs looked at each other before replying, “No.”

“What about the ring itself? Platinum, white gold?”

“Actually,” Tony spoke up. “I prefer plain gold. What about you, G…Jethro?”

Relieved that Tony was starting to participate, Gibbs agreed to yellow gold.

“Secret traditionalists.” Richard took two trays away before bringing out another. There were modern, mixed gold styles and some throw-back styles like Art Deco, engraved, spiraled.

When Richard set the tray down, Tony’s eyes swept the board and found it. It was exactly the type of ring he thought of wearing someday. Tony kept trying to look at the other rings, but the set kept drawing him back. Gibbs was watching him closely and knew when he locked on to the set.

“Richard, we’ll take these.” Gibbs picked up the box and knew by the look on Tony’s face, he’d been right.

Section 24

“Mr. Vice-President, thank your for seeing me on such short notice.”

“I admit, I almost refused your call, Hagel. Please tell me there aren’t more problems with NCIS over Agent DiNozzo’s citizenship.”

“No, sir. Aside from the publicity, that appears to have stalled the HSA.”

“So we aren’t here,” the vice-president gestured at back room of the same small local restaurant, “to handle a dispute between cabinet members.”

“No, sir.”

“I know I’m going to hate myself for this, but what’s this about, Hagel?” The vice-president leaned back in the arm chair.

“I’d prefer to wait for the others.”

“Who all have you invited to this little soiree?”

“Director Comey, Agent Fornell,” a commotion at the door interrupted Hagel, but his relief faded when the vice-president looked at the newcomers and then glared at him. “Secretary Mabus and Director Vance.”

“You said this wasn’t about NCIS,” the vice-president growled.

“Technically, I said it wasn’t about Agent DiNozzo’s citizenship.” Hagel’s statement earned him another glare. The arrival of the others coincided with the arrival of the waitress bringing glasses and
a bottle of bourbon, which he had her leave. Hagel wanted at least one glass, if not two, before the whole story came out.

The vice-president watched the five men exchange pleasantries while he sipped his drink. He had pretty much convinced himself that he did not want to know what could involve the FBI and NCIS. The only downside was his curiosity. His mother had always warned him that it would get him in trouble. “If you gentlemen are done stalling, who wants to tell me what is going on?” There might as well be crickets chirping, he thought. “Spit it out, Hagel.” He ordered, unconsciously echoing his words from only days before.

“Agent Fornell is in possession of evidence that could potentially create a publicity firestorm.”

“Fornell has the evidence?” Tobias nodded. “But you called the meeting.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Gentlemen, and I use the word loosely, I am expected to join my wife at the ballet in,” he looked at his watch, “an hour and a half. Given Hagel’s prefabricating, I’m going to take a wild guess that this is linked to DiNozzo and therefore, God forgive me, Gibbs. I can tell by your expressions, I am correct, so can we cut to the chase?”

Vance glared at Mabus and Hagel. One thing about politics he knew was when one was being used as a sacrificial lamb. He’d been saddled with Gibbs and DiNozzo, wasn’t that enough? “Late this afternoon, Agents Gibbs and DiNozzo were present when Jeanne Benoit and Anthony DiNozzo, Senior were returned to NCIS for questioning in regards to Agent DiNozzo’s citizenship issues. At that time, we were informed that Ms. Benoit is now Mr. DiNozzo’s wife.”

“He married his son’s ex?”

“Out of respect for Agent DiNozzo, it should be noted that his involvement with Ms. Benoit was part of former Director Shepherd’s unsanctioned operations.”

“Why am I waiting for the other shoe to drop?”

“Sir, a situation ensued, during which Agent DiNozzo was struck.” Vance paused as Fornell obligingly produced a paper from his file and handed it to the vice-president.

“Is he always like this?” The vice-president looked up from reading.

“Which one, sir?” Vance’s tone was long-suffering.

“I’m assuming from this meeting that DiNozzo, Senior will be facing charges and there is concern regarding bad publicity?”

“Yes, sir, but that’s not the worst of it. Following the altercation, Agent DiNozzo had a visitor who presented him with some manila envelopes. Upon opening them, I contacted Agent Fornell immediately.” Fornell took out the files but did not hand them to the vice-president. “We felt that in order to avoid any hint of impropriety, to hand the cases over to the FBI.”

“Gibbs was in agreement with this?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Let me get this clear. We’re talking Agent Gibbs who could make a mule look docile. The man who could make a snapping turtle look like a quitter. That Leroy Jethro Gibbs voluntarily gave up a
“Yes, sir.”

“Pour me another drink.” The vice-president took a long sip, wondering why he ever thought running for office was a good idea. He’d long since come to the conclusion that the only reason he was needed was to help oversee Gibbs. If the truth came out, no one sane would accept the job. Again, hating his innate curiosity, he couldn’t help but wonder what would make a man like Gibbs back off.

“In all fairness, Mr. Vice-President,” Tobias interjected. “Gibbs did attach conditions to turning over the cases.”

“Of course he did.” The vice-president looked at his watch and winced. His wife was not going to be pleased. “I assume that the reason that you and Director Comey are here is to discuss these conditions.”

“Only indirectly, sir. Agent Fornell brought the cases to me and I discussed the situation with Director Vance. I spoke with the Attorney General and while he indicated that he concurs with the charges, he felt that we should keep you and the president informed and accede to your guidance.”

“I’ll just bet he did. So, what are the conditions?”

“Gibbs handed the file over to me on the condition that the perpetrators do not get a deal. Both go down hard for their crimes.”

“That doesn’t seem out of line. So if the condition and charges are not the concern, what is?”

“It’s the identities.”

“Who is it?” The vice-president gave in to his impatience. Fornell was stalling at handing over the files for some reason.

“Mrs. Jeanne Benoit DiNozzo and Mr. Anthony DiNozzo, Senior.”

“Pour me another drink.” He motioned one of the secret service men over. “Call my wife and tell her I won’t be able to join her.” His wife was definitely not going to be happy. “Let me see the dammed files.”

Section 25

“Tony, Tony, Tony,” he couldn’t help grinning when he opened Gibb’s door and Abby began bouncing around him chanting his name. “I missed you so much, Tony, Tony, Tony…”

“I missed you, too. Calm down, Abs. I’m here now.”

“He wasn’t even gone for two days; and I was with him.” Tim groused.

“But I talked and texted and emailed you.” Abby explained.

“Ah, Anthony, dear boy, good to see you again.”

“Hey, Ducky.”

“Tony.”
“Palmer, my man.”

“Breena made you a cake.”

“I can smell the chocolate, come to Tony.” Tony cooed to the cake, making Jimmy grin. “And how is my little angel?”

“Uh, could we talk a minute?”

Tony immediately handed the cake off to McGee. “Don’t make me hunt you down, McGee. Gibbs is in the kitchen.” When Ducky helped herd the others into the kitchen, Tony realized the old man knew what Jimmy had to say. “Is Victoria sick?”

“No, no. Breena and I have talking and I wanted…well, we wanted…I know you’re dealing with a lot…right now.”

“Palmer, calm down.”

“Do you need money? Does Victoria need something?”

“Breena and I wanted to know if you would be Victoria Elizabeth’s godfather.” Palmer sounded a bit like Abby.

“Me? Wow.”

“If you don’t want to…”

“Palmer, I want to.” In that minute, Tony realized just how much he wanted to. “I’d be proud to be Victoria Elizabeth’s godfather.”

“Now that is settled,” Gibbs said from the doorway. “Pizzas are getting cold.” He stepped aside as Jimmy scuttled past him he said, “Good choice, Palmer.”

“Yes, sir….I mean, Gibbs.”

“You coming, Tony?”

“Can you believe they want me to be her godfather?” Tony was still stunned as he headed for the kitchen.

“Yes, I can.” Gibbs said sincerely. “Victoria couldn’t have a better one.” Tony flashed him a big smile that stunned Gibbs for a minute. With a mental head slap, he put his hand on Tony’s back and guided him into the kitchen. If his hand lingered a few seconds more than necessary, Gibbs would totally deny it.

Sitting down beside Tony, Gibbs looked around at the family Tony tried to deny. He’d never expected this the first day he’d signed on to NIS. He’d been so sure, he’d never have a family again or marry. As if reading his mine, Abby began to squeal. Gibbs thought his ear drum must have burst and his “Abs, indoor voice” joined Tim’s “Abby, calm down.”

“But look,” Abby squealed again and pointed to where Tony had frozen in place holding the last piece of the double pepperoni, sausage and extra cheese.

“If you want it, it’s yours. Geez, Abs, it’s just pizza.”

“No, the ring.” Abby bounced in her chair. “Tony’s wearing a wedding ring. Gibbs, Gibbs, Gibbs,
you’re wearing a ring, too.”

“Abs, you were at the wedding.” Tim mentioned cautiously.

“But they didn’t have rings.” Abs continued bouncing, ignoring the flush on both Tony’s and Gibbs’ faces. “They have rings. Let me see... Let me see... Let me see.”

Blushing harder, Tony placed the piece of pizza on his plate, wiped his hand and extended it over the center of the table where Abby could get a good look.

“I thought it was just gold, but there’s a pattern engraved.” Abby said in surprise. “I don’t recognize the pattern.”

“The gentleman who made it served with Gibbs’ dad. He spent a weekend pass in Italy and saw the scroll work on an engraving in Palazzo Ducale. He sketched it down and brought it back with him. He made this pair of rings before he passed.”

“That is so cool.” Abby cooed. “They are so you and Gibbs. Solid, not flashy, very traditional but with a bit of flair.”

“Thanks, Abs.” Gibbs and Tony chorused.

After the excitement of the rings died down, by mutual agreement, the group concentrated on demolishing the stack of pizzas and washing it down with beer and sodas. As the eating slowed, the tension rose; everyone either wanted to know what the issue was (Ducky, Jimmy, Abby) or wanted the telling over (Gibbs, Tony, Tim). It was Gibbs who finally broke the silence but in the most unexpected fashion.

“I know most of you were caught by surprise when Tony and I married; so I just wanted to get this out for once, have the rumors stopped and move on.” Gibbs said seriously. “So the answer is yes, Tony is pregnant.”

The next few minutes were filled with a lot of coughing and snorting as they cleaned up the soda, beer and pizza spit around the table. For a moment Palmer simply sat and stared at Gibbs unable to reconcile the agent he knew with the comment. In the aftermath, he leaned towards McGee and whispered, “Did Gibbs just tell a joke?”

McGee snickered, “Either that or Tony’s really pregnant.” Though in retrospect, McGee had to admit the odds for both were really high.

Tony looked at Gibbs in amazement. He looked down at his hand again. It was still a shock to see a wedding ring, but comfortably familiar, too, especially when he caught sight of the mate on Gibbs’ finger. This was definitely not how he expected the evening to go. His stomach had been churning while he and Gibbs had shopped and then got ready for their guests. He’d pictured himself having to give all the sordid details, but Gibbs had saved him again.

Tony watched his boss...colleague...husband as he explained the events of the day with McGee pitching in as needed. He looked around at Palmer, Ducky and Abby as they concentrated on what Gibbs was saying. Tony began to wonder if Gibbs was right. Sure they’d joked about being family but here were all his team supporting him, Tony DiNozzo the screw-up. As if sensing the direction of his thoughts, Gibbs looked his way and gave him a nod. Tony began to think everything might just be okay.

The warm feeling lingered with Tony through the evening. Gradually, the gang drifted away. Palmer and Ducky left first, Palmer anxious to get home to his baby girl and he had given Ducky a ride.
McGee had finally assisted Gibbs in prying Abby off Tony. She had spent the rest of the evening almost glued to his side, determined that nobody would hurt her Tony. After assuring her that he would look after Tony for the twentieth time, Gibbs had taken her arm and virtually evicted her. McGee had offered to follow her home. Tony grinned as he heard Gibbs groan as he locked the front door. “Abby on her way?”

Gibbs leaned against the kitchen doorway. He tried to push away the feeling of rightness that came from seeing Tony in his kitchen. He watched the younger man as he wiped the crumbs and spills off the table. “Yeah, it was close though. I threatened to handcuff her to the steering wheel.”

“And?”

“Did you know she has a handcuff key in a zipper pocket in her cuffs? And no, I don’t want to know why.” Gibbs added as Tony’s smile brightened.

“Want a beer?”

“Sounds good.”

Tony grabbed two beers and handed one off to Gibbs. Together they entered the living room. Foregoing his favorite chair, Gibbs sat down next to Tony on the sofa. “Want to watch the news?”

“No tonight.” Gibbs leaned back into the cushions his thumb worried the label on his beer. “Hell of a day. How are you handling it?”

Tony shrugged. “I think I win the award for evil stepmothers. I half expected her to offer me a poisoned apple.”

This was one movie reference that thanks to Kelly, Gibbs did get. “Who am I then? Grumpy?”

“You got it. Finally, you got one. Wait a minute, I give you hundreds of action movie references and you pick up on Snow White? You’re ruining my macho image of you.” Tony proclaimed.

“Comes with having a daughter. And don’t even start with the Cinderella lines. You would never fit a glass slipper.”

“Told you I make a nice-looking woman.”

“Still not Cinderella.”

“Point.”

“So, you okay with Benoit?”

“Don’t you mean Mrs. DiNozzo? Yeah, just can’t help wondering,” Tony turned slightly towards Gibbs. “If Jenny hadn’t put that whole operation in motion, would she have turned into this?”

“Rule eleven.”

“I did, Gibbs. I walked away when the operation was over. Did I cause this?”

“Tony,” Gibbs grabbed his arm, which forced him to slide towards the other man. “You did not cause this. You were an agent with a job. The decisions that Benoit has made since then are on her, not you. Just like Senior’s decisions are his own,” Gibbs added deliberately.

“What he did. God, Gibbs, what kind of monster is he? Did you see that innocent baby girl? What
kind of monster am I?”

Gibbs took Tony’s beer and put them both on the coffee table. He pulled the younger man into his arms as Tony’s body shook with shock and tears. “You are not a monster, Tony. Shhh. It’s okay. Everything will be okay.” Gibbs rubbed Tony’s back soothingly while repeating his words over and over. Seconds turned to minutes then to hours as Tony drifted off. Gibbs held him, unable to sleep himself; he kept thinking about the test Abby was running. For once, he wasn’t sure he wanted to know the results.
Geminiangel looked up in confusion and some fear. The entire cabal seemed to be entering her parlor. Wolfnjag had made her take down all of her world domination plans so they couldn’t be here about them. Maybe they found the knives that RoyalElephant gave her. By the looks on their faces there was something. She looked at the window and tried to judge if she could make it in time. Nope! “Hi. How is everyone?” “Alright, missy.” Jesco0307 said sternly. “Come out from behind that laptop.” “I’m working on the next chapter. Well, see you later.” “Now.” Wolfnjag ordered. Reluctantly Geminiangel paused her game and shut the laptop. “Is there something wrong?” “Is there something wrong?” Wolfnjag took a deep breath trying to calm down. “Geminiangel,” Jesco0307 said calmly, “Do you know why there is a burnt area in the kitchen floor?” “Uh-huh.” ”Would you tell me?” “Well, BunnyBear27 suggested s’mores; so we took a bunch of Senior’s clothes and made a bonfire to toast marshmallows.” Wolfnjag gritted her teeth. “Why didn’t you do it outside?” Geminiangel was shocked. “It’s cold out.” "For the love of..." Jesco0307 patted Wolfnjag. “I’ll handle her. Why don’t you sit down?” Turning to the group, she asked Mandarin Duck, “Would you get her an icebag and a bourbon?” Turning back to the idiot...uh, writer, she said, “Do you know why a lawyer gave this to paper to ArianaFeileacan?” “What is it?” “It’s a restraining order. Do you know why she got it?” “Uh-huh.” “I’ll give her a restraining order. See if she gets anymore chocolate.” Geminiangel starts to cry, “She doesn’t like me anymore.” “She’s upset about the restraining order. She didn’t mean it about the chocolate.” Jesco0307 glares at ArianaFeileacan. “Why did you take out a restraining order?” Assured chocolate was still coming, the tears dried instantly. “I was researching. See, I was talking to Elaine who wanted consummation and I didn’t want Gibbs and Tony to break up because I like them.” “Why were you researching?” Jesco0307 felt like she was trapped in an old Abbott and Costello routine. “Well, while I was talking to Elaine,” Geminiangel pouted. “She hit me. Meanie. “I didn’t hit you. I give you a Gibbs slap because you were being an idiot. Like now!” “So, you filed over the Gibbs slap.” “No. I went to do research.” Yep, Jesco0307 thought, it’s like trying herd cats. “Let me try.” Bane_Huntress stepped up. “Look, I brought you another Hobnob. Why don’t you tell me what you found out and then you can have a nice biscuit?” “Oh. Don’t_hate_me01 said wet wipes are really good to use when cleaning up soda from your laptop.”
“I mean, what did you find out about the Gibbs slaps in your research?”
“Lots. I was worried because Gibbs hits Tony a lot and it hurts so I wanted to see if he needed to see a doctor.”
“Does he need a doctor?”
“I don’t know. When I was researching it said concussions were bad and could hurt the brain and I went to look at causes to see if Gibbs was causing concussions and then it showed a page where someone had been hit and was really hurt and it said if someone you love hits you and hurts you that you should call the number and I did.”
Geminiangel said in one long ramble. “Can I have the hobnob now?”
Bane_Huntress handed it over absently while trying to make sense of Geminiangel’s answer. Finally, she looked at ArianaFeileacan with a shrug. Technically, it was true.
“Geminiangel, if the restraining order is kept, than ArianaFeileacan won’t be able to come see you.”
“No.”
Geminiangel could move fast when the occasion was warranted.
“ArianaFeileacan is my friend. She and I like marshmallows and chocolate and Tony and chocolate and Gibbs…”
“We get the idea.”
Geminiangel quickly grabbed a pen and signed. “You’ll still come see me won’t you?”
ArianaFeileacan wanted to stay mad but it was like being angry at a cat for staring at a sunbeam. “I’ll come see you.”
“And bring chocolate?”
“And bring chocolate.”
“Let’s go play with the BB gun.”
Geminiangel started to leave the room when Panchajaviera grabbed her arm. “Not so fast, missy. You come right back and sit in your chair. We’re going to have a talk about your research methods. Didn’t we tell you that you shouldn’t do research when you’re alone?”
Elaine took the other arm. “And that you shouldn’t just pick the last entry in the dictionary?”
“Or the first,” said Callasandra.
“That doesn’t sound like much fun.”
“And then you can work on Tony and Gibbs consummating,” Elaine said as she and the others smiled happily.

Section 26

The beeping wasn’t his alarm clock but Gibbs couldn’t place it. He felt like his eyes would have to be pried open. Against his chest he felt movement so he forced his eyes open. At first he saw only dark hair but then he found himself staring into Tony’s eyes. In the early morning light Tony’s hazel eyes looked green and Gibbs couldn’t help but stare into them. The beeping noise came again and Tony pushed himself up further, flushing slightly at the intimate position they had been in.

“Cell phone.” Tony muttered, patting his pockets. Just then the noise stopped. “What time is it?” He slurred, his voice still thick from sleep.

Gibbs peered at his watch. “Quarter to five. Need to get ready for work.” Sitting up straight, Gibbs couldn’t hold back a groan as the muscles in his back pulled.
“I’m sorry…”

Gibbs put his finger against Tony’s lips, stopping him. “There’s nothing to be sorry for. Yesterday was a hell of a day. You needed someone.”

“That doesn’t excuse me for crying all over you like a little girl.”

“Tony,” Gibbs took hold of Tony’s chin preventing him from turning away. “You have no cause to be ashamed. You are a good man, whose life just got ripped apart. I’m glad I was here for you last night. I’m here for you today and I will be here for you every day.”

“Jethro,” Tony whispered as he looked into Gibbs’ eyes. The two men swayed towards one another as Gibbs’ hand moved to cup his face.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Gibbs swore as he and Tony jerked apart. “Leroy, open this door.” The voice called before beating on the door again. Gibbs got to his feet, headed to the door and opened it just as the pounding was about to start again. “About time. I called that number you gave me and no one answered. What’s the good of having a phone if you’re not going to answer it?”

“Dad…”

“And when’d you start locking the door?”

“Dad…”

“Well, are you gonna move and let me in or just stand there all day with your mouth open?” Over Gibbs’ shoulder, Jackson spotted Tony in the doorway of the living room. “Well, don’t just stand there come over and give your father-in-law a hug.”

Before Tony could get his wits about him, Jackson had brushed past Gibbs and stepped up to Tony wrapping him in a hug. Casual affection had never been a part of Tony’s life, so he stiffly put his arms about the older man who only pulled him closer. “Don’t worry, son. You’ve got Leroy and me. We’re your family now.” Stepping back one step, Jackson looked at his son again. “Don’t just stand there, Leroy, bring my bag in and shut the door. Swear you were born in a barn.”

“Dad, what are you doing here?”

“I called the office yesterday, but you were already gone. I tried that cell phone number, don’t know why you bother giving it out; you never answer it. Kept trying the office leaving messages and finally around midnight, talked to that Leon fellow, who told me what was going on. I called Maxwell, packed a few things and here I am. Now how about some breakfast? Hope you have real food and not those cardboard waffles you had last time.”

“You talked to Vance?” Gibbs asked as he and Tony followed Jackson into the kitchen.

“That the Leon fella?” Tony nodded at Jackson. “Guess I did. I’d watch him, son. Way he was slurring his words, I thing he might have a drinking problem. Could hear others in the background. Probably at a bar when he called.”

“Dad, you didn’t need to drive down here.”

“Course I did. Tony is going to need all the support he can get. Family support each other. Now, how about bacon and eggs?”

“Mr. Gibbs…”
“It’s dad or Jackson, your choice.”

“You don’t need to cook breakfast…Jackson. We can pick something up on the way to the office.”

“Nonsense. Now, you boys go upstairs and get ready. I’ll have the food ready when you get back.” Jackson pulled the coffee maker out and checked it out to see if it was ready to go. Looking back over his shoulder at the two men watching him, he said, “Go on, scoot. Oh, and Leroy, take my bag up to the guestroom.”

“Je…Gibbs…” Tony said quietly while he waited on the landing for Gibbs to put Jackson’s bag in his room.

“It’s Jethro, Tony. I’m only Gibbs at work.”

“About what happened downstairs.”

“You mean what didn’t happen.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean…”

“Well, I did.”

Tony was frozen in place as Gibbs leaned towards him. His brain kept screaming, “Oh, shit! I’m going to kiss Gibbs!” over and over and trying to encourage him to move but somewhere another little voice was whispering, “I’m going to kiss Gibbs” happily. Then he had no thoughts. Gibbs’ lips were warm and firm as they pressed against his. The little voice urged him to move closer and he was unable to disobey. As Tony leaned in to the kiss, he felt one of Gibbs’ hands move to cup the back of his head, toying with his hair. Tony couldn’t suppress a small whimper, which gave Gibbs the chance to run his tongue teasingly along his lower lip.

“I’ll shower first so I can run interference with Dad.” Gibbs straightened with smug smirk catching the slightly dazed look in Tony’s eyes.

Section 27

“Well, don’t just stand there. Make yourself useful. Throw some bread in the toaster.”

As ordered, Gibbs crossed the room and grabbed the bread. Opening it he started the toast and then crossed over to retrieve butter and jelly. “So what really brought you to town?”

“Told you. Tony’s going to need support.”

“You don’t even know Tony that well.”

“But you do.” Jackson turned the bacon. “I could tell when I met him, he was different. Told myself you’d adopted a son, but I think we both know better.”

“There was never anything like that between Tony and I.”

“Past tense.”

“Ah, hell.” Gibbs pulled his fingers back quickly from the hot toast.

“Going to deny it, Jethro?”

“There’s nothing to deny.”
“Maybe not yet,” Jackson passed him a fork to pry the toast out of the toaster. “If you’re expecting me to give you a lecture or throw a fuss, don’t. I’ve lived long enough to know love comes in many styles. If Tony makes you happy, it is what it is. You love who you love.”

“I’m not in love with Tony.”

“Maybe not, But can you say you don’t love him?” Jackson nodded in triumph. “Love has to start somewhere. Maybe this marriage will be good for you both in the long run.”

“It’s just until we get his citizenship straightened out.”

“You tell yourself that. Now, what time do we have to be at the office?”

“We?” Gibbs looked at his father.

“Well, I can’t help Tony if I’m not with him, can I?”

“Dad you’re not coming to the office.”

“Jackson’s coming to the office?” Tony entered dressed but with his hair only partially dried.

“Yes.” Jackson said at the same time Gibbs said, “No.”

“Okay. What can I do to help?”

“Set the table and see if there’s any juice in there.” Jackson pointed to the refrigerator. Gibbs glared at him from where he was still buttering toast. "And get Mr. Grumpy a cup of coffee. Tired of him running around with a scowl on his face.”

Tony set the orange juice he and Gibbs had bought the night before on the table; and hadn’t that been interesting. He’d never shopped with a significant other before or someone like Gibbs who seemed to take the trip as a military maneuver. Storm the beaches, grab the hostages and get out. Crossing to the sink, he reached up into the cabinet retrieving a large coffee mug and a bottle. Tapping out two Aspirin™, he filled the mug and carried both over to Gibbs. who immediately tossed back the pills and followed them with the hot coffee before giving Tony a gruff thanks.

Tony turned away with a smirk. It never failed. Talking to Jackson always gave Gibbs a headache. Personally, he thought it was how alike they were, not that either man would ever admit it. Still, he’d take Gibbs’ father over his own any time. For a moment the picture of Senior and that little girl came to mind and he fought to push it away.

“It’s okay, son.” Tony felt Jackson’s hand on his shoulder. “He can be a real bastard before he has coffee. Well, actually he can be a real bastard even with coffee.”

“Kate and I learned that quickly. Gibbs with two B’s, second one for bastard.” Tony laughed.

“He make you follow all those rules of his?”

By the time Tony had the table set and Gibbs had a stack of buttered toast, Jackson and Tony were bonding over Gibbs-isms. Which Gibbs declared flatly was not a real word. Jackson was serving up his son along with bacon and eggs. If he didn’t find a way to turn him off, Gibbs would never be able to put the fear of Gibbs back into Tony. The only good think had been the way Jackson had covertly interrogated Tony.

One story in particular made Gibbs’ head ache harder and he wished for a few minutes in
interrogation; no cameras, just him and Senior. Unable to reach the cause of his headache, he sipped his coffee while Jackson pried out the story of Tony’s first pet. A friend had given Tony a young dog when the boy’s sister developed an allergy. Senior had pitched a fit over the mongrel. After the dog “fell” down the stairs and had a close accident with the limo, Tony had snuck the dog out passing it off to another friend. He’d never had another pet except for his goldfish, Kate.

Glancing across the table, Gibbs looked into his father’s eyes and saw the same rage echoed there. He knew his father wouldn’t hesitate to take a swing at Senior if he got the chance. While Gibbs ate, he avoided the elephant in the room. He was not taking Jackson to headquarters. However, as the meal wore on, he couldn’t avoid the tentative relationship the other two were building. Sighing, he drank the last of his coffee. Ah, hell, he finally capitulated, “In the car in five.”

On the way to work, Tony chattered away pointing out crime scenes and other sights. As they neared the shipyard, though, he became quieter; his jovial mood, forced. Tony’s left leg bounced nervously until Gibbs placed a hand on his knee, giving it a squeeze. In the mirror, Gibbs meet Jackson’s eye and dared his father to make a comment.

It was Gibbs who took the lead with security getting his father a badge and clearing him as a visitor. Finally they were in the elevator ready to enter the bullpen. It was early enough that the only person in the area was McGee.

“Morning, Boss. Morning, Tony. Morning, Mr… Mr. Gibbs. nice to see you again.” McGee covered his surprise quickly. “Boss, Vance was looking for you.”

“Vance?” Gibbs looked at his watch. Vance was never in this early.

“Said he wanted to see you…” McGee started.

“…to see you the moment you got in.” Vance finished.

“Leon. I believe you know my father.”

“I believe I spoke with you last evening. In town for a visit?”

“Came to spend some time with my new son-in-law. Never expected Jethro to marry again, hated to miss the wedding, but I hope someone took pictures.”

“Oh, yes, sir.” McGee spoke up. “I believe that Abby has some she took on her phone.”

Gibbs had been watching Vance closely during the conversation. “Why don’t you and Tony take Dad down to Abby’s lab and she what she has? I’ll catch up with you in a bit.” The trio filed out noisily and Gibbs watched the twitch of Vance’s eyes.

“Okay there, Leon? See you’re still in yesterday’s suit.” Vance winced. Gibbs smirked and pulled out his left-hand drawer. “Aspirin™,” he offered. Taking the bottle, Vance tipped out some and swallowed them dry. “You have a little party last night?”

“I hate you.” Vance said dryly. “Because of you and DiNozzo, I had the dubious pleasure of spending the evening out until about…” he looked at his watch, “an hour ago with SecNav, Director Comey, Agent Fornell, Secretary Hagel and the vice-president.”

“No deals.” Gibbs said firmly. “I will not allow Senior to get away after what’s he’s done.”

“Fortunately, the vice-president is of the same mind.” Vance rolled his shoulders trying to ease the stiffness. “Fornell provided him with a copy of the evidence. After several rounds to wash the
situation away, the VP agreed that it is in the best interest of all concerned that we in no way try to whitewash the situation. Senior and Beniot will be fully prosecuted.”

“Good.”

“You and your team are expected in MTAC at 8:45 am.”

“What’s this about?”

Vance managed a smirk of his own. “Fornell collected the suspects a little while ago, it is my understanding that they were confrontational and slightly disheveled from their night in interrogation. He took them for processing and immediately following, they are being arraigned this morning in federal court. Thought your team might enjoy the perp walk.”

Section 28

“Looking a bit rough this morning, Leon.”

Vance looked up from the paper in his hands to see SecNav looking disgustingly bright-eyed. Giving the folder to his secretary, he walked to join him. “And you look, disgustingly well, even after last night…”

“Aspirin™, Visine™ and Red Bull™, a fresh suit and tie. I always make sure that I keep my office stocked. With jobs like ours, it comes in handy.”

“I didn’t expect to see you. I was just ready to head to MTAC.”

“I figured I would join you this morning.”

Vance realized SecNav wanted to be observe Gibbs’ and DiNozzo’s reactions. With a nod he led the way. As they approached the door, Leon cringed internally as they met Ms. Scuito who had not seen them as she was talking a mile a minute to Agent McGee, who had just spotted them.

“Popcorn? Do you really find that appropriate, Miss Scuito?” Abby held a large bag of popcorn and a large Caf-Pow.

“Secretary Mabus. Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir. I mean, I was just holding it for McGee, sir.” Thrusting the popcorn at Director Vance, she pushed it into his stomach and his arms automatically grabbed, to keep it from falling. “Bad, McGee.”

Vance simply closed his eyes and shook his head at her antics. “This is going to be hard on Agent DiNozzo. I hope that we remember that we are here to support him in this difficult time.”

“Yes, director.” Abby grabbed McGee by his tie and pulled him into MTAC.

“Ah, Director Vance, Secretary Mabus, how good to see you here. Come to offer support to dear Anthony?”

“Dr. Mallard, it’s good to see you again.”

“Have you met my assistant, Mr. Palmer?”

“Mr. Palmer.”

“Secretary Mabus, Director Vance.” Palmer said nervously.
“Have you seen Gibbs?” Vance asked Ducky.

“Why ... you avoiding me, Leon?” Gibbs was right behind Vance, followed by DiNozzo and Jackson. “I believe you remember my dad.”

“Mr. Gibbs, good to see you again. Secretary Mabus, this is Mr. Jackson Gibbs, Agent Gibbs’ father.”

“Please to meet you, Mr. Gibbs.” Mabus extended his hand. “Agent Gibbs is one of our finest agents.”

Jackson eyed his hand suspiciously and then looked at Vance. “I’m also Agent DiNozzo’s father-in-law.”

Jackson’s declaration gave Tony a warm feeling inside. Looking towards Gibbs, their eyes met. From the look, Tony knew Gibbs was holding back a grin while looking on with pride.

“Of course. Secretary Mabus is well aware of that.” Vance said, trying to ease the situation.

“Agent DiNozzo is also a very fine agent. NCIS is lucky to have them.” Secretary Mabus drew his hand back.

“Hmph. Well, come on, Tony. Let’s see this fancy theatre of yours.” With a wink, Jackson urged Tony ahead of him, entering the room.

“Theatre?” Secretary Mabus mouthed at Vance.

“Am I late?” Fornell hurried up.

“Shows about to start.” Gibbs paused next to Vance. “I know you and Tony haven’t always been on the best terms, Leon, but popcorn, really? Couldn’t you show a little respect?” Rolling his eyes, Vance shoved the popcorn into Gibbs’ hand and led SecNav in. Gibbs grinned at Fornell and offered him the popcorn bag.

“Vance brought popcorn?” Fornell was puzzled until Gibbs turned the bag around and he saw the skull and crossbones in black marker. He snorted and followed Gibbs into MTAC.

As Gibbs passed Abby’s aisle he handed her the popcorn and received a bright smile in return. As he sat down next to his father, Tony leaned across from the other side of Jackson to whisper, “You didn’t save me any popcorn?” Gibbs’ hand itched and Tony sat back in his own chair smugly. Whap! Tony turned around to McGee who simply pointed at Gibbs who leaned forward in his seat and smirked.

“Gentlemen…and ladies, we will of course be running ZNN but we have been informed that one of the mainstream news networks happened to be broadcasting live from near the courthouse. We’ll be watching that on the main screen,” Vance announced as he and SecNav headed for seats next to Tony. “Please turn up the sound,” Vance ordered the technician.

The iconic reporter was returning from a commercial break. “For those of you just joining us. We are stationed across from the court house awaiting the beginning of day one of the trial of former Senator Hunter Bane on racketeering charges. We have been informed that there has been a slight delay this morning and the judge has now scheduled the opening for 1:00 pm today. But…Bombshell, ladies and gentleman, sources tell me that the trial was delayed while security was being increased. As you can see, the area has an increased police presence in the last half hour.”
“Let’s bring in my guest, former prosecutor Elaine Feildawn.”

Gibbs leaned forward to look at Vance. “How’d you get her to agree?”

“The vice-president asked and didn’t tell her you were involved.” SecNav spoke up. “She still isn’t happy with you.”

“So Ms. Feildawn, is this amount of security normal for this type of trial?”

“Actually, no. We don’t typically see this type of security unless there are major concerns regarding either threats against the court or the defendant is a major higher profile.”

“Being a senator isn’t high profile?”

“Not in this case. We would be more likely to see this type of security for cases like the Unabomber or the Boston bomber trial. I’m very surprised at the amount of security we are seeing today.”

“Just a minute,” the anchor placed a hand to her ear cupping the receiver there, “Friends, I’m being told that an unnamed source is confirming this increased security is not related to Senator Bane’s trial and that security has actually been tripled. Yes, tripled.” Posing dramatically, the anchor again cupped her receiver; nodding intermittently. “Listeners, it appears that we just happen to be in the right place at the right time.”

Tony snorted. If this were any more choreographed, there would be a guy on screen with cue cards. Jackson and Gibbs exchanged worried looks.

“Welcome back. Bomb shell, today, we are here in Washington, DC across from the courthouse which we have just learned has had security tripled. Yes, friends, I said tripled and this is according to an unnamed source. During the break, our producer has been trying to track down more information. We are now being told that the security is in preparation for an arraignment that will be held here this morning. Let’s go back to my guest, former prosecutor Elaine Feildawn. Would I be right in saying that this amount of security is extremely unusual for an arraignment?” With a smile a shark would envy, she turned to her guest.

“I’m admit to being shocked that these arrangements are only for an arraignment.”

“What type of perpetrator would rate this type of security?”

“To be honest,” Elaine Feildawn smiled at the camera, presenting a very professional demeanor. If Gibbs hadn’t known her, hence one of Gibbs’ rules, he would almost believe she was telling the truth. “I’m shocked with the amount of security. I don’t know if I’ve ever seen this much here.”

“There you have it, friends. We are across from the courthouse and we will keep you apprised of this breaking story. While we are waiting for an update, we will take a commercial break.” The anchor smiled at the viewers.

Getting to his feet, Tony moved to the aisle. Gibbs stood putting his hand on his arm. “You okay?”

“Just antsy.” Tony rolled his shoulders and felt a hand on his other arm.

“You need something?”

Tony felt warm at the genuine caring in Jackson’s eyes. “The waiting, you know.” Abby pushed past Gibbs and stood looking up at him. Silently, she offered him the popcorn bag and he took a piece popping it in his mouth. Even though it tasted like cardboard to him, he offered her a smile.
“Thanks, Abs.”

“Gibbs.” Fornell held up his cell. “Cars are about ten minutes out.”

Gibbs nodded. “If you want to leave, we can walk right now.” His hand moved to Tony’s back giving it a discrete rub.

“No.” Taking a deep breath, Tony shook his head. “No, I need to see this through.” Leaning forward he dropped a kiss on top of Abby’s head. Turning, he headed back to his seat but now found himself sitting between Gibbs and Jackson. It was nice to feel so surrounded by people who cared, he thought letting his arm press against Gibbs’ on the armrest.

“Here, Tony.” McGee stuck his arm through between Jackson and Tony. “Thought you might need this.”

Tony took the hot cup, smelling the coffee. “Thanks.” McGee simply patted his back and sat back down next to Abby who snuggled against him.

Gibbs tried not to glare. Would it have hurt McGee to bring two cups? Then he felt the cup touch his hand. “Here,” Tony whispered. “I hate to hurt his feelings but I don’t think I could drink anything right now.”

“And we’re back. Bomb shell! Listeners we are hearing from an unnamed source within the FBI that the security is indeed for an arraignment. According to our source, there are two persons who will be formally arraigned this morning. Our producer is attempting to find information on the defendants but we have been told that the one will be charged under the RICO and Mann Acts. Let’s go to my guest, former prosecutor Elaine Feildawn. For our friends out there, can you give us some insight as to the RICO and Mann Acts?”

“I’d be happy to. The RICO Act is the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. It has been useful in prosecuting crime syndicates by enabling the prosecution of the organizing heads who give the orders for murders or other illegal activities. The Mann Act was established in 1910. Essentially, it made the transport of a woman or girl across state lines for immoral purposes illegal. The original intent was aimed at prostitution. However, I doubt very much that we are talking about prostitution given the amount of security. It has been amended and now is more focused on prostitution or illegal sexual acts, but even then…” Elaine stopped.

Drawn in, the anchor leaned forward. “Please continue.”

“I shouldn’t speculate. Since I really don’t know for certain.”

“Our listeners understand but as a former prosecutor surely you might have some ideas?” The anchor was anxious for any salacious details.

“I’ve tried people under the Mann Act, which included human trafficking and I can tell you that they were horrendous. But, given this level, I’d have to guess that we have to be talking about acts that are especially heinous or depraved.”

“So I would guess that we wouldn’t be talking about simple rape or abuse for them to be described as ‘heinous and depraved’? Just a minute friends, I am getting an update form the producer.” The anchor couldn’t quite hide the spark in her eyes at the scoop she was getting. “Bomb shell, friends. I’ve just been told that a car is enroute and should arrive shortly. Our source has indicated that the defendant is a foreign citizen from France. She was a former resident of the United States, studying medicine. We have to take a short break. Stay tuned, friends, as we follow this breaking story.”
“Fornell, who’s the informant?” Tony looked down the row of chairs. “Director Comey’s secretary, but he’s overseeing the flow.”

“Friends, there is a caravan arriving. We are now being told that the defendant is one Jeanne Benoit from Lourdes, France. She is reportedly now married into a family from Long Island, New York, the DiNozzos. The DiNozzos are a prominent and influential family. Her husband is said to be none other than the current head of the family, Anthony DiNozzo, Senior. Yes,” the anchor turned her head to draw attention to the earpiece receiver. “I’m being told that Mr. DiNozzo’s son is a federal agent with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service in Quantico. Agent DiNozzo was recently in the papers following his marriage to fellow agent, Agent Jethro Gibbs.”

The picture abruptly shifted to a black sedan parked directly in front of the courthouse. Amazingly, there were no blocks or impediments to the camera view. The team watched as Jeanne was pulled from the car.

“Friends, you are watching the arrival of Jeanne Benoit DiNozzo. We are being told that Mrs. DiNozzo is being charged with arms trafficking, conspiracy and terrorism.”

The camera zoomed in on Jeanne’s face. Tony cringed. She would be mortified when she saw the pictures. Orange was not her color. Pulling away from the agents she stood defiantly and mounted the steps on her own.

“You doing okay?” Gibbs leaned towards him.

“Yeah.”

“Friends, we are watching the arrival of Jeanne Benoit DiNozzo here at the federal courthouse to be arraigned on charges of arms trafficking, conspiracy and terrorism. That is Mrs. DiNozzo entering the building.” The anchor was nearly bouncing at the scoop. “We apologize for the information we gave earlier, Mrs. DiNozzo is not be charged under RICO or … Wait, wait. Bomb shell!” She almost squealed. “We are being told that another car is just arriving carrying no other than her husband, Anthony DiNozzo, Senior. Yes, there’s the car approaching now.”

Tony took a deep breath and swallowed hard. Inside he knew this was the right thing to happen, but he still had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. A warm hand slid into his. He turned to his left and Jackson was watching him with concern. He squeezed Tony’s hand and gave him a sad smile. On his other side Tony could feel Gibbs moving and felt his hand on his lower arm.

“We can leave. No one would think any less of you.” Gibbs whispered, but Tony simply shook his head.

“Friends, the car has stopped and we are awaiting our first look at Mr. Anthony DiNozzo, Senior who is be arraigned today with charges under the RICO and Mann Acts. Our source is now telling us that Mr. DiNozzo is accused of drug trafficking, human trafficking, organ trafficking and a host of other criminal activities. The evidence is not being released at this time, as there are many states involved.

While the anchor droned, Tony watched his usually meticulously attired father emerge from the sedan, dressed in an orange jumpsuit. Tony did not think he had ever seen his father look so untidy. As his father was forced up the steps, Tony could see him fighting the agents and could tell he was yelling at them. As the door closed behind him, Tony felt cold inside.

“Friends, that was Anthony DiNozzo, Senior, New York icon, entering the courthouse. His arrest was in conjunction with a long-term investigation. We are being told that Agent DiNozzo, his son,
was involved in the gathering of evidence.” The anchor nearly crooned, “How terrible to have to turn your own father in. Agent DiNozzo should be commended for his dedication to justice and his moral character. Our sympathies go out to him in this trying time. God bless you, Agent DiNozzo. We will have more on this breaking story later in our broadcast.”

Tony rose from his seat and turned to the aisle. His only focus was getting out of there, going somewhere safe. Gibbs mouthed “home” and gestured to McGee who cut him off. “Here, Tony. Let’s get you out of here.” With Jackson’s help they guided him out.

“Director, I’m taking…”

“Just go. Your team is off for a week.” Leon said.

“Thanks, Leon.”

“Gibbs.”

“He’ll be okay, Abby. I’m going to take him home.”

“I know you’ll take care of him.” Abby chewed nervously on her lip. “The test you wanted. It finished this morning.”

“And?” Gibbs prodded her along.

“It’s negative, Gibbs. Senior isn’t Tony’s dad.”
Chapter 11 Section 29

Chapter Summary

CH 11 Author notes
“Are you sure ArianaFeileacan said to meet here?” Geminigangel didn’t like the place at all.
Callasandra patted her shoulder encouragingly. “She said it would make up for the kitchen floor that we burnt.”
“I didn’t know she and wolfnjag had actually put new floor down.” Geminigangel pouted.
“The lack of a hole didn’t give you a clue?” Mandarinduck asked. Yep, there was that innocent look again. Right on cue. She hurried up walking, the last time that Geminigangel gave her that look; Mandarinduck had ended up in a whipped cream fight. Wolfnjag had made them clean the library all night including wiping it off the book pages, maps, ceiling.
Royalelephant took position behind Geminigangel. The cabal had decided they had to stage an intervention. If Geminigangel took off running, she didn’t want to have to chase her all over the parking lot and building.
Geminigangel sniffed sadly. “I only wanted to go get a triple hot fudge and hot caramel sundae with wet pecans and whipped cream.” She peered over her shoulder with wide open eyes, “We could run and get them and come right back. Please, royalelephant.” Stay strong,” usatraveler whispered. “It’s for her own good.”

Chapter Notes

Geminigangel tries to turn around. “I’m supposed to see BellaHickenbottom tonight” “Watch her, she’s tricky.” Royalelephant said.
MandarainDuck and Callasandra each tucked one of her arms in theirs preventing her from turning.
“Oh, I know this,” Geminigangel smiled. “Bow to the corner, bow to your partner, swing your partner and do-si-do. Then link your partner and promenade the door…” It almost worked. “Uh, hi, Arianafeileacan!”
“Geminigangel, where do you think you were going?”
“Uh, we were square dancing.”
“Elaine, Jesco0307, carbo21 and panchajaviera are waiting to see you.”
“Panchajaviera is here?” “The entire cabal is here.” Arianafeileacan looked puzzled at the look of fear on Geminigangel’s face. “What’s wrong?”
“I might have…accidently… spilled a couple of bowls of popcorn and soda on Panchajaviera.” Geminigangel whimpered. “She wanted popcorn. I made a big bowl with butter but I didn’t see the ottoman.”
“That’s only one bowl.” Royalelephant said.
“Well, I felt bad so I made another big bowl and got her a big soda.”
“What happened?”
“She moved the ottoman.”
Usatraveler snickered.
“We could make s’mores. I’ll just go get some of Senior’s clothing.”
“Oh, no you don’t, missy.” Arianafeileacan grabbed her. “We’re going in that room
over there and you are coming with us, now.” Arianafeileacan had MandarinDuck and Callasandra take ahold of Geminiguel’s arms again with royalelephant and usatraveler in flanking positions.

“There you are,” Bane_Huntress appeared in the door. “I thought you weren’t coming.” As Geminiguel was manhandled, er… escorted in, she asked Callasandra, “Any problems?” Callasandra rolled her eyes.

Jesco0307 came and took Geminiguel’s hand. “We have some new friends come meet them. “This is psyche53, carbo21, Elliandra, Patriciasita and sailor_silvymoon.” Geminiguel waved shyly.

“She doesn’t have a shy bone in her body. I’ll bet you five, she tries to get one of them to make s’mores here.”

Wolfnjag simply glared at LeiLadleLei. “I never take a sucker bet.” She lowered her voice. “While we’re here, BellaHickenbotto offered to take BunnyBear27 and magpie1600 to the house and get rid of the rest of Senior’s clothes, the lighter and the chocolate and hobnobs she hid.”

LeiLadleLei laughed. “It wouldn’t be so bad if she remembered where she hid them. But, hey, even a blind squirrel finds an acorn now and then.”

“And if you’re really good and pay attention, we’ll all go out for ice cream afterwards.”

Geminiguel narrowed her eyes. She didn’t like being in a classroom. But…she did like brownies; so she allowed them to lead her to the front. The minute she was seated, Geminiguel started to panic. Someone had superglued the desk chair. “I don’t like this.” She wiggled. “I want to go home.”

“Too much plot, not enough passion.” Elaine called.

“Alright, we’re going to watch the movie. “Brihahastruggle for the right words.

“Enough talking…more movie.” ArianaFeileacan hollered. Don’t_hate_me01 glared at the cabal as they catcalled. “This is to help Geminiguel not for your amusement.”

Bane_Huntress made her way to a projector in the room. “Now, Geminiguel, we want you to watch carefully and take lots of notes.”

Geminiguel watched suspiciously as the movie started; The Cops Get Foxy. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad. There was a dark-haired guy dressed as a cop. Maybe they were giving her the idea for a case. Foxy must be the name of the crook. Oh, there was an older cop with a bit of silver in his hair. As she watched he pushed the younger man into the locker room and up against the wall. Geminiguel looked at the two men suspiciously. They looked a lot like the Tony and Gibbs.

Rip! There went the young cop’s shirt. Geminiguel looked around; perhaps the older man was going to fire the young cop? She looked back to see the older man close his teeth around the younger man’s….
Section 29

“He asleep?”

“Pretending.” Upon arriving home, Tony had decided to lay down pleading tiredness. Gibbs had followed him up on the pretext of changing clothes. At his urging, Tony shed his suit for a pair of sweats with an old Ohio State T-shirt. If anyone asked, he would deny watching his senior field agent lean over in his blue silk boxers to pick up his socks off the floor. Tony laid down on their bed facing the window while Gibbs finished changing. Uninterested in talking, he feigned sleep.

“A lot to take in. Even if he is evil as the devil himself, he’s still the boy’s father.” Gibbs looked away. “Leroy?” Jackson asked inquisitively.

“I’m going to put on a pot of coffee.”

“Leroy?”

Gibbs braced himself, both hands gripping the sink edge.

“I saw that Abby stopped you when we were leaving.”

“Dammit, dad, let it go.”

Jackson put his hand on his arm. “I care about that boy. Today was rough on him, if there’s more to come…”

Gibbs let out a sigh. “You know I told you about Senior hitting Tony? During the altercation, Senior said Tony was not his son and that he shouldn’t have allowed his mother to bring him home from Italy. Something about the way he said it…”

“Your gut?”

Gibbs nodded. “I told McGee to have Abby run the DNA.”

“And…” Jackson prodded.

“Senior isn’t Tony’s father.” Gibbs hit the edge of the sink with his fist. “How do I tell him? After all he’s been through this week, what’s he going to say?”

“Thank you?” The Gibbs men turned to see Tony standing in the doorway. “I…uh…couldn’t sleep.”

“Tony, I…” Gibbs hated Tony finding out the news this way.

“No.” Tony padded forward in his stocking feet. “I may get upset later that you went behind my back but… I’ve been laying upstairs and every time I shut my eyes, I see that little girl and what he did to her. I couldn’t… I just kept thinking about carrying his blood in my veins and what kind of a monster I could turn in to…”

“You’re aren’t going to turn in to a monster, son. You’re a good man; there’s no evil in your heart. Even if there were, you think Leroy would let you go bad?” Jackson soothed.

“I know I should be upset over being lied to all this years. But, all I can think is ‘Thank God, I’m not
his son.’ Gibbs gut to the rescue again.” Tony smiled sadly. “Am I related to him at all?”

“No. Abby checked when the test came back that he wasn’t your father. You’re not related in any way.”

Jackson put a hand on Tony’s elbow and guided him to the table where he sat obediently. “Was that why he hated me? Because my mother had an affair?”

Gibbs sat next to Tony and took ahold of one of his hands. “I don’t know, Tony. Men have held grudges over less reasons. It doesn’t matter, Tony, he’s out of your life now. No more bailing him out, no more rants, no more put downs. You are free of him.”

“How did you know?” Tony asked.

“How much did you hear?”

“Just that your gut asked Abby to do testing.”

“Do you remember what your father said after he found out we married?”

“I was a little preoccupied with the pain and blood.”

Gibbs sighed and then reach into his shirt pocket. “McGee happened to have a recording app on during the altercation.”

“Just happened to?” Tony said dryly.

Gibbs smirked. “Afterwards Vance had him transcribe it. This is the copy.” He opened the paper and laid it on the table in front of Tony.

Tony couldn’t prevent a snicker. The conversation had been printed in a large font. “I see McGee printed it so you wouldn’t need your glasses.”

Gibbs swatted his head. “Here,” He pointed to a section. “Right after he punched you he says he shouldn’t ‘have allowed your mother to bring you here from Italy.’ Then while they were dragging him out he says you ‘were never his son.’

“He’s said I wasn’t his son hundreds of times.”

Jackson looked at Gibbs, both men agreeing with their eyes that given one chance they would take all of Tony’s pain out on Senior’s hide. The government could have what was left. Jackson rubbed Tony’s shoulder in support.

“It was letting your mother bring you from Italy. That’s why I asked Abby to run the test. You deserved the truth.”

“Some things make sense now, but so much more doesn’t.” Tony focused on that line. Now that Gibbs had pointed it out the phrasing was strange. He knew he had been born in Italy. Had Senior wanted his mother to give him away? Had she refused? Why had Senior allowed him to passed off as a DiNozzo?

“Why were you born in Italy?” Jackson asked.

“Plane crash.” Tony replied. “There was a big plane crash in Italy. It killed my father…Senior’s cousin and his family. I think my grand…Senior’s dad made them come to Italy for the services.”
“Were you early?”

“I don’t think so.” Tony tried to remember Senior or his mother ever saying anything about it.

“If you were on time, your mother would have been nine months pregnant. Why was she allowed to fly?” Gibbs was puzzled. It didn’t make sense for a woman about to give birth to get on a plane. Why didn’t Senior just leave her home?

“Something tells me Senior isn’t going to be in the mood to answer questions for me.” Tony said sadly. “I guess my mother took that to her grave.”

“Not necessarily, Tony. We have the other envelopes.” When Tony looked a bit confused, Gibbs reminded him gently. “In addition to the envelopes for Senior and Benoit, there were two other envelopes. One was labelled Cristian Antonio Fabbri. The other one you never opened.”

“I don’t know what I did with them.” Tony panicked.

“It’s okay, Tony. We gave the Fabbri envelope to McGee to see if he could make sense of it, remember.” Gibbs realized Tony had been pretty much in shock during the meeting with Vance and Fornell. “The other envelope was labelled personal. In the commotion, we forgot it in Vance’s office. McGee gave it to me this morning. Do you want to open it?”

“Want to?” Tony shook his head. “But I guess I need to. I need to know who sent it.” Gibbs got up and went to the drawer he used to store mail and bills. He pulled the envelope out and walked to the table. Sitting back down he held the envelope out to Tony who reach out, his inner turmoil given away by the shaking of his hand. Dropping his hand back to the table, he shook his head. “Would you?” He pleaded with Gibbs.

“You want me to wait in the other room?” Jackson made to get up.

Tony shyly took the older man’s hand shaking his head. “No. We’re family, right?”

“We’re family,” Jackson confirmed. “Well, hurry it up, boy. Don’t keep Tony waiting.”

Gibbs pulled his glasses from his shirt pocket and put them on; giving his father a glare. He turned the envelope over undoing the clasps. Like the other envelopes it was a stack of papers with a large paperclip. On top, on a full-size sheet of stationary written in beautiful script, was a short note.

When Gibbs went to pass the note to Tony, he refused motioning for Gibbs to read it out loud. “Dearest Antonio, congratulations on your marriage. I hope that you and Agent Gibbs will have a long and happy life. I am aware that your past has not been what it should have been. I’m sure that you are wondering about the dossiers on Senior DiNozzo, Sr. and Mrs. DiNozzo. Let’s just say a close eye has been kept on those around you. I could not risk leaving you alone before, but now that you have a new family in Agent Gibbs and his father, it was time to provide you the truth. It is in your hands whether or not you use the information, but I feel I know the man you are and have become with Agent Gibbs by your side. May God have mercy on their souls. You are free, Antonio. Do not look back. May you and Agent Gibbs finally have the happiness you so richly deserve.” Gibbs paused, “There’s no signature.”

Tony took the paper in his shaking hands. His fingertips lightly touched the writing. “I don’t understand. Why? Who?”

“I don’t know, Tony.”

Jackson squeezed his arm. “Seems like you’ve had a guardian angel watching over you.” Tony
placed his hand over the older man’s hand in gratitude. “What’s that, Leroy?” While he comforted Tony, he saw Gibbs thumbing through the other papers looking shocked.

“Tony,” Gibbs laid the papers down and took a deep breath. “When you inherited the cabin, do you remember who left it to you?”

Tony thought for a minute. “No, just that it was a relative from Italy.”

“Do you know the law firm that handled it?”

“No. The papers were just sent to my attorney’s office. What’s wrong?” Tony tensed.

“This is a deed and information on a home in St. Thomas.” Gibbs handed the paperwork to Tony. It was a lovely villa with access to a private beach.

“There’s also a cabin in Montana and a small villa in Italy.”

A shocked Tony took the next papers hardly able to read the print. “They’re ours,” Tony said to Gibbs.

“They’re yours, Tony.”

He shook his head vehemently. “The deeds are in both our names, Gibbs. They are ours.” Tony insisted.

Gibbs took a look at the last deed which was also in both their names. The deed was for a ten acre piece of land on the outskirts but still close to NCIS. Behind the deed was a blueprint and artist’s rendering of a beautiful new house built with craftsman details. Gibbs swallowed hard; it was perfect. It was a sturdy looking home with a big porch. The standard rendering had the additional details added to the gables. On the first floor there was a guest suite and across the hall was a den that could be used as a separate sitting room for his dad.

There was a big front porch and out back a large covered patio. The wall between the kitchen and dining room had been removed, opening the whole area up to the back patio and the huge great room. Upstairs was a large master suite. Two of the upstairs bedrooms, marked two and five had been converted to offices for Tony and himself. They were at the same side of the house as the utility room and shared a Jack and Jill bath. A large bonus room was marked for a home media room. Even a section of the four car garage had even been turned into a wood-working shop.

It was the perfect home; plenty to appeal to him and to Tony. Room for them to be together but also room to have some time apart. He knew Tony would love it. The attached paperwork indicated that construction was already prepaid and could begin at once. All he and Tony had to do was to meet with the team and pick materials and colors. Touching the artist rendering again, Gibbs handed Tony the paperwork. He knew by the intake of Tony’s breath that he loved it, too.

“What do you have there, son?”

Tony held the papers where Jackson could see. He proudly pointed out the suite marked for Jackson. “You could live with Jethro and me. There’s plenty of room so we could each have our space. See, look at the wood-working area.” Tony frowned. “If we took this entire space, we could really spread out there. I’m sure it wouldn’t be hard to put up a detached garage for the cars.”

“Then you would have to go out in the cold to get in your car. The attached garage stays. We could move the workshop to another building.”
Tony pouted, “Then I can’t pop in and out to talk to you while I’m making dinner. Think of the boat we could make in there. I say we expand the workshop.”

Jackson smirked watching the two. “Well, if it were me. I’d talk to these people.” He pointed to the name on the blueprint. “It says that modifications can be made. If you extended the garage out to the side of the existing wall; you could move the driveway to enter the garage from the side. It wouldn’t take that much and you could have a four bay garage closed off from the workshop. It’d probably work better than it being tandem anyway.”

“Oh, and we could put a nice bench along the wall were the garage door is now with a big bay window that you could look out while working. And we could add a door from your suite into the workshop.” Tony said excitedly.

Gibbs hated to bring the pair down but he picked up the last set of papers. “Tony,” he waited until Tony focused on him. “These are papers indicate a transfer of funds into an account in your and my name.”

“Transfer of funds?” Jackson questioned.

“How much?” Tony asked.

Gibbs handed him the paper and his eyes went wide. “There is also an annuity account set up for each of us upon retirement.”

Tony automatically took that paper. “Five thousand dollars a month, each?” He said incredulously.

“Whether or not we are still married. There is a paper here indicating that in the event of divorce, how the main account is to be divided.”

“Main account?” Jackson queried. Tony simply handed him the first paper and waited. “Eight million? Is that dollars?”

Tony scanned the paperwork. “It seems that it’s just under six million pounds so that makes it, eight million, six hundred forty seven thousand three hundred forty three dollars and sixteen cents.”

“Tony, which of Senior’s family has this type of money to leave you?”

Tony shook his head. “No one. The inheritances were handed out years ago. This can’t be from the DiNozzos.”

“Were any of your mother’s family in Italy?”

“The Paddingtons? None that I know of. Besides the money went down the male line of the family. They cut mother off after giving her a settlement upon marrying Senior. Why?”

“Tony, these papers are transfers from other accounts. If this was an inheritance, why weren’t you present for the reading of the will? Why did it not come through probate lawyers?”

“What are you trying to say, Leroy?”

Gibbs looked at Tony while he answered Jackson. “I think whoever sent you this, is still alive. After all, everything’s in both of our names and we were married only a few days ago.” He grabbed Tony’s arm when he swayed. “Easy there. Come on, Tony, take a deep breath.”

“I’ll get him some water.” Jackson headed for the sink quickly.
“Jethro…” Tony grabbed the hands that held him. “Don’t let go.”

“I’m right here, Tony. I’m not going anywhere.” Gibbs took the water from his father and urged Tony to drink.
Chapter 12 Section30-34

Chapter Summary

A little Easter tail uh, tale
“OUCH!!!”
Geminiangel shuddered at Wolfnjag’s loudness. Didn’t Wolfnjag realize that she needed quiet when she was playing…uh, writing?
“Geminiangel!”
Geminiangel heard the footsteps and quickly swapped screens. “Yes, Wolfnjag?”
“What was this doing in the refrigerator?” Wolfnjag was pointing to the mousetrap daggling from her fingers. That was a good question. Was a refrigerator an appropriate place for that trap? Geminiangel dug through her papers looking for the battle plans.
“Geminiangel!”
Wolfnjag turned at the screaming from outdoors. Tugging the trap from her hand she made her way to the window to look out. It looked like…but it couldn’t be. Looking back she saw the culprit easing towards the door. “Oh, no you don’t.” With her good hand, Wolfnjag took a good hold of her ear. “Why is Bane_Huntress hanging from a tree?”
“I don’t know.” Geminiangel said innocently. Did Bane_Huntress like carrots?

Chapter Notes

Dragging her prey, Wolfnjag made her way outside. To her shock members of the cabal were scattered on the lawn. Bunnybear27 had a net draped over her and USAtraveler and Callisandra were trying to untangle her. From what Wolfnjag could hear of the conversation, Geminiangel was in deep trouble. LeiLadleLei appeared to have one foot sunk into the ground. Bellahickenbottom was holding her steady while Psyche53 was trying to pull her shoe from the hole.
“Oh.” Geminiangel felt her ear pulled loose from Wolfnjag’s grip. Jesco0307 and ArianaFeileacan each had a hold of one of her shoulders. “Uh, hi?”
Royalelephant held up a metal animal trapping cage baited with what else? Carrots.
“Would you like to explain this?”
“Or this?” Eilidhdawn held up a small snare.
Geminiangel thought hard. “No.”
“No, what?” ArianaFeileacan said.
“I wouldn’t like to explain.”
Magpie1600 patted ArianaFeileacan on the back. Never ask Geminiangel a question like that. It’s like asking a dog why it chased its tail. “Geminiangel, the cabal stopped by to see if we could help you?”
“No! No! No more movies.” Geminiangel frantically tried to escape.
That worked well, ArianaFeileacan thought. “No, Geminiangel. We decided not to do another intervention this week.” Or until they paid the school back for the window Geminiangel had shattered escaping. It hadn’t even helped. The idiot…uh, writer had gotten the idea that the stars of the movie were clones trying to replace Tony and Jethro. Shellec36 had managed to remove a lasso from her ankle and join them. “Geminiangel, are you afraid of staying here?”
“Nooo.” Geminiangel said slowly.
“Were you trying to keep the cabal away?”
“No!” Geminiangel twitched her nose. “Well, maybe polka_ducha. She said something about thickening the plot and I like the flowers.”
Shellc36 opened and shut her mouth a couple times. That made as much sense as a jellyfish with a driver’s license. She looked at polka_ducha who was stunned.
MarieKiki19 decided she couldn’t do any worse. “Geminiangel, remember me? We had popcorn and soda together the other day.”
Geminiangel smiled brightly. “You’re one of the new members of the cabal. You like chocolate, too.”
“That’s right. Do you know why all these traps are all here?”
“Yes.”
“Do you want to tell us?” MarieKiki19 felt a swell of pride. It was working.
“No.”
Rose_malmaison snickered. It was like trying to hold onto a feather in a hurricane. Not gonna happen. Now that Bane_Huntress had been freed from the tree, she could snicker, too. In the background, they watched Jesco0307 and ArianaFeileacan playing rock, paper, scissors to see who would go next. Jesco0307 lost and pleaded for two out of three before accepting her fate.
“Geminiangel,” Jesco0307 looked around at the cabal and the mess of a lawn. “It appears we accidentally set off most of you traps. If you tell us what you are trying to catch, we could help you reset them.”
Geminiangel perked up. Help resetting them? It had taken her almost all night to set them. “A rabbit.”
“You set the traps to catch a rabbit?”
“Yes.”
“Why are you trying to catch a rabbit? Are you going to eat the rabbit?”
Geminiangel looked horrified and grabbed for ArianaFeileacan hiding behind her.
“Never.”
Bane_Huntress looked at the variety of traps. “Geminiangel, these traps are too big for a rabbit.”
“Have you seen him?” Geminiangel asked in awe.
“Seen who?”
“The Easter Bunny.”
“The Easter Bunny? You set all these traps for the Easter Bunny?” Wolfnjag made to Gibbs swat her.
“Yes.”
Rose_malmaison fought hard but the curiosity got to her. “Why are you trying to trap the Easter Bunny?”
“Well. See last year, he only left a couple jelly beans. I wanted to make sure that he brought enough chocolate for all of us this year. I was afraid that I would miss him when he stopped by.”
Psyche53 just laughed. It was all logical; to Geminiangel at least. Managing her? Worse than herding cats. Thankfully, that was Wolfnjag’s job.

Section 30

It had been too much. Gibbs had been watching Tony for his breaking point. The night in solitary, the wedding and escape from the press, confronting senior, the perp walk; it was too much in only… Gibbs thought for a minute… four days. Was it only four days ago that he had walked in to find
Agents Sacks and Maison cuffing Tony? He could feel tremors running through Tony’s body even as he pushed the glass away insisting he was okay. Gibbs was grateful when his father interceded.

“Son, you’re not okay.” Jackson took ahold of one of Tony’s hands. “After everything you’ve been through, it’s amazing you’re still sane.”

Gibbs couldn’t resist, well, he could have but, it was Tony. “Sane may be an exaggeration.”

Jackson glared at his son but Tony only snickered and admitted. “He may have a point.”

Making a decision, Jackson stood and pulled on Tony’s hand urging him to his feet. “You need a rest.” Jackson glared at Gibbs again who stood and put his arm around Tony’s waist to steady him. “I know that you can’t sleep with everything rolling around in your brain, but at least lay down on the couch for awhile.” Jackson glared at Gibbs, again. “That couch needed replaced before you were born. I’ve never known anyone to latch on to anything like you. You’re worse than a snapping turtle, I swear.”

“Tony has a nice set in the garage,” Gibbs admitted. “I thought we would swap them out this weekend. Then we can put this one in the basement.”

“Humph.” Jackson snorted. At the door to the kitchen, he released his hold on Tony. “I’ve got to run out for a couple things. Packed in a bit of a hurry.”

“I could pick up what you need, dad.”

Jackson glared at Gibbs. His son could be dense at times. “No, you take care of Tony. Settle him on the couch, I’ll be back in a bit.”

“Just leave the door unlocked.”

“Like I don’t know you?” Jackson patted his pocket to ensure he had his wallet.

“Come on, Tony.” Gibbs lead him into the living room as Jackson shut the front door. He settled Tony on the sofa with a pillow and pulled afghan off the back of the couch covering him snuggly.

When Gibbs turned to leave, Tony grasped his hand. “Don’t go, please?”

Gibbs eyed the old sofa and then urged Tony onto his side. It took a bit of maneuvering but eventually they settled. Tony lay facing the back of the sofa with Gibbs spooning in behind him. “He always hated me, didn’t he?”

“I think so.”

“Why didn’t she ever tell me?”

“You said yourself, she had crawled into a bottle.”

“He must have hated her, too. All over me. I wonder if that’s why she drank?”

“Didn’t you say the Paddingtons had a history of alcoholism? It wasn’t because of you, Tony. She was susceptible to it, but wasn’t strong enough to break the alcohol’s hold. What she ultimately did was be strong enough to keep you at home and not in boarding school, until she died.” Gibbs felt Tony stiffen at the mention of boarding school. “What’s wrong?” He felt a shudder run through the other man’s body. “You don’t owe me an answer.”

Gibbs’ caring was Tony’s undoing. “He didn’t send me away because she died.”
You don’t have to tell me.”

“I want to.” Tony felt the need to finally share his burden. “You saw what he was like when he found out we were married. When I was young I… there wasn’t a lot of affection. I guess I was looking for it. Senior was out of town, as he usually was. I didn’t know he came home early. He caught us kissing and went wild. Screamed at me that I was filth, that I was not his son and never would be.” Tony stopped for a minute, Gibbs hadn’t made a sound, just silently supported him. “It was another boy. He said he would not have a homosexual in his house; only not so nicely. Senior threw him out of the house and then he… Senior… he…”

“He’ll never hurt you again.” Gibbs promised. “Senior is out of your life. That’s what got to you in the bullpen.”

“That’s why he disinherited me; why he sent me away. If you don’t want me here, I’ll understand.”

“Why would I not want you here?” Gibbs asked.

“Because I … uh…”

“Is that why you didn’t want to share a bed at the cabin?”

“I thought you’d hate me if you found out. Bad enough you had to marry me and others will think you’re a faggot.”

“Ahhh.” Gibbs pulled Tony closer. “You thought I would be angry because you’re bisexual? Tony, I’m not a homophobe. It would be hypocritical.”

“You were married…” Tony whispered.

“Shannon was part of my heart. The others? Trying to recapture what I had with her. Doesn’t mean I always dated women. Just couldn’t marry a man at that time or I’d probably have had another ex or two. I learned that it’s what’s inside that is important. Sure, I kept it quiet; but being a marine doesn’t mean everyone is straight. Just that you know what to say and what not to.” The two men were silent for a while. “Relax, Tony. I’ve got your six.”

Tony felt Gibbs wrap his arm around him and pull him snuggly against him. Tony felt safe, cocooned where nothing or no one could harm him. Slowly the tension drained from his body and he relaxed into Gibbs. He finally gave in to the weariness and closed his eyes. As he drifted off, he felt Gibbs’ breath on his neck.

Section 31

At the barely audible close of a car door, Gibbs eased away from Tony. Leaving him sleeping soundly, he made it to the front door as his father stepped in. “What is that?” Gibbs hissed.

“It’s a pet carrier. I thought you were smarter than that, Leroy.” Jackson whispered back.

“Why do you have a pet carrier?”

“It’s a wedding present. Tony needs something for comfort at this time and you aren’t the most cuddly fellow in the best of times.”

“Absolutely not.” Gibbs whispered furiously. “No dog.”

Jackson arched his eyebrow at his son. “And remind him of the dog when he was little?”
“Then what…” Gibbs bent silently to peer in and wicked claws emerged through the wire, followed by a hiss. “No, no way. You are not giving Tony a cat.”

“This poor fellow is the last of his litter. No one seemed to want him.” Jackson looked at the carrier fondly. “Not a pure bred. But I don’t think Tony will mind.”

“Absolutely not.” Gibbs had no doubt Tony would love the creature when he found out no one else wanted him but there would be no cats in the DiNozzo-Gibbs household. “No cats. Do you hear me, dad? A dog is one thing, that is…” The cat hissed at him again.

“You said, no dog.” Jackson said in a confused manner.

“If you had bought a dog that would have been okay.” He’d learned early in life that cats detested him; it was that thought that lead him to put his foot down, thus making a big mistake.

Jackson opened the door and stepped back as if to put the carrier outside. He handed to the young salesman waiting on the porch. “Thank you for the loan. Thank the manager for me. I’ll take him now. Just leave his things right there.” Jackson stepped in and let the door close again. He was still holding the pet carrier.

“Didn’t you hear me? I said no cats.” Gibbs voice raised slightly forgetting to whisper.

“Of course, I heard you.” Jackson lifted the cage up. Involuntarily, Gibbs pulled back expecting claws. Instead he got a glimpse of pink nose. “No. I told you…”

“You said a dog would be okay.” Jackson caught a glimpse of motion in the living room. “Did Leroy wake you? Did you have a nice rest, son?”

“I was just napping.” Tony approached not wanting to intrude on what appeared to be a private discussion. “Did you get everything you needed?”

“Sure did.” Jackson motioned him closer. “Picked up something for you both while I was out.”

“What?” Tony was puzzled by the carrier.

“I thought you and Leroy needed a little pick me up.” Jackson used his free hand to open the carrier, reach in and pull out a fuzzball.

“For us?” Tony’s eyes brightened. He smiled at Jackson as he reached out and gently took the small puppy. “Oh, Jethro, isn’t he cute?”

Gibbs played the conversation back trying to decide just where he lost control. He came to the conclusion that he had never been in control and had been totally played by his own father. Jackson knew his relationship with cats. Gibbs wasn’t slow to figure out that the cat had been a decoy; based on the conversation with the unknown person, borrowed just for the purpose of getting Gibbs to agree to a dog.

“Jethro?”

Gibbs refocused on Tony, whose tone was a bit nervous. He was holding the puppy to him as if afraid it would be torn from his arms. “I’m not sure a handsome fellow like that would approve of being called cute. I think he’d prefer handsome.” Tony’s uncertainty vanished and he smiled joyfully at Gibbs.
“You are handsome, aren’t you?” Tony was mesmerized by the puppy.

Jackson acknowledged his son’s slight nod as surrender. He really was a good boy, Jackson thought, just a bit too rigid most of the time. He steered Tony and the puppy into the living room. “His things are on the porch, Leroy.”

Shaking his head, Gibbs opened the door collecting a huge bag of puppy food, a nice dog bed which he envisioned many a fight over and a large bag of mixed paraphernalia. He left the puppy chow in the hallway, the bed along an empty stretch of wall and hauled the rest into the living room. Jackson was seated in Gibbs’ favorite chair, so Jethro sat next to Tony on the couch. The sleepy puppy was stretching his limbs and yawning.

“What kind is he?”

“Big. Look at those paws.” Gibbs said. “Could call this fella big foot.”

Tony covered the puppy’s ears before scolding Gibbs. “You’ll give him a complex.”

“I told the manager that you worked in law enforcement and liked to run.” Jackson felt sad inside and watched Tony brighten at the fact that he knew he enjoyed jogging. “He’s part German Shepherd and part Collie, that they know of.”

Gibbs took another look at the paws. “Might be a bit of retriever mixed in.”

“Not a pure bred, of course.”

“Pure breeds are all show, no heart. Aren’t they?” Tony cooed at the puppy. “You’re such a good boy. You’re going grow big and strong. We’ll go running in the park and take long walks. Won’t we?”

Gibbs realized the last sentence was directed at him. “He’s yours, Tony.”

“He’s ours.” Tony decreed. “We can walk him after we get home from work. Oh, no.”

“What’s wrong?” Gibbs tensed.

“He’s going to need a place outside for when we’re at work.”

And there it was. The puppy had been deemed an in-house dog. Gibbs could just tell Jackson was smirking inside. “I can make him a house that he can use when we’re gone.”

“We need to go shopping. He’s going to need a bowl, a collar, a …”

Jackson smiled at his son-in-law. “That bag there has the essentials. Well, don’t just sit there, Leroy.”

Before Gibbs could react, he felt it. No. No. No. He had decided, regardless what Tony said, it was Tony’s dog. He was not going to get involved, well other than the walks but there it was. Tony had handed off the taffy colored fuzzball. Instinctively, he brought the other hand up to secure the puppy. Before he could hand it back, a pink tongue swabbed his chin. He had dog slobber, well, puppy slobber, on his chin.

“He likes you, don’t you?” Tony beamed at Gibbs and the puppy before diving for the bag. Jackson had covered the necessities and more. Tony pulled out a set of new bowls, a leash and a collar with an engaveable tag.

“Once you name him, they can put his name and yours on the tag.”
“His name. What are we going to call him? Jethro…”

“No, one Jethro in the house is plenty. He needs a name all his own.” Gibbs misunderstood. He was stroking…uh, corralling the fuzzball in his hands.

Tony and Jackson exchanged a smirk. Rough, tough Gibbs was melting in the puppy’s paws. Tony reach in the bag again, pulling out grooming tools and finally toys. As he pulled out a rubber ball, it squeaked slightly.

Gibbs fumbled as the puppy jerked in his hands and its ears perked. “What’d you hear? Huh, what was that?” The puppy swiveled his head, intent on listening. He motioned for Tony to squeeze the toy again. The puppy froze in place, looking in Tony’s direction. Gibbs held his hand out and Tony gave him the ball. “You’re gonna be a guard dog, aren’t you?”

Shoot and score, Jackson chortled internally. No dogs. Look at him, Tony and that puppy have him so wrapped. Within minutes, Tony had his big, tough husband on the floor with him and the puppy playing ball. He was sure Gibbs would claim it was training. Jackson smiled, this was working out just fine. He leaned back in the chair content to watch his boys play with their puppy.

Section 32

Gibbs sat in his favorite chair listening to the quiet. His father had retired earlier and Tony was letting the fuzzball run around the backyard before bedtime, trying to wear him out. He wasn’t sure which would wear the other out. He sighed as his cellphone disturbed the quiet. “Gibbs.”

“Boss.”

“What’s up, McGee?”

“I was calling about the envelope Tony gave me.”

Gibbs heard the back door close followed by a scrambling sound on his linoleum. That fuzzball was going to punch it full of nail holes. “Jethro.”

“In here.” Gibbs replied. When Tony followed the mutt into the room, he indicated the cellphone. “It’s McGee.” He hit the button and put him on speaker.

“Hey, McGee.”

“Tony.” The puppy yapped and looked frantically about the room for the unknown speaker. “Is that a … dog?”

“You think Gibbs had started barking?”

The puppy yapped again. “Silly thing, that’s just McGee. Take your ball and lay down.” Tony sank to the floor and leaned against Gibbs’ legs while he soothed the puppy.

“I didn’t know you had a dog.”

“Jackson gave him to us as a wedding present. Wait till you see him. He is so adorable.”

“McGee, you called to ask something.”

“Yes, boss.” McGee turned his attention back to the reason for his call. “I hadn’t had a chance to look at that envelope you gave me. Do you still want me to run the information?”
“Yes. This whole thing is a major mess.” Tony looked at Gibbs for confirmation as he replied.

“I got to thinking about that guy who gave you the envelopes. So I sort of ran facial recognition on incoming national flights.

“McBadBoy, did you hack Homeland Security again?”

“Uh…”

“Don’t worry about it, McGee.” Gibbs glared at his husband. “What’d you find?”

“How did you know I found something?”

“You wouldn’t have called this late for nothing.”

“Oh, yeah.” McGee agreed.

“Well.”

“Right, boss. The person who gave you the envelope came in on a flight from Rome this morning.”

“You know where he’s staying?”

“That’s just it, boss. He isn’t. He left for Rome this evening.”


“Yes, boss. His name is Vincente Rossi. He works for the Moretti law firm in Palermo.”


“No, he took a flight from Palermo to Rome and caught the international flight.”

“That’s weird.”

“Why, Tony?” Gibbs asked as McGee listened.

“The DiNozzos came from Rome. I’ve never heard of Palermo.”

“McGee.”

“Yes, boss.”

“Find out what you can.”

“Will do. Tony, if you need anything…”

“Thanks, McGee. Sleep well.”

“This makes no sense, Gibbs.” Tony cuddled the sleepy puppy for security.

Gibbs couldn’t stop thinking about the deed for a villa in Palermo. Unable to help himself, he ran his fingers through Tony’s hair soothing him. “It’s going to be okay. We’ll get to the bottom of this.”

Section 33

“Gibbs…” Tony reached out for his husband’s shoulder as he had rolled away the last time Tony
begged.

“No.”

“Please…” Tony tried to tug Gibbs back onto his back.

“I said ‘No.’ Now roll over and go to sleep.”

“I can’t sleep like this.” Tony pleaded. “Can’t we just…”

The knock on the bedroom door was followed by a loud yap before the mournful whimpering began again.

“Leroy, you awake?” Jackson opened the door and stuck his head in.

With a disgruntled sigh, Gibbs rolled over and sat up in bed. “Yes, dad.” He switched on the light on the bedside table. “Come on in.”

“How can you sleep with that racket?” Jackson asked cantankerously.

“He’s just scared.” The minute the light was on, Tony was out of bed and on the floor next to the dog bed where the puppy lay whimpering. He lifted off the piece of wood Gibbs had sanded and put over it to keep the puppy in and scooped him up in his arms. “If Gibbs wasn’t such a meanie…”

“He is not sleeping with us.” Gibbs repeated for what he was sure was the hundredth time.

“He’s lonely. He’s used to having someone to help keep him warm.”

“That’s why he has the hot water bottle.”

Jackson leaned back against the wall, sleep forgotten for the moment. This was better than the comedians on that late show. Too bad there was no one to bet with, he thought. He knew where that puppy was going to sleep.

“He’s used to live bodies.”

“The alarm clock will simulate a heartbeat. Tony, put the puppy back in his bed.”

Tony reluctantly put the puppy down on the nice comfortable bed, with the cozy hot water bottle and the wrapped ticking alarm clock. Knowing a soft touch the moment Tony’s hand withdrew, the puppy let out a mournful wail. He was instantly back in Tony’s arms and looking at Gibbs with triumphant eyes or at least that was Jethro’s interpretation.

Jackson realized that the battle could rage all night and while it was amusing, the boys needed their sleep. How Leroy ever got so stubborn was beyond him. He looked at Tony pouting. That boy needed some tips on how to get around Leroy’s stubbornness. Well, there’d be plenty of time for that later. He’d give the boy a bit of help tonight.

“Son, I’m an old man. I need my rest.” Jackson smirked internally as Gibbs bit back a retort that reminded his dad just who bought the puppy.

Tony looked guilt-stricken. “I’m so sorry, Jackson. I’ll take him downstairs so you can sleep.”

“Son, you need your rest, too.”

Gibbs saw the trap but again he had been out maneuvered by a sneaky old man. “Tony, you need to
sleep. You can let him sleep next to you, but only for tonight. Tomorrow, he sleeps in his bed.” He already knew he’d lost the battle and the war, but appearances must be made.

“Thank you, Jethro. You won’t even know he’s here.”

Tony scurried back to bed and laid down on his side, snuggling the puppy into his chest. His work done, Jackson headed back to bed; answering Jethro’s dry goodnight with a cheerful goodnight to his boys. Gibbs turned out his light and settled back down; laying on his back and pulling the covers up over his and Tony’s shoulder.

“Jethro…”

“Yes, Tony?”

“Are you angry with me?”

“No.” As he said the word, Jethro realized he really wasn’t. He’d known from the moment Tony laid eyes on the puppy where he would end up. Tony wouldn’t be Tony with any other outcome.

“Jethro…”

“Yes, Tony?”

“Could you…”

Gibbs rolled towards Tony. “What’s wrong, Tony?”

“Could you hold us? Like you did on the couch earlier.” Tony’s tone reflected his fear of rejection.

In answer, Gibbs pulled Tony towards him spooning him. Dislodged, the puppy give a small whine which ended when Tony pulled him back against his chest. Gibbs laid his arm over Tony lacing his fingers through the hand Tony had over the small pup. The trio slowly drifted off; Tony protecting the puppy and Gibbs protecting them both.

Section 34

Bacon. It had a way of seeping into your dreams. Enticing you to open your eyes. Tony fought for as long as he could. He felt secure. Behind him he could feel Jethro pressed against his back. Their fingers were tangled in the puppy’s fur. He hated sleeping with someone else in his bed. Tony never felt secure sleeping with anyone; a nice leftover from living with his mother and Senior; but this… this felt nice, this felt right. It felt so right that all of Tony was awake or rapidly waking up. Where Jethro was snuggled against him; he could feel that part of him was already awake. He stiffened slightly; but the arm over him tightened and Gibbs whispered in his ear.

“We’re both men, Tony. Nothing to be embarrassed about. Nothing needs to happen now and even if it did, we’re married.”

“Just to keep me out of jail.” Tony muttered.

“Doesn’t have to be.” Gibbs said. “We’ve known each other a lot longer than most of my ex-wives. Won’t scare you off with my temper.”

“Second ‘B’ for bastard.”

“I trust you at my six all day. Never trusted anyone but my dad or… or Shannon that much.”
“You’re the only person I know that’s never told me a lie. The only person who told me that they had my six and actually meant it.” Tony admitted. “Afraid of screwing that up.”

“Who says we couldn’t make it work?”

“If we don’t…” Tony shivered.

“Rule five and I think this could be good.”

“But if it goes wrong…”

“You’d still be family.” Gibbs said firmly. “We’ve gone through a lot together. The plague. My amnesia. Somalia. Ari. Didn’t always agree; you were the only one who stood up to me; called me on my shit.”

“Marriage is more than just companionship, what about….?”

“Sex?” Gibbs said bluntly.

“Well, yeah…” Tony was glad Gibbs couldn’t see his face.

“Lived without it before.” Gibbs said matter-of-factly. “We’re not horny teenagers. We both have been attracted to men before. Why don’t we just see take the time and see what happens? Marriages have started with a lot less.”

Tony felt the puppy start to move and just like that the minute was over. Gibbs pushed himself back and swatted him on the behind. “Best take that fuzzball outside before you end up washing the bed.”
Geminiangel sneaked in through the window. She’d made it. Before she could turn around, a light snapped on.

“Just where have you been?”

“Uh, hi?”


“I was… uh… uh…”

“The truth, Missy.” Callasandra stepped forward. “Do you know how worried we were? We couldn’t find you or Bane_Huntress. Were you two together?”

“No.” Geminiangel replied truthfully. “But I know where she was. She was at…”

“We are not talking about Bane_Huntress; we are talking about your whereabouts.” BunnyBear27 said.

Geminiangel turned to see BunnyBear27, psyche53, Jillebeth, Shellc36, royalelephant, jesco0307, MarieKiki19, usatraveler, BellaHickenbottom, avidreader, Gibblette, eilidhdawn, Josette, ArianaFeileacan and trout1986 all glaring at her. “Hi, everybody. Nice weather, isn’t it?” BellaHickenbottom tapped her foot impatiently. “You were supposed to be here with Tony and Jethro; helping them move their relationship along.”

“I was.”

“‘We’ve been here waiting for over a week. You were NOT here. You were supposed to be helping them move their relationship along. We want kissing and loving. You promised...’” BellaHickenbottom glared harder.

Geminiangel scuffed her shoe on the floor. “I was with Jethro and Tony and Jackson. Ask rose_malmaison. She was with me.”

“Geminiangel, you know we care about you. When you disappear without telling us that you are going somewhere, we worry about you,” Jesco0307 put her arm around Geminiangel’s shoulder. If she was honest, they were always worried over Geminiangel. If she wasn’t off placing traps, she was building fires indoors. Then there was the chocolate addiction, Jesco0307 sighed. Why couldn’t they have gotten a stable writer? Maybe they should consider professional help.

“I’m sorry.” Geminiangel felt really bad. Why didn’t they believe her?

“Won’t you tell us where you were, really?”

“I was helping Tony and Gibbs. See, Tony moved into Jethro’s house and Jethro wouldn’t let him bring his things…”

“Geminiangel, SecNav had all of Tony’s things moved in when they got married,” BunnyBear27 said gently.

“They aren’t married yet.”

The cabal looked at each other worriedly. That had been the main plotline. Had Geminiangel lost the plot? (Definitely pun intended.) Maybe they had pushed her too far with the intervention. She didn’t seem to enjoy the movie as much as they had.

Josette moved to GeminiAngel’s side. “Honey, don’t you remember when Jackson brought Tony and Gibbs a puppy?”
“Yes, the little fuzzball.”
“That’s right, Fuzzball. You remember Fuzzball?” Josette asked.
“Yes, Tony and Jethro named him.”
Josette gave a sigh of relief. It sounded like she wasn’t has far gone as Josette feared.
“Do you remember what happened after they named Fuzzball?”
“Yes, I gave it to Wolfnjag and then I went for a walk.”
Josette looked at Wolfnjag for confirmation. When she nodded, the cabal was torn between going for the story or helping Geminiangel. Jesco0307 glared at them. If they didn’t whip Geminiangel back in shape there wouldn’t be any more story. “Where did you walk?”
“Just down the path.” Geminiangel pointed.
“What happened then?”
“Well, I ran into solariana and she told me I was running late. We took off through the forest and we went out the door and then we ran into rose_malmaison and we ran over to Jethro’s and got there during the fight…”
“Okay, who let the idiot read Alice in Wonderland?” One of the cabal… cough… bella…cough… asked.
The cabal looked at Wolfnjag suspiciously and she protested. “I took all the fiction away.”
“Who’s Alice?” Geminiangel asked innocently. “I don’t remember her. Is she a new member of the cabal?”
“Geminiangel, rose_malmaison is away for a while. Don’t you remember her saying she had something to do?”
“Yes. That’s what I’m telling you, we went with solariana…”
“Geminiangel, there is no solariana.”Josette said firmly.
“Yes, there is. I was supposed to be there not here. I promised.” Geminiangel started to cry.
“Geminiangel, I’ve been here since you arrived, remember?” ArianaFeileacan said trying to calm her. When she nodded, ArianaFeileacan continued, “Babykid528 and I asked you to stay, remember?”
“And I did.” Geminiangel tried to pull herself together. “But I wasn’t supposed to stay. I was only to supposed to stay until Tony and Jethro were married. After they did, I didn’t know where to go so I met solariana and she offered to let me go there. So I told her I would. She and rose_malmaison gave me this beautiful picture, but then you, trouvera, babykid528, a, gwynhefar, Jade1, ArianaFeileacan, rose_malmaison, NCISVU, jesco0307, and Trevelyan were so nice to me and you made me feel so at home, I told you I’d stay here, but I was already promised there. So, when I ran into solariana she reminded me that I had to be there, because I had promised. See?”
That was as clear as chocolate pudding. ArianaFeileacan looked around the rest of the cabal hoping someone else had figured it out. That was like asking someone to solve Pythaogoras’ Theorem, she realized. But then, don’t_hate_me01 stepped forward.
“GeminiAngel, did you see Jacie3 there?” Don’t_hate_me01 had a strong suspicion.
“Yes. They said you were already done.”
Don’t_hate_me01 shook her head and looked at the cabal. “It’s alright everyone. The idiot was over at NCIS Bang. The 2015 Reverse Bang is going on and the 3000 word rough drafts were due this weekend. I forgot she had signed up.” Most of the cabal looked relieved that GeminiAngel hadn’t lost the twist. She might be an idiot; but she was their idiot.
“Morning, Tony.” Jackson smiled as his son-in-law almost ran through the kitchen taking the puppy to the backyard.

“Good-morning, Jackson,” Tony called back over his shoulder.

“There’s coffee,” Jackson said as Gibbs followed Tony into the kitchen at a much slower pace. “Tony seemed to be in a hurry.”

Gibbs smirked. “While he was pulling on his shirt and jeans, the fuzzball started looking for a place to squat.” Filling his favorite cup, he stood at the sink watching his barefoot husband, and wasn’t that still a new thought, following the pup around the yard. The pup was leading him all over as he tried to decide where to mark his turf.

Jackson dished up the potato and egg scramble, then joined him at the window. He snorted with laughter as Tony stepped on something and hopped on one leg. The pup took advantage of his situation and dashed towards Tony’s good leg. Both Gibbs men smirked when Tony ended up on his rear on the morning dew soaked grass.

When Tony started towards the house, puppy tucked under one arm, Gibbs retrieved what he had come to consider Tony’s mug and filled it. Shuddering at the thought, he generously added sugar. Crossing to the fridge he also added the hazelnut crap Tony liked. Hearing the door, Gibbs moved towards the counter as Tony entered letting the pup down. The small bundle of energy headed for Gibbs and pawed at his shoes especially the leather laces.

“No.” Gibbs looked down and said firmly. The pup made a grab for the nearest lace and Gibbs used his foot to gently push him back. “No. If you want to chew, get your toy.”

“Jethro, he’s just a baby. He doesn’t know what you’re saying.” Tony complained. Gibbs just smirked and handed him the coffee. As Tony leaned forward to accept the cup, Gibbs dropped a quick kiss on his lips. Tony froze, looked around for Jackson and found the older man smiling fondly.

“He needs to learn now. Start him off right,” Gibbs continued as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

“Come and get it while it’s hot.” Jackson herded his boys towards the table. “Yes, yes, I see you.” Jackson said to the pup who was pawing at his pants. The pup followed them to the table dancing around his humans.

“Wow.” Tony breathed in deeply. “This looks great, Jackson.” The older man had made potatoes, scrambled eggs and ham plus hot cakes to go with the bacon.

“You should taste Tony’s scrambled eggs, Dad.” Gibbs said as he passed the food to Tony. “He made them for us at the cabin.”

Tony beamed with pleasure at Gibbs’ compliment. He took several slices of the crisp bacon, biting into one with relish. Bacon for breakfast was something he rarely took time to make. If he admitted the truth, it’s because he rarely had time to make it correctly in the morning. It was either cooked too fast or too slow.

“No.” Jethro caught Tony’s forearm as he made to slip a piece of bacon to the fuzzball. “No table scraps.”

“Jethro…”
“He’s right, son. The pup’s still a baby. Table food is likely to upset his stomach and make him sick.”

Tony looked appalled that he had almost hurt the puppy. “I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay, Tony. No harm done.” Jethro gave him a small smile. “I know the movies show it all the time. It really isn’t a good idea though. It also teaches them to beg at the table even when the human food is too spicy or rich for their system. It’s best to feed him the puppy mix and you can reward him with treats.”

“Sorry.” Tony looked down at the puppy. “Let me get you some food.”

Jackson reached out this time, “I put food in his bowl this morning.”

“We’ll give him a chance to eat.” Jethro smiled gently. Finally the puppy began to wander around the kitchen poking his nose into corners and nooks.

The three men exchanged small talk as they ate the meal Jackson had prepared. As they tossed around possible plans for the week off; Gibbs kept one eye on the puppy. “Tony, when you took the fuzzball out, did he do all this business?” He asked casually.

“I think he marked about twenty places.” Tony said. “Next time, I need to put my shoes on first. That grass was cold and damp.”

“Did he do anything else?”

Tony looked at Gibbs strangely. “Like what?” Gibbs simply pointed to the puppy who was squatting in a corner. “Oh, crap!” Tony exclaimed.

“Exactly.” Gibbs smirked.

Section 36

The peace of the morning gave way to a knock on the door just after the Gibbs family cleaned up after breakfast. Well, technically the puppy cleaned his food bowl, Jackson cleared the table, Jethro did the dishes and smirked while Tony cleaned the floor. Fresh, hot coffee in hand, the men had moved to the living room to relax when the knock came.

As soon as the door swung open, Abby bounced in. “Gibbs, you locked the door…” Abby pouted. “You never lock the door. Bad Gibbs.”

McGee shrugged apologetically as he entered. “She would have been here two hours ago, but I made her wait.”

“Hey, Tony. Papa Gibbs.” Abby greeted the others. “Where is he?”

“Who…” Tony started.

“There he is. Oh, precious, come to Aunt Abby.” Seeing the new person about to pounce on him, the puppy took off with a yelp for Gibbs who had just sat down.

Tony smiled at the sight of the puppy trying to frantically climb Gibbs’ leg. He sank on to the floor, unconsciously leaning against his husband’s leg. “Silly thing. Abby isn’t going to hurt you.” Tony scooped the puppy up. Looking at Jethro, he smiled. “I can see he’s going to be a daddy’s boy, aren’t you? Hmm, silly thing. You think daddy will protect you, don’t you?” Tony crooned to the
puppy, calming it down.

The others in the room were stunned. The look on Jethro’s face was priceless and Jackson burst out laughing. He had never wanted a camera so bad in his life. McGee tried desperately to turn his laugh into a cough. Abby was torn between wanting to laugh and being hurt the puppy had run from her. Tony was oblivious to the effect of his words and looked around in confusion before finally just patting the floor next to him and encouraging Abby to sit next to him.

“Tony, he’s so precious. I’ve been dying to see him since McGee told me about him last night. What’s his name? You didn’t name him Silly Thing, did you? I wanted to bring Jethro to meet him, but McGee said no. Meanie.”

Tony patiently pet the puppy and tried to calm Abby. “Jethro and I haven’t named him yet. He’s part German Shepherd and part Collie.”

“Ooh, you could call him Laddie.”

“No.” Gibbs rejected it flatly as the puppy wiggled away from Abby and went across the room to his toys. He grabbed his rubber bone and began to drag it back towards Tony.

“There’s a ton of good movie dogs.” Abby started to rattle off a list. “There’s Hooch, Buddy, Beethoven, Petey, Bruiser, Einstein, Otis, Marley, Tramp…”

“Actually,” Tony interrupted. “I don’t think a movie name would be the best fit. I thought maybe we could give him a marine related name.” Tony looked up a bit shyly at Gibbs as he spoke. “Something that we can both relate to.”

Abby beamed at the two of them. “Let’s make a list.” she produced a small notepad and pencil from somewhere on her person.

“Well,” Tony started, “I looked up the corps and it was started by Samuel Nicholas so I was thinking Samuel or Nicholas.” Abby obediently wrote it down.

“I don’t think either suits him.” Jackson spoke up. “Could call him jarhead.”

Tony looked at his father-in-law, disappointed. “You wouldn’t.”

“What about Marine?” McGee offered.


Tony looked reproachfully at his husband. “You’re going to give him a complex.”

“What about Sergeant?” McGee tried.

“No stripes. Could call him Valor.” Gibbs said to Tony. It was worth the effort when Tony lost the reproachful expression. “Maybe Honor?”

“Oooo, Sousa wrote the hymn.” Abby said excitedly. “You know… From the halls of Montezuma…”

The puppy stopped turned to Abby and howled. Tony laughed. “He wants to sing with you, Abs.” Abby held out her hand to the puppy. “Come on, sing with Aunt Abby…to the shores of Tripoli…”
Gibbs watched the pup and then said to Abby. “Start over.”

“What?”

“Start the song over.”

“From the halls of Montezuma…” On cue the pup stopped and howled. The others stopped to watch the pup.


“Zuma.” Tony tried the name. The pup turned his head and looked at Tony giving a howl.

Jackson smirked at them. “I’d say he picked his own name. Didn’t you, Zuma?”

The pup wagged his tail excitedly as Tony picked him up. “Is that your name? Are you Zuma Gibbs?” The puppy barked excitedly. Tony looked up at Jethro for approval.

“I think Zuma is a fine name.”

Chapter End Notes

“Wait a minute,” Callasandra said. “You mean the entire time we’ve been here worrying about her; she was over at Live Journal writing for NCIS Bang?”

“Yup.” Geminiangel smiled brightly, not realizing the danger she was putting herself in. “Tony and Jethro still haven’t gotten ‘happy’ and she gave them 3000 words that could have been used for hugging and kissing and sex? Let me at her!” It took many cabal members to hold her back. This gave the others the time to slip away and hunt down Wolfnjag. They had a story to read….

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Truth time -

I'm very sorry for the delay. Real life has been a bit rough and I've a few wee health issues. I'm doing much better, so I hope to resume posting at least once a week.

Geminiangel
Chapter 14 Section 37

Chapter Summary

Geminiangel sneak it through the window. She’d made it. Before she could turn around, a light snapped on.
“Geminiangel, just where have you been?”
“Uh, hi?”
“I was… uh… uh…” Geminiangel peered around carefully to see if Wolfgang had assembled the cabal.

Here we go again, Wolfnjag thought.
“I hadn’t heard from BellaHickenbottom. I was getting a bit worried.”
“That was…” Wolfnjag considered the statement. It was rational. That alone was abnormal. “So you went to check on her.”
“Yup. I was worried and you were busy.”
“So you’ve spent all this time together?”
“No.” Geminiangel replied truthfully. “I don’t know where she is.”
“So you were out looking for her.”
“No.” Geminiangel looked at Wolfnjag strangely. “I don’t know where she is.”
“If you weren’t there with BellaHickenbottom, who were you with?”
“Zuma.”
“Why were you with Zuma?”
“I was talking to Psyche53. We went to pet a pony. I’m worried about her.”
“Why?”
“Petting a pony always makes me happy. She didn’t seem to be having fun.”

Chapter Notes

“Why…never mind.” Wolfnjag pulled herself away from that tangent. “That doesn’t explain Zuma. Why were you with Zuma?”
“I thought petting a puppy would make Psyche53 feel better.”
“Did it?”
“She wasn’t home.”
“So you took Zuma home?”
“Of course not.” Geminiangel looked shocked at the thought. “Gwynhefar couldn’t pet the pony with Psyche53 and me so I took Zuma to see her and dragon606.”
“Where is Zuma?” Wolfnjag wondered if this was what other betas went through.
“I took her home.”
“But you didn’t come home?”
“No. Queene of the Deer told me if I came to see her husband’s show, he’d sing Johnny Rivers' Secret Agent Man for me. I wanted to hear Roger Miller’s Chugalug, but he couldn’t sing it.”
“Why not? Didn’t he know the words?”
“My muse broke her wing.” Geminiangel answered as if it was the most obvious answer in the world.

Taking a deep breath, Wolfnjag tried to center her thoughts. Maybe she should call ArianaFeileacan to handle this. She and Jesco0307 usually had better luck. Of course,
last time Don’t_hate_me_01 had figured it out. Of course, that was it. “Geminiangel, were you off visiting Solarina again? Didn’t we explain the rules? You have to stay here until Tony and Jethro have ‘marital relations’?” Wolfnjag made a note to thank Psyche53 for finally getting that through to GeminiAngel. “I didn’t see her,” Gemminiangel said not meeting Wolfnjag’s eyes. “When did you see Solarina?” Wolfnjag congratulated herself on catching that slip. “Yesterday. But she came to see me.” Geminiangel protested. “She only stopped by to tell me that I could share with cabal after May 12.” Wolfnjag sighed. That was good. It wasn’t more B&A, but it was something at least. “Geminiangel, the cabal has been calling. Why aren’t you working on B&A?” Asking directly never worked, but neither did anything else Wolfnjag thought. “The doctor said not to.” “Psyche53 said that?” That would get her cabal pass pulled, Wolfnjag thought angrily. “No. Callasandra’s doctor.” “Why did you see Callasandra’s doctor?” “I went with Callasandra.” “Why?” Wolfnjag decided it might not be a bad idea to invest in a digital recorder. It would save her vocal cords a lot of strain asking that question. “Her hand hurt.” “Did she have an accident?” “No.” “Why did her hand hurt?” “Because of the soda.” Wolfnjag shook her head to clear the confusion. “How did the soda hurt Callasandra’s hand?” “It didn’t.” “You just said her hand hurt because of the soda.” “Yes.” “So how did the soda hurt Callasandra’s hand?” “It didn’t.” “Then what did?” Wolfnjag raised her voice in exasperation. “The cans.” Wolfnjag could hear the ‘duh’ that Gemminiangel didn’t say. “Alright. The doctor said you couldn’t work on B&A when you took Callasandra there because the soda cans hurt her hand.” Gemiinniangel smiled brightly. Finally! Sometimes she wondered if Wolfnjag was a bit slow. She had to explain things over and over. “Exactly.” “Well, did he say when you could work on it?” “When my hand stops hurting.” Wolfnjag couldn’t help it. “Why is your hand hurting?” “The soda.” “What I don’t understand is what made your hands hurt. Can you tell me that?” “Opening all those cans of soda strained our hands.” Of course. The stupid soda again. And the blasted cans. Maybe an entirely different track was needed, Wolfnjag thought. “How many did you open?” “2317, I think. Only 70,177 cans to go.” “What were you doing with that much soda?” “Filling the pool.” “Filling the pool?” “Yup.” “With soda?” “Yes.”
“You idiot. Why would you fill the pool with soda?”
“So we could float on the popcorn.”
“Why kind of idiot…” Wolfnjag didn’t finish the question, she already knew what kind.
“Nevermind.” Wolfnjag made a note to call her therapist and the pool company in the morning.

Section 37

Tony groaned as he sat down next to Jethro who smirked and offered him a drink of his beer. “I warned you.”

Nothing would do but Abby had to go shopping for her newest nephew. Unfortunately, she insisted on dragging a parent along. Tony lost the battle; Jethro simply said “no” and Abby pouted till Tony gave in. She had drug McGee along to help carry packages. Tony figured he gave in rather than spend the afternoon with Jackson and Jethro.

“It wasn’t that bad.” Abby stepped over the piles of bags Tony had dropped. “Baby!”

Tony eluded Jethro’s attempt to reclaim his beer. “You drug me to five pet stores. Five!”

“Zuma deserves the best,” Abby looked around for her little nephew. “Where is Aunt Abby’s angel?”

Tony almost jumped when a nose touched his side and, in shock, lost the fight over the beer. He looked down to the small gap between himself and Jethro; saw Zuma peeping out.

Holding up the bottle as if to take a drink, Jethro whispered behind his hand. “He jumped up here when he heard her voice.”

“Zuma…” Abby called. “Come see what Aunt Abby got you.”

With a small whimper, Zuma retreated back to his hiding place between Jethro’s back and the couch cushion. Tony snickered and looked across the room where Jackson was smiling behind Abby’s back.

“What did you all do with McGee?”

“He’s getting stuff out of the car.” Tony said.

“How much did you buy?” Jethro glared at the pile of bags and then at Abby.

“Not much.” Abby protested. “He’s getting the food.”

“For us.” Tony clarified. “We stopped and picked up take out.”

“Chinese?”

Tony shook his head at Jethro’s question. “Mama Zee’s.” He watched Jethro’s eyes light up and smirked. “Jackson, I got you what I ordered Jethro. Bistecca alla Fiorentina, Gibbs’ style.”

Jackson was shocked when Jethro gave a moan. “What’s ... what do you call it?”
“Take Mama Zee's porterhouse and skip the wonderful Dijon, wine and spice rub, ditch the sautéed spinach and you basically get a wonderful steak with sautéed onions and double potatoes.”

“You could at least have left the door open.” McGee complained as he struggled into the entry hall with the bags of takeout. Immediately the smell permeated that room was making mouths water. Tony even felt Zuma poke his nose out to take a whiff before retreating when Abby moved.

“Here.” Abby took some of the boxes, placing them on the coffee table.

As McGee moved to place the rest on the table, he looked out the double window behind the couch. “Hey, Boss, you expecting company?”

Jethro sat up his gut suddenly churning. “Why?”

“There’s a dark sedan pulling in front of the house.”

“Down. Get down.”

Without missing a beat, McGee turned and took Abby to the floor covering her with his body. He knew his boss’ instinct too well to doubt him. If he said get down, you got down.

While McGee was taking care of Abby, Jethro grabbed Zuma from behind him. He shoved him into Tony’s arms as Tony moved to the floor in front of the couch. Satisfied that Tony, Zuma, McGee and Abby were okay, Jethro launched himself at Jackson yanking him out of his chair and shoving him to the floor. As he did, shots rang out. In seconds, the front window shattered and the living room was sprayed with bullets.

Waiting for a pause, Tony placed Zuma under the coffee table and pulled his own revolver. Tony took advantage of a break in the gunfire. Popping up over the back of the couch, he emptied the gun at the sedan. A second burst of gun fire erupted.

“McGee, gun.” Tony reach under the coffee table as McGee pulled his service revolver and handed it to him. Just as he had before, he emptied the clip; this time taking out the rear window. In response the sedan pulled out, squealing its wheels and disappearing down the street.

Tony stood. “All clear. Everyone alright?”

“Abby and I are okay.” McGee reported.

“Jethro? Jackson?”

“Will you get off me?” Jackson groused from the floor. “You’re twisting my back.”

“Give me a minute.”

Tony started towards him; having heard the pain in Jethro’s voice. “Jethro, what’s wrong?” Rounding the coffee table, he started towards him. A red patch was spreading, as Jethro struggled to move to the side of his father and he panicked. “He’s hit. McGee, call 911.”

“On it.”

“No.” Jethro gritted out. “Agent DiNozzo, take command.”

Tony started, then he took a breath to clear his head. It took Gibbs reminding him of his training to snap Tony out of his panic. “McGee, call Vance. Tell him we have a situation, Agent Gibbs is down and we need Ducky and Palmer over here ASAP. Then call Fornell.”
“Got it.”

“Abby, upstairs in the bathroom there’s a big first aid kit in the closet.”

“On it.” Abby saluted and went running for the stairs.

Kneeling beside Gibbs, Tony helped Jethro lift enough for Jackson to slide out. “You alright, Jackson?”

“Yes. What do you need me to do?” Jackson asked.

“Can you put on a pot of coffee? I know Fornell and Gibbs will want it.” As he spoke, Tony was trying to enlarge the tear in Jethro’s pants to see the bullet hole.

“Tony, Vance has the on-call team headed our way. Palmer’s enroute with Ducky.”

“Tony,” Abby bounced down the steps. “What can I do?”

“I need scissors. I can’t see the wound.”

“What are you doing?” Gibbs tried to twist his head to see.

“Lie still.” Tony heard a whimpering. Turning he saw Zuma, who he had left under the coffee table, dragging himself across the floor with his body flat to the floor. He couldn’t resist laughing. Zuma resembled a marine recruit crawling under wire as he wiggled and used his paws to pull himself; whimpering as he came. He crawled all the way to where Gibbs lay and then pulled closer until he could reach out and tap his nose against Gibbs’ nose. Once there, he whimpered and whined occasionally casting a suspicious look at Abby.

“Well, you did tell us to get down.” McGee observed. “You have him trained all ready, boss.”

“What are you doing?” At Gibbs’ question, Zuma sat up and barked protectively and gave a low growl.

“It’s okay, Zuma. Daddy has a booobo.” Abby explained. While she did, Tony took the scissors from Abby and slit the seat of Gibbs pants.

“Stop that.” Gibbs growled.

“I have to see where you’re shot.”

“You don’t have to expose my ass to the world.”

“Abby, get some pads and hold the pressure.”

“Abby is not touching my ass.” Gibbs tried to roll away and put his hand over the area in question.

“Jethro!” Tony leaned over to look him in the face. “We have to see the damage. You may need an ambulance.”

“I’m not going to the hospital for a gunshot to my ass.” Jethro growled. “Wait for Ducky.”

“You’re being ridiculous.” As Tony talked, Abby pushed his hand away.

“I mean it. Stay away from my ass.”
"Give me those." Jackson had watched the scene. "I trust, since I washed and diapered you, you won’t object to me seeing your ass for the umpteenth time." With a slight wince, Jackson knelt down in Abby’s place. "What do you need me to do, Tony?"

Ruthlessly, Tony cut a large section of boxers away. And hadn’t that been a shock? He would have sworn Gibbs’ was a tidy whitey fan. True, they weren’t silk like Tony’s but he could work on that. The left buttocck cheek was exposed and Tony took his hands and examined the area. He noted with relief that there was an entry and exit wound. He motioned for Jackson to put pressure on the exit while he put pressure on the entrance.

"Good news, the bullet’s out. It’s a through and through.” Tony leaned down to look at Jethro. “It went in slightly to the side of your hip and out through the cheek. Looks like you’re going to need a few stitches. You’re lucky it didn’t hit the bones of your hip.” The look the two shared reflected their relief that it was not a potentially career-ending wound.

"Well, there’s something I thought I’d never see…never really wanted to…” Fornell said as he came in to the living room. "Must be an eclipse, I didn’t hear about.”

"Fornell…” Gibbs snarled. When Gibbs snarled, Zuma popped up on four legs and went around his body to stand at the feet of the new person. He barked and growled.

"Easy, Zuma. He’s a friend." Tony soothed him.

"Why, DiNutso, I didn’t know you cared.” Tobias snickered as Zuma looked at Tony and then back at him unsure whether they needed protecting. Deciding to err on the side of caution, Zuma planted his front two feet and barked another warning.

"Zuma, stand down,” Gibbs said his voice taut with pain. Immediately, Zuma abandoned guard duty for comfort duty coming back to rub his nose on Gibbs’ cheek.

"Zuma?" Tobias watched the puppy lift his head to look at him and then go back to comforting Gibbs.

"He was a wedding gift from Jackson and he’s quite a daddy’s boy.” Tony explained. “Do you know Agent Fornell?”

"Good to see you again, Mr. Gibbs. I wish it were on better circumstances.” Tobias circled around and hunkered down to speak to Jethro. “You okay, Jethro?”

"Just ducky.”

"No, that would be me, dear boy, did you hit your head, too?” Ducky entered with Palmer hard on his heels, carrying a doctor’s bag.

Tobias put a hand on Jethro’s shoulder for a minute then offered his hand to Zuma to sniff. With a look at Jethro, who nodded, Zuma permitted him to scratch behind his ears before curling up next to Jethro. Standing, Tobias headed to where McGee was for information.

Jackson accepted Palmer’s hand and stood, allowing Ducky to take his place. “What do we have, Anthony?”

"Appears to be a through and through.” Tony allowed Ducky to hold pressure while he and Palmer swapped places. Satisfied that Jethro was in good hands, he scooped Zuma up, to his displeasure. "Hush, Zuma. Ducky and Palmer will take good care of him.” Tony winced as he realized his hands were covered with blood and that he was transferring it to the pup. Gibbs’ blood. Jethro’s blood.
“Here, Tony,” Abby took Zuma in her arms and lead Tony into the kitchen to wash. While Tony scrubbed the blood off his hands, she used a wet paper towel to gently remove the blood from the disgruntled puppy.

“Hey, you.” Tony lifted Zuma up with his clean hands so that he could look in his face. “It’s okay. Settle down.” Holding the pup snuggly against him, Tony reentered the living room. Looking at Ducky working on Gibbs, he moved to join Vance, Fornell and McGee. He could see several NCIS and FBI agents on the front lawn.


“Ms. Scuito, Agent McGee and I were out. When we returned, Agent McGee was the last to enter the house carrying the take-out. As he was placing it on the coffee table, he noticed a dark sedan pulling in front of the house. Agent Gibbs ordered everyone to the floor.”

Vance interrupted, “Gibbs’ gut?”

“Yes, sir. “

“Continue.”

“Agent McGee ensured Ms. Scuito’s safety. I took cover in front of the couch while Agent Gibbs ensured his father’s well-being. As we moved, an individual in the car opened fire, with I believe a semi-automatic. When they stopped to change clips, I used my service weapon to return fire. Agent McGee realizing I was in a position to return fire, also gave me his service weapon. When the gunfire stopped again, I emptied his clip. I broke two windows and believe I may have hit a tire.”

“Any license number? Any identifying marks?” Tobias asked.

“No. Standard late year dark sedan. Nothing distinguishable. Two occupants; one driver, one shooter with a mask.”

Vance and Fornell exchanged looks. “NCIS will cede the investigation to you, Agent Fornell. In the interim, NCIS will provide security for Agents Gibbs and DiNozzo.”

“Do you think this is related to my father, sir?” Tony was concerned that they had become targets.

“I’m not sure, but I think that we should err on the side of caution. Agent Gibbs?”

“Will be fine, Director. He’s very lucky.” Ducky joined their group. “A few inches over and it could have hit his hip socket. Agent Gibbs has declined a trip to emergency room as I administered aid. No large blood vessels were severed. I gave him a local anesthetic, then cleaned and stitched the wounds. The entry wound took four stitches; the exit six. There are a few supplies that will be needed. I have taken the liberty of giving a list to Abby and sending her out for them.”

“Thanks, Ducky.” Tony looked past him to where a couple of agents were helping Jimmy get Gibbs to his feet. They were escorting them upstairs. “I should assist him, if you’ll excuse me, Director.”

“Go on, Agent DiNozzo. There are people enroute to fix the window for you.”

“Thank you. Tim?”

“I’m staying. Check on Gibbs, I’ll handle this.”

Tony nodded his thanks. He and Zuma hurried up the stairs where they could hear Gibbs’ yelling.
Stopping at the bedroom door, he snickered at the attempts to undress Jethro. “Gentlemen, thanks for your help. I think Palmer and I can handle this.” He stepped forward and put Zuma in his bed. The agents gracefully filed out.

“I don’t need help.”

“Jethro, if you lean over you run the risk of popping a stitch. Let me help you. Palmer, hand me a pair of boxers from the top drawer.” As he spoke, Tony waited for Jethro to toe off his shoes, unbutton and unzip his ruined pants. He let Jethro push them down, only taking over when Jethro winced. Palmer handed the requested items to Jethro and beat a hasty retreat downstairs before he saw more than he wanted to.

As Tony knelt at his feet, Jethro put a hand on Tony’s shoulder and stepped out of one pants leg and then the other. Tony could feel his face heat up as he took the fresh boxers and helped Jethro into them. From his position, he couldn’t help but get an up close and personal view of “Little Leroy”. In retrospect, maybe “little” was a misnomer. As Tony guided the boxers up, he pulled out on the front to accommodate “Little Leroy” and his hands met Gibbs’. He looked up into Jethro’s eyes, seeing a look he never expected to see. Tony licked his lips and “Little Leroy” gave a twitch.

“Leroy, you decent? Director Vance wants a word.”

“Give me a minute.” Gibbs handed the sweats to Tony. “Remember where we were, before the interruption.” Flushing hotly, Tony helped him step into the sweats and busied himself picking up the ruined clothes as Gibbs granted Vance entry.

“Leon.”

“Gibbs, Agent Fornell is taking lead. Until we get some information, I’m placing a team in rotation for security.” With his father and Tony’s safety in mind, Gibbs didn’t protest which caused Vance to raise an eyebrow. “Agent McGee has indicated that he plans on staying until the repairs are finished. I assume you want kept in the loop.”

“Ya think?”

“Until we get to the bottom of this, your team is listed as being on stand down. I’m not suggesting that you work cold cases, as I know that you and Agent DiNozzo have other concerns. I assume that Agent McGee will be assisting you. As soon as there is any news, you’ll hear from me. Gentlemen.”

Jackson watched the man go downstairs. “How are you, son?”

“Fine, dad. I could use a cup of coffee.”

“Pot’s on.”

“Why don’t you lay down for a while?”

“Only if you plan on staying with me.” Gibbs whispered in Tony’s ear as he slowly crossed the room to his father’s side.

Blushing again, Tony busied himself with Zuma. Picking the pup up out of his bed, he praised Zuma for staying. As he passed Jethro and Jackson on the way to the stairs, he felt a hand caress his buttocks. Shocked, he looked over his shoulder to see the smirk on Jethro’s face.
Chapter Summary

The sweet angels in the author's notes, like Zuma, do exist and are actual rescue animals. Rocco is in New York and has FIV. Keeko is in Massachusetts and Porsche is a Long Beach kitten.

Chapter Notes

“What’s she doing in there?” BellaHickenbottom asked. The door was still locked. Wolfnjag was sitting at the table enjoying an adult libation. At least they knew where the idiot was, they just couldn’t open the door. “Since she came back she’s been closed up in there. Says she’s working.”

“Can’t we get a locksmith?” NewDawn pleaded. “Or we could break down the door?” Jesco0307 shook her head adamantly. “If we spook her, we may not find her for a week. Trust me, we’ve learned that the hard way. Nope, just have to let her get whatever it is out of her system.”

“And hope the house is still standing…” Wolfnjag said pessimistically.

“Here have another Miami Vice.” BellaHickenbottom said comfortably. “So she hasn’t come out at all?”

“Nope. Not even when Psyche53 stopped by and offered to take her to the petting zoo.” Royalelephant said.

“I thought she might had slipped out the other night. The neighbor was complaining that her pony’s main and tail had been dyed.” Wolfnjag admitted. “But I checked the door and she was still in there.”

“Is that normal?” dragon6o6 didn’t understand why magpie1600, BunnyBear27, gwynhefar, usatraveler and LeiLadleLei were rolling on the floor laughing.

“Sorry,” snorted Shellc36. “We forget you’re new to the cabal.”

Everyone froze as the lock clicked. The door squeaked open just a bit. “Wolfnjag, did you get that tuna?”

Wolfnjag pointed to the bag on the floor next to the doorjamb. “Why do you need so much tuna?”

A hand grabs the bag and whisked into the room.

“Wait.” Wolfnjag hollered. “The cabal is here and wants to say hello.”

Geminiangel stuck her head out. “Hi, everyone. Bye, everyone.” The door shut and the lock clicked.

“No.” Callasandra cried as she counted her fingertips. She almost had the door.

ArianaFeileacan looked puzzled. “What’s with the tuna?”

“She sent me to the store for seventy-five cans. She left the note on the outside of the door.”

“Seventy-five cans?” QueenBee4Ever repeated.

“Yes. I went to three stores to get that much.”

Shan6 looked at the rest of the cabal. “Aren’t you worried?” She and muse2greats exchanged worried looks.

Shellc36 just shook her head. “Nope.”

ArianaFeileacan looked around. “You haven’t know the idiot…uh… Geminiangel long. We count ourselves lucky we know where she is…speaking of which… has anyone
In the idiot’s study, Gemininiangel filled a long window box planter with tuna. “Here, help yourself while you’re waiting your turn, please. I think we’re ready to begin…” Queene of the Deer picked up a file. “Number 117, please. We’re ready for you.” As the interviewee made it’s way to the chair by the desk, Queene of the Deer continued. “This is Porsche. She is a Burmese/Turkish Van mix, in the Khao Manee family. Porsche is twelve weeks old and very playful. She has a very sweet personality.” Gemininiangel looked Porsche over carefully. “I’m sorry. I just don’t think you’d be happy. Thank-you for coming. Please help yourself to tuna before you go. Next.” Queene of the Deer picked the next file. “Number 118, please.” As the interviewee made it’s way to the chair by the desk, Queene of the Deer continued. “This is Rocco. Rocco is a chocolate Burmese. He has lived in New York all of his life but is ready to move into a more sedate phase.” Gemininiangel motioned Rocco to turn around. “Well, you are handsome. How do you get along with puppies? This is Zuma.” Queene of the Deer looked at the now scratched photo of cuddly little Zuma and never paused. “Number 119, please. This is Keeko, she is two years old. Keeko is a lovely chocolate Burmese from Massachusetts. She admits she’s had a few …uh… toilet issues but is willing to keep putting herself out there. She describes herself as a real cuddlebug.” Gemininiangel shook her head. “I don’t think you would be happy. Who we’re looking for has to be a bit tougher. Sorry. I do know of a friend who might be perfect. Here, have your agent call Roxanne. Next, please.”

Section 38

Tony wasn’t sure how he made it to the foot of the steps without walking into air. He focused on Zuma to cover up how Jethro had rattled him. The living room was full with agents and investigators so he turned into the kitchen. Ducky and Palmer were already at the table. Too agitated to sit, Tony moved to lean back against the counter by the sink as Jackson and Jethro entered the room.

When Zuma wiggled, Tony leaned over and let him down on the floor. Immediately, Zuma ran over to Jethro and pawed his pants. “I’m fine, Zuma. Go play.”

Zuma looked up at Jethro then looked towards the living room where his toys lay and then back up at Jethro with an ‘Are you nuts?’ look on his face. Tony couldn’t help but laugh. “He shouldn’t be in there, he might get glass in his paws.” Walking into the living room, he picked up Zuma’s rubber bone and his ball. Abby’s purchases lay in the carnage. Tony shrugged, they’d open them later.

“Here, Zuma.” Tony let the ball drop and using his foot, rolled it across the floor. Zuma simply yawned and sat down at Jethro’s feet. “Tough guy, eh? How about this?” Tony held out his rubber bone. Zuma tried to play it cool, but his tail gave his excitement away. “Come here. Come on. If you want it, come get it.” Zuma was clearly torn. He glanced from Jethro to Tony to the bone to Jethro over and over. Tony couldn’t resist the pleading eyes so he walked over and leaned down giving Zuma the bone. With a yip of thanks, Zuma made a quick twirl and then attempted to lay down on top of Jethro’s shoes.

“Silly thing, you can’t lay there.” Zuma gave Tony a ‘Wanna bet’ look then turned, facing the other direction and tried to lay down.
“I’d say that was not a ‘talk to the hand’ gesture,” Palmer laughed.

“He’s upset. He knows something is wrong with Leroy.” Jackson looked at the pup fondly.

“Oh, for heaven’s…” Jethro started to lean down but stopped at the first pull of a stitch.

Before he could even wince, Tony had scooped up the pup and was helping Jethro straighten back up. “You can’t lean over with stitches. Here.” Tony handed Jethro the adoring pup who immediately rubbed his head under Jethro’s chin.

Jethro rubbed his ears gently while walking around the kitchen and speaking softly. “I’m fine, you silly thing. It’s nothing. I know you were frightened but…” Tony strained but couldn’t make out the rest of the conversation. He missed the looks exchanged by the other three men as he stared at his husband with a look almost like the puppy’s.

“Anthony…Anthony.” Ducky raised his voice slightly the second time he spoke his name.

“Sorry, my mind was a million miles away.”

“I seriously doubt it was that far, dear boy.” Ducky said slyly as Jackson and Palmer snickered. Tony refused to dignify that with a remark and Ducky continued, “Jethro will need the bandage changed at least twice a day. I’ve had Mr. Palmer put together some supplies. I expect some redness in the area that is par for the course as Jethro never follows my directions.”

“He was like that as a boy. He broke his arm one time and the next thing I knew there he was going down the road on his bicycle. Broken arm and all.” Jackson shook his head. Ducky and Jackson commiserated with a look.

“I am right here.”

“We know.” Ducky and Jackson chorused while Tony and Palmer snickered.

“As I was saying. Some redness will no doubt occur. You will need to keep an eye for infection, such as any red streaks, discharge or fever.” Ducky continued. “If you see anything that concerns you, call me or Mr. Palmer immediately.”

“Gotcha, Ducky.” Tony nonchalantly crossed the kitchen, removing the pup from Jethro’s arms and placing him on the floor. Evidently the talk had worked because he took his bone and went to lie down chewing contently. “Tea, coffee?” He offered as he pulled down Jethro’s mug, filled it with coffee and handed it to Jethro. Tony nodded approvingly. Jackson had pulled out an insulated thermos for the first pot and had brewed a second pot.

“That would be lovely.”

Tony reach up in the cupboard for the Earl Grey tea that Jethro kept on hand for Ducky. He stuck a cup of water in the microwave while he poured coffee for the rest of them. As they congregated around the table, Jethro moved to join them. Pulling out his normal chair, he looked down in disgust.

“What is that?”

Tony leaned over to where he could see. “It looks like a pillow.”

“I had Mr. Palmer get that out of my car. Mother often tucked it behind her back when she rode. I’m afraid it will have to do until Abby and Timothy return.”

Jethro disgustedly stared at the flowered pillow with lace trim. “Oh, do sit down,” Ducky said firmly.
“It won’t hurt you. It’s not like the flowers will rub off on you. Trust me, you will be glad for its presence especially when the local wears off.”

“Got another cup?” Fornell appeared in the doorway. Jethro just waved him towards the pot. Helping himself, Fornell came back to sit down at the table. He took a long sip and sighed in pleasure. “Good coffee.” He took another sip. “The investigators have finished with the living room. There’s a cleaning crew working in there now. The team to replace the glass will be here shortly.”

“Thanks, Tobias.” Jethro knew a few favors had been called in to have the room cleaned and the window fixed so quickly. “What do we know?”

“Found the car a few blocks away.” Fornell lifted his cup to Tony. “You managed to take out two tires. Back went flat pretty quick from the look of it. Took a direct hit. Front was more of a nick but it blew out. At that point they abandoned the car. A team is going over the car and I’ve got a team canvassing the neighborhood. We’ll get them.” Draining his cup, Fornell rolled his shoulders before rising. “I’ll keep you up to date so as I get anything. Don’t get up, I know the way out. And speaking of out, I think your guard dog needs your attention.” He pointed to the pup who was sniffing along the cupboards and starting to squat.

“Zuma,” Tony was up and moving quickly. “Come on, let’s go out.” He was relieved when Zuma started running towards him but the relief was short lived as Zuma went to Jethro’s feet and barked up at him.

Fornell chuckled. “Easy to see who he prefers.”

“He’s a real daddy’s boy.” Tony agreed. “Come on, Zuma. Daddy can’t get up right now.”

“Go with Mommy, fella.”

Tony glared at Fornell. “I am not mommy.”

Fornell held up both hands in surrender. “Well, if Gibbs is Daddy…”

“I’m daddy, too.”

“Isn’t that a little confusing for him?” Fornell taunted. “I mean most kids have a daddy and a mommy; not two daddies.”

“I’m not the mommy.” Tony denied forcefully.

“Uh, mommy …” Tony turned furiously to rebuke Jethro but he simply pointed to where Zuma was starting to prance. Ignoring the men’s laughter, Tony simply scooped the puppy up and headed for the backyard.

Section 39

Tony looked up from where Zuma was watering the fence when he heard the screen door open. He smiled at Palmer who strode to join him carrying both of their coffee. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” Palmer watched Zuma for a minute. “So wedding present.”

“Yeah. From Jackson. I can’t believe it. Jackson’s the best.”

“He’s adorable and totally devoted to Agent Gibbs. Kind of like you.”

Tony jerked in surprise. “I…uh…”
“Don’t worry. I don’t think he’s realized it yet. You forget, I was upstairs while you were coping an eyeful.” Palmer watched Tony flush. “I also saw how unsettled you were when you came downstairs. Don’t bother denying it.”

“I… He…”

“You know you can talk to me. Are you and he…” Palmer waggled his eyebrows.

“No…. but…”

“What’s wrong, Tony?”


“How so?”

“This whole marriage thing. He’s never blown his top. He’s acting like…”

“Like what, Tony?”

“Like he doesn’t mind being married.”

“So you’re freaking out because he’s not freaking out.”

“Stupid, right?”

“How long have you and Gibbs been together?” At Tony’s strange look, he clarified. “How long have you and Gibbs worked together?”

Tony thought back. “Ever since the Baltimore case.”

“So almost ten years?”

“Hard to believe, isn’t it?” Tony shook his head. “Longest I ever worked anywhere.”

“ Longer than Gibbs’ marriages.” Palmer took a drink. “Tony, I didn’t know Gibbs before you came. I’ve only ever known the dynamic between the two of you. I have to say that it really isn’t that much of a surprise to me.”

“What?”

“Tony, you two have a relationship built on total trust and respect. There’s a lot of marriages built on a lot less. I know you can say it’s the nature of the job…blah … blah… blah. Even I can tell that your relationship with Gibbs is different from your relationship with McGee. I know you trust McGee to have your back, but you trust Gibbs. Period.”

The two men watched Zuma scampering about the yard for a minute. “Breena and I talked about this when I heard about your marriage. Both of us agree that you two are good together.”

“Gibbs has been married four times. All to redheads. I’m not a redhead.”

“And not a woman? Is that what’s bothering you?”

“I got disowned and kicked to boarding school for a kissing a boy.”

“But Gibbs is a man, not a boy.” Jimmy watched the confusion on Tony’s face. “Are you afraid the
marriage won’t work or that it will? What happened upstairs?”

“I think he…I think he made a pass at me.”

“Ahhh…”

“What do you mean, ‘ahhh’?” Tony demanded.

“Are you upset that he made the pass?”

“No… I … I don’t know.”

“I think you do. And, I don’t think you’re upset about it. Tony, give it a chance. You and Gibbs know everything there is to know about each other. Even though this wasn’t your or Gibb’s idea, it doesn’t mean it won’t work. I think this could be good…for both of you.”

“Who are you and what did you do with Jimmy Palmer?” Tony asked glibly.

“No deflection, Tony.”

“Deflection?”

“I may have visited a couple of websites for family and friends of gay men.”

“Why?” Tony was shocked.

“Why do you think? I’m your friend. I want to be here for you and Gibbs.”

“I can’t believe you’d do that…for me.” Tony was stunned.

“You’d do it for me.”

Tony couldn’t rebut Palmer’s answer. He also couldn’t believe that Palmer had went to that much trouble. That much trouble for Tony.

Palmer watched the emotions on Tony’s face. Although not a violent person, Palmer wished he could have just five minutes with Senior. He had destroyed Tony’s sense of self-worth and deprived him of a childhood. Finally, Tony called for Zuma who had apparently finished marking his territory to his satisfaction and was happily rolling in the grass. As the trio made their way back to the house, Tony stopped on the back deck and turned to face Palmer, his face serious. “You’re my Ducky.”

Palmer smiled back. “And you’re my Gibbs.”

Unaware of the special nature of the conversation between the two men, Zuma barked until Tony opened the door and he could go running in. The two men looked at each other for another moment and then Palmer put his hand on Tony’s shoulder. “So, while I was studying, I checked out the safe sex chapters. Do we need to talk about condoms and lube?”

Section 40


“Mastered that when I was six months old, Abs.”

Abby shoved the bags she was carrying into McGee’s chest so she could hug Gibbs. Zuma came running in through the back door, slid to a stop and then turned tail. “There you are. There’s Auntie
Abby’s little angel.” Tony inadvertently blocked Zuma’s escape. Before the pup could circle around him, Palmer had shut the door and Abby pounced. “How’s my little sweetheart?”

“He loves his Auntie Abby. Don’t you, Zuma?” Tony bit his lip at Zuma’s reproachful glare. The pup did take after Gibbs.

“Wait till you see what Auntie Abby got you. Well, don’t just stand there, McGee, go get his presents.” McGee just rolled his eyes and handed the bags he was holding to Gibbs.

“Not on the table.” Gibbs said firmly as Abby sat down and went to put Zuma on the table.

“Meanie.” Unperturbed, Abby cuddled Zuma against her before sitting him on her lap. “Goody… goody…” Abby bounced as McGee entered the kitchen, earning her a growl from Zuma. “Don’t be grumpy, look.” She proudly pulled out a set of dishes with the Marine insignia and Zuma’s name engraved and painted in Marine blue.

Gibbs was impressed in spite of himself. Reaching out he took one of the bowls and got a glare from Zuma. The puppy was disgruntled that Gibbs took the bowl and not him. “This is very nice, Abs. Where did you find these?”

“There’s a little shop near the gallery who makes them special. Special bowls for a special pup, isn’t that right, Zuma?” Abby scratched behind his ears before reaching for the next bag.

“I don’t remember that.” Tony said as she pulled out a lovely hand-tooled leather collar with a metal tag, again with Marine insignia and Zuma’s name. She had also included their phone number. “That’s lovely, Abby. Here, sit up and let me put this on you.” Tony slipped the collar around Zuma’s neck. “Don’t you look handsome? Thanks, Abby.” He kissed her on the cheek.

“I also got a kit to embed a microchip. That way if anything happens, which it won’t, they can call you immediately and have access to his medical records.”

“Isn’t he too young?” Gibbs asked.

“The vet said it can be done anytime, but he recommends Zuma be at least 6 weeks. You just use a needle to inject it; I can do it for you at the lab.”

At the word needle, Tony and Jethro exchanged a look. “We’ll talk it over, Abby.” She handed the paperwork to Tony. “Are you planning on having him neutered?”

The men all winced. “We’ll talk that over, too.”

“You’re such a good boy. I know these presents aren’t much fun, kinda like clothes for Christmas, but I think you’ll like this.”

“Abby,” Gibbs said sternly. “You promised not to go overboard.”

“I didn’t. He needed those things. I only bought a couple toys.” Reaching into the bag, she pulled out a bear. She held it out to Zuma who cocked his head to look at the bear. She squeezed it and it squeaked causing Zuma to jump.

“You bought him a teddy bear?”

“It has a braided body that helps keep his teeth clean when he chews it. Again, it’s a present but useful. I only bought one real toy.” As she spoke, Abby pulled the final object out of the bag and Zuma barked excitedly. It was a boat. “I figured he should get used to them.” Zuma yipped looking
from the boat to Abby and back. He kneaded her leg with his front paws and gave a little whine; his ears perked up. “Here you go.” Putting Zuma and the boat on the floor, she held out the attached anchor. Gripping it firmly in his teeth, the anchor squeaked. Shaking his head, he gave a little pull and danced when the boat moved. Dropping the anchor, Zuma looked it over and then got a firmer grip. Tugging he pulled on the anchor and the boat moved. He tugged harder and the boat moved further. Zuma was prancing now; as he proudly pulled the boat across the floor. Then he stopped, dropped the anchor and used his nose to line the ship up with Jethro’s shoes.

“What do you have? Did Abby get you a boat?” Zuma answered Jethro with several excited barks. “Take it for a sail.”

As if he understood, Zuma picked up the anchor and began pulling the boat around the table. When he got to Abby, Zuma paused. Dropping the anchor, he approached her slowly. He sat down and looked up at her and then standing he placed both paws on her knee and barked. “You’re very welcome.” Abby leaned down and Zuma gave her a sloppy kiss. “Want to take your bear with you?” Abby placed the bear on top of the boat as if he was riding it. Zuma wagged his tail furiously and then grabbed the anchor setting sail again.
“Did you ever find out what’s she doing in there?” Shellc36 asked. The door was still locked.
“She and Queene of the Deer were interviewing cats.”
“Interviewing cats?” Callasandra shook her head. “How do you interview a cat?”
“That’s what you’re going with? Of anything you could ask, that’s what you’re going with?” Jesco0307 snorted.
LeiLadleLei snickered. “I think the question on most of our minds is why?”
Wolfnjag shook her head. “I’m figure I’m better off not knowing.”
“Well if she’s done with that, what is she doing?” Psyche53 asked. “She hasn’t answered the comments, she hasn’t posted a chapter.”
“Do you know if she’s working on B&A?” ArianaFeileacan asked.
“She told me she had something more important to work on.” Wolfnjag prepared herself for the explosion.
“There is nothing more important…” BellaHickenbottom hollered. “She promised us sex.”
There was a rumble of agreement from members of the cabal.
“Everyone calm down.” Psyche53 urged. “We knew that she was a bit… unusual going in.”
“Usual? She’s nuttier than a case of Planter’s Peanuts™.” QueenBee4Ever spoke up.
“In a good way, of course.”
“At least she’s leaving the pony next door alone.” Wolfnjag knew she’d jinxed it when she heard a loud whinny from outside.
“Everyone come see.” Geminiangel yelled.
“That came from outside.” BellaHickenbottom led the charge.
“How’d she…” Queen of the Deer started.
“Window.” Wolfnjag said simply.
The cabal hurried outside. There stood the pony, it’s mane and tail now red and blue, hitched to a long spring board passenger wagon decorated in red, white and blue. The long backed benches had been moved to face outward instead of towards the center.
“Hurry up.” Geminiangel bounced excitedly.
“What on earth?” Royalelephant’s jaw dropped.
Usatraveler started bouncing. “It’s lovely, Geminiangel. What a great idea!”
“Come on, come on.” Geminiangel started bouncing around the cabal handing out American flags. “The parade is starting soon.”
ArianaFeileacan nodded proud of their author. “You’re right, Geminiangel. Memorial day is more important.”
“Queen of the Deere and I have memorized a bunch of songs like America, America the Beautiful, Yankee Doodle, This land is your land, When Johnny comes marching home…” Geminiangel paused for a gulp of air.
“We get the idea.” BellaHickenbottom took a flag. “Well, what are you waiting for?”
“Aren’t you driving?” BunnyBear27 asked.
Geminiangel shook her head. “I think Wolfnjag should drive. She makes sure I do what I’m supposed to and fixes my booboos.” She drug the toe of her red, white and blue sneaker through the dirt.
Wolfnjag was stunned. Just when she was sure Geminiangel had lost the plot, she pulled something like this. She started to reply, but then cleared her throat. It was dust, not a
lump she thought firmly. “You heard her.” Wolfnjag took the driver’s seat and hollered over her shoulder. “Start us off, Queen of the Deere.”
As the wagon moved off, the cabal could be heard singing “From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripolil… We fight our country's battles in the air, on land, and sea…First to fight for right and freedom…”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 41

“You okay, McGee?” Tony slipped out on to the front porch where McGee was watching the empty road.

“You shouldn’t be out here.”

“They’re not going to try again tonight.” Tony looked at the side of the house. The splintered siding the only remaining sign of the attack; as the glass had been replaced. “Abby didn’t take your car?”

“No. Palmer talked her into going with him and Ducky. He planned on trying to talk her into staying with Ducky tonight.”

“You ready to take off?”

McGee stared into the distance for a minute. “In a while. I have to grab something out of the car. Jackson and Gibbs still inside?”

“In the kitchen.”

“Why don’t you head back in? I’ll be right in.”

“You going to tell us what’s bothering you?” McGee looked at Tony sharply. “You’ve had something on your mind all day. Even before this…” Tony waved his hand at the front of the house. McGee took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Yeah.”

“McGee, okay?” Gibbs asked as Tony returned to the kitchen.

“No.”

“He tell you what’s going on?”

“Not yet. Said he’d be back in a minute and we’d talk.”

“Why don’t I take Zuma out back and let you two talk?”

Tony placed his hand on the older man’s shoulder before he could rise. “You’re family. Stay. Besides,” Tony grinned and gestured to where the pup was curled up with his nose resting on the bear. “I think Zuma is a bit tired from all the sailing.”

Zuma didn’t even stir when the front door rattled. McGee struggled through with a large box and his computer bag. “Some watch dog…” Gibbs smirked.
“What is that?” Tony asked as McGee placed a large cardboard box in front of him and nudged it towards him.

“It’s just something I picked up while you and Abby were picking out Zuma’s other gifts. It’s for Zuma. Well, you and Zuma.”

Gibbs pulled out his knife and handed it to Tony to slit the packing tape as McGee watched nervously. Tony reach in and pulled out a wheeled contraption of lightweight fabric. “Uh…”

McGee stepped over and with quick moves he snapped it into position. “It’s a pet stroller. I checked with the vet and Zuma shouldn’t start jogging with you until he is at least eight months old.” Tony stared at McGee in shock. “I thought this way you could still take him and get him used to being out around people and the route.”

“McGee, this is…” Tony shook his head and he moved the stroller back and forth experimentally. “This is amazing. You shouldn’t have…”

“Oh, he’s my nephew, too.” Embarrassed at Tony’s emotional response, McGee moved to sit across from him.

Taking pity on the young agent, Gibbs spoke up. “So, you ready to tell us what’s stuck in your craw?”

“Nice, Jethro.” Tony said wryly and Gibbs just shrugged. “What don’t you want to tell us?”

McGee fumbled with his computer then resolutely opened the lid and his fingers flew as he opened a file. “Gibbs mentioned the questions around your birth in Italy. You know, why your mother flew when pregnant and whether you were premature. So I decided to do a little more digging. This picture was published mid-June; shortly after your parents returned home.”

Tony stared at the picture. Senior stood behind his wife his arm resting possessively on her arm. Tony was in her arms. Dressed in a small suit complete with tie, baby Tony was held protectively against her chest facing outward to the cameras. It was the picture of the perfect family and a perfect lie.

“So not premature.”

“Doesn’t appear to be.”

“Why would Senior let mom travel so close her due date?” Tony wondered. “Did he know then? Was he hoping she would lose me?”


“Rome’s where Senior’s family is from.”

“And Palermo is where the law firm is located.”

“So there is a connection.”

Jackson watched his son and son-in-law bounce back and forth. It wasn’t often, he got a chance to see the well-oiled team that solved so many NCIS cases. He could tell there was more conversation going on than what they were saying out loud. The two were completely in sync.
“Your… Senior’s first cousin and his wife were killed in the crash along with their two sons and his wife’s family. This article says that they left for Palermo on May 6.” McGee turned the computer and showed the other men the clipping.

“This gives us some more details, but nothing we didn’t already know.” Gibbs looked at the agent intently.

Biting his lips, McGee once again turned the machine. “While I was looking through the paper for information about the crash, I found this.”

When the computer was turned back to the others, Tony saw his mother as he hadn’t know her. She was standing tall and smiling happily. Dressed in an elegant, form fitting gown with a plunging neckline. Unlike the other picture, Senior had his arm around her and was also smiling. “That’s nice, McGee, but I really don’t need to see it.” Seeing the perfect picture of a young, glamorous couple in love made Tony slightly queasy knowing what had come after.

“There was a reception for Alexander Calder, the sculptor who created the Bent Propeller at the Trade Center. It was held at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York, the night before his Circus exhibition opened. It was at the Museum for several weeks.”

Gibbs looked at McGee and his gut ached. This picture was important, too important and Gibbs didn’t like where he was afraid it was headed. “When?”

“I checked the dates, Gibbs.”

“McGee…”

“April 19, 1972.” McGee stumbled on as if to be sure they understood. “This picture was taken two and a half weeks before the DiNozzos left for Palermo.”

“That’s only six or seven weeks before the picture with me. It can’t be.” Tony looked up into McGee’s eyes back to the picture.

“I checked, Tony. I even contacted Director Weinberg at the Whitney Museum to have him check the archives. They have a copy of the photo.”

Tony looked at Gibbs with anguished eyes. “She’s not pregnant.”

Section 42

Tony helped Jethro ease down on their bed and move onto his side and then moved to undress himself. Jethro watched him intently. Ever since McGee had dropped his bomb, Tony had been quiet, too quiet. Zuma fresh from his nap and had definitely noticed and followed in Tony’s footsteps whining now and then. Each time, Tony would try to smile and would pet the pup but his heart really wasn’t in it.

Jackson had taken the pup for a tour of the backyard before bedtime to give the two men time to talk but Tony had busied himself with Jethro’s meds and plans for the next day’s dinner. Jethro hadn’t pushed, yet. He knew it had been a big shock for his husband, although Tony had put up a good front while thanking McGee and seeing him off. He watched Tony emerge from the ensuitebathroom and try to coax Zuma into his special bed. “Just bring him with you. I think all three of us could use a little extra cuddling tonight.”

Tony looked at Jethro in shock. After the protests the night before, this was a total about face. He wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth though, quickly scooping the pup up and came toward
the bed. Jethro lifted the blanket so Tony could scoot in and then he put his arm around Tony’s waist and pulled him back snugly against him.

“How’s your hip?”

“I know it’s there.” Jethro had taken several Aspirin™ eschewing Ducky’s prescription pain pills. He’d had stitches many times and didn’t feel the wound justified them, but Ducky had insisted on prescribing them.

“Want an icebag?”

“Just want to lay here.” Jethro heard Zuma whining and peeked over Tony’s shoulder to see him crawling slowly up the bed.

“What do you want, silly?” Tony gave up trying to hold the pup. Free, Zuma moved up to snuggle under Tony’s chin and licked it before whimpering again.

“He’s worried about you. We both are.”

“I’m fine.”

Jethro rested his chin on Tony’s shoulder. “I know that ‘fine’, Tony, and I know you’re not.”

“My whole life is a lie. My family… I don’t’ have a family. I feel… I feel like I don’t exist. Like I’m not real, I don’t belong to anyone.”

“You’re real, Tony. You belong here with me and fuzzball.” Tony snorted when Zuma yipped as if in agreement and gave him another sloppy kiss. “You’ve got family. You’ve got me, fuzzball, Dad, Ducky, Abby, McGee, Palmer…”

“I know. I just… I don’t know who I am.”

“I do. You’re Anthony DiNozzo, my husband. The past doesn’t matter but I swear I will find your past for you.”

Tony blinked back tears. Jethro was an amazing man and there was no doubt he would keep his vow. He felt safe and … Tony hesitated and realized … he felt loved. More than he ever had in his life. Just from lying here in Jethro’s arms with Zuma tucked in under his chin. “You should get some rest, Ducky will have my head.”

“While you lay here and think all night? Nope.”

“I can’t sleep. My mind won’t shut off.”

“Lot happened today. The shooting. McGee’s bomb. Abby and Zuma’s new relationship.”

Tony snickered. Abby had been thrilled when Zuma had willingly given her a good night kiss and let her cuddle him before leaving. “Yeah.”

“Bet I can help you sleep.” Jethro thought twice about his plan before deciding to go ahead. He rubbed his hand up and down Tony’s chest. “Been doing some thinking.”

“About what?”

“The house.”
“Fixing the holes?”

“Not this house. Our house.”

Tony held his breath. “Our house?”

“Been thinking about it since I saw the plans yesterday. Why don’t we call the architect tomorrow?”

As Gibbs talked his hand slipped lower and lower on Tony’s stomach. “Have them incorporate the changes you, Dad and I talked about.”

“Even the expanded workshop?”

“Yes.” Gibbs hand slipped even lower.

“But, Jethro, this is your home. This is where your memories of Shannon and Kelly are.”

“That would be our home. I’ll always remember the past but you are my husband. That house would be our home. Our family’s home.”

Tony squirmed. Little Tony was taking more interest in where Jethro was absent mindedly rubbing his lower stomach and less on the house. “Our family?”

“We’ll talk Dad into selling the store and moving in. We’ll invite the team over on weekends for barbeques and movie nights.” As Gibbs talked his hand moved lover to the front of Tony’s boxers and continued the massage.

Tony was breathless. He struggled to focus on Gibbs voice as more and more blood rushed south. His fingers twisted in the sheets.

“Maybe we should add a pool. What do you think?” Gibbs crooned. “We could get off work and take a quick deep in the evening while we grill some steaks. Maybe even a hot tub? Send Dad over to Ducky’s for the evening and we could skip the bathing suits. It would just be you and me, hot frothy water, bare skin just gliding back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth.” As he spoke Gibbs had taken a firm hold of Tony’s erection and using the silk boxers moved his hand in time with the words. He ignored his own blossoming interest. Although release would be good and probably painful with stitches, this was about Tony. This was about connecting with Tony. “Would you like that Tony? Just you and me? Making love under the stars.”

Gibbs continued crooning as Tony began to pant and then to moan. “Jethro… I…”

“Just let go, Tony.” Gibbs moved his hand faster and faster. Stopping his verbal seduction he nuzzled the skin under Tony’s ear. Then he kissed it and finally began sucking as he sped up his movements. He felt Tony begin to stiffen and he continued as, with a moan, Tony came.

Disturbed by Tony’s behavior, Zuma also stiffened and gave an anxious bark. “It’s alright, Zuma. Mommy’s fine.” Gibbs snickered into Tony’s shoulder.

“Not Mommy.” Tony summoned energy to give Zuma a reassuring pat. “You… right in front of Zuma.”

“He didn’t see a thing.” Gibbs felt Tony shiver and then begin to wiggle out of his silk boxers; sliding away as he did. Gibbs simply put his hand back around his waist, giving it a tug.

Tony managed to slip out of his dirty clothing without dislodging the pup or Gibbs. Using the boxers he cleaned himself awkwardly and tossed them in the general direction of the bathroom. He yelped...
as Gibbs pulled him back against him. There was something erotic about being naked while Gibbs was wearing his boxers. He could feel the hardness pressed against him. “Jethro…Let me…”

“No. Don’t think that’s on Ducky’s approved activity list tonight.”

“You shouldn’t have…” Tony began guiltily.

“Shh… Sleep now.”

“I need to get dressed.” Tony protested fighting the post coital drowsiness.

“Like holding you like this. Sleep. Dream about our new home. Sleep.” Gibbs coaxed and finally, warm and relaxed, Tony gave in.

Chapter End Notes

In honor of US Memorial Day...
Forgive me for exercising my patriotism and for the serious tone of this note. I hope it offends none. I have a deep respect for service men; past, present and future. Military poetry has been a passion of mine for years written for those I have come to know and some I never knew. For all of them, for any of your heroes who gave the ultimate sacrifice and for all those mourned....

My hero lies at rest

A simple granite headstone no different from the rest,
How can the world know that a hero lies at rest?

Years spent in a uniform, one of our country’s best,
Halfway around the world, this hero earned his rest.

A brother I looked up to, my life I know was blessed,
But my heart is filled with sadness, for my hero lies at rest.

While he slumbers on I’ll go, ’til I pass heaven’s final test,
And I know I’ll see again the face, of my hero now at rest.
Chapter 17 Section 43-44

Chapter Summary

I was in a rush to get this out so this is not betaed but is fresh off the press....the keyboard.

Chapter Notes

“Where is she?” Wolfnjag yelled, interrupting the picnic, uh, important meeting of the Cabal to discuss world relations. Well, Tony and Gibbs relations. Or actually lack of relations. Marital relations.
Jesco0307 planted her face in her hand. She should have taken a longer vacation. What had the idiot done now? Between her fingers, she replied. “Geminiangel isn’t here. I haven’t seen her since I got back.”
“I know where that nincompop is.” Puzzled Jesco0307 stole a glances at Callasandra, royalelephant and usatraveler. They all looked puzzled, too. “I had to go track that idiot down in the middle of the night because someone suggested she follow the dragonflies and she ended up stick in a tree three miles over. And don’t think I don’t know who that was, Queene of the Deer. You should have been the one out at 3am with a flashlight. One more time and I swear I’m going to have them embed a tracking chip.”
“If it’s not Geminiangel or Queene of the Deer, who are you looking for?” Psyche53 asked calmly.
“When I find her…” Wolfnjag prowled between the people. ArianaFeileacan looked at Queene of the Deer, sometimes she and idiot got together…
“Wolfnjag, you’re acting like….” a glare from Wolfnjag stopped the comment. “Like… uh… You’re really upset. Who are you looking for and what did they do?”
“There she is,” Wolfnjag started through the crowd. “Don’t let her get away.” Wolfnjag went up and over a picnic … uh, meeting table; managing to grasp Kiki_L by the collar. “Oh, no you don’t.”
“Urk…Hi, Wolfnjag, want a cookie?”
Wolfnjag didn’t reply, just began dragging her towards the house. “It wasn’t bad enough I had to nurse the dumbbell through a concussion. Heaven only knows why she thought she needed go outside at 8pm to throw blocks of ice and cans of cat food up on the roof. She just kept saying the cat was getting too hot. Do you know how long it took to repair the dents in the tin?”
Jesco0307 had just raised her head. She had decided to save Kiki_L but as Wolfnjag continued she dropped it again. So that is where she’d lost the note with the time and name of the play.
“As if she doesn’t get enough trouble on her own. You….You had to go and… stir her up again.”
Callasandra and the rest of the Cabal started after the two. “Uh, Wolfnjag, what did Kiki_L do?”
“She ruined my garden.”
“Your garden?” LeiLadleLei shook her head. “I’m sure Kiki_L would be happy to help you replant your garden?”
“Traitor. I didn’t do anything to the garden.” Kiki_L protested.
“We’ll all help you repair your garden,” ArianaFeileacan said firmly. She was torn
between curiosity and fear. “It’s not a garden, it’s a sanctuary…” Wolfnjag said bitterly, continuing to drag Kiki_L along towards the back of the house.

BellaHickenbottom hurried past some other members to get to Wolfnjag’s side. “A sanctuary? For who?”

“For them.” Letting go of Kiki_L, she pointed to the fenced area. “Look what you did.” “They’re so cute.” Sonya said.

Wolfnjag glared at the cooing members of the Cabal. “They destroyed my garden.” “Where did they come from?” Joss80 said staring at the three miniature horses frolicking around.

“She did it.” Wolfnjag pointed at Kiki_L. “They’re not mine.” Kiki_L protested. “You told her to get them.” “Kiki_L, didn’t we warn you about Geminiangel? Didn’t we tell you how ….” Patriciasita shrugged unable to find the right words.

“Let’s all calm down and address the important thing.” Psyche53 said while petting the grayish white pony. “What’s their names?” “Argh.” Wolfnjag stormed into the house.

QueenBee4Ever took a break from petting the smaller brown pony. “I guess we should go after her.” “Do we have to?” “Kiki_L.” “Fine.” Kiki_L gave the medium sized pony one last pat.

The cabal trooped into the kitchen where Wolfnjag was slamming cabinet doors. “Where is the wine? Leave me here with this lunatic and company and no wine.” “Wolfnjag, where did the ponies come from?” “I told you. Her!” She pointed at Kiki_L. Jesco0307 shook her head. “Bellahickenbottom, why don’t you make a pot of tea?” As Bellahickenbottom moved past, she slipped her a small bottle to spike the tea. “I’m sure Wolfnjag would find it calming.” “Now, Kiki_L, we’ve all had situations with the idi… Geminiangel where she… interpreted things in a… different way than it was meant,” Magpie1600 said. They all remembered the invasion fiasco. “Have you talked to Geminiangel about ponies lately?”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 43

Gibbs opened his eyes reluctantly. He could tell he was alone that not even the fuzzball was in bed. He smiled when he saw Tony pulling up a pair of jogging pants. “What time is it?”

Tony turned with a smile. “About six. How are you feeling?”

“A little sore. Where’s Zuma?”

“Your dad’s puppy sitting.”

“Dad.”

“Yeah.” Tony came over and sat down gently to pull on his socks. “Zuma woke me wanting to go out. As I was coming back from downstairs, your dad was coming out of the bathroom. Zuma
decided he wanted to stay with grandpa. I checked on them a bit ago. They’re both sound asleep in bed.”

“He’s sleeping in bed… with my dad.” Jethro was shocked when Tony nodded. He couldn’t believe his father would let a dog sleep in his room let alone in his bed. “I’d pay to see that.”

“Well, it just so happens…” Tony reach over to the nightstand and grabbed his phone. Quickly accessing an app, he handed Jethro the phone before going to his dresser for a shirt.

Jethro snorted. His dad was flat on his back and Zuma was curled up on a pillow with his head on Jackson’s stomach. Jackson wore one of his old-fashioned athletic under shirts. Well, old-fashioned might not be accurate anymore Jethro thought as Tony slipped into a tank style tee. He considered pointing out the similarities between his dad’s fifties style underwear and Tony’s shirt but decided that it would have to wait until he could move better. Speaking of moving, Jethro slid sideways in the bed letting out a small groan.

“Hey, take it easy. Where are you going?”

“Let’s see. I’ve been sleeping all night. Where do you think?”

“Sorry. Stupid question. Let me help you.”

By the time he was standing, Jethro was distracted by Tony’s shirt. Across the front was the sentence, “In Gibbs we trust, everyone else goes through CODIS.” “Where did you find that?”

Tony flushed. “My frat brothers. One of them saw a shirt like it which had God instead of Gibbs. They got together and had it special made. Said that based on what I had said about you I evidently trusted you more than God.” Jethro smirked. “I don’t wear them to the office.”

“Them?”

“It. I don’t wear it to the office.”

Jethro debated pressing the issue but decided that his bladder required immediate attention. He started towards the en suite. As he passed Tony, he stopped and gave him a lingering kiss.

Shaking off the kiss, Tony quickly made the bed. “Jethro, do you want help getting a shower?”

“I’ll just do a Marine cleanup now. We can shower later.”

Tony paused in putting the pillows on the bed. He wondered if that was an invitation and he felt himself twitch in interest. Determinedly he forced himself to concentrate on getting ready for the day. Crossing to the dresser, he gathered fresh boxers and socks for Jethro. “Don’t bother putting your boxers back on. I want to change your bandages.”

“Didn’t plan on it.” Jethro emerged from the bathroom still wiping shaving cream from his face.

Tony almost swallowed his tongue to keep from drooling when he caught sight of Jethro. The shaving cream was all that he was wearing. Sure, he’d seen Gibbs in boxers during stake outs but this was Jethro, his husband.

“Where do you want me?”

“Huh?”

Jethro smirked certain Tony was distracted by thoughts were of the sexual nature. “Where do you
Tony sat down on the corner of the bed and forced himself to focus or rather not to focus on Jethro’s body. “Can you stand here? If so, I can do both at once rather than you having to roll around on the bed.” And wasn’t that a lovely image?

“Sure.” Jethro came to stand directly in front of Tony.

By now, Tony realized that Jethro was being deliberately provocative. Especially when he sat up, face to head with Little Jethro. “If you really want to wrap my…” Tony licked his lips deliberately and Jethro gave a low groan. “Bandages on that I will, but I think they will do your ass more good.”

“Tease.” Jethro turned sideways.

“Takes one to know one.” Tony carefully peeled the bandage away. He carefully touched the area checking for fever. It had been close. A few inches could have ended Jethro’s career. “Jethro…”

“It’s okay.” Jethro put his hand on Tony’s shoulder comforting him. “It didn’t happen.” He knew what a close call it had been. He kept his hand on Tony’s shoulder as Tony efficiently re-bandaged him and helped him into the clean boxers, socks and sweats.

Section 44

“Get back here, you little fuzzball.”

Hearing Jackson’s shout, Jethro opened the door to his father’s room and Zuma came bounding up dragging a shirt. “Tony.”

Near the top of the steps, Tony managed to scoop up the pup who was headed for the stairs; stumbling on the shirt as he ran. “What are you doing, silly thing? Give me grandpa’s shirt.” Tony tried to tug the shirt out of Zuma’s mouth but the pup only growled and tugged back.

“Little devil grabbed the sleeve and took off on me.” Jackson said disgruntledly from the doorway. He was dressed all but the shirt.

Jethro smirked at his father and walked to where Tony stood trying to rescue the shirt. “Zuma.” Jethro kept his voice low but firm. “Drop.” Zuma simply tilted his head and stared at him curiously. Jethro took a hold of the shirt about six inches from Zuma. “Drop.” This time, Zuma turned to look at Tony as if to ask what Jethro wanted before turning back to Jethro and give him a small woof around the shirt in his mouth. Jethro gave Zuma a gentle tap on the nose while repeating, “Drop.” In shock, Zuma let go of the shirt and jerked his head back. “Good boy, Zuma.” Jethro said giving him positive reinforcement.

“You hit him,” Tony yanked Zuma back against him protectively. “He’s just a puppy. How could you?”

“Tony, he’s just a puppy now, but soon he will get a lot bigger. Better to teach him now, before he’s dragging you to the steps or chewing on your Armadi suit jacket.”

“Armani,” Tony automatically corrected him. “He’s so little, what if you hurt him? He doesn’t have anyone to protect him.”

Jethro ran his hand through his hair. He hadn’t been thinking when he stepped into Tony’s private minefield. He didn’t doubt Tony’s concern for the pup, but he was also facing Tony’s own issues. There had been no one to protect him from Senior. “Tony, a light tap to the nose isn’t abusive. Think
of it as a head slap.”

“Those can hurt.” Tony protested.

“They get your attention. Look at him, Tony.” Jethro gestured to the puppy cuddled happily against Tony’s chest chewing on the cuff of Tony’s shirt. “If he were hurt, he would let us know.”

Unhappily, Tony was forced to concede the point. “He does have to learn right from wrong but can’t we use treats?”

“Most of the time, yes. But there will be times a treat won’t work. Now how about you and Zuma get the coffee started, Dad and I should be now by the time it’s done.”

“What about the stairs and your leg? I could help.”

“Not the first time I’ve taken them with an injury. Besides Dad’ll keep an eye on me.”

“If he needs me, you call me okay?” Tony looked past Jethro to Jackson who nodded. “Are you hungry?” Tony coaxed his shirt free and muttered to the pup as he went downstairs. “You know he loves you. He just wants you to be a good pup.”

“Boy’s been through a lot in his life.” Jackson came forward and picked up his shirt.

“Not over yet.” Jethro responded.

“I’d like just fifteen minutes with that Senior. What he did to that poor boy.”

“I could do a lot with just five.”


“I don’t know.”

“How’s he taking his mother well not being?” Jackson buttoned his shirt, grimacing as he rolled up the damp cuff.

“The little good in his childhood is from her. I don’t think he can process it yet.”

“Think Senior will confess if he’s offered a deal? Tony needs to know the whole story.”

“There won’t be a deal, Dad. Tony made Leon and Tobias swear when he turned over the evidence.”

“If it’s the only way to get the truth?”

“He won’t let them bargain.”

“What if he never finds out who he is?”

“We know who he is and we kept telling him until he believes us.”

“We?”

“Thought you might want to hang around awhile. If you don’t need to get right back to the store.”

“Well, I guess Maxwell wouldn’t mind watching it for a while longer.” Jackson herded Jethro towards the stairs and then step in front of him to give him a shoulder to lean on.
“What’s Maxwell plan to do when he graduates?”

“He’s hoping to take a job and save up money.”

“No college?”

“He isn’t that interested in learning. He’s always enjoyed working the store since he was old enough.”

“Could hire him to manage the store.” Jethro said casually, “Might even be interested in buying it down the road.”

“And leave me doing what, Leroy?” Jackson glared up at his son.

“Thought you might oversee the building of our new home.”

“New home?” Jackson stopped only a couple steps for the bottom. “Leroy, you gonna sell this place? This is where Shannon and Kelly and you lived.”

“I know. But, I think that Tony and I should have our own home.”

“Don’t remember you saying anything like this with Diane or Rebecca or Stephanie. You in this for the long haul, Leroy?”

Jethro looked directly at his father. “Yes.”

“You serious about building that house that was in that envelope?”

“With the modifications, you and Tony added. Plus, a bigger deck and a pool in the backyard.”

“Well, I guess I could stay a little while. Keep an eye on the builder and the pup while you’re at work.”

Chapter End Notes

“Yes.”

“What did you say?” Callasandra asked gently. They really didn't want to scare new Cabal members like martinamcivorncis, but they needed to be aware of the danger.

“Well, she seems to be a bit… high maintenance. So, I suggested… shegetaminiaturehelperhorsewhocouldfetchthingsforher.”

“Did you get that?” Shellec36 shook her head.

“Can you repeat that slower?”

“I suggested she get a miniature helper horse who could fetch things while she’s writing.”

Queene of the Deer thought that wasn’t a bad idea and said so. “Okay, one would have been enough but…Wolfnjag, you wouldn’t have to keep bringing her chocolate and marshmallows.”

“Didn’t you hear what I said? It’s a sanctuary. They aren’t here to be helper horses.” Wolfnjag protested.

“There aren’t?” Borderlinecrazy began to wonder about this group. Bellahickenbottom could see that they were getting nowhere with Wolfnjag.

“Geminiangel? Where are you?”
“Here.”
“Well would you come here, please?”
“But that’s where I am? Here.”
“Geminiangel, get yourself to the kitchen now.” LeiLadlelei ordered. The cabal could here her thumping down the hall. They all looked up as the sounds got nearer.
“Hi, everyone. I didn’t know all of you were stopping by.” Geminiangel looked up at them from her hands and knees.
“Why are you…” ArianaFeileacan decided to ignore her position and concentrate on the issue. “Geminiangel, why are their ponies in the backyard?”
“You met them? Aren’t they great?”
“Why are they there?”
“Kiki_L suggested I get a helper…” Geminiangel began.
“She told us,” Jesco0307 interrupted. “Why are there three of them?”
“Well, Isabella and Silver Bullet are brother and sister and they needed a home. So, I was going to bring them, but then Candy looked so sad. He grew up with them and I couldn’t separate them. They’ve had such sad lives. So I decided they could live here where we could all take care of them.”
The Cabal exchanged glances. It was a pretty sensible for her. If they needed love, well, they liked ponies.
“Ooonk.”
“What was that?” Bellahickenbottom looked around nervously.
“My helper. I’m training him.”
“But aren’t Isabella, Silver Bullet and Candy your helpers?”
“Of course not.” Geminiangel turned and called. “Come on, Dakota, hurry up. I want to show you where the marshmallows are.”
The Cabal nervously watched the doorway as sounds came down the hall. And then there it was a…a miniature mule.
Wolfnjag shook her head sipping her boubon, uh, tea. “What you didn’t expect that? A mule for a jack…”
“Wolfnjag!”
Chapter 18 Section 45-46

Chapter Notes

Pardon me for being so serious, but I so appreciate your comments & emails over the last ten months. It is hard to believe it has been that long. As some of you know, my mother is in her early seventies & had major surgery last August. We almost lost her in September. It took a very long time for her to heal and even now she doesn't have the strength she did before. That is part of the reason for the delay.

The rest was partly due to my neck, the headaches & problems with my arms that prevented me from typing. The arm bands QueeneoftheDeer recommended are helping.

The last reason is sort of an excuse. Some of you know that I took up writing in wake of cancer. I was lucky not to have to do chemo or radiation but I did have a double mastectomy that was complicated by an infection in the chest wall. I am on medication daily to prevent cancer reoccurring. That medicine has taken a toll. I don't seem to have the energy (or creativity) that I used to have but I am trying to fight my way back.

I am so blessed that all of you have stuck by me. Progress may be slow but I do not intend to abandon the cabal or the story or the ponies. Thank-you all.

Sorry it's not beta'd, I was too eager to post.

Section 45

Jethro watched his father and Tony moving around the kitchen. Delicious smells were filling the kitchen. The two men worked in concert as if they had been doing it for years. He couldn’t believe it was only six days since he walked in on Tony being handcuffed. Even if it hadn’t been a week yet, he knew it in his gut. It felt right. They were a family.

Tony brought a tray of biscuits to the table emptying it into a bowl. He smirked as Gibbs snitched a biscuit and tossed it from hand to hand to keep from getting burned. “You could wait.”

“Nope.” Jethro said unrepentant. “Your biscuits are too good.”

“Better than mine, Leroy?” Jackson asked from where he was turning thick slices of ham.

“Busted.” Tony sing-songed as he placed the tray on the counter. He switched out carafes and brought the fresh coffee to the table.

Jethro shifted on the cushion Ducky had left and buttered the biscuit. “Well, Dad. Whose biscuits do you think I should like better, my husband’s or my father’s?”

“So you don’t like my biscuits better?” Tony put on a sad face as he set the coffee down.

Jethro gave him a swat on the rear and grabbed another biscuit.

“Spouse abuse! Jackson, you’re my witness.” Tony laughed as he moved back to the stove to stand next to his father-in-law. He checked the scrambled eggs, finding them done to his satisfaction he
placed them in a bowl and took them to the table. “Need a hand, Jackson?”

Jackson pointed his spatula at another pan. “You could dish up the home fries. This ham is ready to come off.”

“Sounds like I’m just in time.” Fornell said from the kitchen door. Jethro glanced at Tony who gave a small nod before saying to his husband with a smirk at Fornell, “I thought you locked the door.”

“Pull up a chair.” Jethro pointed to the table while finishing his second biscuit.

Ignoring Tony’s comment, Fornell sat down next to Jethro. “Thanks.” He looked up as Tony produced a large mug and filled it from the carafe.

In typical male fashion, conversation gave way to enjoyment of the meal, Jackson and Tony provided. Once the dishes were heavily depleted and Gibbs had managed to swipe the last biscuit, Tony and Jethro exchanged a knowing look. “So, Tobias, what brings you by?”

Fornell wiped his mouth and looked enviously at the biscuit Gibbs held. “Breakfast. Heard you had DiNozzo cooking.”

“McGee.” Gibbs stated the source definitively.

“Talked to him when I stopped by NCIS to see Vance.”

“What was he doing at the office? We’re off the roster.”

“Said he was following a new lead. Anything I should know?”

Tony took a long sip of coffee trying to decide how to answer the question. With Senior, it had been a relief to know he didn’t carry his DNA, but his mother… Mentally, Tony shook his head. Not his mother. She had been the only thing bearable in his life and she wasn’t his mother. He looked to Jethro and then Jackson for guidance, before realizing he needed to take the lead. Neither man would break his confidence. “McGee found a picture online last night. The golden couple, Mr. & Mrs. DiNozzo, arriving for a reception at the Whitney Museum of Art just before my birth. She wasn’t pregnant.”

Fornell took a sip of his coffee. This was not a good turn of events. “Maybe she carried well. You know there are women who don’t show till late in the pregnancy.”

Jethro shot down Fornell’s theory. “The picture was taken just a couple weeks prior to the DiNozzos going to Palermo. McGee also found a picture of the three taken shortly after their return. Tony was a healthy full-term baby. There’s no way she was pregnant. It would have showed in that dress.”

“A panty line would have showed in that dress.” Tony muttered bitterly.

“Well, damn.” Fornell took a long sip of his coffee. He hated to be the bearer of anymore bad news.

“So, Fornell, I know you didn’t come to taste my cooking.”

“We traced the car we found that night.”

“Which case?” Gibbs wondered who had tried to take them out this time.

“None.” Fornell held his cup out for a refill. “Turns out a couple of your neighbors saw you on the news. Decided they didn’t want ‘your kind’ living in their neighborhood. Had a few beers, had a few more, got the bright idea to scare you out.”
“Huh.” Gibbs looked at Tony. “Didn’t expect that. Guess it’s a good thing we’re moving.”

“I don’t know I feel a bit cheated. I figured a cartel, foreign assassin, weapons dealers… All we get is drunk, prejudiced neighbors?”

Gibbs exchanged looks with Jackson who obligingly swatted his new son-in-law.

“Hey!” Tony looked at Jackson betrayed. “I’m your son-in-law.”

“He’s my son.” Jackson shrugged. “Besides I worry enough about people hunting you two down. It’s nice that it is just drunk neighbors.”

“That’s not all you came for, Tobias.” While Tony and Jackson bantered, Gibbs had been watching Tobias. “Might as well spit it out.”

Tobias reluctantly put his cup down realizing he couldn’t stall any longer. He let out a big sigh of relief when the front door banged shut.

“Boss?”

Section 46

“Kitchen, McGee.” Gibbs called.

“Morning, Boss, Tony, Jackson. Agent Fornell.” Juggling the packages in his hand, he sat a beverage carrier down on the table, followed by two large boxes with distinctive packaging.

“You stopped at Hansen’s?” Tony bounced in his chair and grabbed a box.

“It was on the way,” Gibbs glanced at his agent with a raised eyebrow. “Sort of.” McGee added. “I picked up some of that cappuccino you like Tony and some of their special java.” McGee handed the Styrofoam™ cups around. He had even brought one for Fornell.

“You can’t seriously still be hungry.” Gibbs watched his husband salivating over the box.

“It’s donuts. From Hansen’s.” Tony stated in explanation. “With sprinkles.”

“The other box is muffins. They’re still warm.” McGee watched his amusement as Tony abandoned the donuts and pounced on the other box. As the box was opened the smell of warm muffins filled the air. The scent of blueberry, lemons, apple, banana teased the nostrils of the other men, while Tony made a triumphant grab.

“Chocolate chocolate chip with pecans.” Tony crowed.

Jackson eyed the huge muffin. It did smell good and he did have a cup of coffee just waiting.

“Dad! We just ate.” Gibbs was shocked when his father grabbed the muffin box.

“Loosen up, Leroy. They’re still warm. What do we have here?”

Still clutching his muffin, now missing a large bite, Tony began to point. “Those are Citrus Raspberry with poppy seeds, those are blueberry praline, these are apple raisin strudel and these are chocolate chocolate chip with pecans. Hey, McGee, I don’t recognize those.” Tony said pointing to the remaining muffins while taking another large bite of his muffin.

“Those are two new varieties that Aalrik sent for you to try. He’s considering adding them and
wanted to know what you think.” McGee leaned over the table. “Those are…” he thought for a minute. “Oh, yeah, cinnamon honey sour cherry and those are white chocolate raspberry crisp.”

“White chocolate raspberry?” Tony stared at McGee as if Elvis had just returned to the building.

McGee nodded. “Said it’s sort of a take on white chocolate cheesecake with raspberry sauce and dark chocolate crust.”

Tony glanced at the half-eaten chocolate muffin in his hand and then back at the box. “White chocolate…. Raspberry…”

“Give me that.” Jethro swiped the remaining muffin. “Well, go on,” he said taking a bite.

“You’re the best husband ever.” Tony grabbed the new muffin.

Jackson smirked at his son. He never pictured his son eating a chocolate muffin. “Uh, Leroy, we just ate.” He reminded his son.

“It’s muffins. From Hansen’s.” Gibbs used Tony’s explanation. “Loosen up, dad.”

McGee and Tobias hid their snickers behind their coffee cups. Both men were content to let the Gibbs family enjoy their muffins for as long as they would. Exchanging a glance each man grabbed a donut or muffin to prolong their reprieve.

Their second breakfast consumed, Gibbs looked at Fornell and McGee. “You want to tell us now about whatever you two don’t want say.”

Fornell glanced at McGee but couldn’t force the younger agent to break the news. “I stopped in at NCIS to tell Vance about a situation. Last night,” Fornell drank the last of his coffee to ease his suddenly dry throat. “Last night, Senior was attacked.”

“Is he…” Tony couldn’t finish.

“No. He’s not dead. They worked him over pretty good. Broken ribs, arm, fingers, concussion and a lot of bruises and some pretty bad internal injuries. He’s in a secure prison hospital. He’s serious but stable. I talked to the doc myself. He said he’ll live.”

“He was supposed to be in maximum security, what the hell happened, Tobias?”

“Gibbs, you know what it’s like. We’re investigating, but…”


“We’re watching a couple guards. They got roughed up a bit in the attack but something doesn’t add up.”

“Foreign cartel?” Gibbs asked.

“We don’t think so. It appears to be a U.S. link to one of the drug rings.”

“You can’t just “not think so”.” Gibbs raged. “The foreign cartel isn’t going to just crawl off. They’re going to want to leave a warning.”

“They left a warning but…” Tobias cleared his throat. “Ah, hell. The DOJ decided that they didn’t want Senior and Benoit held in the same city so they decided to move Benoit to Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York last night. It was top clearance only. On the way, the transport
was… was ambushed. All the transport personnel and the marshals in the unmarked cars leading and following them were all shot to death.”

“Jeanne was the warning.” Tony said in shock. “She’s dead?” Gibbs rubbed his back in comfort.

“Yeah. I saw the photos. They made it real personal.”

“Does Senior know?”

Fornell shook his head. “Senior is being kept unconscious. The doctor doesn’t think he should be told till his condition is upgraded. The DOJ is trying to keep Benoit’s death quiet but with ten marshals killed, it’s not going to stay that way for long. I thought you should be prepared.”

Tony pushed back his chair and stumbled to his feet. Gibbs rose and tried to take him in his arms, but Tony pushed away. “I can’t breathe. I can’t…” Putting an arm around his waist, Gibbs lead him to the back door and then out on the back porch.

Jackson looked towards where the two men had exited. “I know they appreciate your coming to break the news in person.”

Fornell rose slowly. He felt he had aged twenty years in the past twenty minutes. “I better go. There’s an inquiry today into the incidents. Pretty sure some heads are going to roll. I haven’t seen an op this FUBAR in years. If they want to…” Fornell just shook his head.

“Thanks, Fornell.” McGee stood. “I’ll let them know you had to report in.”

McGee escorted Fornell to the door. “Listen, tell Gibbs the word was somehow leaked that the Tony and Senior weren’t speaking and that Senior isn’t his dad and that’s one reason Tony turned him in. I’ve got a friend in listening to chatter. It seems the cartel decided that because of that Tony would be of no use in sending a warning. If I hear any different, I’ll let them know.”

“Thanks. I’ll let him know.”

“Jackson, are you okay?” McGee was concerned when he re-entered the kitchen and saw Jackson leaning his hands braced on the sink.

“He can’t seem to catch a break.”

“No, he can’t.”

“What haven’t you told him?” Jackson looked at the young agent and then back at his sons.

“I’ve been through everything I could find and followed every lead I had. There’s nothing to link either Benoit or Senior to DHS.”

Jackson turned to McGee. “Then the person who started this whole mess?”

“Still out there.” McGee looked out the window at his team mates. “Whoever is after Tony is still out there.”
Chapter 19 Section 47-48

Chapter Summary

The author notes are inspired by the unlucky US cabal members whose taxes must be filed by August 18th.

Chapter Notes

“Please be seated.” The woman said sternly. “I understand that you chose not to have a representative with you.”
“No, no politicians.” Gemiiniangel shuddered.
“I meant a lawyer.”
“Rule 13.”
“I beg your pardon.” The agent shuffled her files.
“That’s against rule 13.”
“No, it’s not. You are permitted a lawyer. Would you like me to call one for you?”
“NO!”
“Calm down. You can waive the right.” The woman straightened her horn-rim glasses.
“Now, could I have your name?”
“Gemiiniangel.”
“No, your full real name.”
“Gemiiniangel1964.”
“Let’s come back to that. Where do you live?”
“FF.net and AO3.”
“No. Where do you get your mail?”
“Oh.” Gemiiniangel nodded strongly. “FF.net and AO3.”
“Miss, are you sure you don’t want someone with you? Do you usually have someone to help you?”
“Wolfnjag.”
“Would you repeat that?”
“Wolfnjag. The cabal throught it would be a good idea if she lived with me and helped me.”
“So this person lives with you?”
“Uh-huh.”
“What are you doing?” The woman snapped at her.
“I was looking at the butterflies. They should be out flying. I’m going to open the window for them.” Gemiiniangel had ahold of the edge of the frame ready to lift it.
“Leave that alone. That is my prized collection. I mounted them myself.”
“You ride them?” Gemiiniangel’s eyes filled with tears. “What kind of monster are you?”
“Of course, I don’t ride them.” The woman slammed her hand down onto the desk. “Do you realize how much trouble you are in?”
“You’re not going to tell the Cabal, are you?”
“Ah, yes, Cable. You’ve listed him as a dependent.”
“It’s not him.”
“Not who?”
“The cabal.”
“Gable?”
“Cabal.”
CRACK. The agent stared at the broken pen in her hands. Putting it in the trash can, she took a deep breath and willed her shaking hands to still. “Is Cabal your son?”
“No. It’s ArianaFeileacan, Aussiefan70, buns1974, Callasandra, carbo21, Chiefraz, devb3, Fairhaven74, Felmyst, Goddess47, jane_x80, keegu, LAG0802, magpie1600, MamaT, Mihoshi_Jackson, nevarstar, ncisgirl2014, otrame, Patriciasita, psyche53, QueenBee4Ever, ShadowWolfsDen, Sharon, Queen of the deer, Teresahr49, Trout1986, …”
“Enough.” Taking a deep breath, she placed her hands in her lap. “I want to know Cabal’s name.”
“I told you. It’s ArianaFeileacan, Aussiefan70, buns1974, Callasandra, carbo21, Chiefraz, devb3, Fairhaven74, Felmyst, Goddess47, jane_x80, keegu, LAG0802, magpie1600, MamaT, Mihoshi_Jackson, nevarstar, ncisgirl2014, otrame, Patriciasita, psyche53, QueenBee4Ever, ShadowWolfsDen, Sharon, Queen of the deer, Teresahr49, Trout1986…”
“You’re telling me that you financially support this cabal.”
“No.”
“It says right here, you have listed the Cabal as a dependent.”
“That’s right.”
“So you give them money.”
“Absolutely not!” Geminiangel said indignantly. “That would be bad.”
“If you’re not giving them money, they are not your dependents.”
“They depend on me.”
“You can’t list them as a dependent if you are not supporting them.”
“We support each other.”
“You have also listed Isabella, Silver Bullet, Candy and Dakota. Are they your children?”
“No.”
“Are they family members?”
“Oh, yes!”
“How are you related?”
“I don’t understand.”
“Are they nieces, nephews, cousins?”
“Isabella and Silver Bullet are brother and sister. I don’t think Candy is related to them. And Dakota isn’t related to any of them.”
“How are they related to you?”
“Don’t be silly. The can’t be related to me. Isabella, Silver Bullet and Candy are horses and Dakota is a jack…”
“Geminiangel! Where are you?”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 47

“Where’s McGee?” Jethro asked after Tony excused himself to go upstairs. Having heard the door, Zuma came racing to the kitchen and jumped happily at Gibbs' knees. Then he raced back to the foot of the stairs and barked up at Tony. “Easy, Zuma. Come on. He’ll be back.” With one last bark, Zuma laid down to wait. “Good boy. Dad?”
Jackson took a sip of his coffee and motioned to the fresh pot. “He had some errands he needed to run.”

Jethro eyed his father closely as he took a sip of his own coffee. “McGee didn’t just stop by to bring donuts. Did he leave anything for me?”

“No.”

“Do I really have to interrogate my own father?”

“Can I watch?” Tony carried Zuma into the room. “Why are you interrogating Jackson? Did he hide the coffee?”

“He let McGee leave.”

“Without reporting? Bad form. I thought I trained him better than that.” Tony smiled at Jackson. “McDonutBoy came for something other than to bring donuts. It had to be bad for him to bring muffins, too.” Tony shared a quick glance with Jethro.

“Oh, I don’t think he left without reporting.”

“But, we were out… Jackson, you took his report? Shame on…” At the look on Jackson’s face, Tony dropped his teasing. “What is it? What did McGee say?”

“You might as well spill it, Dad. Or would you rather I have Tony call his cell?”

“McGee was going to wait but I told him I’d tell you.” Jackson set his cup on the counter. “Should have let him stay.”

“Is it Senior?”

“No, it’s nothing to do with that man.” Jackson reach out to rub Tony’s shoulder comfortably, but focused on Jethro. “He said he’d checked everything and that neither that man nor that woman had anything to do with Tony’s citizenship issues.”

“Looks like your gut was right again.”

“Tony…”

“Stop, Jethro. That day in Arlington we both knew it. It’s not Senior’s style. He likes to push the buttons in person. Jeanne prefers…preferred to work behind the scene but with a more vicious outcome. I’m surprised she didn’t hire a hitman.” Tony hugged Zuma. “It was a long shot from the word go. We knew that.”

“We’ll find them.”

“We will. The best team NCIS has is working on it. I just… I hate not knowing.”

Putting down his cup, Jethro stepped forward and gently placed his arms around Tony and the pup who howled in outrage at being trapped between the two men.

“Here.” Jackson deftly removed the pup and carried him whining into the other room. Hush. They need a little time to themselves. Why don’t we see where Leroy put your bone?”

“Jethro.” Tony left himself melt into his arms. “What do we do now?”
“We start at the beginning.” Jethro turned into Gibbs for a minute. “Team dinner at 6. Everyone. Whoever’s out there could act at any minute. I want to know who and I want to know why.”

“It’s Saturday. What if they have plans?” Tony felt that head slap might have partly been deserved. “Right, team meeting. I’m on it! Should they bring anything?”

“We’ll take care of it. Get your jacket and I’ll meet you at the car after I tell dad where we’re going.”

“Are you going to tell me where we’re going?” That head slap wasn’t deserved Tony mumbled as McGee picked up his call. “McGee! Team meeting, six pm.”

Gibbs could hear Tony speaking as he bounded up the stairs. Entering the front room, he found Jackson snoozing in the recliner while Zuma chewed contentedly on a bone in his lap. “You shouldn’t be on the furniture.” He told the pup who looked up at him with a smirk.

“Technically, he is on my lap not the furniture.” Jackson said without opening his eyes.

“You and Tony are spoiling him.”

“And?” Jackson looked up at his son with a grin.

Deciding this was a battle that he didn’t want to fight right now, he simply ignored the comment. “Tony and I are going to the store for a few things. We’re having a team meeting at six.”

“You want me to make myself scarce, Leroy?”

“You’re part of Tony’s team, aren’t you?” Jethro countered. “We’ll be back in a couple hours.” He heard Tony bounding down the stairs and letting himself out, still talking on his cell phone. He headed for the door, adding as he shut the door behind himself. “Don’t let the pup destroy the house.”

Section 48

Shopping with Jethro was definitely an experience. Unlike the trip earlier in the week, Jethro wasn’t re-enacting the invasion of Normandy. Their first stop hadn’t been to pick up dinner supplies; the reason for the trip Jethro explained. Instead Tony found himself outside an exquisite baby boutique in Alexandria. He paused to admire the potted cherry trees framing the display window. “Uh, Jethro. Regardless of what you told the team, you do know that I’m not pregnant, right?”

His thank-you for the slap was automatic. “If I remember correctly, Mr. Palmer asked you to serve as Victoria’s god-father and I believe, therefore, you are required to spoil her somewhat.”

Tony’s face lit up and he surprised him and Jethro by giving him a quick kiss. “You are the best! Come on, we have shopping to do.” Jethro found himself towed in the wake of hurricane Tony.

Jethro found watching Tony shop for Victoria interesting. In spite of his Armani addiction, eschewed the extravagant silver plated baby items and instead made a beeline for the stuffed animals, arranged among the baby furniture. Each was picked up and hugged to see if it met Tony’s standard. It had to be soft but not floppy. Substantial enough to cuddle but not hard. Finally, he narrowed the choices to a traditional teddy bear in a soft honey gold with a pink bow, a plush lamb that begged to be curled into and unbelievably a dog that bore an uncanny resemblance to Zuma.

“I can’t choose.” Tony moaned.
Jethro took the lamb and popped it in a shopping basket he had grabbed. “From Uncle Tony.” He grabbed the bear. “From Uncle Jethro.” Taking the last animal, he added it. “From Great-Uncle Jackson”.

Tony laughed. This was a side of Jethro he hadn’t seen before. “Not from Zuma?” He wandered further into the store and stopped at a rack of elaborate newborn dresses. Unable to help himself he found himself selecting several of the frilly creations. As he turned towards the counter, it took his breath. “Jethro?”

Jethro followed his gaze to the Victorian style dollhouse on the display by the counter. He joined Tony in looking over the house. Touching it gently, he evaluated the quality of wood. “You know she won’t be able to play with it for a couple years.”

“I know but…” Tony was mesmerized.

“Fairly good quality.” Jethro ignored the sales lady’s indignant look. “You know what, this might be a good project for the new workshop.” Tony turned his head to look at him. “Between, you, me and dad, we could make something pretty special. Could design it to look like this or maybe like our new home. That is, if you want to.”

“I’d like that.” Tony was thrilled by the reference to a home of their own and the thought of working with Jackson and Jethro. He floated in a daze while Jethro handed over their shopping basket and they argued who would pay. Tony won by calling godfather’s privilege.

Throughout the shopping trip, the two argued good-naturedly over which steaks to get. Tony arguing for rib eye against Jethro’s choice of Porterhouse. It wasn’t any surprise that they ended up with the porterhouse.

“You know, they wouldn’t mind hot dogs and hamburgers or pizza.” Tony remarked as they moved on to choose the side dishes.

“It’s our first time hosting dinner. I would mind.”

Yep. There went that warm feeling in Tony’s stomach again. It lasted until Jethro picked up a head of iceberg lettuce. It was fun to argue over the different lettuces, tomatoes and various vegetables. Finally, done at the grocers, they made one last stop at a beverage center for bags of ice and a variety of drinks.

Chapter End Notes

“Uh-oh.” Geminiaiel started looking for a place to hide.
“Where is that idiot? Geminiaiel, answer me now.”
Geminiaiel hid under a glass top table near the window. “Shh. You haven’t seen me.”
“Geminiaiel!” Wolfnjag burst into the office. “Don’t say another word. Get out from under that table. Now.”
“You’re mean!”
“You’re an idiot.” Wolfnjag turned to the agent. “I am so sorry.”
“Wolfnjag, did you find her?”
Wolfnjag pointed to the idiot.
“I thought she’d look stranger.” Fairhaven74 said to Aussiefan70.
“Hi, geminiangel, I’m Aussiefan70.”
“I’m Fairhaven74. I really enjoy Gibbs and Tony’s story.”
“Do you like ponies and donkeys and elephants?”
“Yes.”
“Do you drink caramel Macchios?”
“Yes.”
“Would you buy me one?”
“Yes.”
“I like you.” Geminiangel turned to interrogate the other new member.
“Do you like kids?”
“Yes.”
“I’m going to have two. Do you want to see them?”
“Yes.”
“I do think I should be able to eat all the chocolate that Wolfnjag hides from me?”
Ignoring Wolfnjag as she vehemently shook her head, Aussiefan70 tried to be diplomatic and change the subject. “I understand you are having a little problem with your taxes.”
While the idiot was distracted by cabal, Wolfnjag handed the IRS agent a new set of papers. “We completed these for her. My best suggestion is to just trash whatever she sent you.”
The IRS agent held up a stack of papers an inch thick smeared with chocolate. “Are you her caretaker?”
Wolfnjag nodded reluctantly. “I lost the coin toss.”
“May I strongly suggest that you not allow her to attend appointments alone.”
“I try not to leave her alone period. Unfortunately I was arranging for someone to watch the horses and donkey. When I turned around the jack…”
“Fly… fly…” The two women turned to see Fairhaven74, Aussiefan70 and Geminiangel tossing the butterflies one by one in the air.
“Stop. Don’t touch them.” The IRS agent shouted. “Get out. Just get out and take that idiot with you.”
“You were supposed to keep her out of trouble, while I handled the taxes.” Wolfnjag scolded the newbies as she shepherded the idiot out.
“You said to help her.” Aussiefan70 said.
“You weren’t helping.”
“Yes, I was. She wanted help freeing the butterflies.”
Momentarily distracted, Wolfnjag noticed two members of their little group had disappeared. “Where did the idiot get to now?”
“There’s a coffee cart in the lobby. She and Fairhaven1974 went to get some.”
Wolfnjag rolled her eyes. Somehow the idiot seemed able to corrupt the nicest people with her insanity. Maybe there should be some kind of test for new cabal members.
“Hi, Wolfnjag, Geminiangel said to meet her here. Is she writing?”
Wolfnjag rolled her eyes. “Does she ever? I had her working on B&A; turned my back
to get Dakota a carrot, a chocolate, chocolate chip muffin with pecans and a mug of cold
milk. When I turned back she was gone.”
“You feed the mule muffins and milk?”
Wolfnjag rolled her eyes again. She pointed at a crumbled piece of paper with crayon
drawings.
Otrame looked at the paper. Who’d think to draw a purple carrot? That might be Dakota
next to it. There was what appeared to be a toadstool with growths, oh, yeah, muffin.
Next to it was a glass of turquoise liquid. Good thing, Wolfnjag spoke idiot. “Well, I
guess I will leave you to whatever it is you are doing?”
“Last night, while sane people were sleeping the idiot went dragonfly hunting.”
“And those are…?” Otrame pointed at the insects.
“Baby dragonflies.”
“Of course. Why baby dragonflies?”
“QueeneoftheDeer suggested the next cabal meeting be held at the butterfly house at the
zoo.”
“When? When?” Otrame bounced but stopped when Wolfnjag glared.
“ShadowWolfsDen, nevarstar, MarieKiki19 and jane_x80 took her dragonfly hunting
last evening.”
“Sounds like fun.” Otrame shrugged at Wolfnjag’s glare. “Well, it does.”
“Wolfnjag, here’s some more moss and rocks. Keegu is hunting some fairies to ask if
they want to help babysit.”
Panchajaviera smiled as she came in with a basin.
“Babysit?”
“Hi, Otrame. Yeah, babysit the orphan dragonflies.”
“Orphans.” Wolfnjag confirmed sourly.
“Do you want to help me and Chrissie0770 find more things for the homes?”
“Definitely.” Otrame escaped with Panchajaviera. “Hi, Fairhaven74. You don’t want to
go in there.” Otrame pointed to the house.
“Geminiangel invited me to meet her kids.”
“She’s not there, trust me.”
“Psst. Psst…”
“Do you hear that bush hissing?” Fairhaven74 went to peer into the huge bush. “Hey,
usatraveler, what are you doing?”
“Shhh. Come in. Don’t let Wolfnjag see you.”
Otrame looked around and then dived into the bush.
“Through here.”
Otrame crawled after her fellow cabal member. Somehow she thought that in joining the
cabal that crawling in bushes wasn’t the craziest thing she would end up doing.
“Hi.” Geminiangel and LAG0802 were sitting cradling blanket wrapped kids. “Aren’t they sweet?” Geminiangel asked. “Want to feed one?”
“Definitely.” Otrame held her arms out eagerly. Yep. Her grandmother would approve.
“Meh!...Meh!....” said the baby goat as it head-butted the bottle.

Section 49

“Zuma, hush.” Tony scooped the barking pup up as he headed for the door. “Ducky, come on in.”

“Anthony, how are you handling things, my boy?”

“The best I can.”

“And how are you, my fine fellow?” Ducky extended his hand for Zuma to sniff and then scratched behind his ears.

“Overexcited.” Tony laughed. “He’s been racing in and out every time the back door opens. Gibbs is out back he has the grill going and I’ve been working in the kitchen. He can’t decide where he wants to be, can you, Zuma?” The pup barked and wiggled to be put down. Once his paws hit the floor he took off through the hall and kitchen. “I believe that Zuma offered to show you the way.”

“Tony! Hurry up, McGee.” Abby swatted him with her clutch and hurried ahead of him and he simply rolled his eyes at Tony behind her back. “I saw that, McGee.”

“Hi, Abs.”

“Where’s my little Zuma?”

“Probably in the back yard with Gibbs. Nice to see you too, Abs.” Tony said as she hurried off.
“What do you have, McGee?”

“Abby insisted on bringing what she calls some dips and nibbles.”

“Great. It’ll give everyone something to start on while the steaks and everything else is cooking.”

“Something smells good.” McGee followed him into the kitchen placing his carrier on the table.

“I’ve got potatoes baking.”

“I’ve baked potatoes and they don’t smell like that.”

“Oh, I did some plain and experimented a bit. I had a few different ideas I wanted to try. So, I made some traditional twice baked, some...”

“Traditional?” McGee interrupted.

“I removed the inners added some cheese, some bacon, some chives and then stuffed them back and layered cheese on top. Then I did a few I’m calling a la Tony.”

“A la Tony?”

“I did a little southwestern style stir fry. Added the potato and voila.”
“They smell great.” McGee peeped in the oven. “Tony, what army is joining us?” He stared at the trays full of baked potatoes.

“They are great warmed up, McComic. It makes a balanced quick meal that can be frozen. Just reheat. Besides, I wanted everyone to be able to try the variety.”

“What are the orange ones?”

“Oh. Twice baked sweet potatoes with a little butter, some honey and walnuts. I though Abby would like those.”

“Are those the mushroom and onions that you made at the cabin?”

“Yes, but these will be better. I had a bit of time to marinate the mushrooms.”

“Steak?” McGee asked mouthwatering.

“Porterhouse. Jethro is doing the honors on the grill.”

“You guys are going all out.”

“It’s our first team dinner.” Repeating Jethro’s reasoning gave Tony that warm feeling again. “I even got the stuff to make a real salad. No iceberg lettuce.” Tony added seeing McGee’s look of confusion.

“Do you need help with anything?”

Tony continued mixing spices into a bowl. “I think it’s all covered. Want to grab us each a beer? Jethro set up a washtub on the back porch to cool them.” A tentative knock interrupted.

The two shared a glance. “Palmer.” They chorused.

Tony shook his head. “He just can’t seem to break the habit of knocking.”

“Still nervous around Gibbs.” McGee said leaving the kitchen. “I’ll let him in.”

Section 50

Tony leaned back on the bench contentedly. The steak had been cooked to perfection. Everyone had raved about his potatoes. Tony was a bit shocked that so many of them had been eaten and more had been claimed for leftovers. The spring evening was still cool but between the warmth of Jethro’s stone grill and the matching fire pit on the patio, it was perfect to sit there listening to the conversation flow around him. He could feel Jethro’s arm warm against his shoulder as he sat next to him. He cuddled Victoria against him letting her hold tight to his finger and to her lamb’s ear.

“Still awake?” Jethro peered over at her.

“Just relaxing, aren’t you, angel?”

“She’s had a big night. So has Zuma.” Tony smiled at the sleeping pup whose head was on Victoria’s foot.

“He was a bit jealous.” Gibbs smirked. “He didn’t like sharing his mommy.”

“I’m not his mommy.” Tony protested. It was true Zuma had been unsettled, alright jealous, when Palmer arrived with his family. The pup had danced in from the yard and had barked at the new
arrivals until hushed by Tony.

After McGee had left the Palmer family in, Tony dried his hands and sat down on the kitchen chair, Zuma sat quietly watching Breena hand Tony the pink blankets. Putting both paws on Tony’s leg, he nosed at the blankets as they were peeled away revealing the small infant in pink ruffles. Victoria cooed as her world was exposed and Zuma yipped in shock.

“Hush, Zuma.”

“It’s okay,” Breena said, “she loves Ducky’s corgis. Aren’t you a good boy?” Breena expertly scratched Zuma’s ears. “When you get a bit older, you and Victoria can play. Would you like that?” In answer, Zuma took off to the back yard yipping for his personal door opener McGee to let him out again.

“She’s so beautiful.” Tony gently sat her on his knee. “Hi, sweetheart. I’m your godfather. I’m going to watch over you and mommy and daddy. You’ll never have to worry or be afraid.”

“Ahh.” Jethro entered from the backyard carrying Zuma. “That’s what you were carrying on about.” Deftly, Jethro exchanged Zuma for Victoria to Palmer’s surprise. “She’s lovely, Palmer.”

“Thank-you, si… Gibbs.”

“I thought you were manning the grill not stealing my god-daughter.” Tony joked.

“Dad is overseeing McGee at the moment. Have you given her the package yet?”

“Oops. Forgot.” Still holding Zuma, Tony made his way to the corner and came back with the rather large gift bag handing it to Breena

“Tony, you didn’t have to buy her anything.” Breena and Palmer protested.


“It’s so cute and so soft.” Breena squeezed the lamb.

“That’s from Uncle Tony.” Tony held Zuma up where Victoria could coo at him while Tony played with her feet.

“What a lovely color bear. It’s just the right size, too.” Breena handed it to Jimmy.

“That’s from Uncle Jethro.”

“Un...uncle...Jet...Jethro.” Palmer stuttered.

“Yes, Uncle Jethro. If that’s alright with you, Palmer.” Jethro glanced at him and then at Victoria. “You don’t plan to leave her with Tony without adult supervision.”

“Hey.” Tony sluggéd Jethro’s arm. “I’m an adult.”

“How many diapers have you changed?”

“Uh. I’m an adult.”

“Oh, look. It looks just like you.” Breena lifted the stuff dog and held it up in front of Zuma who
drew back in shock and gave a yelp.

Caught off balance, Tony staggered as Zuma struggled wildly in his arms. “Easy, Zuma. It’s ok, just a toy.” Sitting down, Tony held the pup tightly crooning to him when the pup whined.

Breena quickly put the pup back in the bag. “Is he okay?”

“He’s fine.” Tony reassured her. “He just got a bit scared. The pup is from Great-Uncle Jackson. Just like you were from Jackson.” He held Zuma up speaking softly.

“It’s good it’s not the other way around.” Palmer laughed. “The corgis are enough to handle right now.”

Breena held up the dresses. “Tony, these are gorgeous. Where will she wear them?” She laughed. “She hasn’t received an invitation to any royal cotillions. Don’t you think they are a bit fancy?”

“A princess deserves gowns fit for a princess. She can wear them to visit her favorite uncles, can’t you, Victoria?” Jethro pressed a small kiss on her hand. As they heard a loud discussion from outside, Jethro grimaced and turned to Tony. “I better get out there before dad forces McGee to mutiny. Shall we swap?”

“Here let me.” Breena scooped up her daughter. “It’s almost feeding time.”

“Use the living room.” Gibbs pointed. “Beer, Palmer?”

“Sure.”

Tony smiled proudly as Jimmy followed Jethro out. He whispered to Zuma, “That’s our family. I think we’re pretty lucky, don’t you?”

Section 51

“Gibbs.” Abby’s voice brought the two men back to the present. She had pulled her chair up next to the bench. “Don’t get me wrong. It’s been a great evening, but I know there’s a reason why we’re here.”

Jethro sighed, hating to end the pleasant evening on a sour note. “We’ve got some more information that McGee found. I wanted to bring everyone together, share the information and try to talk it out.”

“Do you want me to leave?” Breena asked.

“It never hurts to have another person around and you’re part of the family now. I think I can speak for Tony as well.” Jethro looked at Tony who nodded.

“Hey, Tony. Look, a real campfire.” McGee joked as the others pulled their chairs into a closer circle.

“To bad we don’t have real marshmallows.”

“Ooo. Ooo.” Abby leapt to her feet and took off around the house towards her car.

“Five dollars says she has marshmallows.” Tony offered.

“That’s a sucker bet.” McGee countered. “Five dollars she has the makings for smores.”

“Five dollars, real marshmallows, chocolate and graham cracker for smores, and she has the
skewers.” Jethro interjected.

“Done.” Tony and McGee accepted as Abby came bouncing back.

“Here we go.” Pulling a bag of marshmallows out, she handed them to Tony. Next came chocolate bars and graham crackers that she handed to McGee.

The two men held their breath as she dug back into the bag and pulled out metal skewers. Grumbling, McGee reach into his pocket and pulled out a five-dollar bill which he passed to Gibbs while Tony simply said he’d pay him later.

“What are you paying Gibbs?”

“He said you’d have the smores ingredients and skewers.”

“Of course, he did. He called and asked me to pick them up.”

“Cheater.” Tony elbowed his husband in the side.

“Hey. You never asked if I knew before you bet.”

“Shame on you, Gibbs. And shame on you, McGee for betting against me.”

“Tony bet against you, too.”

“Tony has had a really bad week.” Abby excused him and Tony smirked.

While marshmallows roasted, McGee and the Gibbs men exchanged looks. Finally cuddling his sleeping goddaughter for comfort, Tony broke the silence. “The past six days… wow, only six days… huh… Thank-you, Jethro.” The group laughed as Gibbs managed a left-handed hand-smack. “Yeah, Yeah. What I was going to say before the spousal abuse, there has been so much happen. Some good,” Tony glanced at this husband, “some not so good. Jethro thought it would be a good idea to bring everyone up to date. So, uh, first off, for those who don’t already know. I’m not a DiNozzo. Which is grounds for applause, but I’m also not a Paddington. McSleuth found a picture of my… Mrs. DiNozzo right before my birth and she wasn’t pregnant. The only truth surrounding my birth is that I was born in Italy.”

Jethro felt Tony’s tenseness. He knew Tony was waiting for rejection, Jethro grit his teeth, he really wanted one shot at Senior. Hoping to relieve some of the anxiety, Jethro laid his hand on Tony’s shoulder.

“My dear boy,” Ducky said sadly. “You have had a terrible week, Anthony. How are you coping?”

“I’ve got all of you, really that’s all I really have had.” Tony glanced down at Victoria missing the angry/sad looks on his behalf.

“Are there any leads?” Ducky moved the conversation forward.

McGee spoke up. “I was able to trace the lawyer Vincente Rossi to the Moretti law firm in Palermo, Italy.”

“Palermo? Where have I heard that?” Ducky took a minute to think. “Yes, I remember. It was 1972 June… no, May. It was a Friday I believe. I was in Europe on assignment at the time. I believe it was a Douglas DC 8 left Rome for Palermo. It went down on Mount Longa. Killed everyone on board. The fabulous director Franco Indovina was lost on that flight. Such a tragedy.”
“Ducky, you never cease to amaze me.” Tony toasted the older man.

“The DiNozzos went to Rome as Senior’s cousin and his family were on the plane.” Jethro explained.

“Is it possible you belong to one of the cousins?”

“No. When I did the genetic testing, there is no familial relationship between Tony and the DiNozzo family.” Abby said sadly.

Palmer leaned forward. “Is it possible that your birth parents were on the flight?”

Tony looked at Jethro. “I don’t know.”

“This mysterious benefactor who sent the dossiers on Benoit and DiNozzo uses a law firm in Palermo. It would make sense if they lived in Palermo. McGee, can you get ahold of the passenger list and check for Palermo residents?”

“On it, boss.”

“Jethro, I was in Europe at the time. Some of my contacts may be able to assist Timothy.” Ducky offered.

“Good job, Palmer.” Jethro thanked the young man and Tony gave him a thumb’s up.

“Tony, was your mother…uh, Mrs. DiNozzo ever hospitalized?”

“She was after a car crash. Why, Abbs?”

“If I can get ahold of that record, I may be able to determine if you are related to the Paddington’s.” Abby explained.

“Why don’t you put it in that big computer?” Jackson asked. “You know the one on TV that tells where a person was born?”

“Oh! Genetic profiling? I could totally do that, Grandpa Gibbs.” Abby said enthusiastically.

“How long?” Gibbs asked.

“Couple weeks.”

Gibbs looked at Tony before confirming the test. “Let’s do it.”

“Would Senior help us out?” Breena asked.

“Doubtful.” Tony shook his head. “I think he’ll be too busy ducking and covering.”

“Fornell was here this morning. Benoit was killed last night with ten agents during a prison move. Senior was also attacked and is currently being kept unconscious.”

“Besides Senior would want something in return. I won’t let him use this to make a deal.” Tony said firmly.

“Besides McGee has explored the connections. Neither Senior or Benoit is involved in Tony’s citizenship issues.” Jethro explained.
“That’s not good. So whoever is after Tony is still whoever? A whoever that’s still out there?” Abby said fearfully.

“Jethro, is there any word on the shooters from last night?” Ducky asked changing the subject.

“When Fornell stopped by this morning he had solved the case. On a positive note, last night’s drive by shooting is not related to Tony’s birth and immigration issues. It appears a few of the neighbors object to having a same sex couple living here.”

“How are you and Anthony going to handle the situation?”

Jethro looked at Tony who gave a small nod. “Actually, the lawyer who brought the dossiers also brought some other paperwork. It seems Tony’s benefactor purchased a piece of land near NCIS and had some house plans drafted; so we will be moving.” Tony swore Abby’s squeal went three times higher than a dog could hear comfortably.

The announcement broke up the campfire as the group clamored to see the plans and they drifted inside and around the kitchen table. Late into the night, they laughed, made suggestions and teased the two men about their new home. Tony smiled to himself as he and Zuma lay in Jethro’s arms after they left. It had been a real family evening. Hopefully, it was the first of many to come.
The cabal decided to hold the meeting at the cottage. There were plenty of things to pet; goats, ponies, donkeys…and whatever the idiot had adopted next. While pretty, butterflies and dragonflies didn’t like to be petted much.

“That’s it. I quit!” Wolfnjag stormed out of the house. “I have dealt with ponies, orphaned dragonflies, goats, mules, goats, and a certifiable jack…”

“Whoa, whoa.” Callasandra stepped up bravely. “What’s wrong?”

“Who did it?” Wolfnjag was in a rage.

“Who did what?” Aussiefan70 asked.

“Who demanded “smut”?” Wolfnjag yelled. There were many guilt looks exchanged among the members.

Circling the irate Wolfnjag, LAG0802 peeped in the door. It looked like a vacuum cleaner had exploded. “Oh, no.”

“What?” LadyDrak1075 whispered.

“Look.” LAG0802 pointed.

Peering between their shoulders, MamaT asked innocently. “Did she get hold of the vacuum cleaner?”

Wolfnjag was indignant. “Do you think I’m an idiot? I lock all the machines in the trunk of my car.”

Keegu stepped up to peek, then stepped back to let Kiki_L look. As the members filed by the disaster scene, Jesco0307 tried to calm Wolfnjag. The members began to whisper amongst themselves speculating as to what could cause the situation when daikininz took her turn. “Oh, no, she didn’t?”

“You see it, too. Don’t you?” Wolfnjag demanded.

“See what?” Usatraveler asked on behalf of the cabal.

“It’s not totally random. There are clean areas. Almost like the idiot made…” Daikininz couldn’t force herself to finish.

“Made piles of “smut” for every one of you.” Wolfnjag screamed. “I warned you about her. I warned and warned you.”

“I don’t get it.” ShadowWolfsDen said.

Whipping out a dictionary, Trout1986 thumbed through it quickly. “Smut. A small flake of soot or other dirt.”

“Who gave her the dictionary?” Snusas1 asked. “It’s right here in the Cabal rules. Rule 8 – Do not give the idiot a dictionary.”

“Where is she?” Panchajaviera asked.

“Locked in her library. Again!”

“By herself?” Sharon asked.

Getting a bad feeling, QueenBee4Ever started counting. “Has anyone seen QueeneoftheDeer?” Everyone shook their head.

“That’s good, isn’t it?” Felmyst asked. “At least she isn’t alone.”

“Rule 11. Never leave the idiot and QueeneoftheDeer alone.” Snusas1 quoted.

“Why can’t you leave QueeneoftheDeer alone with the idiot…the writer?” Fairhaven74 asked.

ArianaFeileacan started ticking the reasons off on her fingers. “They went to a club and the idiot’s muse ended up with a broken wing. They decided to interview cats for the story. QueeneoftheDeer suggested that the idiot follow the dragonflies and then the idiot had to be rescued at three in the morning. Then there were the ponies…”
“Is anyone else not allowed to be alone with her?” Fairhaven74 was shocked to see several hands go up.
“Alright. The longer they are alone, the bigger the potential disaster.” Psyche53 said. “How about a couple volunteers to calm down Wolfnjag?” Whispering to daikiniz, Psyche suggested getting her drunk. “We also need a couple volunteers to clean up the… the smut. Come on, ArianaFeilacan, you’ve known her a long time, let’s go drag them out.”
ArianaFeilacan whined. “Why can’t I help clean? Why do I have to deal with the idiot?” Walking carefully, Psyche53 knocked on the library door. “GeminiAngel, are you in there?”
“No.”
“Idiot.” ArianaFeilacan whispered under her breath.
“Is QueenoftheDeer with you?”
“Are you with me?” GeminiAngel could be heard asking, before her reply. “No.”
“That’s too bad. We had a chocolate mousse cake.”
“I’m here.” GeminiAngel said throwing open the door to reveal the two sitting in the room holding…
“Oh, my … Where did you get that koala?” Wolfnjag screamed.

Section 52

“You’re up early.” Jethro walked into the kitchen. “Figured you would sleep in. You were pretty restless last night.”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to disturb your sleep.” Tony said regretfully.

“Don’t apologize.” Jethro said and Tony braced himself for a head slap, instead Jethro dropped a kiss on the top of his head before sitting down next to him. “That wasn’t a complaint; I was concerned.”

“I made coffee.” Tony went to rise but Jethro took his hand stilling him.

“What’s wrong?” Jethro asked.

“Where’s Zuma?” Tony countered.

“He’s in dad’s bed. They decided to sleep in. Now, will you tell me what’s wrong? I thought last night went well. Your potatoes were almost a bigger hit than my steak.”

“Just almost.” Tony smiled reluctantly. “Last night was wonderful.”

“Then what?”

“I was thinking about my mother and father. You and I know the evil in the world. What if Senior stole me? I mean, maybe he bought me on the black market. Maybe I was kidnapped.”

“It could also be that your parents were killed on that flight.” Jethro countered.

“And no one wanted me?” Tony said again.

Jethro had that irresistible urge to spend time with Senior again. “You don’t know if there was anyone who could have taken you in. That what you were thinking about last night?”
“I think I need to know.” Tony said quietly, “I know that this should be enough, but after our family left last night I just kept wondering.”

“We’re going to get to the bottom of this, Tony.” Jethro vowed. “If I know McGee, he’s already working on that passenger list.”

“I know.” Tony bent his head and chewed on his bottom lip.

“Hey,” Jethro reached out and took Tony’s chin, forcing him to meet his eyes. “Talk to me. Tell me what you need.”

“I…” Tony looked into Jethro’s eyes taking in his earnest expression. “I can’t wait, Jethro. I need to talk to that attorney. I need to go there.” Tony tried to drop his head as he rushed on. “I need to go to Palermo. I know that I’ve missed a lot of work already and with Jackson here.…”

Jethro placed his fingertips. “Shhh… I know. That’s why I told McGee to book us two tickets to Italy later this week.”

“You did?” Tony was shocked. “When?”

“While he using his phone to record you and Zuma saying good-bye to Victoria. I think he said something about posting.”

Tony paused for a moment. He and Zuma had pressed their noses to the window to blow kisses. Maybe the Elf Lord would make a trade. He mentally gave himself a Gibbs slap. There were more important issues to deal with right now; like two tickets.

“Two?”

“You don’t think I’m letting you go alone, do you? I also asked dad if he would watch Zuma and the house while we’re gone.”

“We… you and I … are going to Italy?”

“Yep. Thought maybe we’d go to the villa in Palermo. We can talk to that Rossi in person.” Jethro paused a little uncertainly. “That is, if you want me along.”

“Yes! I mean.” Tony could feel his cheeks warm. “I want you with me.”

“Good.” Jethro smiled. “I thought we could call the architect tomorrow and see how long it will be until we can get an appointment. McGee’s going to double check and make sure there is no problem with our passports. Hopefully, by Wednesday we can be off to Italy.”

From upstairs they heard the sound of the guest room door creaking open. A few minutes later they could hear the water pipes rumble. “I will not miss that.” Jethro sighed.

At a sharp yip, Jackson could be heard muttering. “Get back here you little varmint.”

Tony sprang up heading for the steps, while Jethro walked stiffly across the kitchen to start a pot of coffee laughing softly. As he listened, Jethro could hear Tony running up the steps talking as he went. “No, Zuma. You can’t go down stairs yet. Stay. You’re being a bad pup, aren’t you? Come here. Oh, thanks, Jackson. I’ll take him down with me.”

Jethro had just finished setting out mugs when Tony reentered the kitchen. Thankfully, he had come down much slower than he went up. When he turned, he couldn’t help but laugh. Tony’s tee shirt
was now wet thank to the even wetter pup. “Do I even want to know?”

“Jackson decided to take a shower. He thought Zuma was still in bed. When he turned on the shower, Zuma decided to join him.” Tony said sitting down with the pup on his lap. He was trying to dry the wiggling pup who wanted no part of the towel Jackson had provided.

“Let me guess. He decided he didn’t want a shower?”

“Jackson said he took off and pawed the bathroom door open. I meet Zuma and Jackson at the top of the stairs. Needless to say, Grandpa Jackson is not too thrilled at the moment.”

It was inevitable and impossible to prevent, not that Jethro tried very hard. Just the thought of the pup invading his dad’s shower was enough. He could totally picture it so he gave in and started laughing. It took a few seconds for Tony to join him but upstairs Jackson smiled at the sound of his two sons laughing and the disgruntled whimpers of Zuma.

“So nice shower, dad?”

Jackson glared at him and reached for the coffee. “Don’t start, Leroy.”

“So what were you wearing when Tony met you at the top of the stairs?” Jethro asked slyly and then smirked as Tony spit coffee and his cheeks reddened.

“Well, I was in the middle of my shower. What do you think I was wearing?” Jackson delivered a nicely unexpected Gibbs slap as he came to sit at the kitchen table. “I had a towel, idiot. Where is the mutt?”

Tony pointed to the corner where Zuma was pouting. “He really didn’t like being towed dry.”

“Then he should stay out of my shower.” Jackson said bluntly. “So what’s for breakfast? Want me to stir up some flapjacks?”

“Why don’t I treat you both to breakfast out?” Tony offered.

“Why don’t I go out and pick something up? I was thinking about making a quick run for some wood. That pup needs a place to run outside. Don’t want dad to have to chase him down the street while we’re gone.”

Jackson looked at both men. “You’re going?”

“Tony and I agreed this morning. You sure you’re okay watching the pup?”

“Zuma and I’ll get along just fine. Don’t worry about a thing.”

“Why don’t you ride along with Jethro?” Tony asked Jackson. “I need to do some laundry and start packing for the trip.”

“You going to pack for me?”

Tony smirked at his husband. “You trust me to pick your outfits.”

“You’ll be with me when I’m wearing them.” Jethro countered.

“I should check the weather over there.”
“Sounds like a plan.” Jackson took the last drink of his coffee. “C’mon, son. Let’s go get that wood and some breakfast.”

Tony sat at the table finishing his coffee as the two men started out of the house. He could hear them bickering until the front door closed and he realized he was alone. Alone. For the first time in nearly a week he was totally alone. Since Tuesday morning, Jethro had been with him or in hearing distance. Now here he was in Jethro’s house by himself. A cold nose poked his ankle and he scooped Zuma up. “Hey, Zuma, why don’t we go look up the Palermo weather and then go through Jethro’s closet?”

Section 53

Tony stared out the window of his seat. His first class seat. His first class seat on his way to Palermo. He couldn’t believe he really was on his way. Things had fallen in line and just like Jethro said, it was Wednesday and they had just boarded the plane.

Sunday afternoon had been fun in a weird way. The two men had returned with breakfast, actually more of a brunch, and the wood, chain and other accessories including a pole that was inserted into the lawn with a 360° swivel chain that allowed Zuma to run around most of the yard. Unfortunately for Jackson and Jethro, Zuma and Tony were more of a complication than an asset.

Tony has insisted on carrying the wood rather than Jethro with his stitches. He insisted he was strong enough to carry the pieces alone. The second trip necessitated a twenty-minute delay while Jethro doctored a protesting Tony’s finger. Since the boards were not rough, neither Jethro and Jackson could explain the nasty splinter. Finally, after getting to sit still long enough while Jackson distracted him, Tony was ready to go back to work, this time with a pair of gloves.

Jackson and Jethro had set up sawhorses to lay the wood on for cutting. While they were spreading the plans out on the picnic table, Jethro was unable to stop Tony in time. He placed a two by four on the sawhorse and managed to cut it and the saw cord. Luckily Tony was distracted by Zuma who was yipping over the noise of the saw while Jethro retrieved a role of electrical tape and fixed the cord.

With a glance between father and son, Jackson took on the task of distracting Tony with the plans and where he thought the house and run should be placed while Jethro started clearing the area. Finally, they were ready to start. Jethro had gotten some metal rods for the fencing deciding that they would do temporarily, the new house would have a nice wooden run. Jethro marked spots on the ground where the posts would be with spray paint and showed Tony how to hold the fence and use the short sledge hammer to start driving them into the ground. He left him to the poles while he and Jackson started the dog house. Not fifteen minutes later, Jackson nudged his arm and pointed for Jethro to look behind himself. Not satisfied with the short sledge hammer, Tony had grabbed the big one from the garage and was using it to drive the now three-foot-high pole further in the ground.

Jackson enjoyed a nice cold beer on the porch while Jethro tried patiently to explain that while Zuma wasn’t that tall, the pup would want room to jump and play. He also explained that the structure was to be temporary and that the eight foot poles didn’t need to be driven that far into the ground. Tony joined Jackson for a beer and to give Zuma a good belly rub while Jethro tried to pull the pole up. He ended up having to get a crowbar and shovel to dig it out and then adjusted the new run around the hole. He also took the opportunity to hide the long sledge hammer.

After the break, Jackson decided to hold the poles while Tony drove them in. Satisfied that Tony was properly supervised, Jethro went back to work on Zuma’s house. Only thirty minutes later, Jethro finished taking care of Tony’s foot, now wrapped in a bandage. Somehow, Tony had dropped the sledge hammer onto his foot. Satisfied that it was not broken just bruised, Tony was given a
bandage, an ice bag and a beer. Jethro decided to finish the poles himself while his dad worked on the
dog house.

The Gibbs’ gut was reliable. Jethro looked to the porch and saw only an ice bag and half-empty beer
bottle. Jackson was showing Tony how to hold a nail and then drive it in straight. Jethro never had
time to say a word. If nothing else, Tony was enthusiastic. He had taken a powerful swing and hit his
hand. Jethro was half way across the yard before Zuma’s yelp joined Tony’s. Jackson had wisely
confiscated the hammer and was escorting Tony into the house again.

Luckily for Tony he hadn’t managed to hit the thumb nail full force, Jethro wasn’t sure how Tony
would have handled having Jethro using a needle to drill into the nail to relieve the pressure if it had
been bleeding under the fingernail. Using his well-stocked medicine kit, Jethro placed a splint on
Tony’s thumb not that he thought it was broken but more to hopefully slow Tony down. A second
ice bag and Tony was placed back on the porch with his beer.

Not twenty minutes later, there he was. He picked up a spare hammer which Jethro deftly
confiscated. Although it had only been a few hours since brunch, Jethro was hungry. With a quick
glance from his son, Jackson admitted to wishing for a few cookies or a nice slice of cake. That’s
how Zuma’s new area got finished safely with Tony in the kitchen making a cake, chocolate of
course. Even, Tony had to admit the run and house were nice when done. Zuma wasn’t really
impressed, preferring the swivel post.

As Tony leaned his head against the plane’s headrest, he gave a smile. Monday morning both he and
Jethro had been shocked when the architect had made time for them that afternoon. Evidently their
benefactor had been very generous in ensuring that their project was priority. After discussing the
basic changes the men had requested, the new four bay garage allowing for a media/game room in
place of the first floor office and making a workshop out of the existing tandem garage. The upstairs
bonus room would be made into a nice library area, while two of the bedrooms which shared a
powder room would be used as offices (not requiring adjustments to the plans).

The extension of the front porch would now be a porch that wrapped around the side and connected
to the covered patio under the upstairs covered veranda. The covered patio opened into a large open
patio with a massive built in grilling station with a retractable roof. The architect had added a small
cabana style outdoor kitchen near the area where Tony could make side dishes while Jethro was
grilling. Each area had a nice bar on the side where guests could keep them company. Tony loved
the architect’s ideas for the patio area. Several cozy clusters of chairs for sitting and talking. He had
placed a huge outdoor fireplace of natural stone and several fire pits that could be used to warm the
night.

It was at his suggestion that the pool would be terraced slowly below the outdoor kitchen and grilling
station. It gave them a wonderful view out of the pool and the sitting areas that the architect had
placed around the pool. Two cabanas included powder rooms and changing areas. On the other side
of the yard where the porch wrap around had been added, the landscape gave way to a wide open
area where Tony and the others could play games. Jethro even requested a basketball area for Tony.

Having agreed on the changes and additions, the Gibbs men signed off on the plans and then joined
the architect for a trip to the property. It was set well off the highway but was still an easy trip to
work. The architect had already graded a driveway to the center of the property. He pointed out flags
where the company had already marked the area for the house. Standing there next to Jethro, Tony
could hardly breath. It was perfect and by the squeeze of Jethro’s hand he felt so, too. He was even
weaker in the knees when the architect predicted the project could be complete in six months.
Jethro was skeptical but the architect assured him that the company had been offered a very generous bonus from their benefactor to ensure such quick completion. A designer would also be provided who had a very generous budget and would help them pick out furnishings and then ensure that the house was ready for them to move in. As they left the area, Tony sat in the back of the architect’s SUV. He didn’t think he’d ever been happier.

Tuesday was a bit calmer. The men made sure that the house was cleaned and straightened so Jackson wouldn’t have to do too much. That afternoon there was laundry. Tony even found time to bake another chocolate cake for Jackson. In the evening, the family had gathered for pizza and conversation. Palmer and McGee teased Tony about Palermo only having authentic Sicilian pizza which lead to a crust fight until Breena brought out a double batch of her brownies for dessert.

Ducky had given Jethro a quick checkup but refused to remove the stitches until Jethro vowed to remove them himself. Disgruntled, Ducky had given in but Jethro swore he had put a mile of Steri-strips™ on in revenge. McGee hadn’t made a lot of headway but was expecting information from Ducky’s colleague at any time. It had been very late when they broke up with McGee offering to drive them to the airport.

Tony let out a deep breath. Today had been hectic. There had been last-minute packing. Jethro had insisted on no more than one suitcase. Tony had been put out but had nearly knocked his husband over when Jethro announced that he knew Tony couldn’t leave Italy without some shopping and they would pick up extra bags there. Tony had drifted off to sleep dreaming about leather jackets, Murano glass, pottery and wine and long nights with Jethro. There was a smile worthy thought, also. They shared brief quick kisses and hugs, but unexpectedly, Jethro hadn’t pushed their intimacy further than the single hand job. But every night, Zuma and he got to sleep in Jethro’s arms.

That had been the only dark spot of the last few days. Zuma had watched warily as Tony and Jethro carried their suitcases down the stairs and put them by the front door. Sensing something, he has whimpered and whined unless either Jethro or Tony were holding him. Even Jackson couldn’t calm him. The pup refused to settle down and Tony had held him with one hand and ate with the other. When McGee and Jethro had carried out the bags, Zuma had latched on to the cuff of Jethro’s pants trying to keep him inside. Scooping him up, Tony had rocked him a bit and whispered to him. Finally, Jethro had to take Zuma and give the pup to his dad and almost pull Tony from the house. He could still hear Zuma’s whimpering cry.

“He’ll be fine.” Jethro held Tony’s right hand. “Dad will take good care of Zuma.”

“I know. It’s just…”

“I’ll miss the little fuzzball, too.” Jethro admitted. “Just think, in eight and a half hours we’ll be in Paris. Too bad we only have a little over an hour layover. We’ll have to come back sometime when we can take in the sights.”

“It would have been nice if the layover in Rome was a bit longer. Three hours won’t even let us leave the airport.” Tony complained.

“But we’ll be in Palermo faster. In about fifteen hours, we’ll be there.”

“What if we don’t find any answers?” Tony asked forlornly.

“We will.” Jethro squeezed his hand. “We will.”

Tony wanted to believe him.
Section 54

Chapter Summary

I’m know a bit obsessive about getting details right. I do a lot of looking online to find things like the perfect pup, the rings, the house etc. I did set up a group where I have been uploading pictures. The last I uploaded were the picture and plans for the original house. I also uploaded a revised picture and floor plans as well as created a banner. https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Bourbon_and_Aspirin/info

Chapter Notes

The cabal tromped in happily. It had been a great meeting at the café. No need to tell Wolfnjag the café was at the local winery. After all, they had offered to draw straws to find a victim…volunteer to watch the idiot so she could attend the meeting.

Wolfnjag sat at the table with a cup of what might have been plain coffee had it not been for the smell of whiskey. “Keep your voices down.” From the other room came moaning. “Now see what you’ve done.”

“What is that?” Otrame asked.

“The idiot.”

“What’s wrong with her?” QueenBee4Ever asked.

“She says she has a sinus infection. I think she’s hung over.” Wolfnjag sipped her coffee. “So my question is…Which one of you got her drunk?”

The members of the cabal all froze. Some looked at co-conspirators and others tiptoed for the door.

“Freeze.” Wolfnjag raised her voice which raised the volume of the moaning. “Shut her up, for heaven’s sake, daikininz.”

“What do you need?” Daikininz popped her head around the laundry room door.

“Who’s watching the idiot?”

“She wanted her dragonfly jammies. Aussiefan70 offered to watch her while I washed them.”

“No!” Wolfnjag started towards the study.

“Where did we leave off last night?” Geminianangel dropped her icebag.

“I think the wineries near Mt. Etna. Yes, this is the next. This is Allegracore Etna Rsso from the Fattorie Romeo del Castello.” Aussiefan70 said. “It says it’s good with pasta,
risotto, mushroom and eggplant.”

“To Mt. Etna.” The two toasted before taking a long drink.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Wolfnjag grabbed the bottle.

“We’re testing wines.” Geminia said. “Tony and Gibbs are going to be having a meal and we need to find the best wine.”

Wolfnjag grabbed a throw pillow and whapped Aussiefan70 over the head. “I told you. Rule 3 Do not give alcohol to the idiot.” She punctuated every word with a whap of the pillow.

Flowerpotgirl looked at JulieMH. Maybe this was a bad idea. Sure the first meeting had been fun, but this was something else. “Uh, excuse me.” Flowerpotgirl said. There was the bray of an inebriated donkey and the belch of a pleasantly buzzed Kiwi.

Alyse_SaFyre, annette_ella, ArianaFeileacan, Aussiefan70, buns1974, Callasandra, carbo21, Chiefra, Chrissie, daikiniz, dbv3, Fairhaven74, Felmyst, Goddess47, janelx80, jesco0307, keegu, Kiki_L, LadyDrak1075, LAG0802, magpie1600, MamaT, MarieKiki19, Mihoshi_Jackson, nevarstar, ncisgirl2014, otrame, panchajaviera, Patriciasita, psyche53, QueenBee4Ever, QueeneoofheDeer, ShadowWolfsDen, Sharon, snusa1, Teresahr49, Trout1986, usatraveler and Wolfnjag all turned to look at her and JulieMH.

JulieMH bravely asked, “Is it always like this?”

“Yes!” Chorused thirty-eight voices.

**The sinus infection is real. I haven't been able to talk for two days, but I can type.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Section 54

The overnight flight hadn’t brought Tony a lot of sleep. He envied his husband’s ability to sleep on any aircraft. He was amused that Jethro seemed a bit more restless in first class than on a military flight. Tony had expected Jethro to be a bit leery of public displays but when the blankets and pillows were handed out his husband had raised the arm rest between them, layered the blankets over them and pulled Tony into his side. Much of the night Tony had watched the clouds and stars.

The layover in Paris had given the men just enough time for a quick coffee before the flight to Rome. The layover in Rome gave the men a little time to walk around and they decided to eat at Gran Café Panorama before the flight to Palermo. While airplane food had improved, they enjoyed a nice meal at the Sport Village Café. By mutual decision, they decided to leave shopping for the return trip. Finally, their flight had touched down in Palermo. Jethro snuck looks at Tony, hating the tension in his body language. He led him to the baggage claim and then the two started to make their way from the airport discussing whether to take a bus or taxi for the forty-five minute ride into Palermo.

“Good old McTransport,” Tony chortled as he pointed out a sign to Jethro. A liveried driver held a sign proclaiming Gibbs and DiNozzo. “He booked us a car.”

Gibbs felt his gut clench. “No, he didn’t.” At Tony’s look, he explained. “I had him book the tickets
under his name. I didn’t want anyone to know we were coming.”

The driver looked at his smartphone and then approached the two men. “Signor Gibbs. Signor DiNozzo. Welcome to Palermo.” The driver noticed Jethro’s wary look. “Ah, please, one minute.” Quickly he dialed a number and spoke in rapid Italian and then handed the phone to Gibbs.

“Gibbs.”

“Ah, Signor Gibbs, this is Vincente Rossi. We spoke at your office. When Signor Moretti heard you were headed to Palermo. He took the liberty of arranging transportation for you and a suite of rooms at the Grand Hotel Villa Igiea.”

“We had considered staying at the Villa.”

“Of course, Signor. Signor Moretti felt that it would be convenient for you to be closer to town for a few days. If you would prefer, I could make arrangements for Giro to take you to the villa.”

“That won’t be necessary. The hotel is fine. I assume we will be meeting Signor Moretti.”

“Of course, signor. Signor Moretti suggests that we met tomorrow for lunch in your suite, if that is agreeable?”

“We’ll expect you then.”

“Bueno. Signor Moretti has placed Giro at your service during your visit. If you require anything, please do not hesitate to ask. Until tomorrow, Signor Gibbs.”

Jethro closed the phone and handed it to Giro. “Let’s go.”

The driver smiled and insisted that he take their baggage. Once in the car, the driver pointed out sights as they drove but Tony and Jethro remained mostly silent. When they arrived, the hotel was impressive. It was located outside of the city of Palermo with views of the mountains and the sea. When Tony spoke up, the driver smiled as he took their bags out of the car. “It is very beautiful here. It is also quieter but only a ten- to fifteen-minute drive to downtown.” He handed Gibbs a phone. “If you need me, please do not hesitate to contact me. My number is right here.” With that he led the two men up to the reservation clerk and excused himself.

Tony waited quietly letting Jethro deal with the check-in. The desk had provided the keycard to the presidential suite. It had a separate living room with a large desk, a bedroom, a bathroom with beautiful marble, a dining room and a balcony with sitting for dining or conversation. Jethro couldn’t help imagining sitting with Tony on the balcony having coffee and watching the sun set or the sun rise.

They were led to their suite by a friendly, thankfully English speaking attendant. Safely in their room, Jethro tipped the bellboy having exchanged dollars for Euros at the airport. Years of work experience had given DiNozzo complete faith in Gibbs and he had quietly followed his lead. Now that they were alone, Tony wanted answers from Jethro. “What’s going on?”

The knock on the door startled both men. Tony’s hand automatically went for the gun he always wore. The same gun that was in the gun safe back home. Jethro simply went to answer the door. “Yes?”

“Compliments of the hotel, signor.” The young man placed his tray on the nearby table. “If you would prefer to dine in your room, please you have only to contact the front desk.” He handed Jethro a handwritten menu and waving off a tip left them alone.
“Missing something?” Jethro smirked.

“Ha-ha.” Tony rolled his eyes and looked at their gift. There was a large basket with a wide selection of biscotti, crackers, nuts, cheeses and fruit. He took note of the bottle of Sicilian chardonnay wine from one of the better known local wineries. “This is not your general hospitality gift basket. Not that I don’t appreciate it. What’s going on?”

“Apparently, it’s not just Senior and wife that were being closely monitored. The car, Giro, the hotel room were all arranged by Signor Moretti. The person on the other end of the phone was our old friend Vincente Rossi.”

“The lawyer.” Tony exhaled slowly. “He’s had someone watching us?”

“Appears so.”

“I don’t like the sound of this. What’s your Gibbs’ gut say?”

“If they had wanted to harm us, I have no double we would have disappeared from the airport. Vincente Rossi indicated that he and Signor Moretti would join us here for lunch tomorrow. He also said it would be easier if we were close to town for the next few days. I think we’re close to your anonymous benefactor.”

“So, not Signor Moretti. One of his clients then?”

“Probably. By this time tomorrow, I believe we will have some answers.”

Chapter End Notes

I was going to include this but wasn’t sure about the translation. If anyone speaks Italian, please is it close?

*** Giro’s conversation with Signor Rossi:
“Essi sono arrivati ma sono sospettosi.”
“Fammi parlare Signor Gibbs.”

Translation:
“They have arrived but are suspicious.”
“Let me talk to Signor Gibbs.”
Chapter Summary

It has been a sad time for fanfic readers recently. On April 25, the fanfiction world lost Arsinoe de Blassenville, a writer of varied fandoms. Also on that day, we lost half of the writing duo Bobmin356 aka Bob and Alyx. Bob passed away in his sleep and the world of fandom lost a tremendous story teller. This duo wrote many epic fics in the Harry Potter fandom. It is Bobmin356 who gave me inspiration. Bob and Alyx wrote many hilarious vignettes of the duo trying to give the disclaimer that they didn’t own the Harry Potter fandom. Through the years this included, but was not limited to, naked donut delivery girls, llamas and a missing penis. You could say they enabled me to find my “silly side” and embrace the cabal.

I dedicate this chapter to Susan (Arsinoe de Blassenville) and to Bob (Bobmin356). The author notes are dedicated to Bob (and Alyx) for their inspiration. Both writers will be sorely missed. May they rest in peace.

Chapter Notes

A little plot bunny that didn't fit the story, but it wouldn't let me go!

Jethro tried to hand the pink envelope to the messenger. “This is for Tony.”

Zuma looked up at him in disgust. He was a boy. He didn’t do pink. Not only that, just how was he to carry it. He opened his mouth to complain and found the corner of the envelope in his mouth.

“Take it to Tony. Go on.”

Zuma sat down on his rear. How Jethro lost the plot? Did he really not understand the situation? He was the dog, Jethro the human. It was Jethro’s job to cater to his whim; not try to have him deliver a PINK envelope.

“If you take it to Tony, he’ll let you curl up on the couch with him.”

Zuma tilted his head considering. It’s not like the living room is that far away. He did like to curl up on the couch with Tony.

Jethro upped the ante. “Today’s Sunday. Plenty of time to play ball in the yard.”

Zuma stood up. He loved to play ball in the yard with Tony and Jethro. He gave a doggy sigh. Pink. Deciding he headed into the living room dragging the dreaded pink envelope.

“Hey, Zuma. What you got?”

Zuma stopped at Tony’s feet. Surely Tony was smart enough to know what an envelope was. Even if it was pink. Tony finally relieved him of his pink burden.
Tony opened the envelope. A beautiful bouquet on the front with the words “Happy Mother’s day”. Unable to help himself, he opened the card. “Of all the mothers in the world, I’m so glad that you are mine.” It was signed with a pawprint.

Zuma sighed again. Hadn’t that been fun. Jackson, the traitor, had held him while Jethro had put something wet on his front right paw. Jethro put the paw on the card. Then, Zuma was held while Jethro bathed his paw. He had let both of them know this behavior by humans was unacceptable.

“Leroy Jethro Gibbs.” Tony yelled. “I am not the mommy.” He scooped up Zuma and gave him a kiss than carried Zuma off with him to murder his husband. Zuma noticed that they paused long enough to put the card on the mantel. He didn’t think Tony was that mad really. On the plus side once he and Tony chased Jethro they would get to wrestle on the lawn before playing ball. It almost made up for the pink. Almost.

“Wolfnjag,” GeminiAngel said hesitantly. “There’s horse in the garden with Isabella, Silver Bullet and Candy.” She just knew she was going to be blamed. Wolfnjag continued pouring beer into a bowl. “I know.”

“It wasn’t me. And it’s like most of the time when I say it wasn’t me. You said no more animals.” GeminiAngel thought about the two new rabbits that now lived under her desk.

“I know.” Wolfnjag finished pouring the beer. She took the bowl in one hand and a couple apples in the other.

“What is a horse doing in the garden?”

“He’s hiding out.”


Wolfnjag started out the door. “He won the Derby Saturday and he needed someplace to hide out from the press. Shut the door, would you?”

GeminiAngel just stared after her. This wasn’t right. It was her job to create chaos. She was the idiot not Wolfnjag. Maybe corralling the cabal had finally broken her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 55

“Calm down, Tony. You need to take a deep breath and relax. You are so tense; you’re going to snap.” Jethro took his hand. They had spent a relaxed evening on their balcony sipping wine. Jethro had held Tony during the night, but knew Tony hadn’t sleep much and not deeply. Tony had been quiet this morning while getting ready and now that it was nearly noon, he was becoming more anxious all the time. “Everything is going to be fine.”

“Promise?” Tony hated the weakness in his tone.

“No matter what we find out, it doesn’t change anything with us or our family.” Jethro gave Tony a reassuring hug and he really wanted a nice discussion with Senior about his emotional abuse.

“Why don’t we call home? We have a while before they get here.”

“Isn’t it too early?”

“It’s almost six, dad will be probably be up.” Jethro was happy to see Tony perk up and quickly
dialed the number. To his surprise, his dad didn’t answer the phone.


“Abby, why are you answering the phone?” Jethro fended off Tony’s grab for the cellphone.

“He wants to know why I’m answering the phone.” He could hear Abby whispering loudly. He could hear noises in the background.

“Hi, Boss.”

“McGee, why are you and Abby answering the phone? Is dad okay?”

“Yes, Jackson is fine.”

Fending off the continuous assault over the phone, Jethro put it on speaker. “Then would you like to tell me why you are answering the phone?”

“No,” McGee said weakly.

“McGee.” Jethro said firmly.

“Well…”

“Give me the phone. Son, how’s your trip going?”

“Dad, what is going on?”

“We had a small incident, nothing to worry about.”

“We’ve almost got him.” An unknown voice shouted in the background.

“Got who?”

“Zuma was a bit upset over you leaving. He kept going up and laying on your bed and whimpering. Then Abby brought dinner over. I thought I had the door shut but he somehow got in. So Abby went up to get him and he decided to try to hide. While she was trying to get him out from under the dresser well…”

“What happened to Zuma? Jackson, is he okay? Where is he?” Tony was distraught.

“The fireman is almost to him.”

“Fireman? There’s a fire?”

“No, no. He’s a friend of McGee’s.”

“Dad, what happened to Zuma?”

“Somehow he managed to get up in your box springs and well… he got tight.” Jackson said. “Now don’t worry. Abby called McGee and we turned the box springs over but couldn’t get him out. McGee called a fireman he knew who came and brought a friend. They’re cutting him out.”

“We’ve got him.”

Tony and Jethro could hear the shout. Then they heard the howling coming closer and closer.
“Here, come to Auntie Abby.” Tony smirked as the howl turned to yelps of distress.

“Give him here.” Jackson could be heard. “Hush you little fuzzball.”

Tony could hear his father-in-law trying to calm Zuma down but the yelps turned to a heart-rending whimper. It was breaking his heart. He could hear Jackson speak to Abby, then the line went dead. “They hung up!”

At that time, Gibbs cellphone rang again. It was Abby. “You’re on speaker, Tony. Say something.”

“Hey, Zuma, it’s okay.” The whimpers ceased and he could hear Zuma giving small barks. “It’s okay.” The barking became frantic. Suddenly, there was Zuma taking up the whole screen and pawing the phone.


“He’s fine.” McGee spoke up. “Not a scratch but your box springs are in bad shape.”

Tony punched Jethro’s arm. “I told you no one was using those old metal things anymore. We are getting a new box spring.”

“Well, yeah, they cut it up. We have to.” Now that Zuma was safe, Gibbs was happy for the distraction they provided Tony.

“And a new mattress.”

“They didn’t cut the mattress.”

Tony slugged him again. He crooned to Zuma who was still trying to get to his favorite people.

“Oops. Say good-bye, Zuma.” They caught a glimpse of McGee carrying Zuma at arm’s length rushing from sight.

A brisk knock had Tony tensing again.

“Dad, we’ll have to call you back later.” Jethro disconnected the call. “Relax.” Jethro stroked Tony’s hair. “I’ll get it.” At the door were two men, one the lawyer from NCIS.

“Signor Gibbs,” Rossi began, “May I present my employer, Signor Calogero Moretti.”

“Signor Gibbs.” Moretti bowed slightly.

“Signor Moretti,” Gibbs felt Tony’s hand on his back. “May I present my husband, Anthony DiNozzo.”

“It is my pleasure, Signor DiNozzo. I have looked forward to this day. I took the liberty of ordering for us. Perhaps we could begin our discussion over a nice glass of wine?” He gestured to a bellhop who stood with a tray to the side. “Maybe on the balcony?”

“Sounds good.” Gibbs stepped back and waved them in.

In no time, the four men were sitting in the conversation area on the balcony. Moretti looked around and gestured. “I trust that you are happy with your accommodations?”

“It...” Tony cleared his throat. “It was very nice of you to make the arrangements.”
“When my father Taviano had a stroke several years ago, I was trusted with the Fabbri file. It has been an honor to fulfill his vows.”

“Who is…” Tony took a deep breath suddenly not sure he wanted to know. “Who is Cristian Antonio Fabbri? Is he my father?”

“No.” Moretti shook his head. “I’m sure that your husband has a strong suspicion. Otherwise, he would not have directed your Agent McGee on his current path.” Moretti looked Tony straight in the eye with a gentle smile. “You are Cristian Antonio Fabbri. You have your mother’s eyes and her smile.”

“You know my mother? My real mother?”

“Si.” An almost identical look of irritation crossed Tony and Gibbs’ faces as a knock interrupted the conversation. Moretti simply gestured for Rossi to handle it. “I have known your mother all my life. I did not become aware that she was a client until my father’s stroke.”

“She’s still alive?” Jethro interjected.

“Si. She is alive and in good health.”

“Didn’t she want to meet me?”

“She wants very much to meet you, however…” Signor Moretti frowned as his phone rang. Pulling it out, he looked at the screen. “One moment, please.” He stood and went to stand near the wall while the bellboy was setting the table under Rossi’s careful watch.

"Hanno visto lui ancora?"

“Io sono con lui ora.” Moretti replied.

“Sta bene? Con tutto ciò che orribile uomo ha fatto?”

“Si. Suo marito sembra prendere cura di lui.” Moretti met Gibbs’ eyes.

“Vuole incontrare me?”

“Ha appena chiesto la stessa cosa di te.”

“Avete spiegato?”

“Sto solo cominciando. Vuoi che mandi Rossi a prendervi?” Moretti asked.

“Non ancora. Se vuole ancora incontrare me in seguito…”

“Lo fara’. Vi posso dire. Dopo che ho spiegato, avrò Rossi portarlo a voi, sì?”

“Si.”

The call disconnected. Moretti was sure that the faint reply was uttered through tears at odds with his impression of the woman he knew. Pocketing his phone again, he returned to the waiting men.

“Shall we begin our meal while I answer your questions?”

Section 56

Afterwards, Tony couldn’t remember what he had eaten. Urged by Gibbs, Tony had mechanically
cleaned his plate while focusing on Moretti’s comments and answers to Gibbs’ questions. Tony had added questions a few times, but had mainly allowed Gibbs’ to conduct the interrogation. As they seated themselves, they agreed to dismiss the formality and use first names, except for Gibbs. Only a select few would ever use his first or middle name.

“You say that you know Tony’s mother. Is that who ordered the spying on us?”

“We did not consider it spying more watching over Antonio to be sure of his welfare.”

“Why the cabin?” Tony asked.

“Your mother was concerned about the situation and felt that at times you needed somewhere to retreat and heal. She had the cabin made for you.”

While Tony processed that answer, Gibbs took over. “The files on Benoit and Senior. How could you let that go on? Do you have so little regard for the victims?”

Calogero looked offended. “Of course we care. Our operatives took the pictures and documented the evidence. It was then turned over to the proper international authorities. We took every opportunity to stop the atrocities.”

“But you didn’t stop Senior.”

“He was your father, Antonio.” Calogero explained. “While your mother suspected all was not well between you, at the time, he was all you had. Once you married, your mother knew you would have all the support you needed.”

“But our marriage… it wasn’t…. we didn’t…” Tony struggled for the words.

“Your mother was aware of the circumstances of your marriage. She was also aware of your relationship with Gibbs.”

“Why didn’t she stop homeland security?”

“Gibbs, there are other forces at work. Antonio’s mother was not able to stop them, but she immediately ordered the documentation to solve the issue sent to you via Rossi.”

“Talk about cryptic.” Tony smirked at Vincente. “Would it have hurt you to explain a few things?”

“From our observations, you deal well with cryptic.” Vincente motioned at Gibbs.

“Touché.” Tony acknowledged with a smile at Gibbs.

“That is what we need to discuss.” Gibbs was irritated. “Who’s your plant? For you to know the type of information about our personnel lives, you have to have someone on your payroll.”

“Ah.” Moretti and Rossi exchanged a look, before Moretti answered. “Our client thought you would pick up on that. Let me say, we have not approached any of your team or paid any of them to gather information. That being said, there are some acquaintances who have unknowingly provided information.”

“Who?” Jethro demanded.

“Your former director Sheppard provided a lot of information, mainly complaints about you and DiNozzo to an old friend of hers.”
Tony and Jethro exchanged glares. Jenny had so much to answer for in her life. Gibbs hated what she had done to Tony in ordering him to not provide protection and for putting him into the Benoit situation. “Who else?”

“You realize that your acquaintance was not aware that they were speaking to someone who we spoke to?”

“Who?” Jethro repeated.

“I hesitate to cause problems for the person involved. Such joy for life…” Moretti started to explain.

“Abby.” Jethro and Tony chorused to Moretti’s surprise. Jethro brushed off some irritation. Abby was Abby and neither he or Tony would want her to change.

“Who?” Tony’s voice had an edge of anger. “Who betrayed Abby?”

Moretti took a long sip of his wine while studying Tony over his wineglass. Interesting. He saw none of the righteous anger that Gibbs did over being spied on. However, a hint of impropriety aimed at a colleague and Tony became angered on her behalf. Tony truly held his team as family and would protect them. Rather than upset their conversation, Moretti decided to explain. “Sister Therese Joseph.”

“You put a spy among the nuns?” Tony was stunned.

“No, no. Please,” Moretti hastened to explain. “Sister Therese Joseph is a nun. She is also a dear friend of your mother.”

“My mother?”

“Yes. Your mother.”

“My mother’s friend is a nun?” Gibbs felt his gut churning as Tony pursued his line of questioning but kept coming up with an illogical conclusion.

“Si. For many years.”

“Who is my mother?”

“Sister Martha Agnes.”

Section 57

“Please be seated. Sister Martha Agnes will be with you shortly.”

After Moretti had dropped his bombshell, he had provided few answers insisting that it was his client’s place to explain the details. Information about Tony’s father would also have to come from his client.

Understandably, Tony was more than a little shocked and Gibbs was more than a little angry at the lack of details. Before the entire situation blew up, Moretti had announced that if Tony wished to meet his mother, she was waiting for him in local church. A quick call had summoned Giro and the car. At the church a young nun had lead them in to a small meeting area.

Gibbs thanked the sister before she left and went to stand by Tony. “You okay?”

“I mean; I know I’m unique but my mother is a nun. A nun! I feel like I’m in a bad “B” movie.”
"Don’t worry, your father wasn’t a priest."

Tony turned and immediately saw his eyes in her face. Dressed in traditional habit, he couldn’t immediately tell her hair color. “Um… Hi.”

“Hello, Antonio. You’ve grown a lot since I last saw you.”

Seeing that Tony was beyond words, Gibbs stepped forward. “Hello, Sister, I’m…”

“My son-in-law, Leroy Jethro Gibbs.”

“My reputation precedes me.” Gibbs said dryly.

Tony drew a deep breath. “I need…” He reached out for Gibbs’ hand.

“Please sit,” Sister Martha Agnes said, sitting down on a chair in front of two chairs around a small table. “I’m a little older than you expected, I guess. You believed you were born to a teenager, perhaps?” She smiled when Tony nodded. “I wasn’t too young to know what I was doing. I just did it anyway. How do I explain?”

She continued without waiting for a reply. “I was a spinster as you would say. I was never beautiful or pretty.”

It was true, Tony thought. She wasn’t beautiful in the normal sense but had classic features. Her beauty was more that of Katherine Hepburn than Marilyn Monroe.

“I didn’t have gentlemen callers. Only those who had an eye on my family or their concerns. I had resigned myself to being alone. Destined to care for my aging parents and then my sister Anjelica’s children. I did some charity work and I remember the first time I saw your father. I wanted him, more than anything, more than I should have and I didn’t care who I hurt. Not my parents, not him, not his wife…”

“He was married?” Tony asked. Had he exchanged one cad for another dad?

“Yes, but do not think what you are. He was not the type to be unfaithful. That’s one of the things I admired about him.”

“Did you love him?”

“I thought I did.” His mother smiled sadly. “If I had really loved him, I wouldn’t have torn his world apart the way I did for one night.”

“One night?”

“That’s all we had, Antonio. He had come to a charity event alone, as I usually was. I stayed near him all night; made sure his glass was always full. I had taken a room in the hotel. I convinced him to sleep it off before going home, but when I got him in my room… I remember his face the next morning, the self-loathing over what he had done. Then he told me he had come alone because his wife was sick the night before, she was pregnant.”

“He has other children?”

“Two before, the one she was carrying and one after. Where was I? Oh, yes. I told him that no one would know, that I’d never say anything. Best laid plans…” His mother shook her head. “Of course, it didn’t work. Not after I realized you existed. I refused to tell my parents who the father was. They
were so angry they threatened to disown me but the only person I told was Father Antonio.”

“Antonio?”

“Yes, I named you for him. I told him in confession. I was on my knees for months with my rosary. I decided to keep you, you know. My parents were irate, but I pleaded and finally they agreed it would be part of my penance. It was such a scandal in our town. I stayed home, went nowhere.”

“Why didn’t you keep me then?”

Her eyes seemed to turn deep blue and her face reflected her sadness. “You were due in June. My family decided to take a trip before you were born. Of course, I was unable to go. They were on Alitalia Flight 112 when it crashed into Mount Longa. My whole family was gone; my sister, my brother-in-law, my nephew and my parents. Everyone died but me… I was beside myself with grief. My brother-in-law’s family offered to make the arrangements and I accepted. I never expected your father to be there at the funeral. When he saw me…his face… I tried to avoid him, but he cornered me… I remember looking over his shoulder and seeing his wife standing there holding his child. The expression on her face…the devastation.”

“Again, my brother-in-law’s family came to my rescue. You were born that night. Labor brought on by stress and grief, the doctor said. They offered to let me stay with them until I was recovered and could take you home. That family was the DiNozzos. Senior and his wife came to the funerals. I believe my brother-in-law was his cousin.” Sister Martha Agnes looked past them as if seeing the past. “I met her in a small courtyard where I would go to pray. She was crying; so heartbroken. She had just lost another child. The doctors told her there would be no more.”

“Oh, Antonio. I prayed so long. There was a young woman who wanted a child so desperately. It appeared that she and Senior were happily married. I felt God was guiding me. So, although it was the hardest thing I had ever done. I offered to let them adopt you but insisted that they keep the name Antonio. I’ve never forgiven myself for giving you up; for what they did to you.”

Tony looked at the tear that was rolling down her check. “You didn’t have any way of knowing. It’s not your fault.”

Gibbs looked proudly at his husband. Tony had such a forgiving nature. He would eliminate anyone trying to take advantage of it, but he knew Tony’s mother would not waste his forgiveness.

“Is that when you joined the convent?”

“No. That was later. Much later. I went home trying to put a life back together without you. I threw myself into charity work; anywhere I could be near children. It was another year that Father Antonio before came to me. He had seen the calling in me. I told him I could not do so. I could not commit my earthly self for I held the family estate. When my family died, I had sold the businesses and lived frugally in the family home. It was Father Antonio that took me to Taviano Moretti. He offered to help me. I decided to sell the family home, but decided to keep the villa where my family spent weekends when I was a girl. They drew up papers, put things in trust for you. Only once your birthright was secured did I feel that I could enter the convent.”

Tony’s mother smiled. “In the midst of all that, your father arrived. He wanted to know where you were. He had talked his wife into accepting you, but it was too late. I took him to Signor Moretti. Your father hired him to investigate your life. He began sending me copies of the reports. I was devastated by what I had done. When he realized that your birth had not been formally registered in the United States; he and Signor Moretti took steps to protect you.”
“Does my father live near here? I looked for the Fabbri family but wasn’t able to locate him.”

“Antonio, you and I are the last two of the Fabbri family. I could not give you your father’s name.”

“So you are Martha Fabbri?” Gibbs clarified.

“I was Brigida Fabbri. I am Sister Martha Agnes now. I chose the name Martha for the woman that would have been stoned in the Bible. It seemed to be appropriate after what I had done. I chose Agnes for St. Agnes of Assisi and decided to minister to the poor.”

“Does my father live in Rome?”

The sister looked shocked. “Your father wasn’t Italian, he is American. That’s how Signor Moretti was able to file paperwork for dual citizenship when he filed your adoption papers.”

“If my father was an American, how did you meet him?”

“He came as a sort of diplomat. After the scandal broke, he was forced to return to America in disgrace.”

“My father? Is he still alive?”

“Yes, Antonio, he is.”

“Who is he?”

“I cannot say.”

“What do you mean you cannot say? I have a right to know.”

“Yes, you do.” Tony’s mother bowed her head. “But I made a vow to protect his career, his family.”

“I’m his family, too.” Tony protested, “You can’t do this to me. Not when I’ve come all this way.”

“I will have Signor Moretti contact him. It must be his decision. It is up to him to reveal his identity.”

“Where does he live?” Gibbs demanded. “You can tell him at least that. You owe him that much.”

Tears streamed down her face as she whispered, “Washington, D.C.”

Chapter End Notes

*** Moretti’s conversation with... da da dum… Tony’s mother.

“Have you seen him yet?”

“I am with him now.”

“Is he okay? With all that horrible man has done?”

“Yes. His husband seems to be taking good care of him.”

“Does he want to meet me?”
“He just asked the same thing about you.”

“Have you explained?”

“I am just starting. Do you want me to send Rossi to pick you up?”

“Not yet. If he still wants to meet me afterwards…”

“He will. I can tell. After I have explained, I will have Rossi bring him to you, yes?”

“Yes.”
“Who are we looking for?”
Jumping GeminiAngel grabbed her chest. “Shhhh.” She peeped around the corner again.
RoyalElephant whispered. “Who are we looking for?”
“Aliens.”
GeminiAngel crept back the way she came motioning royalelephant to follow. Around the back, royalelephant could send members of the cabal in the garden playing with Isabella, Silver Bullet, Candy the rescue helper ponies and their helper donkey Dakota. Isabella and Candy were wearing bonnets and Silver Bullet and Dakota had cowboy hats. Things seemed normal there.
ShadowWolfsDen came bouncing over. Literally. On a pogo stick. “How’s he look?”
GeminiAngel squealed in delight. “Doesn’t Coors look wonderful?” DejaSue, Spiderprincipi and ncisgirl2014 nodded enthusiastically as they looked at the large Clydesdale with a blue braided mane, the feathering around his legs was braided. The hoof was painted candy apple red.
“Coors?” NewDawn said.
“Uh-huh.”
“That’s a Clydesdale,” flowerpotgirl said.
“Uh-huh.” GeminiAngel pointed to where delphiskye, LadyDrak1705, JulieMH and Chrissie were “helping” the twin baby goats change their clothes. “We have to name them.”
Royalelephant dutifully admired them. “But what does this have to do with aliens?”
Jesco Geminiangel waved at annette_ella and njfkf who were petting Coors. “Oh, this is bobdog54 who’s new to the cabal.kl Hey, QueenBee4Ever have you see Wolfnjag?”
“She went to the store for more hay.”
“Good.” Slipping through the backdoor, GeminiAngel said, “We had a koala named Kiwi, but Wolfnjag wouldn’t let him stay. In here.”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 58

“Hey, you okay?” Tired of watching Tony from the doorway, Jethro came up behind Tony as he stood by the balcony railing. Putting his hands on Tony’s shoulders, Jethro pulled his husband back slightly so that Tony leaned against him.

Tony laughed bitterly. “My mother deliberately tried to ruin my father’s marriage. No one will tell me who he is. And now my mother is a nun. How did my life get so screwed up in not even two weeks? Hell, I was Anthony DiNozzo, US citizen, NCIS agent, scion of the DiNozzo family of New York. Now, I have a green card, I’m illegitimate, my supposed father is a criminal scumbag and oh, yeah, my mother is a NUN.” As he spoke, Tony’s voice got louder.

“It hasn’t been all bad.” Jethro whispered in his ear. “Two weeks ago, you were my very special
senior agent and I was your boss. Now, we’re married, you have a great father-in-law, a lovely goddaughter and don’t forget Zuma.” Jethro continued as Tony laughed. The laugh may have been a bit on the hysterical side, but it was a laugh. “And Zuma’s amazing Auntie Abby.”

“Abby is going to freak. My mom’s a nun and her nun friend has been using Abby for information.”

With a half sob, Tony turned and pushed close to Jethro. He felt his husband’s arms encircle him, holding him tightly and sharing his strength.

“She will. But you know Abby, she’ll scold Sister Therese Joseph and give her those “I’m so disappointed in you” eyes.” Jethro felt Tony smile. “Then she’ll forgive her and take her bowling.”

“I feel like such a girl.” Tony sniffed.

“Because you’re letting me hold you? Tony, these last two weeks have been hell for you. Stronger men would be whimpering in a corner. Not you.” Jethro praised him. “I admire you for your stance on Senior and Benoit. It would have been so easy to burn that envelope and walk away but you didn’t. You wouldn’t let them cop a deal to make your life easier. You are one of the strongest people I know. I am so proud of you.”

Tony pulled back so that he could look in Jethro’s eyes; his own eyes tearing up when he saw the sincerity with in the gaze. “If it weren’t for you…”

“Got your six. Always.” Jethro brought his hands up to Tony’s shoulders. “That’s what family does. That’s what a husband does.” Cupping his hand under Tony’s chin, Jethro leaned in and kissed him.

The first few kisses were tentative seeking a response from Tony. After the third kiss, Tony moved closer and put his arms around Jethro. Pulling back again, Tony looked into his husband’s eyes as if he was searching for his soul. Stepping back, Tony took the other man’s hand and pulled him into their suite away from prying eyes. Hesitating at the doorway to the bedroom, Tony allowed Jethro to take control.

Jethro kicked off his shoes and Tony followed suit. Pulling him towards the bed, Jethro shrugged out of his jacket and then slipped Tony’s off his shoulders while he kissed him. Tony struggled to free his arms from the jacket sleeves. Finally free, Tony caressed Jethro’s back. Both men had removed their ties after leaving Tony’s mom and had loosened the buttons on their collars. Jethro trailed kisses down his neck and sucked on a spot at the base of his neck.

“If you give me a hickey…” Tony protested then moaned.

Hands were busy opening whatever buttons they could reach. Shirts were tugged and pulled until the two men were free. When Jethro winced as the Steri-strips™ on his hip pulled, Tony pushed until Jethro was lying on his back. With only a slight hesitation, Tony settled his one leg between Jethro’s and the two men lost themselves in the sensations. It was just hands, skin and lips. Although hands tugged at belts, they two men only succeeded in pushing their pants down past their hips. When hard flesh covered with silk rubbed against hard flesh in soft cotton, both groaned and it was not enough and it was too much.

As they lay together their breathing calming, Jethro laughed. “It’s been a long time since I’ve done that,” he said gesturing to his soaked boxers. “Wanted to make the night last.”

Tony tugged at his own soaked boxers. “Was just what I needed. Just how I needed.” Tony forced himself to leave Jethro’s embrace. “Forgot how uncomfortable this was.” He pushed the slacks and boxers down and off. When Jethro didn’t move, Tony gently took a hold of Jethro’s slacks and tugged.
“I want cuddle time.” Jethro complained with a smirk.

“Shower first and dry boxers, then cuddle time.” Tony held out his hand and helped Jethro up. Jethro shrugged out of his boxers. Naked except for their socks, the two men headed to the bathroom hand in hand.

Section 59

Unable to resist the call of the night, the two men went outside after their shower. Jethro sat down on the cushioned chaise in the conversation area. When Tony went to sit on the next chair, Jethro caught his hand and pulled an unresisting Tony down on the chaise with him. Tony was now wedged between Jethro’s legs resting with his back on Jethro’s chest. There was a bit of a nip in the air but Tony had snagged one of the throws from the area and the two men were snug and warm.

They could see a few stars here and there. The moon was half shrouded in clouds but it didn’t ruin their view. Out on the Tyrrhenian Sea, they could see the lights of ships passing. Sailboats rocked gently off shore. As they watched, a cruise ship began to move and head out to sea.

“We could do that.”


“Jump on the next cruise ship leaving.” Jethro murmured. “Just drift around the Mediterranean seeing the sights.”

“Okay, who are you and what have you done with Leroy Jethro Gibbs?” Tony twisted so that he could see Jethro’s face.

“Why?”

Tony began to tick his reasons off on his fingers. “One, you gave up two big cases to Fornell. Two, you are selling your house. Three, someone we didn’t know pays for a house and you just go with it. Four, McGee booked us to Sicily on a first class flight. Five, Moretti hires a driver and books us a suite and you just accept it. And did I mention, our seats were first class? That’s not the Gibbs I know.”

“It’s what you need.” Jethro said. Seeing the puzzled look on Tony’s face, he placed his check against Tony’s and took his hand. “You needed me. If I had kept those cases, Vance would have put you on another team temporarilily or assigned you to cold cases. I promised to always have your six. Can’t do that if we’re separated. Besides, I want to help you through all this. I want to be there if you need me.” Jethro curled one of Tony’s fingers down.

“The house? Well, that was Shannon’s and my dream house. Since I lost her and Kelly it hasn’t been a home. I’ve let old memories linger. With my exes, I never felt a desire to move on. Probably why the marriages didn’t last. But with you? I want a home that’s our own. One free of memories for both of us. True, we didn’t have to build that house but I saw your face when you saw the picture. I knew you were picturing us on a swing on that front porch. I know because I was picturing it, too. That doesn’t mean I enjoy having someone else pay for it. Between selling both our places, my retirement account and some investments, I think we could have qualified for a loan. Might not have been able to afford the changes and might have had to cut the land and house sizes down a bit but that is our house, our home. The fact that it has a suite for dad is just icing on the cake.” Two more fingers went down.

“First class? It’s one thing to splurge when we’re on a personal trip. Don’t get used to it, because
when we’re on the job, it’s back to military flights.”

“There’s the Gibbs we all know and love.” The head slap wasn’t very hard and might have ended in stroking Tony’s hair, but Gibbs would deny it. Jethro? He ran his fingers through Tony’s hair. “The suite? My gut didn’t view Moretti as a threat. If I’d had doubts about the motives, we’d have made our own arrangements. With everything that’s happened you deserve a little pampering.”

“Things have been moving really fast, Tony. We’re good together. I want this,” Jethro intertwined their fingers. “I want our marriage to work. I probably won’t say it as often as I should but this is real. When Vance and Mabus dropped their little bomb, I didn’t take it well I admit. I also didn’t fight it that hard. There were a few other favors I could have called in but…” Jethro sighed. “Seeing Sacks drag you out in handcuffs gutted me. I couldn’t imagine you not being on my team every day. Did a lot of thinking that night and realized, it wasn’t just wanting you on my team. I couldn’t bear the thought of not having you in my life. All those nights, you, me, pizza, beer and a game. I wanted those every day and I wanted you beside me every night. Once I sorted my thoughts out, I didn’t even think about other options. I chose to marry you.”

“Jethro…”

“Don’t say it.” Jethro hugged Tony tighter. “I don’t think either of us is ready to use the “L” word but despite that, I know we will. When I finally do, I want you to listen to me because I probably won’t say it as often as I should. I’m not that touchy-feely kind of man…”

“You’re not?” Tony said in mock-surprise.

“Smartass.” Jethro gave him a soft head slap. “Guess what I’m saying is, I’m in this for the long haul.”

“Me, too. I’m not ready to say the “L” word either, but even with everything spinning out of control; I knew it would work out if I just held on to you. You’ve been my anchor for years. I knew everything would be okay as long as we were together.” Tony paused. “I never really pictured myself married. I mean when I proposed years ago, it was kind of what was expected. Go to work, find a girl, get married, blah, blah, blah.” Tony toyed with Jethro’s wedding ring. “This does feel right. I know I’ve got a lot of emotional baggage and it probably won’t be easy, but I’m in this for the long haul, too.”

Jethro chuckled, “We are such girls.” He grunted as Tony poked him in the ribs. Resettling his husband, Jethro pulled up the throw. By mutual consent, the two men laid there, content in each other’s company as the night drifted by. There would be time tomorrow to deal with Tony’s parentage and other issues, tonight was theirs.

Chapter End Notes

“My idiot alert went off.” Chorused panchajaviera, Callasandra, LAG0802 and ArianaFeileacan as they all came racing in. Watching them all attempt to enter the study at once was a true Kodak moment, Aussiefan70, Fairhaven 74, jane_x80 were howling with laughter.

“IDIOT!” Geminianjel cringed. “Help.”

“Do you want to tell…” Wolfnjag stopped, she was not falling for that again. “Why did I get a call from the Department of Homeland Security telling me that prank calls would
be prosecuted?”
“I don’t know.”
“Did you call the Department of Homeland Security?” Wolfnjag’s yelling drew the cabal members towards the house, she could see them crowding are the windows and the study door. “Answer me.”
“Maybe.” Geminijangel was looking for an escape route. She saw QueeneoftheDeer peeping out of the secret compartment where she was caring for twin fawns.
“Geminijangel!” Jesco0307 shoved her way in. “Haven’t we talked about NASA before?” The older cabal members shuddered remembering the Grover’s Mill incident and promised to tell the newbies when Wolfnjag wasn’t around.
“Yeesss.”
“Then explain to me why the administrator, Charles Bolden, just called me.”
“He wanted to talk to you?”
Wolfnjag and Jesco0307 took a step towards her and then stopped. A quick game of rock, paper, scissors left Wolfnjag grudgingly stepping aside to let Jesco0307 get the first crack at the idiot. “Alright, you sit right down there on your chair.” She pointed at the big list on the wall. “Read Rule 19.”
With a pout, geminiangel recited, “Rule 19. The idiot is not permitted to call the police.”
“Keep going.”
“19a. The idiot is not permitted to call NASA. 19b. The idiot is not permitted to call the White House. 19c. The idiot is not permitted to call any branch of the military. 19d. The idiot is not permitted to call TV stations. 19e. The idiot is not permitted to call Radio stations. 19f. The idiot is not permitted to call Any government office; local, state or federal. 19g. The idiot is not permitted to call any foreign government office. 19h. The idiot is not permitted to call 911. 19i. The idiot is not allowed to communicate in any way with the IRS. Rule 19 is amends “call” to “to communicate in any form, even smoke signals.”
“I didn’t.”
“You contacted the Department of Homeland Security.”
“Yes.”
“So you called a government office.”
“No. I called a department, not an office.”
“Cabal members, please update your rule list.” Wolfnjag shouted. “Amendment to 19f. change “office” to “office, department, or any government organization.”
“Now why did you call NASA?”
“The department of Homeland Security hung up on me.”
“So you decided to break rule 19a.” Jesco0307 clarified.
“It was an emergency.”
“How could it be an emergency?”
“There are aliens.”
“We have talked about this before, Idi… geminijangel.” Jesco0307 tapped her foot.
“I have proof.”
“What proof?” Jesco0307 demanded.
Looking over at Wolfnjag, Geminijangel gave a big sigh. Leaning down under the desk, she reluctantly pulled out a box. Inside the box was a white bunny with multicolor spots and a florescent blue bunny with white spots. “Look.” She points into the box where there were five pink creatures. “See the aliens made clones but they had trouble like that guy on TV who tried to clone his cat and it came out naked.”
“Grab your keyboard,” the muse chortled, her psychedelic aura flashing brighter than a disco ball. “I found out who Tony’s father is. Hey, get up.” Pokes geminiangel as she lies on the loveseat in her study.

“Don’t wanna.”

“Don’t care. Get up. You promised that as soon as I found out who Tony’s father was; you’d let everyone know. Now. Chop. Chop.”

“Go away.” Covers face with a pillow.

“Don’t make me get rough with you.”

“Leave me alone.”

Amelitta grabbed her stubborn writer by the ear forcing her to sit up. “Now you listen here, I could have spent the night out at a club with the cabal, but noooo… I spent the night watching McGee do dull search after dull search after dull search. Now get up and do your job.”

“No.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Amelitta looks at her more closely. “Are you sick? Should I call Wolfnjag?”

“No.”

“Are you still afraid of the clones?”

Geminiangel looks at the pink creatures snuggled with Coke and Chips. Now that the shock of clones was over, they were kinda cute. “No.”

“Is it Wolfnjag posting the rules online?”

“No.”

“Come on, work with me here.” Amelitta says a bit impatiently. “QueeneoftheDeer’s husband is doing a show tonight and he promised to sing Chug-a-lug for me. So be a good little writer and go write this down.” If possible, Geminiangel looked sadder. With a long-suffering sigh, Amelitta sat down next to her and put a wing around her.

“Alright, alright. Everything’s going to be okay.” She said comforting. “Now spill.”

“It’s just… Well, you know how this was only to be a one-shot?”

“Only you thought it was a one-shot, idiot.”

“Yeah, yeah. Well, I was just thinking. Tony knows who his mom is now.”

“I know. Was that brilliant or what?” Amelitta beamed.
“And if we now know who Tony’s father is, it’s almost over.”

“What’s almost over?”

“Bourbon & Aspirin.” Geminiangel noted Amelitta’s confusion. “Once everyone knows who Tony’s dad is there’s only a few loose ends to tie up.”

“Well, there’s who is after Tony and… and… Huh…”

“See.” Geminiangel sighed. “I don’t want to leave. I like it here with the Cabal. We have such fun and there are all the animals that need taken care of.”

“Well, darn,” thoughts of her own nights out with the Cabal ran through her mind. Amelitta’s aura dimmed and turned blue. “Now I’m depressed.”

Section 60

Jethro couldn’t begin to count the number of sunrises he had seen but the scene over the Tyrrhenian Sea was the most memorable. The eastern sky was starting to lighten in preparation for the sun’s arrival. He glanced down at Tony still sleeping in his arms. Maybe it wasn’t the sunset but the company. He was grateful for the fire pit. Overnight the fire had burned down. Now the heat came from the embers and was being released by the pottery.

As he stared into the embers he replayed their visit with Tony’s mom. Something wasn’t adding up. Moretti knew he and Tony were on their way. Obviously, he had told Sister Martha Agnes. Why not contact Tony’s father? Why didn’t Tony’s mom call his dad? She had to have known that would be Tony’s first question. He didn’t like the fact that Tony’s unknown dad was in DC. He didn’t believe all the info came from Jenny and Abby. After all, Rule 39. There was no such thing as coincidence. Right now, Jethro decided to focus on Rule 5. His husband was in his arms. He and Tony were in the Mediterranean with sunrise coming up. This was too good to waste.

Gibbs scowled at the pod and the coffee pot. The least the hotel could do was provide a real coffeepot. Tony smirked grabbing the pod and swapping for another in the wide variety available. Popping it in to the machine, he put one of the beautiful mugs on the drip tray and hit the buttons to brew the coffee nice and strong.

“I’ll get it.” Tony almost sang as he went to answer the knock on the door.

By unspoken agreement, the two men had decided that deep conversations could wait until after breakfast. Rather than venture into one of the restaurants, the two men had decided to have breakfast on their balcony. Gibbs waited for the machine to quit hissing. Taking his mug, he wandered out on the balcony as the attendant was leaving. Tony had opted for a polo shirt instead of the shirt and tie. Jethro admired the flex of muscles. Nearing the table, the scowl was back. This was not breakfast; this was a sugar-holic’s dream.

Tony laughed. “Sorry. No steak and eggs on the menu. This was the best I could do.” He lifted the lid on a plate showing ham and cheese crepes. “Luckily, they have a few ‘international’ dishes for travelers.”
Jethro was unable to keep his grumpy look. The day was too beautiful and his husband too cheerful. Of course, he hadn’t been too cheerful about waking up so early but that changed as Jethro had held him tightly, whispering as the sun rise neared. Promises of long nights on their own patio by one of the outdoor fireplaces. Skinny dipping in their pool after barbeques with their family. Of course, Zuma would be sleeping with grandpa on those nights.

Both men had been loath to break the spell but finally Tony had risen to answer the call of nature. Helping a groaning Jethro up, he had laughed while his husband complained about being used as a bed all night. It was just bluster, he knew as Jethro gave him a toe tingling kiss and slipped past him to reach the bathroom first. While Jethro was going through his morning routine, Tony had taken the time to order breakfast before taking care of his own needs.

Hunger satiated, Tony pushed his plate back and took a sip of the freshly squeezed orange juice. It was icy cold, tart and sweet. A perfect complement to the coffee he had chosen to make for himself.

“Ready to talk?” Jethro asked, taking a sip of his own coffee.

Tony looked at him wryly. “Do we have to?”

“Your choice.” Jethro decided not to push. Yet. “Want me to call the car to take us to the villa?”

After refusing to divulge his father’s name, Sister Martha Agnes had tried to soothe over the situation by turning the talk towards her childhood. She had talked about growing up a pampered princess in Palermo and the home her parents had outside the city. There were stories of long summer days in the cool of the woods and sleeping on the terraces, of she and her sister exploring the woods and pretending to be princesses imprisoned waiting for their princes.

She had been frank as she described her own bitterness when she had realized that her first suitor was more interested in her father’s money than in courting her. It had opened her eyes to the fact that she would never be a beautiful princess. She had become sullen and brooding as she watched her sister Rosina wined and dined by one handsome man after another before her sister had fallen in love with Roberto DiNozzo.

Her discontent had grown throughout the courtship, engagement and wedding. She had stood up for her sister even while acknowledging that it was not in her own future. When her nephew, Nicolò was born she had stood again. This time as his godmother. Sister Martha Agnes had wept when she talked of the flight; the loss of her mother, father, Rosina, Roberto and Nicolò. She talked about the DiNozzos giving her shelter and helping her make the arrangements. Relived for them meeting with his adopted mother in the garden.

Tony knew she had deeply believed that Eleanor and Senior would give him a good life. Something had changed the woman Sister Martha Agnes had met into the alcoholic Eleanor Paddington DiNozzo he knew. Perhaps if Eleanor had lived, Tony gave himself a mental Gibbs slap. She had been an alcoholic, she would not have stood up to Senior anymore then she did the first eight years.

Sister Martha Agnes had tried but the identity of Tony’s father lingered like the proverbial elephant in the room. Her offer to accompany them to the villa had seemed almost half-hearted. Perhaps she was unable to handle the memories. Regardless, the meeting hadn’t been the “Hallmark” moment that movies loved to include. Both Tony and his mother left the meeting with unresolved issues.

Jethro watched the emotions that crossed the younger man’s face. He was proud that Tony trusted him enough to be open with him and not hide behind the mask most people saw. Picking up his coffee, he tried to be patient.
“No.” Tony said quietly. “I want to go home.”

Jethro found he wasn’t really surprised. Tony had some answers but there was nothing more to be learned in Palermo. The rest of the answers were back home in DC. “McGee should be up in a couple more hours, we’ll call him and have him get us on the first flight back. There were some things Moretti wanted you to sign. How about I call and make an appointment for this afternoon?”

Tony nodded reluctantly. “I’ll start packing.”

“You’ll get ready to go.”

“Go where?”

“I believe you promised souvenirs. I’ll have the car called and we’ll spend the morning in Palermo. We’ll do a little shopping and maybe find something more substantial to eat.”

Section 61

Jethro was happy to see the smile on Tony’s face as he held up another find. They had stumbled across Miniature Alfio Ferlito, a store that specialized in hand made miniatures. For the last hour, Tony had been piling ‘necessities’ on the counter as he selected items for Victoria. Jethro had suggested after a half hour that they had plenty of items to decorate a dollhouse but at the puppy dog eyes, he had folded. At least Tony was happy now.

As a craftsman himself, Jethro could appreciate the quality of the miniatures. The attention to detail and hand details were amazing. When whirlwind Tony finally wound down, the smiling clerk happily offered to ship the purchases home for them for free. Jethro managed to not even wince at the total. A nearby jewelry store proved the shortest stop as they selected necklaces for the women in their life.

As they wondered on, they found a shop specializing in local pottery. Tony forced Jethro to help select a set of dinnerware for “family” dinners. The counter was now filled with a few vases, some accent pieces for the kitchen to match the family dinner set and various pieces for the new house. For Ducky, they had found a lovely tea set. It was Jethro who found the pièce de résistance in a shadowy corner; a set of dinnerware and matching tea service just perfect for a young princess to use in a playhouse. Tony squealed at the sight, something he would deny later. For Breena, they found a vase and some flower pots that were perfect for her patio garden. Again, the beaming clerk offered to ship the items. Tony set aside the tea set, Breena’s vase and some sets of mugs to take home along and the clerk offered to deliver them to the hotel while they finished shopping.

In between shops the men sipped coffee and talked about the wonderful architecture and statues. The clerk at the pottery shop had recommended a shop called Quir and the they made their way towards the shop hoping to find the perfect gift for Abby. The shop was across from via dei Calderai and the window was filled with colorful belts and bags and leather items. Entering, it was clear the shop was just perfect for their needs. It was easy to select a new messenger bag for McGee. There were even belts that could be used with hidden knives. They quickly selected belts for all the men, including Fornell. They even found a leather bag that could be used for a diaper bag and a dark leather bag that could be used for Palmer’s medical bag. There was a wide selection of leather wallets assembled on the counter. Tony had picked up a purse for Breena. There were even purses for Kayla Vance and Vance’s secretary Helen but nothing special for Abby.

The couple who owned the store had given them a tour of the workroom. As the stack of leather goods grew, so did their smiles. Noticing the look on Tony’s face, the gentleman approached to see if he could help. A conversation later and a showing of Abby’s picture on Tony’s cellphone, the
older gentleman escorted Tony back in to the workshop. Jethro made to follow but his cellphone rang. Motioning to Tony, he stepped outside hoping his husband wouldn’t bankrupt them.

“Gibbs.”

“Boss, it’s McGee. I got the manifest from Ducky’s friend and there was a Matteo and Antonia Fabbri on Flight 112.”

Gibbs interrupted. “They’re Tony’s grandparents.”

“Oh.” McGee enthusiastic tone was gone.

“We met with Tony’s mom yesterday afternoon.”

“That’s wonderful. How is he?”

“Looking forward to coming home.” Jethro looked towards the store but Tony was still in the workroom. “We’ll have a team meeting when we get home and we’ll explain. For now, can you get us on the first available flight home?”

“On it, boss. Boss?”

“Yeah, McGee. Is Tony okay?”

“Not yet. But he will be once he’s home.”

“There’s a flight leaving 7 am your time tomorrow. I could have you into Dulles by 11 am our time tomorrow. It’s a bit more expensive for the short notice.”

“Make it happen, McGee.”

“On it. Tickets will be at the counter.” McGee confirmed. “Tell Tony…”

“I will.” Gibbs terminated the call. Taking a deep breath, he re-entered the store where he could see Tony at the counter.

“Any luck?”

“Once he saw her picture; he just…” Tony shook his head in admiration. “He says it should be at our hotel by four. It’s just perfect.”

This time, Jethro handed over his card. With assurances that their purchases would be delivered, the two men moved on. In the next shop, which specialized in leather clothing, Jethro let himself be talked into matching suede bomber jackets lined with cashmere, a slightly longer coat in a bomber style that was perfect for the cold winter weather. A hip length coat was chosen for Jackson in a soft brown suede. Tony chose a longer trench coat for winter. A few pairs of gloves for everyone and Tony was ready to move on.

As Tony waved good-bye to the ecstatic clerks who were preparing the majority of their order for shipping and some for delivery to the hotel, Jethro led him back outside. Noticing the time, Jethro decided lunch was on the agenda. They had a few more hours until they were to meet Moretti at the hotel. They popped in to a little restaurant just down the street. As they ate their meals, Jethro told him about McGee’s call. He was a bit surprised when Tony declared them done shopping. They decided to head back to the car and ask Giro for a suggestion about where they could find a basic suitcase to use for their purchases.
The cheerful driver told them not to worry. He would take them back to the hotel and would take care of the luggage issue. Rather than the direct route, Giro took them on a short sight-seeing tour before delivering them back to the hotel. With two hours before their appointment with Moretti, both men took the opportunity to crash on their bed resting their tired feet and talking about their purchases.

Section 62

When Moretti knocked, Jethro led him into the living area where Tony was waiting. The lawyer suggested Tony sit at the desk with Gibbs next to him. Across the desk, Moretti reach into his attaché case and pulled out a tall stack of files. As he handed each to Tony, Moretti explained them in detail answering both Tony and Gibbs’ questions completely. Most of the forms turned control of the family trust over to Tony.

Initially Tony balked. He was uncomfortable with all he had been given already in terms of money and real estate. Moretti stepped out on the balcony for a bit while Tony and Jethro discussed the issue. With his mother now a nun, Tony was the only surviving member of the family. If he did not accept the bequest the money would be in limbo forever. They discussed the good that could be done with the money. Jethro suggested that he talk to Ducky. Acquiescing only when Jethro agreed to share the inheritance, Tony allowed him to call Moretti back in.

The attorney quickly made a note to put the trust in both their names. The next sticking point was a file that created trusts for his heirs. Looking at Moretti, Tony said, “I don’t see my husband or myself becoming pregnant.” This earned him a slap. Glaring at Gibbs, Tony muttered. “Well, I don’t.”

“Your heir does not need to be a blood relative. I understand you have good friends.” Moretti explained. “Perhaps you wish to set up trusts for them.”

This brought about another discussion between Jethro and Tony but both waved Moretti back into his chair when he offered to leave. Both men agreed that protecting their family came first. Jethro was surprised but proud that Tony included Fornell and Vance in their extended family. Trust funds and educational trusts were set up for Victoria Palmer, Emily Fornell, Kayla and Jared Vance. Trust funds and educational trusts would automatically be set up for any additional children born to their family. Trust and retirement funds were also set up for the family, including the Palmers, McGee, Abby, Fornell and Vance. Tony insisted on including Ducky, although Jethro assured his husband that the ME was taken care of.

Once all the papers were prepared, Moretti promised to have the paperwork ready in the morning. Tony could sign them on the way to the plane and he would have a courier deliver the copies and notifications to the “heirs.” He also agreed to help set up a fund to help the victims of Senior and Benoit and the children of the local orphanage. Moretti recommended having a US attorney as a liaison for charities to be set up in the United States; including the ‘Shannon Gibbs’, ‘Kelly Gibbs’, ‘Jacqueline Thomas Vance’ and ‘Caitlin Todd’ scholarship programs.

A mentally exhausted Tony drifted out onto the balcony while Jethro showed Moretti out. He also heard Jethro speaking with a bellboy that he later discovered had delivered all their purchases, the requested suitcase and a tray of fresh fruits, cheeses and more wine. Strong arms wrapped around his waist and he leaned back into his husband’s embrace.

“I really hate this.”

“I know.”

“So much money, so….” Tony sighed. “Why me?”
Stepping back, Jethro took his husband’s hand and tugged him over to their chaise. With a little persuasion, the two men ended up in the same position they had the night before. “Why not you?” Jethro asked as he placed his cheek against Tony’s. “I know you don’t feel right taking the money, but you can do a lot of good. Look at what you’ve done so far.”

“I just want… I…”

“We’ll find him, Tony. We found your mother. We’ll find him.” Jethro promised. “We’ll be home tomorrow and we’ll put McGee on the case.” Jethro rubbed the younger man’s arms feeling the tense muscles. “Want to tell me what’s really bothering you?”

“You saw what money did to Senior. What if it changes us? What if I change? Will you…”

With a silent apology to Ducky, Jethro said, “Did it change Ducky? Do you really think he or dad would let it change us? Dad would turn us over his knee with Ducky’s help.”

Tony laughed sadly. “He would. What if they think I’m trying to buy…”

“Hey,” Jethro stopped him. “Yes, you may have gone a bit overboard with the souvenirs. That’s because they’re family. You’ve never had a family to spoil and now you do. They will understand. They may scold you a bit for wasting money but they will understand. I will not let the money change you.”

“Promise?”

“Promise. You know, you did forget one person on your little shopping spree.”

Tony thought hard as he mentally reviewed their purchases. “Who?”

“Zuma.” Jethro laughed as Tony elbowed him.

“I did not.” It was Tony’s turn to laugh. “Remember at Quir when we went back in to the workroom? He asked if I had anyone else I hadn’t found something for so I showed him Zuma’s picture. I told him that Zuma was our wedding present from your dad and about the little issue last night. I told him I wanted something special but that Zuma already has a nice leather collar. He actually had a leather bone someone had ordered and hadn’t picked up and a rope toy with a leather ball on the end to play tug of war.”

“I can’t believe he had dog toys.”

“Yup. In a way I hate to leave here. Everyone has been so kind.”

“Well, you did buy half the goods in Palermo.”

Ignoring him, Tony continued. “But I like us here. Last night was perfect. Just you and I under the stars. I don’t want to lose this.”

“I told you last night I’m in this for the long haul. Last night was amazing but it’s just the beginning for us.”

“But we’ll be back at work soon.”

“Gibbs and DiNozzo will be back at work. Jethro and Tony will be enjoying their life together.”

“You really believe we can do this? We can make our marriage work?”
“Wouldn’t have gone through with it if I didn’t.”

“I should call my … my mother and let her know we’re leaving.”

“Anything special you want to do on our last night?”

“Dinner here on our balcony and watching the stars all night?”

“Sounds perfect. Tell you what, call your mother. Then order dinner. I’ll start packing.”

The two men rose to complete their assignments. As they separated inside Tony stopped Jethro. “Jethro, I…” He couldn’t voice the feelings that were in his eyes.

Geminiangel stopped just inside the door. It didn’t look like a tim tams tasting to her. Holding the card over, she let Amelitta look at the card Aussiefan70 had given them. It still said, “Tim Tams Tasting! Enjoy a taste from the southern hemisphere. Writers and their muses welcome.” The address was right and everything. Just then she heard someone shout, “There she is.”

There was only one thing to do. Geminiangel shoved Amelitta in the direction of the crowd. After all, she could fly. Geminiangel then pulled on the door. As she went to flee, there was ArianaFeileacan standing in the doorway. “And just where are you going, missy?”

Turning the other way, Geminiangel found Amelitta had joined the cabal. Traitor. It was only a little shove. Her shoulders drooping, she gave in to her fate. They had brought her here to tell her it was over. She might as well let them get it over with.

Wolfnjag fought her way to the idiot. “You just had to start something. They called a special cabal meeting over you. Now get over here and sit down.” She pointed to a chair and Geminiangel sat reluctantly.

QueenBee4Ever stepped to the podium. “As co-chair of the membership drive, I would like to announce that there are many new members since the last special meeting. Please stand as a call your name. Please give a big Cabal welcome to delphiskye, mandy153, Jane_x80, ShadowWolfsDen, bobdog54, cokesb, and DejaSue. Welcome to the Cabal.”

There was a rousing cheer and applause for the newbies. “Now, I would like to have QueeneoftheDeer, chair of the interspecies alliance, make a few announcements.”

“Thank-you, QueenBee4ever. As I’m sure you are aware there are new members of the alliance. I’d like to introduce them to you. Coming to us from the US, meet Coors.” The Clydesdale stepped forward in all his red, white and blue warrior braid glory. “Next, here are Nanny and Billy.”

Wolfnjag jumped to her feet in protest. “Sit down, wolfnjag. The alliance held a vote. It is affirmed that these are their names.” The kids were dressed in their best overalls and tutus. “Next, I introduce you to the twins, Bambi and Fawn.” QueeneoftheDeer’s sharp look kept Wolfnjag in her seat. “Lastly, I’d like you to meet Coke and Chips and their… uh…clones. Ima, Pattie, Attila the Bun, David Hopperfield and Schnuggle.” The clones were in a small basket sitting between their proud …uh… originals. “And now meet Mimic the magpie.” When the applause died, she continued. “Unfortunately Kiwi was not able to get a flight back in time and the dragonflies were a bit scattered. Last but not least, I would like everyone to meet Spot the Zebra. I am sure that the cabal alliance will continue to grow. I would now like to turn the mike over to ArianaFeileacan, chair of the rules committee.”

Wolfnjag jumped to her feet. “What rules committee? I make the rules for the idiot and the safety of the cabal. Just look at poor Callasandra.” Poor Callasandra had her leg in bandages and propped on a chair. “Everyone knows you can’t rollerskate in a frozen swimming pool. Everyone but the idiot.”
“Wolfnjag!... Now as I was about to say, in the matter of the special meeting. It has come to the attention of various members that the id… Geminiaangel has been laboring under a misunderstanding. Psyche53 made a motion for a special meeting, which was seconded by Fairhaven74, otrame, Aussiefan70, annette_ella, our new members, flowerpotgirl and on behalf of Callasandra and herself, roylelephant. You do realize that only one person is needed to second a motion, don’t you?” The group just smiled happily at her.

“The voting in now complete and I am happy to say that the result of the vote is ratification of Rule 1214 with all members approving and only one vote abstaining,” she glared at wolfnjag. “I declare as of now and be it know forever, geminiaangel,…”

The idiot tried to ball up in her chair. Here it came.

“The Cabal will never disband.”

“I understand, I’ll just … Huh?”

“Rule 1214 says that the cabal will never disband, you idiot. You’re stuck with us.”

The idiot could hear calls of “Long live the Cabal.” And “Hell, no. We won’t go.” She didn’t think she had ever been so happy. Jumping up, the idiot went to where Amelitta was sitting and grabbed her by a wing. “Thanks everyone! I love you all. Come on, Amelitta.”

“Where are you going?” Aussiefan70 asked. “I have tim tams and we’re going to have a sing-a-long.”

Grabbing the sleeve, Geminiaangel pulled Aussiefan70 along. “We’ll be back. Amelitta and I have a chapter to finish.” As the trio exits, Geminiaangel can be heard asking, “So, who is Tony’s daddy?”

Section 63

“Short conversation.” Jethro commented as he carefully laid Ducky’s teapot in his suitcase and began packing their new clothes around it. “Everything okay?”

“A little awkward,” Tony admitted. “I know she’s my mother but…”

“But?”

“She’s a nun.”

Gibbs paused. “Is that really a problem for you?”

“It should be a problem for her.”

“Not sure I’m following.”

“You know the Catholic stance on same sex marriage.”

“Ah.” Jethro continued packing.
“What? Ah, what?”

“Well, is it that you’re upset that she isn’t or is it your own feelings?”

“Well… damn.” Tony dropped to the bed.

“I know you were raised Catholic.”

“We weren’t really practicing for the most part. I did go to a church school for a bit.”

“Really? Can’t really see you in Catholic school.”

“Neither did Sister Mary Bertha.” Tony automatically rubbed his knuckles. “Didn’t seem to like her nickname.”

“You nicknamed a nun?” Jethro looked at the look his husband was giving him. “Right. Dumb question.” Jethro had to ask. “What did you nickname her?”

“Sister Marry Bert and Ernie.”

Jethro snorted. “Only you. So you okay with Sister Martha Agnes now?”

“I guess so.” Tony began to pack.

Jethro picked up on the underlying tension in Tony’s voice. “Tony, give it time.”

“I could feel the need in her voice but she…”

“Your birth certificate says she is your mother but she’s a stranger to you. She’s had all your life to wonder about you. She also had people keeping tabs on you and feeding her information. You never had that opportunity. This isn’t a fairy tale. You don’t develop feelings just by seeing a name on a piece of paper and voila you have a loving mother-son relationship. Relationships take time. Look at us.” Jethro was relieved to see a smile come to Tony’s face.

“Here’s the package from Quir.” They had wrapped them in shipping paper, but Tony had to peek in the packages.

“Catch.”

Tony fumbled to catch the pen his husband tossed him. “Huh?”

“If you put their names on them, we won’t have to go through them again when we go to hand them out.”

“Great idea.” They developed a system. Tony opened the paper so they could both peek, then he wrote the name on the outside of the package and passed it to Jethro to pack. “There’s an extra package. We must have got someone else’s package in with ours.” Tony peeled back the paper and found a selection of leather animals. Each had a “Z” tooled into the leather. The cutouts were shaped like a rabbit, raccoon, squirrel, etc. There were multiple layers of what Tony knew was scrap leather sewn together securely with the features of the animals tooled in and accented by stain on the leather.

“Jethro, look.” Tony held up the squirrel. “Aren’t they amazing? I can’t believe they did this.”

Looking at his husband, Jethro could. Tony didn’t set out to charm the leather maker and his wife; he was just being Tony. Tony’s admiration and appreciation of their work and his natural personality just came out in his smile. “Zuma will love them.”
“I’ll put them on top with his tug ball and leather bone in the small bag.”

The driver, having gotten a look at the shopping bags being delivered, had bought a nice size suitcase from a local chain store. He had also included a small travel bag that could be used as a carry-on. Into the carry-on went Breena and Abby’s souvenirs. Both he and Tony had loved what the leather maker and his wife had made the Goth. It also held the smaller gifts like the belts and the wallets for the men.

“Jethro, here’s Victoria and Diana’s dolls plous clothes from Stefano and his grandmother.” A beautiful soft doll that was perfect for Victoria to sleep with had drawn Tony into a small shop where an elderly woman hand embroidered the faces and made wardrobes of decorative clothing for the dolls. Nothing could dissuade Tony. He demanded that he be allowed to purchase a selection of the dolls and the clothing to include with the toys that Jethro and Jackson would make for the hospitalized children.

A sharp-eyed young boy watched them carefully. The grandmother explained that it was just of two of them. Her husband had been lost at sea and her daughter and son-in-law had died in a crash. The shop had a small apartment above and the income from the shop covered their needs. The small mound of dolls with clothing had increased substantially after that.

Jethro would deny that the dolls with matching wardrobes he selected weren’t actually required. After all, Victoria would grow into the doll. Just because Kayla and Emily were older didn’t mean they wouldn’t appreciate the beautiful embroidery. Also, who knew what name they would draw in the NCIS pool? The person whose name they drew might have a daughter. It was then that Jethro learned that Vance’s secretary Helen had a young daughter who was handicapped. Her husband had walked out shortly after Diana’s birth. He had never known that Tony had babysat a few times as Helen sometimes had to take a part-time job to make ends meet. He wasn’t surprised that Tony dashed back to select an even larger wardrobe for Diana’s doll.

Realizing the men really meant their compliments and that they weren’t actually just trying to con his grandmother into lowering her prices, lead to the young boy taking Tony by the hand and encouraging him to follow him into a small curtained off area. Jethro followed out of curiosity not protectiveness. The small area had a small old-fashioned sewing machine. There were some scraps of cloth and leather. Pointing from the machine to himself, in broken English, the boy explained that he was learning to contribute to the shop. Removing a blanket in the corner, he exposed a pile of what looked like satchels.

Intrigued, Tony had picked one up and examined it surprised at the softness. The boy showed them how he had used the leather for the fastener, the handle and to give it some sturdiness. The cloth was used for softness and decoration. In just a couple moves, it could be opened to create a trunk-like case and then be collapsed to lie flat again. The trunk was just the right size to hold the doll and her clothing. To the boy’s amazement, Tony began piling them into Jethro’s arms. It was an astonished and delighted grandmother who began praising her grandson. Both had waved them good-bye happily.

Jethro looked at where Tony was carefully placing the dolls into the carry-on. Tony had a smile on his face and Jethro knew that he was remembering the elderly woman’s happy tears and the pride on the young boy’s face when he realized how much he had earned for his family. It hadn’t been a surprise to hear Stefano’s name when Tony had Moretti making out bequests. Tony had also mentioned the owners of Quir. By the time, Stefano and his grandmother learned about their “inheritance from a long lost relative” and the owners of Quir their pension from an old friend; they would have long forgotten the North Americans and that was just the way Tony wanted it. His husband was one of a kind. Always had been.
“What are you smiling about?” Tony asked.

“You playing with dolls.” Jethro teased. “Maybe I should ask the flight attendant for a little pilot’s kit.”

Tony tossed a pair of balled up socks at him. “Ha-ha. Is there going to be room for the papers Moretti is sending in the morning?” Tony asked, wariness in his voice.

“Plenty. Put Victoria’s doll in the carry-on and I will put Diana’s in the big suitcase with Ducky’s teapot and the other souvenirs.”

“Do you want to pack our jackets?” Tony stroked the new suede jackets.

“It’s liable to be cool in the morning. Let’s wear them. They aren’t that bulky if we need to carry them.”

Tony looked around the room. The pile of purchases had somehow managed to be packed into the luggage. The only thing left out were their clothes for the following day. Jethro had packed his clean clothes into Tony’s case and put the dirty clothes into his. In the morning, after their showers, it would be easy to pop their dirty clothes into Jethro’s case and be ready to go.

“There are still some sweets left. How about we have them and some coffee on the terrace?” Tony suggested.

“Sounds good.” Jethro picked up the bottle. “Then after the sun goes down, we could light a fire and finish off this bottle of wine in our chair.”

“I like how you think.”

Section 64

“Glad to be home?” McGee asked as he helped Tony and Gibbs stow their luggage. “Isn’t this more luggage than you left with?”

“We had to do a little shopping.”

“Tony, you were only gone for two days.”

“Wait till you see what he had to have shipped.” Jethro smirked.

Tony slugged him in the side. “Did you have to say that?”

“Yes.”

Tony slipped into the back seat leaving Jethro to ride up front. “So how have things been, McGee?”

“Tony, I talked to you last night.” McGee strapped himself in and looked at Tony in the rearview mirror. “What could have happened?”

“Well in the first twenty-four hours you let my little angel get stuck in box springs. How is Zuma?”

“Well…”

Jethro looked at McGee. “What’s wrong?”

“Ever since he talked to you last night, he isn’t eating. Keeps trying to get into your bedroom. I put a
portable baby gate across the stairs early this morning. He kept trying to snuck upstairs and we were afraid he’d fall.”

“Why didn’t you call us?”

“Tony, you were in the air. What could you do? Abby went over early this morning and she called me.”

“Step on it, McGee.”

One look at Jethro and then at Tony’s distressed expression and McGee obligingly pushed the pedal. While he didn’t want a ticket, if it got them home quicker it wouldn’t be money wasted.

Tony never waited for McGee to turn off the car. He was out and sprinting for the front door. Glad the door wasn’t locked, Tony flung the door open and his heart broke as he looked at the puppy laying on the cushion so still. “Hey, Zuma, what’s wrong? Where’s my boy?”

Zuma’s ears perked and his head came up fast. Turning in the direction of the doorway, the pup saw Tony on one knee. His feet scrambled for traction as the puppy launched himself into the air in Tony’s direction. As he descended to the floor, all four paws were already in motion and he landed running full tilt. Another leap and Tony was knocked over, the wiggling pup licking every bit of flesh he could reach. In between licks, Zuma gave barks of joy and occasionally a snarl.

“I think he’s telling you, we’re not allowed to leave again.” Zuma turned and there was Jethro leaning against the door frame. Using Tony as a springboard, Zuma made a leap and Jethro scooped him out of the air. “What wrong, you silly thing? You knew Mommy and I would be back.”

Abby gave Tony a hand to his feet and went to sit by the fireplace. The two men sat side by side on the couch Zuma bouncing back and forth from one lap to the other. Spotting the treat on the sofa, Tony offered it to the excited pup. “Are you hungry? Want a treat?” Zuma finally stilled as Jethro helped him balance across both of their knees. Happy whimpers escaped him as the pup permitted Jethro to scratch behind his ears in just that spot and allowed Tony to feed him bites of his treat.

“See, Abs. I told you he was fine.” McGee said from the entrance hall. He sat the first two suitcases down and turned to go back out.

“McGee, I’ll help you get that in a bit.” Jethro said.

“Nope. It’s only two more. What you’re doing is much more important.” McGee smiled at the trio, relieved to see the adorable pup so happy.

“He was so sad.” Abby said softly. “It just broke my heart. None of us could comfort him.”

“He’s still a baby, Abs. It’s only natural. Jethro and I are the ones that he has bonded to the most. He’d only been, here less than a week when we left. We shouldn’t have left that soon. It was bound to stir up the separation anxiety.” Tony tried to comfort her.

“So much has happened it seems so much longer.” Jackson spoke up.

“Tell me about it. It’ll be two weeks Monday since I walked into the bullpen and that idiot Sacks was dragging my senior agent away. He’d better stay far from my sight. Man’s a menace.” Jethro said disgruntled. The arm along the back of the couch came down of its own accord and pulled Tony a bit closer to Zuma and Tony’s delight. “Course if he hadn’t, we wouldn’t be here like this. And we
wouldn’t have this little fuzzball.”

Tony smiled at him, his heart warming at Jethro’s words. “I’m going to hit the bathroom and change into more comfortable clothes.”

Jethro scooped up the pup and looked into his eyes. “Mommy’ll be right back.”

“I am not the mommy.” Tony protested. As he got to the entrance hall, McGee came in with the last two bags.

“Want me to take these upstairs?”

“Those actually go in the living room. That one has dirty clothes. I’ll just take this one up with me.” Tony picked up the bag and lifted it over the gate. Rather than take the gate down, Tony just stepped over it with one leg on the stairs.

McGee started to laugh. Just as Tony went to lift his other leg, fifteen pounds of snarling puppy latched on to his pants cuff intent on stopping him.

Tony struggled to keep his balance having committed to the step. His foot was only a couple inches off the ground but he was afraid to lift it higher and hurt the pup’s teeth. He was even more afraid to try to back down and possibly fall on the pup. “McGee, a hand here?”

McGee obligingly clapped at the sight. The commotion had brought the group from the living room where they joined McGee in laughing.

“Jethro! I don’t want to hurt him.”

Jethro went over and knelt down by the pup. “Zuma. Drop.” The pup simply rolled his eyes and snarled around the pants material in his mouth. “Drop.” The snarl grew louder. “Come on, boy, let Tony go.” Jethro lifted Zuma up but the puppy gripped the material tighter.

“Do you want to hurry it up a bit?” Tony used his hand on the bannister to try to steady himself.

Jethro set the puppy back down. Standing he headed into the kitchen.

“Jethro, help.”

“I am. I’m going to make coffee.”

Zuma growled and started after Jethro but wasn’t able to with the cuff in his teeth. The puppy tried to drag Tony’s leg which caused Tony to have to shift his balance. Zuma kept looking from Tony to the door where Jethro had disappeared. Growling he tugged harder, but Tony didn’t budge. With a last growl, Zuma released the pants cuff and took off into the kitchen after Jethro where he could be heard snarling and barking as he went.

“That is one determined puppy.” McGee said.

“Thanks for nothing, McSmarty.” Tony hurried up the steps before Zuma came back. The trio went to watch the show in the kitchen.

Zuma had tracked Jethro to counter. The pup sat, barking and snarling at him, as Jethro got the coffee going.

“I think it’s a good thing that Gibbs doesn’t speak pup.” McGee smiled.
Jackson laughed. “If he did, that poor pup would be getting his mouth washed out.”

Jethro leaned back against the counter and looked down at the pup. “Zuma, at ease. We’re home. Tony and I aren’t going anywhere. Now, calm down and go eat.”

“Speaking of eat…” Tony, having rushed through his change, came to the door of the kitchen.

Zuma spun, raced to Tony, and tried to drag him by the cuff of his jeans, all to no effect. He turned, raced back towards Jethro, lunging and making a try for his pants leg. Zuma yelped as Jethro snatched him up by the scruff of the neck. Snarling, his paws ran in the air.

“Jethro, don’t hurt him.”

“Tony…” Jethro looked at his husband.

“I know you’d never hurt him. It’s just, he’s so little.”

“He needs to know that he can’t do this. What if he tried it with Dad, or when he’s a hundred pounds? Someone could be hurt. If your balance had not been good, he could’ve knocked you over earlier.”

“You’re right.”

Abby and McGee exchanged glances. Had Gibbs just talked out his reasons? Had Tony and he really communicated? Jackson just smiled at his sons. The trio decided that something had happened in Palermo and whatever it was had brought the two men closer.

“Zuma, no.” When the pup snarled, he tapped Zuma lightly on the nose. Startled the puppy stopped snarling. “I know you’re upset, but you need to calm down. Tony and I are home now.” When the pup whimpered, Jethro pulled him close. “Good boy. That’s my good boy. Now, you have to be hungry.” Carrying the pup over to his food bowl, Jethro shook some fresh food into his bowl and placed the pup on the floor.

Zuma looked from the food to Jethro. He turned his head so that he could see Tony was still there. Quickly snatching a mouth of food, he looked at Jethro and then at Tony before starting to chew. Slowly Jethro backed away and went to the coffee machine. Zuma turned slightly so he could watch both men. When they moved to sit at the table, he relaxed slightly and focused on eating.

“So now that Zuma’s fed, what about us?” Jackson said.

“How many ‘us’ will there be?” Tony asked.

“I know Jimmy and his family are coming by. They’re anxious to hear what you found.”

Tony and Jethro exchanged looks. They knew the entire family would want to know the details. They had talked on the flight home about having a family meeting and including Tobias and Vance regarding the college and retirement funds. Having it the following day had been discussed but both knew Abby would not be leaving without details and why go through it twice? Tony gave a small nod.

“Abs, would you call Vance and ask him to stop over with the kids? I’ll call Ducky and then give Fornell a call and ask him to come with Emily. Tell them it’s a family meeting. Dinner about 6 pm?” Jethro looked at Tony who nodded.

“Want me to call out for pizzas?” McGee asked.
“I froze a couple pans of lasagna for nights when we work late. Why don’t I pop a couple in the oven?” Tony offered. “I could run out and get stuff for a salad.”

“I can make the salad,” Abby offered. “I’m going to run home and change. I have plenty of stuff for salad, if you’ll make that special vinaigrette dressing?”

“Sure,” Tony agreed. “If I had a couple loaves of Italian bread, I could make some garlic bread.”

“I’m going to go home and change, too. I’ll stop on the way back and pick some up,” McGee offered. “I can also pick up some drinks and ice.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Jackson said.

Section 65

By 5:30, the house was smelling wonderful. In deference to Zuma’s separation anxiety, Jethro had laid down on the couch with his dad in the recliner. Jethro appeared to be sleeping but Tony figured he was trying to prepare for tonight too. This seemed to be an accurate assessment as every time Zuma made a trip to be sure Jethro was still there he came back with this fur ruffled.

Tony had been too wired to nap so he and Zuma were on KP duty. When the secret service packed up his apartment they had brought his small chest freezer and wedged it into a corner of Jethro’s laundry room. After inspecting the contents, Tony had laid out a variety cheesecake from the Cheesecake Factory. He pulled out four casseroles and while they were thawing a bit, Tony and Zuma had managed to bake a batch of triple chocolate chip cookies.

Tony had pulled out a pan of meat lasagna that he believed that Jethro would enjoy. It had a lot of ground sirloin, less cheese and a lower spiced tomato based sauce. He also selected a more traditional lasagna for McGee and Palmer. Tony had used a tomato basil lasagna noodle with a thick marinara sauce and Italian sausage. In between the layers he had used generous layers of ricotta, parmesan and mozzarella cheese.

For Abby, Tony had her favorite vegetarian lasagna with spinach noodles. It had layers of ricotta cheese, mushrooms, zucchini, bell peppers, squash and eggplant with a delicately spiced cream sauce. His last was his latest experiment. Tony had found lasagna was an easy dish to freeze and could be packaged in individual servings for lunch and leftovers, unlike one of his favorite pasta dishes, fettucine alfredo. Not liking the broccoli cooked in the frozen dish, he had special ordered some broccoli lasagna noodles and alternated layering them with egg noodles. In between the layers was sliced chicken and a smattering of carrots and red bell pepper. His sauce was a rich parmesan/Romano cream style and topped with a few bread crumbs.

“Son, I think you’re spoiling us.” Coming into the kitchen, Jackson had opened the oven, enjoying the smells.

Jethro had followed Jackson into the kitchen but had made a beeline for the cookies. He paused with one on the way to his mouth, waiting for Tony to protest they were for after dinner. When his husband didn’t say a word, Jethro looked more closely at the small plate of cookies. There weren’t enough for everyone.

“You and Jackson go ahead,” Tony smiled. “I’ve already put up the ones for after dinner. Those are for you to have now.”

Jackson patted him on the shoulder on his way to the cookies. “You ever get tired working for Jethro, you could start a restaurant.”
“Dad, leave my senior agent alone.”

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t want a restaurant,” Tony said. “I like trying new dishes and I enjoy cooking for my friends and my family.” Tony savored those words. “Just wish I had a second oven.”

“Why didn’t you mention that to the architect?”

“What?” Tony was focused on mixing the spices for Abby’s vinaigrette.

“That you’d like a second oven.”

Tony stopped and turned to look at Jethro. “I guess I just didn’t think of it.”

Jethro caught his father’s look. Both of them were undoubtedly thinking the same thing. Senior had a lot to answer for in his treatment of Tony. When reviewing the home plans, Tony had been insistent that Jackson have what amounted to a suite on the first floor with a door that opened directly to the woodworking room. Tony had been adamant the outdoor cooking area be to Jethro’s standard and that the patio area be set up comfortably for his family. It had been Jethro who insisted on the media/game room. It never occurred to Tony to design the kitchen to his own desire. “Monday we’ll call and talk to Williams. Don’t they make those big stoves with double ovens?”

“The commercial ones?” Jackson asked.

“Yeah. Some even have a griddle/grill on them.”

“Jethro, we don’t need anything that fancy.” Tony protested.

Stepping over to his husband, Jethro looked directly in his eyes. “You love to cook. Think about us, our family, can you see us in that kitchen?” Jethro noticed Tony biting his lip and noticed his quick glance around the kitchen. On a hunch, Jethro turned to include Jackson in the conversation. “You know, dad, I was thinking about that kitchen in the new house. I’m not sure how we are going to fit a table in that room. I know there’s a formal dining room, but when the family gets together we seem to like to sit in the kitchen with Tony.”

With an approving look, Jackson watched Tony’s face as he replied. “You know with the porch wrapping around now, that little covered patio isn’t really needed. Maybe Williams could close that in for a dining room and merge the current dining room with the kitchen. “Between the two of us I think we could make a family table for in there. This one is getting a bit small with the way our family is expanding. We could make a big, round table that could set eighteen to twenty people so there’s room for everyone.”

“Come to think of it. That counter could be extended the length of the new area with big windows above it. That way you could set up a buffet in that area overlooking the pool.” Jackson tossed out.

“I’m sure that a kitchen that big would have plenty of room for a commercial stove, dishwasher, built in fridge and freezer; plenty of storage.” Jethro stopped as Tony’s eyes filled.

“Jethro, I…We don’t have to go to all that trouble.”

“You deserve to have the kitchen of your dreams in our dream home. Tell me, you can’t imagine all of us sitting around that table on birthdays, Thanksgiving or Christmas.”

Tony couldn’t as his imagination saw little Victoria’s birthday party, father’s day celebrations for Jackson and Ducky. He saw him and Jethro laughing with their family.
“We’ll call Williams on Monday and get our family kitchen, okay?” Jethro broke the cookie he was holding in to offering half to his husband.

“Okay.” Tony didn’t think he could get any happier as he let Jethro feed him the cookie.

Laughter preceded Abby and McGee as they arrived. “Tony, it smells wonderful.” McGee complimented him as he put several loaves of bread on the table.

Whirlwind Abby put her salad down, kissed the three Gibbs men on the checks, patted Zuma and peered into the oven. “You made my favorite!”

“Would I have lasagna and not?” Tony laughed. “I know how much you love the vegetable variety.”

“You’ve had it before?” Jethro asked as he pulled out two knives with serrated edges.

“Abs was my guinea pig when I was working on the recipe.”

“Abigail a guinea pig? Far too lovely for that.”

“Ducky!” Abby buzzed by greeting him with a kiss.

“Mr. Palmer is parking his car.” Ducky informed them. “I believe that Director Vance just pulled up, also.”

Tony smiled at the assembly line that Jethro and Abby had set up. Jethro and Jackson sliced the loaves. Abby and McGee buttered the slices with the special butter Tony had prepared. Ducky was drafted into lining them up on the trays. Taking the four casseroles out of the oven, Tony put them to rest on the counter. In short order the garlic bread was in the oven.

The assembly shifted their focus. Clean up was swift and then the casseroles were arranged on the table along with large bowls of salad, baskets of garlic bread, Tony’s vinaigrette, French and buttermilk dressings. Ice, soft drinks, lemonade and iced tea were arranged on the counter with coffee.

As the Vances, Fornells and Palmers arrived they were greeted happily and encouraged to eat. Tony watched happily as everyone filed by piling their plates high. Kitchen chairs were pulled in to the living room for extra seating. Abby and McGee sat at the coffee table with Emily, Kayla and Jared. Once the meal had been consumed, the youngsters begged to take Zuma outside to play ball. After promising to be careful and not leave the yard, they ended up going out alone when Zuma refused to leave his place at Gibbs’ feet.

“I’m assuming this meeting is to discuss what you and Agent DiNozzo found in Palermo.”

“Drop the formality, Vance. This is a family meeting.” Vance quickly hid his shock at Gibbs’ declaration.

Tony spoke up. “Everyone in this room has supported me through the past two weeks. Through the arrest, the incidents with Senior and everything else. You are like family to me, so tonight, I’m just Tony, this is Gibbs.”

Fornell looked at Gibbs in shock but the man didn’t disagree. “Tony, call me Tobias.”

Everyone looked at Vance in expectation. “Fine. Call me Leon.”

“As all of you know, we went to Palermo hoping to track down Christian Fabbri or my biological
family. We found my mother.” Happy exclamations forced Tony to pause. “We also found Christian Fabbri.”

“Is he your father?” Abby was bouncing.

“No, Abs. It seems that I am Christian Antonio Fabbri.” The room erupted in exclamations. “My mother was Brigida Fabbri.”

“She’s dead?” Breena said softly.

“No, she isn’t dead. My mother is now Sister Martha Agnes.” Tony felt Jethro take his hand in support.

It was Fornell who summed up their feelings. “Your mother is a nun?” Abs just sat there her mouth open. “Flies, Abs.” Jethro smiled at her.

“Of course, she wasn’t when I was born.” With help from Jethro, Tony shared all the information that they had uncovered regarding his birth.

“So, it’s an American who was stationed in Palermo and is now in DC?” McGee clarified. “I’ll start a search the minute I get home.”

“Thanks, McGee.”

“How did they get ahold of so much information about you and Tony?” Jethro hated this part. “They had sources including Jen and … Sister Therese Joseph.”

“Sister Therese Joseph??? But… She’s a nun…” Abby protested.

“And apparently a friend of my mother.”

“She used me. A nun used me. I’m going to…”

“Calm down, Abby. It wasn’t meant maliciously.”

“I betrayed you.” Abby was horrified. “I betrayed you.”

“No, Abs.” Tony leaned forward and hugged her. “It’s okay. We’re okay. But there is something else I need to tell everyone. It appears that Sister Martha Agnes and I are the last two members of the Fabbri family. They were apparently one of the wealthiest families in Palermo. The money has done little more than generate interest since my birth.”

“You’re the sole heir?” McGee asked.

“Not anymore.” Tony squeezed Jethro’s hand. “While we were in Palermo, the trust was officially turned over to Jethro and I.”

Around the room, people were exchanging looks. It was Vance who finally asked the question. “Just how much money are we talking about?”

“Enough that if Tony had grandchildren, even their great-great-great children would never have to work.”

“Your jobs?” Vance frowned.
“We’re keeping them.” Jethro stated firmly. “We are having a home built but we don’t see ourselves changing anything else.”

“We may take some of our accumulated vacation leave now and then.” Tony interjected.

“HR would love that.”

“What are your plans for your inheritance, Anthony?” Ducky watched Jethro and Tony closely.

“That’s one reason for the family meeting.” Gibbs pulled several envelopes from the carry-on while Tony spoke. “I want to set up some charities and scholarships. Luckily Signor Moretti had many international clients. He was able to set up several scholarships for me.” Gibbs passed out a series of envelopes. “What Jethro just distributed is information on the ‘Shannon Gibbs’, ‘Kelly Gibbs’, ‘Jacqueline Thomas Vance’ and ‘Caitlin Todd’ scholarship programs.” Once the eruption of voices died down, Tony went on, “I would like the family to have a hand in running the scholarships and was hoping you would set on the boards. Ducky, I would like to set up a scholarship for coroners in your name. I was hoping that you and Jimmy would help organize it.”

“I would be honored, Anthony.”

“Absolutely.” Jimmy confirmed.

“Now comes the other part.” Tony took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “I don’t want anyone to… I want to…”

“What Tony is trying to say is that he wanted to be sure our family was taken care of.” Gibbs handed out more envelopes. “Trust funds have been set up for the kids’ education.”

“Tony, Gibbs.” Jimmy had opened the envelope and then just passed it wordlessly to Breena. “This is…”

“For our family’s future. Tony wants to be sure that no matter what happens all the children will be well taken care of and should any other children be born; their funds will automatically be created. That includes any that your sister has, McGee.”

Fornell looked up with tears in his eyes. “I don’t know what to say. Emily is…”

“Family.” Tony said firmly. “Just like you, Tobias. Which brings us to the last announcement. We know our jobs our dangerous and we wanted to be sure that if anything happened, the family would be protected.” Gibbs passed around the last set of envelopes. This time everyone received one. “Gibbs and I set up retirement trust funds.”

“Anthony, my dear boy, I have no need.”

“Gibbs told me that, Ducky but you’re family, too.”

Vance shook his head. “Look, DiNozzo, Gibbs…”

“Leon, you may not like it, but you’re part of the team, part of the family.” Tony said flatly. “We care about you, Kayla and Jared. We want their future protected, even if we aren’t there.”

“Thank you.” Vance had no other words.

“Tony, we never…” Jimmy struggled for words.

“I know. I was afraid you would think I was trying to buy your friendship, but that was before I
realized that we are a family. This is what family does. So, how about dessert?"

Jethro headed for the coffee pot, Jackson to call the kids and Tony to set out desserts leaving their stunned company to stare at the envelopes and each other. Some were not sure what the biggest surprise was, the trusts or the fact that they were now part of the Gibbs-DiNozzo family.

Section 66

“Morning.” Jackson said as Tony entered the kitchen.

“Almost afternoon.” Jethro added.

“I can’t believe I slept that long.” Tony headed for the coffee pot.

“Big night, last night.”

Tony remembered the evening with a smile. By the time dessert was consumed some of the shock had been wearing off. Then came the favorite part of the night for Tony. Souvenirs. He savored the joy on their faces. Abby had been thrilled at the custom designed purse. It was pure Abby. The leather, a deep black with exquisite tooling, which had brought about a loud squeal as Abby realized the pattern was delicately carved helixes forming diamonds around tiny crosses. Tony couldn’t wait for her birthday. The leather maker was sending some matching embossed leather that Abby could have made into boots, cuffs, a collar, even a bustier if she wanted.

“Abby sure was thrilled with her purse. Thought she had punctured my ear drum for a bit.”

“Poor Zuma.” When Abby had squealed, Zuma had jumped and ran, straight through Abby’s neglected cheesecake. Then the poor pup had to suffer the indignity of being washed. Tony looked over to where Zuma was contentedly chewing on his leather raccoon. “She scared him so bad.”

“Never seen anyone so happy over a purse.”

“Wasn’t the purse.” Jethro corrected his father. “It was the fact that Tony knew her so well and could help design a pattern so perfect for her.”

“I’m just glad McGee and Palmer thought to bring my mattress set in out of the garage the other day. By the time I thought about the box springs, it was so late I figured we’d be sleeping on the floor.” Tony smiled at Jethro. “Or we could have curled up under the boat.”

“So what’s on agenda for today?” Jackson asked.

“I thought I’d put in a load of laundry.” Tony spoke up. “Then maybe Zuma and I’ll go for a run.”

“Want some company? We could do laundry after our run.” Jethro asked.

“I’d like that.”

“Dad, want to come to the park with us?”

“The Phillies are playing the Astros. Thought I’d settle in and watch the game. I could cook dinner.” Jackson offered.

“Do we have any leftovers?” Jethro asked. He’d actually sampled the different lasagnas and liked them all, even to his surprise, the vegetable one.

Tony nodded. “There’s about a third of a pan each of the meat and the cheese.”
“Any more chicken?” Jackson asked remembering how Breena had taken one bite and then said, “Tony, I hate you. I’ll be at the gym twice as long this tomorrow to work this off.”

“I put a piece back for you and sent the rest home with Jimmy and Breena.”

“What about the vegetable?”

“Abby took that home, I think.” Tony went to look in the refrigerator. There on the top shelf, wrapped carefully and labeled ‘Gibbs’, was a generous helping of the vegetable lasagna. “You’re in luck. Abby left you a piece. Usually she’s pretty stingy with it.”

“Did you send food home with everyone?” Jackson asked.

“Sure. The Vances took some of the cheese and some of the meat. Fornell and Emily took chicken and cheese.”

“McGee?” Jethro said.

“Cheese.”

“Do you always make extra to send home?” This was another side of Tony Jethro was learning.

“Usually. Left to her own devices, Abby survives on Cafe Pow and bean sprouts. She pulls as many hours as we do, so she doesn’t have a lot of time or desire to cook. McGee tries to watch his weight but I’ve noticed that he sometimes does so at the expense of getting enough protein and carbs. A balanced diet is important to help him get his weight stable.”

“The Palmers?” Jethro asked encouraging him to continue.

“I started including Jimmy and Breena when she was pregnant. I noticed Palmer was eating a lot of cold cuts. They were watching their budget at the time. When I asked, Jimmy said everything was making Breena sick when she cooked. I talked to Ducky and he recommended some bland items. I told Jimmy I was trying some new recipes and asked him to be a guinea pig. I encouraged him to take the ‘leftovers’ home.”

Jethro noticed the proud look on Jackson’s face. It was in contrast to how nonchalant Tony was. He shook his head realizing that Tony didn’t see it was anything special. They needed to be fed, so he fed them. Every day Jethro was realizing how truly remarkable his husband was and how lucky he was. “Sounds like we have dinner covered, dad.”

“Did you eat this morning?” Tony scanned the refrigerator contents.

“Dad and I had eggs and toast earlier. Want me to cook you some?”

“I usually don’t eat a lot before I run.” Tony said absently. “My lungs work better that way.”

Before Jackson could ask about it, Jethro shook his head. He would explain that to his father later. “What are you going to eat then?”

Tony was now poking in the small pantry. “A-ha!” He emerged holding a box of protein bars up, in triumph. “Jethro, water?”

“Two.” Jethro watched Tony carry out five bottles of room temperature water. “You need to change?”

“Nope. You?” Both men had chosen sweats, tees and sneakers for their Sunday attire.
“Nope. I’m ready if you are.” Jethro finished his most recent cup of coffee. “Enjoy your game, dad.”

“Enjoy your run!”

“Now, let’s see.” Tony retrieved the jogging stroller McGee had given him. Finally hitting the right button, he put the water, protein bars and some apples in the back pocket. In the tray under the bed, went a bowl for Zuma’s water, tug ball and squeaky bone. Two of Zuma’s soft blankets was arranged in the bed area. Treats went in the special handle tray. “Zuma, you want to go jogging? Want to go out?”

Having rested up after his morning constitutional, Zuma jumped up excitedly. Tail wagging, Zuma headed for the door to the backyard, stopped, went back and grabbed his raccoon before heading out.

The park was only a couple blocks which gave them all a chance to stretch their legs. Only a couple yards from home, Zuma stopped and dropped his raccoon at Jethro’s feet. Tony laughed, “Want Daddy to carry that for you?” With a look at Tony, Jethro picked up the toy and put it the bed of the stroller.

Midway through the second block, Zuma stopped, looked around, sat down and barked. “Come on, Zuma.” Tony coaxed. Zuma laid down.

Jethro knelt down and scratched his ears. Zuma rolled over exposing his belly for equal access. “I think he’s reached his limit. Haven’t you, pup? Ready to ride now?” Picking him up, Jethro unhooked his leash, sat him on the bed; and hooked his collar to the internal ring. The stylish red and black stroller had lots of security features and zip open mesh windows that could be adjusted based on the weather. It was obvious Uncle McGee had done research.

For his first trip, Jethro and Tony had decided to open the rear window so Zuma could see Tony and the side window a bit, so that Jethro could be seen. The front was about half open. If the wind was too much Zuma could curl down into this bed or he could sit up and see where they were going. A whimper of uncertainty had both men kneeling down to soothe the pup. Realizing his men were still there, Zuma decided to chew on his raccoon.

By the time Jethro and Tony got to the park, the movement had lulled the pup to sleep. His body cuddled in the blankets; and head on his raccoon. He slept happily through the first half of their jog. On the other side of the park, Jethro and Tony paused to drink some water. Deciding to let Zuma play a bit, Jethro took him out and put him on his leash. Meanwhile, Tony sat Zuma’s bowl out and gave the pup a drink.

The two men played with the pup for most of the afternoon, wrestling and playing tug with his new leather toy. They even rolled the small ball around, letting Zuma bounce and then coaxing him to ‘hand’ them the ball so they could roll it again. When the pup was tired out, Tony gave him a cuddle and tucked him back into his stroller for the trip back. About a block from the house, the men slowed to a walk.

The evening was just what Tony had always longed to have. A family dinner. Teasing Jackson about having to support the Nationals. Doing laundry in between watching television. Cuddled next to Jethro, a sleeping Zuma on his lap. Then falling into bed exhausted; snuggled between his loved ones.

Section 67
It was barely four am and the owner of the office was cursing as he fumbled the lock. The door opened as he complained. “When I get ahold of whoever set off this alarm, I will have his ass in a sling.”

“That would be me.”


Temporarily ignoring his visitor, he took quick look around the office for anything out of place; noting the glass of his bourbon next to man occupying his chair. “Make yourself at home,” he said sarcastically.

“No one answered my knock, so I let myself in. Good bourbon, by the way.”

“I assume you set off the alarm for a reason.”

“Quit hovering and have a seat. I think it’s time we discuss this asinine plan of yours.”

With Gibbs in his chair, he was forced to sit in one of the visitor’s chairs. There was a certain irony in the situation, but he tried to pass it off.

“Before I call the MP’s and have you taken in for breaking and entering, what the hell are you doing in my office?”

“Take it down a notch.” Gibbs smirked. “We both know why I’m here.”

He had the choice of bluff or fold; folding was not an option. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I think you do. You and Sister Martha Agnes. Or should I say Brigida Fabbri?”

“She swore an oath she wouldn’t say anything.” And with those words, he folded.

“She didn’t.”

“How?”

“Gut.”

“The famous Gibbs’ gut. That’s all you have?” He scoffed.

“Woke up earlier today and couldn’t get back to sleep. Might say I put a few pieces together. Like your bio when you were appointed. Knew I’d heard Palermo before. Thought it was an old war story. Did you know there’s a place online that stores pictures of websites? Preserves original pages. Noticed you had Palermo changed to Italy on the website last week.” Gibbs eyed him coldly.

“Brigida and Tony may have bought your poor innocent husband routine, but I know you. You knew exactly what you were doing. You ruined both their lives and you walked away, playing the injured party.”

“It ruined my marriage; cost me my kids.” He protested.

“It wasn’t your first affair or the first time you were caught. When you were appointed, there were rumors about the infidelity and the fact that your kids don’t use your last name anymore.”

“What do you want, Gibbs?”

“You tell Tony or I do.”
“Now listen here…”

“No, you listen. You have twenty-four hours.”

“I can recommend promotions…”

“This isn’t negotiable. Isn’t that one of your favorite phrases?”

“Dammit, Gibbs. If this comes out, it could ruin my career.”

“Oh, please. Save your whining. When a President can have an affair in office, I hardly think one from nearly forty years ago will even be a blip on your radar. In fact, Tony is a hero for turning in Senior. You can talk about how proud you are of your son.”

“Who’s married to another man.”

“I seem to remember you were involved in that. That’s the point I hadn’t quite figured out. Why marriage? Don’t even think lying. I’ll find out the truth. Were you trying to get rid of both of us? Hope the agency would turn hostile over a same sex marriage.”

“Brigida. She recommended it.”

“And?”

“You’ve been a pain in my ass for years. So, yes, I did have some hope that I’d be rid of the both of you. I’ve tried to get DiNozzo out for years. When he joined NCIS, I figured two years and he’d move on. Then, I had Shepherd offer him Rota and he turned it down. When you trotted off to Mexico, I suggested him for the Benoit op and thought René would handle him.” He ignored Jethro’s exclamation.

“I thought he’d quit when you came back, but he just stepped down. I convinced Leon to send him off to sea. I was so sure he’d quit; then you demanded your team back and Vance gave in. I thought marrying him off to you was the answer. I was so damned sure you’d refuse. It was perfect but you married him. When you ‘divorced’, I was going to insist Vance reassign him.”

“We won’t be divorcing. Tony and I are planning a future together.”

“So you’re both gay. Four marriages had to end for some reason.” He laughed bitterly. “Then Brigida gave you those damn files and DiNozzo became a hero.”

Gibbs downed the last of his bourbon and slammed the glass on the desktop. Rising he stepped around the desk. “So you did know about the files. You are a real bastard.”

“Takes one to know one.”

“Second ‘b’ for Bastard. I’ve never denied it.” Opening the door, Gibbs stepped out and didn’t even turn as he state flatly. “You tell Tony or I do. You have twenty-four hours. Oh, and Mabus, don’t try anything. I will destroy you.”
“Look,” ArianaFeileacan whisked off the baby blanket. “It’s Waggles.”
Geminiangel cooed to the small lamb. “I have a surprise, too.” She motions
ArianaFeileacan to come around the sofa where there was a huge Moses basket. “This is
Lambikins.”
“Aw…” She picked up the lamb. They cuddled each other’s lambs while cooing to
them. It was amazing that they had found them already.
“Is Wolfnjag in here?” Aussiefan70 asked sticking in her head.
“No.”
“Good. Look, I found a lamb.” Aussiefan70 removed the blanket revealing a black and
white spotted lamb. “I couldn’t believe I found one. Isn’t this great? Wait, are those
lambs?”
“Aren’t they adorable?”
“Hmmph. Well. Three lambs just mean more cuddles.” Geminiangel swaps lambs with
Aussiefan70. “This is Waddles.”
“He’s not named yet.”
“Hi, sweetie.”
QueenBee4Ever tapped on the door. “Is the coast clear?”
“I don’t know.” Lays the lamb in the Moses basket. “I’ll check the weather report.”
“No. Is Wolfnjag here?”
“No.”
“Look what I’ve found.” Now they had a beautiful smoky gray lamb.

“Hi! I’m goodorevilangel. I’m new to the cabal. Is this where I can find GeminiAngel?”
“Another one?” Wolfnjag waved her through. “What’s in the blanket?”
“Another blanket?” Goodorevilangel said weakly.
“Don’t forget to stop on your way back through and pick up your copy of the cabal
rules. Just go through that door.”
“Thanks.” Knocks with an elbow.
“I’m looking for Gemini…erk.”
Geminiangel pulls goodorevilangel into the room by the collar and quickly shuts the
door. “Shhh… We don’t want Wolfnjag to hear.”
“Okay…. I brought a present.”
Geminiangel got a sense of foreboding. “You don’t have a lamb, do you?”
“No.” Goodorevilangel whisks off the blanket. “Twins!”
“Would you dial this number for me?” The others took the baby lambs.
“Sure.”
“Chrissie0770, it’s me. Could you grab a couple cabal members and do an emergency
supply run?” Geminiangel whispered. “We need extra-large Moses baskets, playpens,
baby bottles, lamb formula and whatever might be helpful.”
“Lamb formula? Did you find a lamb?”
“Six of them.”
“Six?!!?!”
Geminiangel sees QueeneoftheDeer entering the room with a blanket. “Better make it
seven. Oh and someone needs to distract Wolfnjag.”

By the time, Chrissie0770, DejaSue, Jane_x80 and Fairhaven74 staggered in supplies
they were up to nine lambs. Some of them were napping, some were being fed and the
rest were exploring.
“I think we’re going to need more help.” Tassa09 said chasing Lambikins around the
desk.
“I know.” She groans as bobdog54 and CantDanceLovestoRead enter with blankets.
“Callasandra, would you put out the SOS? Who’s keeping Wolfnjaq busy?”
“It was psyche53’s and otrame’s turn; so they are showing Rosiesmomma and Patricia
Engel the ropes.” Annette_ella said.
LadyDrak1075 spoke up. “I think we need a divider by the door so that if she does look
in she won’t see the play pens and everything.”
“How about a folding screen?” Nevarstar suggested. “I have one at home.”
“Great. I’ve got an idea.” The cabal groaned to themselves. GeminiaNgleN grabs
ShadowWolfsDen. “We’ll be right back.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Section 68

When Gibbs let himself into the house, he almost swore. There was a light on in the kitchen. It could
be his dad, but his gut knew it wasn’t.

“Coffee?” Tony gestured to the carafe in front of him.

“Sounds good.”

They sat in silence while Jethro took his first long sip.

“Surprised you’re up.”

“I’ve gotten used to you holding me while I slept. Guess I woke up missing you.” Tony admitted.
“Zuma was stirring so I took him out.”

“Where is he?” Jethro looked around. Ever since the trip, Zuma had insisted on one or preferably
both men within paw reach.

Tony pointed towards his lap. Ducking his head, Jethro could make out the pup sprawled across
Tony’s legs. “Still clingy.”

“I didn’t realize how traumatizing it would be for him.” Tony couldn’t ignore the elephant in the
room anymore. “Want to talk about it?”

“What?” Tony simply gave him an eye roll and Jethro took another long sip. “You want to know
where I was?”

Tony motioned towards his cell. “There’s a text from McGee. Says he’ll call us after he gets a couple
hours sleep and that he may have found something. Put that together with your late night visit, I
would guess the Gibbs’ gut strikes again. I suspect you have an idea of who my father is. So, I’ll ask
again. Want to talk about it?”

Jethro shook his head ruefully. “Ever since Italy came up, I’ve had that feeling that I’d heard of
Palermo before. Thought about it for a while. Maybe Dad or one of his buddies had mentioned it in
an old war story. I woke up a bit earlier and remembered where I’d heard it. Came downstairs to
check and didn’t find what I remembered.”
“You didn’t find what you remembered, so you…”

“I pulled up a bio on a website. It was changed last week when this thing started.”

“Hiding the evidence.”

“Yes. So I remembered McGee talking about some website that stored old sites.”

“You found it there?” Tony was amazed.

It was Jethro’s turn to roll his eyes. “I decided to pay a short visit. He tried to deny it but…”

“You bluffed.” Tony shook his head. “Did it pay off?”

Jethro nodded. “Admitted everything.”

“Someone you know then?”

“I gave him twenty-four hours to come forward,” Jethro said. “But, I’m not going to lie to you. That’s happened for too long. It is someone I know and someone you know.”

Tony went to stand and jostled the pup awake. Startled, Zuma moved his paws in distress until Tony cuddled him against his chest. Watching, Jethro knew that both were drawing comfort from the caresses and cuddling. Tony took a few deep breaths. Jethro knew that he was torn between wanting to know and the betrayal of knowing that this person was in their lives all along. He also knew Tony was mentally going through a list of all the men in their lives. Finally, Tony looked into Jethro’s eyes and simply said, “Who?”

“Mabus.” Jethro said. “Your father is Jarvis Mabus.”

“Secnav?” Tony shook his head. “He doesn’t have kids.”

“Not with his current wife.” Jethro explained. “Mabus lost custody of his kids to his ex-wife in their divorce.”

“My birth led to his divorce?”

“No, Tony. Your mom believed she seduced him. Back in the day, before he really focused on politics as a career, he had a history of allowing innocent women ‘seduce him’ and then he would trot out the wife and kids. He walked away with another conquest, leaving the woman to believe she had seduced a devoted husband destroying their lives. I doubt very much that you were the only child he sired on the way.”

“Son-of-a-bitch.”

“Totally. He divorced when you were a few years old. It corresponds to when he appeared in Palermo claiming that his wife was willing to accept you. He had just lost all custody and you were…”

“A replacement.”

Jethro nodded. “He would have used your presence to cast doubt on why he lost custody.”

“He’s been in on this since I was arrested. He could have ended this the first night.” Finally rising, Tony and Zuma paced. Technically, Tony paced. Over his fright, Zuma had his head over Tony’s heart and had decided to sleep through the rest of the conversation. “Did he start this? Was he the
“one that called DHS?” Tony pondered as he walked. “No, too much risk for him. He wouldn’t want DHS involved. So, why didn’t he stop it the first night? He doesn’t want the truth to come out, does he?”

“He says that it would ruin his career.”

“What’s your gut say?”

“He never wanted it to come out and if you had been deported...”

“I’d have been his dirty little secret forever.” Tony returned to the table. “Mabus was involved in our marriage. Why save me?” Tony held up a hand. “Never mind. Mabus didn’t expect you to declare war on DHS. He was forced to help save me. But why marriage?”

“He says your mother suggested it.”

“Why go along with it?”

Jethro hated to explain but Tony deserved the truth. “He admitted that he thought a marriage between us would lead to both of us leaving the MCRT team and NCIS. He saw it as a way of getting rid of us. Mabus was very upset that, instead, Brigida gave you the folders and that you turned them over to the FBI becoming the public’s hero.”

“He knew? He knew about what Senior and Benoit had done? He didn’t come forward with it.”

“My gut thinks it was his ace in the hole. He doesn’t want the fact that you are his illegitimate son to come out. If it had leaked, Mabus could have used them to create a diversion. If Mabus controlled the release, it would have destroyed your career at the very least.”

“And yours.” Tony took a sip of his now cold coffee. “He would have walked away the hero.”

“What you do now is up to you, Tony. I gave him twenty-four hours to come clean with you, if that’s what you want.”

“It’s our decision. Whether Mabus likes it or not, we’re married.”

“You have a few hours, at minimum, to decide what you want to do.”

“I want a meeting.” Tony stated.

“I’ll call Mabus.”

“No.” Tony shook his head. “I want Secretary Comey, Fornell, Vance, Secretary Hagel and the VP. Let’s see how he likes having his life destroyed.”

Section 69

“Well, I guess I should be grateful it’s not night time.” The vice-president grumbled as he ran into Secretary Hegel in the hallway that lead to the private room in the restaurant. “What the hell was so important, Hegel, that you had to call another damned meeting?”

“Actually, sir. I didn’t call for the meeting.” Hagel stepped backed to allow the VP to enter first.

“Well, if you didn’t call for it, who the hell did?”

“That would be me.”
The vice-president froze. It was his worst nightmare come true. Gibbs. “Son of a bitch.”

When the participants were finally settled around the table, the vice-president slowly scanned the participants. He wasn’t sure that he wanted to know what kind of situation Gibbs felt required the Secretary of Defense, the Director of NCIS, the Director of the FBI, Agent Fornell and Agent DiNozzo. He paused. Where has Jarvis Mabus? The fact that the Secretary of the Navy had not appeared did not calm him in the least. “I assume you gentlemen have been briefed on the situation.” The fact that everyone but Gibbs and DiNozzo nodded started his ulcer growing. “Alright, Gibbs, you have the floor,” the vice-president said reluctantly.

To everyone’s surprise, it was DiNozzo who began speaking. “I appreciate all of you taking time out of your busy day for this meeting.” He ignored the raised eyebrows and mutters. “I know that you have put your careers on the line over the last two weeks and I do appreciate it.” He paused for a moment and looked down. He felt Jethro’s hand touch his knee and it gave him strength. “I went to Sicily in search of answers and I actually found my birth mother, who confirmed that I, in fact, do have dual citizenship. My biological father is a US citizen.”

“While I’m sure that everyone is pleased by your appreciation, this doesn’t appear to meet the standard for an emergency meeting of top level cabinet members,” the vice-president said. “If that’s all…”

“No, sir. But, I would hope the fact that my biological father is an upper level member of the administration who conspired to have me killed. would be.”

“Aw, son-of-a-bitch.” The vice-president moaned. He motioned for the secret service member standing at the door. “Contact my office, tell them to reschedule all my appointments this morning.”

“Yes, sir. Your wife called to remind you about your grand-daughter’s recital this evening.”

“Tell her I’ll call her later.”

“Yes, sir. Anything else, sir?”

The vice-president looked at his watch, it wasn’t even 8 am. Then he looked around the table at the assembled group, plus DiNozzo and Gibbs. DiNozzo before 8 am. That called for coffee. Gibbs before 8 am. That called for a nuclear strike and failing that… “Get a bottle of bourbon and glasses.”

“Sir, uh, the bar isn’t open.” The secret service agent said.

“Do I look like I care? Get it opened.”

“Uh. Yes, sir. I’ll… uh.. Anything else, sir?”

“Coffee. Strong. Black. Plenty of it.” Gibbs spoke up. “Not all of us like pickling our liver this early in the morning.”

“Not everyone has a reason.” The vice-president said dryly. “Would anyone else like anything else?” He said facetiously.

Vance spoke up. He was already rubbing his temples. “Aspirin™.”

“That’ll be the bourbon, coffee and Aspirin™. Now.”
“Yes, sir.” The agent retreated thankfully. Now all he had to do was find bourbon at this hour.

“Alright, DiNozzo. Should I take the fact that Secretary Mabus is not present to indicate he is already aware of the situation?”

“No, sir.” Tony replied evenly.

The vice-president breathed a sigh of relief. At least, it might be possible to contain the situation.

“He is the situation.” At least when the vice-president swore this time, he had plenty of company.

Tony paused for a drink of water before needlessly clarifying. “Secretary Mabus is my biological father.”

“Are we to understand that Mabus is aware of that fact?”

“I spoke with him earlier this morning in his office.” Gibbs spoke up. “Not only did he admit to being Agent DiNozzo’s father, but he implicated himself in the Benoit operation run by Director Shepherd.”

The sound of running feet in the hallway had the men reaching for their side arms. Then the sound stopped and a slightly flushed secret service man carried in a bottle of bourbon and glasses. Setting them on the table in front of the vice-president, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a bottle of Aspirin™ which he handed to Vance. “Your coffee will be here in a few minutes, sir.” Tony took a drink of water to keep from snickering as the secret service agent made a dignified retreat to his post.

The vice-president took a glass and pushed the rest into the middle of the table for the men to help themselves. After pouring a healthy measure, the vice-president passed the bottle to his right and sat back to wait for everyone to fortify themselves. “I am so sick and tired of ‘La Grenouille’ and ‘Benoit’. If Shepard was still alive, I’d strangle her myself. What does Mabus have to do with the whole mess?”

“Secretary Mabus indicated to me that he green-lighted the op Agent DiNozzo was assigned.”

“This was before he knew Agent DiNozzo was his son.”

“No, sir.” Tony spoke up. “He has been aware of who I was since my birth. After Agent Gibbs informed me…”

“Stop. Just stop. The Agent this and Agent that isn’t necessary. We are all aware of your marriage, don’t try to pretty it up. This is no time to be politically correct.” The vice-president rubbed his temple and Vance passed the Aspirin™ down the table. Dumping three pills in his hand, he washed them down with bourbon. “Just tell us what happened.”

“Mabus was stationed in Palermo as a junior intern. He met my mother Brigida Fabbri. She was unmarried. They had a one night stand after which he never contacted her again. He asked for and received a transfer to Rome. Following the crash of Flight 112, Brigida had to go to Rome to make arrangements. Roberto DiNozzo was her brother-in-law and the DiNozzos assisted her in taking care of the arrangements.”

“The DiNozzo family were an influential family and Mabus ended up at the funeral where he realized that Brigida was pregnant. I was born that night. After Gibbs spoke with Mabus today, I called the law firm that handled my adoption. They faxed papers directly to Director Vance showing that Mabus signed the adoption papers. He knew about my birth and he knew who my adoptive parents were.”
“You have proof?” Vance pulled papers out of an attaché case and passed them down. “Why did he want you involved in the La Grenouille debacle?”

“Mabus hoped René would kill Tony. His exact words were that he “thought René would handle him” and that’s why he suggested Tony for the op.”

“He actually set him up? His own son?”

“He indicated that he had tried to get rid of Tony several times, including recommending that Tony be sent to ROTA.” Gibbs explained.

“Agent Afloat.” Vance said. “He’s the one who told me to assign DiNozzo to the Agent Afloat position. I remember he was very angry when Gibbs’ team was reassembled. He initially approved McGee’s and David’s return but refused DiNozzo’s until…”

“Until Gibbs’ not so subtle threat?” Hagel interjected. “I remember that well.” He glared at Gibbs.

“I’m disturbed that the entire citizenship issue could have been solved with just one sentence. That makes me wonder, what else has he been responsible for?” The vice-president asked.

Hagel rubbed his temples. “He’s the one that suggested marrying Gibbs to DiNozzo.”

The vice-president handed him the Aspirin™. “Am I to assume there was an ulterior motive to that also?”

“Yes, sir.” Gibbs replied. “He felt that either the environment would become so hostile that either Tony, I or both would resign or that when we ‘divorced’ he would demand Tony be reassigned.”

“Is there anything that I need to be made aware of?”

“Mabus knew about Senior and Benoit’s crimes.” Tony stated flatly.

“I beg your pardon?”

“My mother had several…watchers who kept an eye on me, our team and my adopted family. She was provided meticulous reports. The folders that I turned over to Fornell came from her attorney. When I spoke with him this morning, Moretti volunteered to send a signed statement and copies of receipts showing that copies of the reports were received and the copies had been paid for by Mabus.”

Vance automatically pulled out a thick file and passed it to the vice-president. “This is only one of the files. They were downloaded from the attorney’s secure server by Agent McGee. The documentation corresponds to the reference number and summary on the receipts. They are overnighting discs with the complete scanned copies of the reports from the time that DiNozzo was adopted until the files were provided last week.”

“So, he was aware that a US citizen has been committing crimes for what, ten years?”

“Closer to thirty-five years.” Vance corrected him. “Moretti, the attorney who is handling DiNozzo’s case, indicates that the records show that criminal activity began shortly after the death of DiNozzo’s adopted mother in 1980. International activity became apparent about twenty years ago.”

“I am fairly certain that I know why Gibbs and DiNozzo requested this meeting and what their recommended action would be. However, gentlemen, I don’t have to explain the repercussions of Mabus’ actions and what it could do to international relations. This type of scandal this close to
elections could be disastrous.” The vice-president held up his hand for silence as Tony straightened in his chair as if to interrupt. “I do, however, want to tell you that recently I have been proud of this administration and in particular Agent DiNozzo’s determination to see justice done. It took a lot of guts, DiNozzo, to turn in the man that you believed was your father.” The vice-president looked him in the eye. “I cannot allow this country, your country to do any less. There will be no deals made. There will be no cover-up.”

Tony sagged in his chair. He was so relieved and in all honesty, surprised. He and Gibbs had discussed the situation before the meeting and both men had agreed that, if necessary, they would resign from NCIS and go public. He put his hand under the table, briefly holding Jethro’s hand. He was thankful that they didn’t have to give up the careers that they both loved.

“No. I am slightly concerned that we have a lot of paper trails but I don’t expect Mabus to go quietly. I am sure that he will go to any lengths to refute the evidence from your attorney. I wish that we had a recording of that conversation, but I know Gibbs’ would never record anyone without a warrant…” The vice-resident paused as if waiting for Gibbs to speak up. “Where did you leave the situation with Mabus?”

“I gave him twenty-four hours to tell Tony the truth.”

“Alright, gentlemen. That gives us a very short time to plan. I am assuming that the inclusion of Director Comey and Agent Fornell means that NCIS will not object to the FBI overseeing this op.”

“No, sir.” Vance confirmed. “Given SecNav’s past suggestions regarding Agent DiNozzo’s career, I believe that I would be asked to be a witness along with two of my agents. Given that this would be a major conflict of interest; I formally recommend turning the case over to the FBI.”

“Secretary Hagel?” The vice-president prodded.

“I concur with Director Vance’s recommendation. I also offer myself as witness to the conversation that occurred between Mabus and Vance regarding DiNozzo’s return from serving as Agent Afloat.”

“Director Comey?”

Comey looked at Fornell who nodded. “Yes, sir. I will appoint Agent Fornell as lead and will oversee the operation personally.”

“Since we are all in agreement, jurisdiction is no longer an issue.” He poured himself another glass of bourbon. “Now, gentlemen, we need a plan. How do we nail him?”

Section 70

Tony had just finished putting a casserole dish in the refrigerator. “If I’m not here, it should go in at 350° until the potatoes are golden brown.”

“Not a problem, son. Never made a shepherd’s pie quite like that.” Jackson wasn’t surprised that Tony preferred to use fresh vegetables. “Think you’ll be that long?”

“I want to drop a casserole and Diana’s doll off.” After leaving the meeting, Tony had found out from Vance that Helen was coming in late due to Diana being sick. He was going to meet her, shortly after lunch. “Then Jethro and I need to see human resources to update some forms.”

“I called Williams and he is updating the plans for Tony’s kitchen. We may stop by and sign off on those, also.”
Tony’s cell rang. Looking at the incoming number, he gave a slight nod to Jethro. “Special Agent Anthony DiNozzo. Secretary Mabus, sir. I’m sorry for my attitude the other week, sir. That’s kind of you, sir. Today? We could come by your office. Don’t tell Gibbs? Top secret? Oh well, alright, sir. Fortunately, we have some things to take care of at NCIS, so could I meet you there? We’re planning on driving in together, so Gibbs’ father can have my car. That’s going to make it difficult to get there.” Tony paused as if thinking. “I know. What about the parking garage next to NCIS? McGee was complaining earlier that it had been roped off and they couldn’t park there till Wednesday. I could meet you there say… three thirty? Of course, sir. I’ll be there. Thank-you, sir.”

“I don’t like this,” Gibbs spoke up.

“Jethro, we discussed the plan earlier.”

“I didn’t like it then and I don’t like it now.”

“I haven’t even told you what he said.” Tony laughed. “Evidently, I’m about to be briefed on a top secret operation. I’m not supposed to tell Gibbs about it; he will be read in later. I am not to come to his office and he did not want to come to NCIS. If anything comes up, I am to contact him by his cell number only.”

“Good job, DiNozzo. You played it well. Sounds like he has no suspicion.”

“I don’t like it either.” Jackson grumbled, taking a seat at the table. “Using Tony as bait. That man is slicker than Lucifer and twice as evil.”

Tony smiled as he remembered Jackson sticking up for him the morning of Senior’s arraignment. He had insisted on making Mabus acknowledge his presence and refused his hand. Tony decided his father-in-law was a fantastic judge of character.

“Is the garage ready?” Jethro asked.

“Vance had it cordoned off before he left the meeting this morning. Cover story is repairs.”

“Cover for the agents?”

“Several maintenance machines, line painters, etc. have been brought in.”

“Eyes?”

“McGee is coordinating the surveillance with Agent Bob Mincef. They’re going to tie into the parking cameras and have equipment in some of the maintenance equipment. They tried to explain it,” Fornell shook his head. “Just gave me a headache. Told them just to make it happen.”

“He a techie?”

“Comey felt that the team needed someone computer savvy like your McGee. Picked him to replace Ron personally.”

“Speaking of, have you heard from our old friend lately?” Tony asked sarcastically.

“Not since he jumped to DHS.”

“Are we sure that Mabus wasn’t involved in that?” Jackson spoke up.

“Not totally, but it doesn’t make sense. Guess we’ll know today.”
“We better get going, Tony. Abby needs to wire you up and we need to be in Vance’s office for a final check.”

Taking a deep breath, Tony stood and went to hug Jackson who held him tightly. “You take care of yourself and Fornell, you take care of my boys.”

“We’ll be fine, Jackson.” Tony headed for the door.

“I know you will.” Jackson hugged his son, too. “Watch yourself.” He held his shoulders and Jethro nodded solemnly.

“Oh, Jethro.” Tony called from the entrance hall. “We have a slight issue.”

“What’s wrong…” Jethro started out and then began laughing. Fornell and Jackson followed him curious about his laughter.

In front of the door, stretched out to his full length, was Zuma. He had his leather raccoon, his squeaky bone and was ready for the day. “What are we going to do? He’s already got separation anxiety.”

Jethro stood firm. An undercover op was no place for a pup. There was no way they were taking Zuma with them. “Dad will take care of him, you know that.”

Tony nodded sadly. Picking up the pup, he hugged him in preparation for handing him to Jackson. As he cuddled him, Zuma recognized the weak link and whined pitifully. “Jethro…”

Jethro tried but there were two sets of those darned puppy eyes. Once this was over, Tony would need comfort. “Get his stroller.” Tony thrust the pup into his arms and hurried to get it before Jethro could change his mind. Zuma looked up at him triumphantly. “You will stay with McGee and Abby.”

“Way to hold firm.” Fornell smirked.

Tony pushed the stroller off the elevator. He didn’t want to risk having to chase Zuma all over the building. There was too much a small pup could get in to. Helen was waiting to give him a hug outside Vance’s office. Filing in quietly, Jethro and Tony joined Abby, Vance, McGee and Helen.

Vance glared at the stroller. “You brought a dog to my office.”

“Of course not.” Tony said indignantly. “I brought a small puppy who has already been traumatized enough.”

“Hey, Zuma. How’s Auntie Abby’s boy?” Abby knelt to talk to Zuma through the mesh windows.

“We have been given the greenlight.” Vance said unnecessarily. “Jethro, Hagel and Comey want us in MTAC. Helen will be here with Agent DiNozzo. She has been read into the situation.”

Jethro automatically looked at Tony who gave him a smile and a nod. “Actually I’d love the chance to talk to Helen.” He patted the pocket Jethro knew held information on trust funds for Helen and Diana. Jethro walked over to Tony and handed him the shopping bag with Helen and Diana’s gifts. “As soon as you get back we’ll do the souvenirs for Helen and Diana.”

“You didn’t have to bring us anything.”
“Not bring my best girl anything? Blasphemy.” As the door clicked, Tony took a deep breath.

“Are you okay?” Helen placed her hand on his shoulder. “I’m here if you want to talk.”

Tony forced a smile. “I do, but not about that. I don’t know what all Vance told you about my… mother.”

“I know that she’s now a nun and that you went to Palermo to meet her. I’m so happy for you, Tony. You deserve so much happiness. I see things are going well between you and Gibbs.”

“They really are, Helen,” Tony took her hand. “I found out something about my mother’s family. Evidently they had money. A lot of money. While we were over there, Jethro and I were given control of the family trusts. We did a lot of talking about what we wanted to do. The first thing that we decided to do is to take care of our family.” Tony reached into his pocket and pulled out the papers and handed them to Helen. “You and Diana are part of our family.”

Helen opened the envelope with trembling hands. She had only read the first couple of words when she burst into tears. “Tony, you can’t…”

“I can and we did. Diana will have everything she needs and you’ll be able to spend more time with her. The fund will pay for the special school her doctor recommended. I know that you’ve had to refinance and take out additional mortgages and loans. By the end of the week, your condo will be free and clear. You will also receive a call from my attorney later this week. He’s arranging for a van with a lift. You won’t have to tug her chair in and out of the car anymore.”

Helen simply cried harder. “Tony, it’s too much.”

“Nothing’s too much when it comes to taking care of family. Jethro and I are building a new house, so there’ll be a lot of barbeques and swim parties.” Tony distracted her by beginning to describe the new house while she held the papers to her chest like a lifeline.

Chapter End Notes

“What is that?” Wolfnjag pointed her finger.

“This angel is ‘Hey Jude’. He’s a Vizsla and he’s only five months old. He’s a One of the new cabal members, Fan, belongs to him.”

“You aren’t keeping it.”

“Nooo.” Geminiangel repeated. “Fan belongs to him.”

“I have enough responsibility taking care of you without those cabal members adding to the confusion with that ridiculous menagerie.”

“Hey, Wolfnjag,” Psyche53 called. “Are these weeds?” A hand held up the tomato plants, Wolfnjag had planted earlier in the week.

Geminiangel slipped out as Wolfnjag took off to rescue her garden. She could hear her yelling about her cucumbers. Opening her study door slowly, she slipped in between the door and the new folding screen that blocked the vision of the room to find out the cabal was up to eleven lambs. “Ta-da. Everyone this is Hey Jude. He’s going to help with the lambs. Can you please keep them together while we talk?”

Hey Jude barked his agreement and took off after the wobbly lambs slowly moving them towards the beds. As he passed the individual members of the cabal, he paused for a nice scratch, a pat or an introduction. He was even slipped a treat a few times. Hey
Jude began to think Fan might be on to something with this cabal. “QueeneoftheDeer, now that Bambi and Fawn are in the open. Do we have enough room in the secret nursery for them?” “I’ve got some cabal members in there working on some bunk cribs for them. I’ve already had to send out for more supplies. We’re going to need a bunch of strollers. I just don’t know how we’ll get them past Wolfnjag.”

“The fireplace,” Geminianangel said decisively. “I don’t think that some of the things like playpens can come down the fireplace. Only Santa can manage that.”

“No. If you push the third brick of the seventh row past the floo adjuster, the back of the fireplace will swing out and allow packages. I had to add it after Wolfnjag took all the violet crumbles. Or is it the seventh brick of the third row before the floo adjuster. Oh, well, one of them should work.” She scooped up a strange-looking ginger colored lamb. “Is this…”

“Shhh… It’s an l…l…a…m…a. It thinks it is a l…a….m….b. We don’t want to give it a complex.”

Geminianangel looked up from where she was writing the letters down. “I don’t care about that, let it be whatever it wants. No one should be forced to be what they don’t want to be. I wanted to know if it was hungry.” She held up a bottle and started a lamb stampede.

Hey Jude wisely jumped up on the sofa and then in to a Moses basket. Herding was hard work. Plus, he almost got run over. He’d just take a little nap.
Chapter Summary

WARNING:

This chapter contains strong language, violence and character death. I know I have it marked 'M' but I don't want anyone caught off-guard.

Chapter Notes

Wolfnjag handed the paper back to the idiot. It was covered in red marks. “What did you do to my next chapter?” Geminiangel complained. “That is not a chapter. That is a bunch of words grouped into what are supposed to be sentences. You might as well have set a trap for innocent sentences that were minding their own business. Then you just forced them to cohabit in a pattern discernable only to you. Trying to sort that out is like watching a bunch of normal people forced to attend a cabal meeting. That was not a chapter, that was a hostage situation begging for a sniper’s bullet. You should be ashamed of yourself.” “So you didn’t like it?” Wolfnjag slammed the study door.

Grumpily, Geminiangel slipped around the edge of the screen. Amelitta was sitting holding Sinatra in her lap crooning, “Fly me to the moon, let me play among the stars. Something about the planets Jupiter and Mars…” “She loved it right?” Geminiangel held the pages up. It looked like a firing squad had practiced with it; red ink almost dripping. “Here, hold Sinatra a minute.” Geminiangel happily swapped for the lamb and Amelitta started thumbing through the pages. “She took the scene where Tony and Gibbs had sex on Vance’s desk before Gibbs went to the meeting in MTAC. What’s up with that?” Geminiangel shrugged. “I don’t know.” “She took out the therapy pony for Diana.” “Said she didn’t want to give the cabal any more idiotic ideas.” “She took out where Gibbs and Tony had sex on Helen’s desk while Abby was taping his microphone on.” “Said it was too ‘unrealistic’ when compared to the literary foundation.” “What literary foundation?” “Don’t know.” “What gives her the right to destroy our work of art?” Geminiangel simply pointed to the piece of paper on the wall, “Wolfnjag is hereby the designated beta and idiot keeper. As such, the idiot and the idiot’s muse must submit all material for proofreading and all material must be approved before posting.” “Noooo. She took out the section where Van Diesel busts into the garage and shreds Mabus to pieces with a machete.” “What do we do now?” Geminiangel moped. “The cabal is waiting for the next installment.” “Ummm… We could… Or…” Amelitta paced back and forth. “Is that the time? Gotta
“You get back here.” Geminiangel stamped her foot causing Sinatra to baa. “Sorry. Hey, Sinatra, shouldn’t you be asleep?” Walking over to the secret door, she tapped lightly. “Hey, QueeneoftheDeer.”

“Sinatra, where were you?”

“Amelitta and he were singing.” Several cabal members waved from where they were watching their charges sleep. “Everything going okay?”

“Everyone’s asleep but for this fellow. He wants to party, don’t you?”

Sinatra baa’d in agreement. Finally, he was getting through to them. He gave another baa, requesting another bottle. Singing was hard work.

“Don’t know what’s wrong with him.”

“Why don’t you give him a bottle and see if he goes to s.l.e.e.p?” Sinatra narrowed his blue eyes at QueeneoftheDeer. He was on to her game. He’d watch his fellow lambs cuddled and given their bottle. He had no intention of falling asleep. There would be no rocking and cuddling.

“By the way, how’s the next installment? Does the cabal need to deal with Mabus?”

“Wolfnjag killed it.” Geminiangel sighed. “She even cut this big surprise guest that Amelitta and I were planning on inviting.”

“Ouch. Well, maybe after feeding Sinatra, you’ll feel more like trying again.”

“I guess.”

“Here you go.” QueeneoftheDeer handed her the bottle she had just finished making. “Come on, Sinatra.” Geminiangel thread her way to his bed. “Want me to rock you?”

Sinatra kicked his leg at the chair. “Don’t feel like rocking? Me, either.” Geminiangel sank down on his pallet. Sinatra resolutely stood, he was a big lamb now. He didn’t need held to drink his bottle.

“I know a song. Want to hear it?” Sinatra snorted. More Sinatra? No. “You may be right; I may be crazy. But it just may be a lunatic you’re looking for. Turn out the light, don’t try to save me. You may be wrong for all I know, but you may be right. Remember how I found you there, alone in your electric chair…”

Sinatra started stamping his hooves. Now this was music. Who cared about Jupiter?
job and the closure rate is down throughout the department. So, go ahead, tell me you told me so.”

“He is such a good person. I hate that he has to go through this. One scumbag for a father is bad enough.” Helen was irate over the situation.

“You’re right about the two of them.” Vance volunteered. “Last night, I had the chance to watch them together. They won’t be divorcing. They’re good for each other. He smooths some of Gibbs hard edges, Gibbs tones downs Tony’s personality.”

“Told you.” Helen smiled as Vance just rolled his eyes.

“Present time.” Tony smiled brightly and held up the bag, as he tugged Jethro towards Helen. Over the next few hours, as Abby wired Tony and they did audio/visual checks, Tony kept the conversations light. They talked about the souvenirs that he and Gibbs brought for Helen and Diana. Abby showed off her own bag to Helen. They talked about Palermo. Zuma was petted and cuddled before he fell asleep in his stroller, totally exhausted. They didn’t talk about Mabus.

“Tony.” McGee’s voice cut through the chatter. “It’s time.”

Vance watched his agent carefully. Now that Mabus wasn’t whispering in his ear, it was easier to see the mask. Those few words had cut straight through the playboy façade and Vance could see the competent, dedicated agent.

“You do not have permission for anything…that includes getting hurt and/or dying.” Gibbs stepped in front of his senior agent. “If anything looks or feels strange, you get out. Do you understand?”

“Yes, boss.” Tony gave him a smirk. “Any input from the Gibbs’ gut?”

“I don’t like this.”

Tony understood that this was his husband, not his boss, talking. “Jethro, I’ll be fine. In just a bit, this will be over.”

“I still don’t like this. I would feel better if you went in with an earpiece.”

“You have expressed your opinion, several times, Gibbs.” Vance said dryly. “Shall we do this?”

“Tony…” Abby stood in front of him.

“It’s okay, Abs. Watch Zuma for us, Auntie Abby.”

“Keep your ears and eyes on, McWatcher.”

McGee simply rolled his eyes and refocused on the screen in front of him. He had earwigs and microphones to keep in touch with the FBI’s group. “Fornell’s team is in place. Bob Mincef and I are on a dedicated, secure connection. We have the greenlight.”

“Let’s get this done.” Tony said and strolled out of the office.

Seemingly, casual, Tony glanced around the third level as he exited the elevator. Mentally he reviewed the placement of the team and moved slowly towards the area that they had outlined as the best area for coverage. The hair on the back of his neck prickled and Tony leaned casually against a column hoping to hear Mabus’ footsteps.
“I expected Gibbs to accompany you.” Mabus approached from behind another column.

“Sir, you asked me to come alone.”

“Let’s cut to the chase, DiNozzo or should I say son?”

“Sir?”

“Don’t try to fool me, I know Gibbs told you about his little visit to my office this morning and his little ultimatum.” Mabus looked at him coldly.

Rather than bluff as Fornell had outlined, Tony realized that Mabus was so confident and arrogant that he needed to come from a place of power; so he attacked. “Jethro is a man of honor. Unlike you, he doesn’t believe in lying.”

“Saint Gibbs, how touching.” Mabus sneered.

“Why?”

“Why what?” Mabus looked a bit off guard.

“Director.” McGee said sharply. “Agent Mincef is indicating we have an issue.”

“Report.” Gibbs said sharply.

“Someone embedded a Trojan Horse that acts like a backdoor into Agent Fornell’s teams’ computers that… Sorry, boss.” McGee stopped the technical explanation. “Someone is getting copies of our transmissions. Bob Mincef is trying to shut them down but…”

“Has the mission been compromised?”

McGee was typing frantically. “I’m trying to do a trace.”

“Agent, are we compromised?”

“Damn it. I knew we should have had an earpiece.” Gibbs snarled.

“McGee, talk to me. Do we shut this down?”

“Sir, if we do, they’ll know.”

“Gibbs, get back here, Gibbs!” Vance hollered after his MCRT lead agent. Zuma woke and began barking frantically. “Abby, shut him up! Helen, I want Comey now. McGee, I want to know who’s getting the link and shut them down now.”

“Working on it, sir.”

“Director Comey, sir.” Helen held the receiver out to Vance.

“I want Palmer on stand-by.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Comey, we’re aborting. Gibbs is on his way to level three.” Vance grit his teeth. “Your end of this operation has been compromised. This is my agent who is at risk. I don’t care if the risk assessment is
low.”

“Sir.”

“McGee.”

“I’ve traced it.”

“Give me a name.”

“Sacks, sir. The copies are going to Special Agent Ron Sacks, DHS.”

“Find him.”

“I did, sir.”

“Spit it out.”

“He’s in the parking garage.” McGee was already rising, gun in hand, as Abby slid into his chair to take over monitoring.


In the confusion, no one noticed a little blur exiting the room.

Sacks tried Mabus’ number again. He had been trying to phone and text him for the last hour. He cursed the case that had kept him out of the office this morning. Upon returning, Sacks and Maison had to complete the paperwork and interrogation. By the time Sacks had a chance to check the virus he had paid a hacker to plant and had noticed the information coming from Fornell’s team, it was too late for him to stop the investigation. Immediately, he tried to warn Mabus. His secretary had indicated he had taken the day off and couldn’t be contacted. Cursing silently, he tried the call again but the stairwell didn’t have any service.

“Why Brigida? I know how you operate, but wasn’t she a bit old for your taste.”

Mabus laughed cruelly. “It was a different world in 1972. The whole free love movement hadn’t caught on worldwide. The teens in Italy were monitored more closely. I met Matteo through my work, he was a prominent businessman. I saw his daughter Rosina and immediately set my eyes on her.” Mabus leered. “Of course, she was already married to DiNozzo so I had to set my sights lower.”

Tony clenched his jaw, which Mabus noticed. “Come on, I know your type and you’ve met your mother. Tell me you wouldn’t have tried to pull her unless you were desperate. Poor Brigida. Now she was desperate, just picked up the bread trail I left for her. Of course, after the fact, she developed a conscious. I called to ‘check on her’ and she wouldn’t even take the call. All the work for a one-nighter.” Mabus shook his head in disgust. “I managed to get transferred back to Rome. That’s when I found out she was pregnant.”

“Never occurred to you to take responsibility?”

“For giving an old maid the night of her life. She should have been more careful. Then she did one smart thing, she gave you to DiNozzo and his wife. They brought you here where I could keep track
Sacks emerged slightly out of breath from the stairwell. “It’s a trap. You need to get out of here quick.”

“What are you talking about?”

“They are all in on it.”

“You’re working with Sacks?”

Mabus smirked at Tony. “Working with him? Hardly. But at least I have one child who isn’t a horrible waste of DNA.”

Tony turned to look at Sacks. “You’re his son?”

“Of course. After your mother ruined his marriage, my mother took us away from him. She even changed our names to her maiden name. When I was in my teens, Dad got in touch with me. He couldn’t get custody but he’s been helping me ever since. We can’t announce it yet, but once I’m head of the agency; we won’t have to hide anymore.”

“Won’t work that way,” Gibbs drawled coming up behind Sacks. “There’ll always be an excuse to not come out won’t there, Mabus? I mean, you set Tony up to be killed by René Benoit. Got another little accident planned for Sacks?”

“What is he talking about, Dad?”

“He’s just trying to trick you.”

“You know me better than that, Sacks. Walk away now, before you get involved.”

“It wasn’t my mother who broke up his marriage.”

“Liar. If it wasn’t for you and her, my parents would still be together.”

“Funny, we were having a little talk before you arrived. It wasn’t my mother who chased him, he was the seducer.”

“Don’t listen to him, Ron. He’s trying to distract you.”

“You’re right, Sacks. I am wired and I have it all on tape.”

“Dad?”

Mabus pulled a gun and aimed it at Tony. “I should have taken care of you years ago.”

Gibbs and Sacks drew their guns, too. They were arranged in a semi-circle around Tony. Mabus focused on Tony, but Sacks alternated between Gibbs and Tony. Gibbs took a couple steps edging closer to Tony.

“Freeze, Gibbs, or he dies right here.”

“Don’t be a fool, Mabus. You’ll go down for murder.”

“I had it all planned,” Mabus pointed the gun at Gibbs. “You think you caught me off guard this morning? I’ve been planning for this ever since that idiot arrested DiNozzo.”
“My mother told me he wasn’t a legal citizen.”

“Your mother is a bitch that should have been put down years ago.”

“No. You love my mother.” Sacks shook his head in disbelief.

“I married your mother because she said she was politically connected. What did I get? A junior internship? And your mother popping out kids like a rabbit. Too stupid to take the contraceptive.” Mabus shook his head. “Then she thought I would fight for custody? I told her to take the lot of you. You’re all weak, just like her.”

“No… You told me how much you loved her. How much you missed raising me.”

“Oh, please. I’ve watched you versus DiNozzo for years. He’s outshone you every step of the way. You can’t even handle a simple murder case.”

“It’s you.” Mabus turned back to Tony when he spoke. “You’re the one that’s kept the feud between Sacks and NCIS going.”

“All I had to do was point the fool at you and tell him how you and your mother ruined his life.” Mabus laughed. “He licked it up like an animal.”

“Why send me afloat?”

“Where’s a terrorist attack when you need one?” Mabus shrugged. “Figured you would get so desperate for a bitch that you would either screw around on the ship and I could can you or you’d resign and move on. I told Shepherd to put you undercover. Then I contacted Benoit. The fool didn’t want to hurt his daughter.”

“So you did plan my death?”

“So many times. Then you come down with the plague. I mean, it was a gift and then you survived. Who survives the plague?”

“What was this, then? Why the meeting charade?”

“Why, I called DiNozzo and asked to talk to him about a case. While we were meeting, you burst in, in a jealous rage. You hit DiNozzo and I pulled my gun but couldn’t stop you pulling yours. You were unreasonable and shot DiNozzo in cold blood. I had to shoot you in self-defense. My problems would be all wrapped up.”

“They wouldn’t have bought that.” Tony said definitely. “They know Gibbs.”

“They knew Gibbs the marine, not Gibbs the homo.”

“You are a complete asshole.” Tony stared at him unbelieving the depths of the man’s depravity. “What about Sacks?”

“He’s useful.”

A brown blur caught Tony’s eye and he let out a cry. “Zuma.”

Startled Mabus tried to grab Tony but missed when he leaned over to grab a dog. His gun cocked, “Drop it, Gibbs.” Mabus said as he was in arm’s reach of Tony. “Back up or I kill him now.”

“Dad?”
“Shut up, you moron.” Mabus snarled at Sacks. “You ruined everything.”

“I was trying to save you from a trap.”

“I gave you the money to have that program installed. All you had to do was monitor it. You couldn’t even do that right. You’re as useless as your mother.”

“Secretary Mabus, drop the gun.” McGee called out exiting the stairwell with Vance right behind him. “You’re under arrest.”

Vance was aggagrated that Fornell’s team had not moved in. What was Comey waiting for? Vance pointed his gun at Mabus. “Jarvis, you are surrounded. Drop your weapon.” Disgruntled, FBI agents emerged, guns drawn.

“I am Secretary of the Navy. I am your supervisor. You will drop your weapon.” Mabus was arrogant and confident. Who did they think they were talking to?

“Not going to happen, Jarvis. This goes over your head. Hegal himself is overseeing this case.”

“Hegal? He couldn’t find his ass in a breeze. I run the department. I control it. Now drop your weapons. And shut that damned dog up.” Mabus swung his gun erratically. “I will put a bullet right through both of you.”

Tony whispered to Zuma trying to calm the pup down. Zuma was frantically emitting whines and small barks. “Let me try.” Gibbs used the excuse to try moving closer to Tony.

“I said stay where you are or I will kill him, Gibbs. Do you want me to put a bullet in his brain?”

“You won’t leave here alive.” Gibbs said firmly. “I will end you.”

“You can’t do a thing to me. I am the Secretary of the Navy. I have autonomy and immunity.”

“No, you don’t, Jarvis. You kill an NCIS agent, you will spend the rest of your life in jail or die. No court will let you off.” Vance said calmly.

Mabus screamed and turned the gun on Vance. “You can’t touch me.”

“Jarvis, warrants for your arrest have already been issued. Everyone knows about the reports showing the dealings of DiNozzo and Benoit. They know you were involved in the Benoit operation. You are going down. Don’t add murder to that charge. They will give you the death penalty. Don’t let that ruin your legacy.” Vance tried to persuade the now irrational man to give up.

Mabus’ face twisted in anger and his gun moved erratically. “Well, if I go down, I won’t be going down alone.”

Later, it would take the video review to really put the next few seconds into perspective. At the time, those involved were too busy reacting. There was the high pitched squeal from Zuma, several cries of pain and multiple gunshots. When it ended, McGee was on his earpiece immediately. “Agents down, we need medical now. Roll ambulances. I repeat we have agents down.”

Gibbs holstered his gun and rushed to Tony’s side. Blood was spreading across his shirt and Tony was gasping for air. “No… respect… for… the… suit…”

Gibbs was busy trying to bare the area. “Don’t try to talk. Let me see.”

Section 72
“Zuma?”


Vance was at Mabus’ side and had kicked away his gun. McGee knelt down next to the puppy and winced. “Come on, Zuma. Come to Uncle McGee.” Zuma whined. “Drop it, Zuma.” McGee used the same tone and technique that Gibbs used. “Come on, drop it.” McGee tapped Zuma’s nose finally getting the pup to release the death grip he had on Mabus’ privates. “Shame on you. You don’t know where that’s been.” Picking up the pup he carried him to Tony’s side where Zuma struggled to get down.

Then, Palmer was there. “Hey, Tony. Just relax.”

Tony was getting his breath back. “Relax, Autopsy Gremlin. Just a through and through. One of those FBI idiots hit me from behind. It clipped the vest. How’s Zuma?”

“He’s fine. You may have to disinfect him though.”

“Why?”

Gibbs smirked. He had seen Zuma’s lunge from Tony’s arms. The pup had earned him a lifetime of the best dog food money could buy. When he was a little older, there was a steak with his name on it. “It appears that Zuma decided to assist in the take down. He latched on to Mabus and wouldn’t let go.”

“He bit him?”

“Oh, yeah.” Gibbs and McGee exchanged smirks.

“Did he draw blood?”

“I’m not checking.” McGee shook his head.

“It appears that Zuma tried to take revenge for his grandmother and latched on to the instrument for revenge.”

Tony’s eyes widened. “He bit his…”

“Yep.” Gibbs smirked. “Latched on and held on tight.”

Palmer chortled. “I am not treating that.”

“Poor Zuma.” Tony held him awkwardly. “Help me up.”

Palmer started to dissent. “Hey, Black Lung, I’ve had a lot worse. Help me up.”

Managing to make it to his feet, Tony leaned heavily on Gibbs while Palmer moved to check Mabus. Ducky was kneeling by another body as the sound of approaching ambulances could be heard.

“Who is it?” Tony looked around for the team members.

“It’s Sacks.”

Tony started staggering forward. Ducky was holding gauze to the wound and speaking softly. When he looked up at Tony’s approach he gave a slight shake of his head. Tony sank down next to his longtime nemesis. “Hey, Sacks.” Taking a pad of gauze, Tony wiped away a trickle of blood from
the corner of his mouth. “So, you’re my big brother. I have to say you haven’t really done a good job to this point. When you get better, I expect you to take me to a Nationals’ game. I want a pennant, popcorn, peanuts, a hotdog, beer and a pretzel. They better be good seats, too.”

Sacks tried to talk and more blood bubbled out. Tony just casually wiped it, “No arguments, I think you owe me. Let’s see forty-four years of birthday and Christmas gifts and a wedding present. I expect a really good birthday gift this year.” Tony could feel Gibbs hand on his shoulder. “Oh, and hey, this is your nephew. Ron, meet Zuma. Zuma, this is your Uncle Ron.” Zuma squirmed out of Tony’s arm and snuggled against Sack’s side. The pup cocked his head looking at him inquisitively.

“Zu..ma.” Sacks coughed and Tony patiently cleaned his face, taking the fresh gauze Ducky handed him.

“Yep, and he expects presents, too.”

“I…did..n’t…”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I know how bad parents can screw you up. He lied to you, to me, to everyone.”

Sacks struggled to lift his hand and Tony immediately took it. “Mom… didn’t…”

“Your mom only knew what he said. Since he was a lying, cheating bastard; we’ll start over.”

“Tell…mom…”

“Hey, just relax. The ambulances are coming. You can tell her yourself.” Tony felt Gibbs’ hand tighten.

“Li..ar..” Sacks coughed again, the blood becoming more of a stream.

Grabbing more gauze, he tried to stem the flow of the blood. “That’s not nice. You’re acting just like a brother. Minute you get out we are so doing a bar night. Give Abby a shot at you.” The blood stopped and Tony focused on his face. “Sacks, hold on. Sacks? Ron?”

“I’m sorry, Anthony.” Ducky reached forward and closed Sacks’ eyes.

“Who?”

Gibbs helped Tony to stand and picked up Zuma. Tony tried to rub the blood off his hands.

“Mabus.”

Tony’s face contorted in anger and he turned towards his biological father. Fornell came to Tony’s side. Tony looked towards Mabus in anger. He could see the paramedics working on his wounds.

“Will he live?”

Fornell shrugged. “He took a couple bullets. They’re trying to stabilize him to get him to surgery. They’ve called for a helicopter.”

“I want to talk to him.”

Without a word, Fornell cleared a path. The paramedics raised the gurney in preparation for taking the elevator to the roof to meet the helicopter. When a paramedic went to protest, Fornell stated decisively. “This is his son. He deserves the chance to say good-bye in the case…”
The paramedic let Tony slide in beside him. “Helicopter’s ten out.”

“This won’t take long.” Tony looked down at Mabus. He was on oxygen, obviously in pain but most important, he was conscious. “You killed him. You killed your son. Do you even care? You shot him in cold blood. Like he was nothing. You murdered your own son.” Tony leaned closer. “When you go on trial, I will be there. Every second. Every day. I will testify and I will help put you on death row. When they execute you, I will be there. Looking in your eyes as you die. If, for some ungodly reason, they let you go, I will be there waiting… Do you understand me? You are going to die and I will be there. Get him out of here.”

Gibbs put his arm around Tony as a paramedic stepped up. “Agent DiNozzo, we need to examine you. If you’ll come with me.”

Palmer diverted the paramedic and sent him on his way, assuring him that he would handle the wounded man’s treatment. Tony smiled at him in gratitude. It lasted until Palmer produced a wheelchair for the trip to autopsy. When Tony frowned, Palmer simply pointed at the ambulance and then the wheelchair.

Fornell shook his head. “Tony, this whole thing went FUBAR. They had a program that copied the server. Comey put finding a mole ahead of the op.”

“Sacks… His mother…”

“I’ve already told Comey I will be informing her personally.”

“I want to meet her.”

“Tony…”

“Jethro, I have to. I held his hand as he bled out. I want to meet her.”

“I’ll do the best I can.” Fornell promised. “Formally, Agent Patterson will also be on desk duty until he completes another cycle of gun safety and target acquisition. He clipped you aiming for Sacks.”

“Sacks? He wasn’t…”

“If I have my way, he’ll be riding a desk till I retire. This job is hard enough without the good guys shooting you from behind. I better head over to Clarissa Morgan’s and tell her about Ron before it leaks to the press. I’ll stop by later to check on you. Gibbs.” The two men nodded and then Fornell walked away.

McGee stepped up to take Zuma while Gibbs and Palmer assisted Tony into his chair.

Tony looked at Vance and held out a hand to shake. “So McGee, you managed to get the Director to watch your six. Good backup. Thanks, Director.”

“Have to look out for my best team.” Vance turned to lead the team back to his office.

“So McWatcher, want to explain how my little angel ended up on the third floor of the garage?”

McGee looked at Tony and then the pup. “No.” He walked off, following Vance.

“He’s learning.” Gibbs smirked. He smiled at Zuma laying up over McGee’s shoulder watching to be sure his humans were following.
“Have you seen the idiot?” Aussiefan70 whispered to QueeneoftheDeer. “I ran into Amelitta and she told me about the installment.
“She seemed a bit down.”
“Did you tell her about the membership cards QueenBee4Ever designed?”
“I was saving that for a surprise. I recommended that she care for Sinatra.”
QueeneoftheDeer pointed.
“Where?”
QueeneoftheDeer made her way towards Sinatra’s area. As she and Aussiefan70 got near they could see Sinatra standing on his bed, pulling at the lovely blanket nevarstar had made for him. There curled up on the pallet was the idiot fast asleep.
QueeneoftheDeer helped Sinatra cover her properly. “Will you watch over her tonight?”
Sinatra baa’d in agreement. He liked the idiot. She sang good songs. She had a lot of wonderful people who helped make sure that they were well feed, warm and comfortable. He sank down beside the idea and laid his head on her side. Aussiefan70 found another blanket and covered him. “Thanks, Sinatra.”
“This is Eltillood of the AOOO Ccnaf Swen.” The perky blonde waved at the camera. “Today, we have a very special guest. It is my pleasure to introduce one of our favorite canines. Welcome, Zuma Gibbs.” Zuma raised his paw and waved to the camera. “Bark…ruff.” “and his translator, geminiangel.” “Zuma says ‘He’s glad to be here.’” “We’re thrilled to have him. Zuma, I know some people weren’t thrilled when Tony and Gibbs adopted you? How did you handle that?” “Rawffffff rawwfff roo roo grr. Bark… arf arf grr.” “Zuma was thrilled. He loves Tony and Jethro very much.” “We read about your latest adventure. Weren’t you scared?” “Arf…arf, arf bark arf arf. Rawfff grrr arf arf.” “He says that initially he was just following his parents. When he realized what was happening, he just knew he had to protect his mommy.” “Such a brave young man. We heard that you recently had a domestic accident. Are you recovered?” “Ruff…ruff…bark arf bark arf ruf grrrr.” “It was much to do about nothing really. He was trying to get away from his Aunt Abby and the box springs tried to eat him. His Uncle Tim found someone who fought the monster and now they’re fine.” “What do you do in your spare time?” “Arf. Rolf ruff arf arf grr ruf arf arf.” “Zuma says that he spends a lot of time with my Cabal.” Geminiangel explains. “We have a lot of friends who hold regular get-togethers and he likes to stop in and play with the lambs.” “Lambs?” “Arf, arf arf arf-arf ruff.” “The cabal has recently gotten some… uh… baby lambs. Zuma has been stopping by to help out. He sings to them and plays with them. He’s also helping train a friend, Hey Jude, who is trying to learn Zuma’s moves.” “That lunge was so amazing.” “Ruuuufff. Bark.” “Zuma says he practiced a lot in the back yard. Now he is passing that knowledge on.” “We understand that you have been made an Agent. That seems like a dangerous job.” “Bar,… bar, rug arf arf bark arf rolf grr grr rrr.” “Zuma says that there are risks but it’s in his blood. His daddy, his mommy and his Uncle Tim do it all the time. At least this way, he’ll be there if needed.” “I’m sorry, it seems that we are out of time. Zuma, thank-you so much for stopping in. I hope that you’ll came back.” “Bark…rolf. Bark ruff ruff grr ruff.” “Zuma says he would be delighted. He’d also like to remind everyone to stop by the National Law Enforcement Memorial when they’re in DC and remember they are heroes, too.” “Thank-you, Zuma. Next, we have the half-Cerberus half-lycavarina from the New Daddy series. Stay with us.” “And we’re out.” The camera man said.
The perky blonde shook Zuma’s paw. “Thanks again for coming. Would you mind giving me an autograph?”
Gemiiniangel pulled out an ink pad and a head shot. Zuma graciously inked his paw and stamped the picture.
“Oh, thank-you!”
Gemiiniangel held a towel for Zuma to clean his paw. “Do you need to get home or would you like come play with the lambs for a while?”
“Ruff.”
“Great. Sinatra just got ‘Just Dance 2016’ for the X-Box and wanted to challenge you.”
“Baaarrkk.”
“I’m sure you will.”

Section 73

Vance lead them straight to his office, telling Palmer to bring Tony there for treatment. Slumping in a wheelchair, Tony cringed as McGee pushed him through the door. Abby rushed forward. “I was so worried. Helen and I saw everything. I can’t believe it.”

Gibbs started to intercede but found it wasn’t necessary. Abby scooped up Zuma. “Bad Zuma. I can’t believe you ran away like that. You could have been hurt. You aren’t hurt, are you? Let Auntie Abby check.”

“Remind me to thank Jackson again for Zuma.” Tony whispered.

“Helen, could we borrow your desk chair? I’d like to have him in a chair without arms so I can get at the wounded area better.”

“Helen, don’t bother, I can stand up.”

“No.” The reply came in multi-stereo from Helen, Palmer, Jethro, Ducky and even Vance. Abby was checking Zuma over thoroughly.

“Fine.” Tony slumped back in his chair, with a groan.

“What’s wrong, Tony?” Palmer and Gibbs chorused.

“My back. Must have twisted it on the way down.”

“Here you go, Tony.” Helen held her chair steady.

“Tony, do you think you can straddle the chair so that you can lean against the back?” Palmer asked.

“Sure. If you can give me a hand with this vest.” Tony complained. “I hate these things.”

“Just stay down a minute and let me get everything set up before we move you.” Jimmy and Ducky commandeered a corner of Vance’s desk. With supplies from the bag, they sterilized the area and set up a medical tray.


“I’m going to cut off your jacket and shirt so we can get the vest off you.”
“This is my lucky suit.”

“Tony, it has bullet holes and blood all over it.”

Tony tried to twist to see how bad the damage was. Whap. He glared at Gibbs. “Excuse me. Injured here, boss, and this is a good suit.”

Gibbs reached for the scissors, unceremoniously plucked a hand full of coat sleeve and sheared it off. “Now it’s not.”

Tony was in shock, looking at the ragged hole in his suit. “Do you know how long I had to save to buy this suit?”


“No… My dry cleaner works wond…” Tony saw skin through the ragged hole. “Boss.” He whined.

“Shut it, DiNozzo, or the pants are next.”

Tony shut up, to the other team members’ amusement. With a smile, Ducky patted him on the knee. “Your well-being is much more important than a suit, dear boy. Jethro, might I suggest that while you and Mr. Palmer assist Anthony to his feet, I take over tailoring his suit?”

“Ha ha, Ducky.” Tony stood and let out a small groan as Jethro and Jimmy helped him up. Helen whisked the wheelchair out of Ducky's way.

“Helen, would you be a dear and help hold Anthony steady? I think I’m going to need Mr. Palmer's assistance with the vest.”

“Oh course, Ducky.”

Vance had moved closer to get a look at his agent’s condition. Ducky pointed to a spot directing Jimmy’s attention. “Is that…?”

Gibbs moved so that he could peer at his husband’s back. It didn’t take two people to cut material.

“Shit.”


“Quite the opposite, I would say.” Ducky watched as Jimmy deftly slit the coat and shirt in one swift move, baring the vest for inspection.

“Someone talk to me. Gibbs?”

“Just a minute, Tony. We’re getting your vest off.” Jimmy said steadily. “Director, could you bring the chair and hold it? Tony, instead of straddling the chair, I want you to rest your left side against the back. Ready? Okay, Tony, sit down easy. Gibbs, can you help me get the vest?”

“Cut it.” Vance ordered. “It may be needed for evidence anyway.” Jimmy immediately started cutting through the straps.

“The Director just authorized you to cut an expensive vest. I don’t like this… Jethro?”

Jethro took the back section of the vest and came around to kneel in front of Tony. There, close to the center of the back of the vest, was a flattened bullet. Had it not been for the vest it would have
struck too close to the spinal cord for comfort.

“My back?” Tony asked.

“You’ve got a nice bruise forming.”

“Ouch! Palmer!” Tony winced.

“Sorry, Tony. Just diagnosing the injury.”

“It’s a bruise and it’s sore. There I diagnosed it for you.” He grumbled.

Abby, having checked Zuma carefully, had joined the viewing party. “I think someone’s getting grumpy. Here, give him some love, Zuma.” She sat the pup carefully on Tony’s left leg.

“Easy, there.” Zuma whined and tried to give Tony kisses. “Whoa, boy, I know what’s been in your mouth.”

Abby looked a bit sheepish. “I gave him one of his tooth cleaning treats. I kept thinking about that, too.”

“You’re such a good boy. Thank-you!” Tony allowed Zuma full access. “You helped Daddy save me, didn’t you?”

“Mabus was whining about the bite when I got to him. Not a word about the gun shots. Just wanted ice and something for pain.” Palmer said getting Tony to smirk. “Wanted to have the ‘dangerous mutt’ put down.”

“Hear that, Zuma? The bad man called you dangerous.” A frown crossed Tony’s face. “Zuma won’t get in trouble will he? I mean, he wasn’t on a leash and he did bite Mabus. Did he draw blood?”

“None of us were willing to check, Anthony. I’m sure that it will be fine.” Ducky and Gibbs exchanged troubled looks.

“He could file a complaint against Zuma, couldn’t he?” Tony worried. “What if they insist on a rabies watch? Zuma still isn’t over us going to Sicily.”

Jethro shook his head. Tony had a bruise the size of two handprints across his spine and right kidney area. He had a bullet hole where a second shot had nicked the vest and went straight though his side. His husband wasn’t focused on his issues; Tony was worried about Zuma.

“Don’t worry, Tony. If he decides to press charges…”

“Agent Zuma has immunity from prosecution.” While Tony had obsesssed over the pup’s safety, Vance went quietly around the desk reaching to the back of the drawer for a black leather object that he now handed to Tony.

“Huh?”

Vance motioned for him to open it. It was an ID case made for a collar. “Standard issue for the K-9 patrols. As such, actions taken by the canines in protection of their owner or in an attempt to bring down a suspect are immune from prosecution. I’ll be sure to reprimand you for not attaching it securely enough, hence, it falling off in action.”

Tony looked at Vance, eyes full of gratitude. “Director…”
“Consider yourself reprimanded.”

“Yes, sir.” Tony held the open credential out for Zuma to see. The pup wasn’t overly impressed by the metal badge but tried to chew on the leather. “Whoops. Where is your raccoon?”

“Here it is.” Abby handed it to Zuma, who was now content to just lean against Tony and chew on his raccoon.

Tony winced and involuntarily flinched as he felt Palmer starting another stitch. “Hold on, Tony. Ducky, can you apply some more topical numbing solution? He’s still feeling this.”

“Unfortunately, dear Anthony has a high tolerance for most medications.” Ducky swabbed the area again.

“How much sewing are you doing?”

“I put two stitches in the entrance hole and four in the exit. It looks like the bullet emerged almost sideways.”

“It felt like it, too.” Tony admitted. “I hate when they bounce off the vest.”

“All done.” Palmer laid the needle down and began bandaging. “Keep this dry, watch for signs of infection…”

“Hey, not my first bullet wound. Got the protocol down.” Tony said flippantly.

“Listen to Palmer.” Gibbs used his usual swap to focus his agent.

“You’re going to give me a concussion one of these days.”

“Tony, when you get home, I want you to lay on your stomach as much as you can. Ice on and off for 48 hours. There’s already swelling across the spine and kidney area. I’ll be in and out to check on you. There may be some blood in your urine with that impact area so close to your right kidney. If it’s more than a trace or you have pain, call me.” Palmer held out a prescription. “This is for pain meds.”

Tony took it and tried to quickly stuff it in his pants pocket. Jethro plucked it out of his hand. “We’ll fill it on the way home.”

Pulling it out of Gibbs’ grip, Vance handed the Rx off to Helen. “We’ll fill it now.”

Accepting a credit card from her boss, Helen said, “I’ll also pick up some flat ice bags.” She gave Tony a kiss on top of his head and walked out the door.

“It’s my bruise, don’t I have any say?”

“No.” Tony was beginning to hate that multi-stereo chorus the group had going.

“Director?”

“Yes, Agent McGee.”

“Comey is demanding to speak to you.” He turned the monitor to face the group and pointed to the connection that he and Bob Mincef had set up.

“Damn, DiNozzo. You look like an elephant stepped on you.” Fornell said as he entered the room.
“Agent Patterson and I will be having words.” Gibbs glared.

“Fornell, I called you back to my office to explain your actions.”

Fornell looked at his boss. “I was told I was required in Vance’s office for an emergency meeting.”

“What idiot told you that?”

“That would be me.” The vice-president led Hagel into the room. Tony went to try to stand. “At ease, DiNozzo. I decided to watch the operation with Secretary Hagel. We decided to go ahead with the de-briefing here.” Looking around the room the vice-president began pointing. “You, you, you and you stay.” He singled out Vance, McGee, Gibbs, Tony and Ducky. “The rest of you are excused. It’s my turn to call a meeting.”

Section 74

Vance began assembling chairs for the attendees. He considered suggesting that they move down the hall to a briefing room but decided that he didn’t want to draw the VP’s attention.

Fornell went to answer a hesitant knock and accepted the dress shirt Abby handed him. Crossing to Tony’s side, Fornell accepted a trade; Zuma for the shirt. The pup looked at him and gave a soft growl, as if to complain about Fornell taking the liberty of holding him, but a word from Gibbs calmed him.

“Thank goodness for Abby.” Tony was grateful for the shirt. He had dreaded attending this meeting half-naked. He made a mental note to replace the shirt he kept in his desk. Slipping it on, he allowed his husband to help him move to sit in a more comfortable chair before accepting Zuma back from Fornell.

“Sir, I would like to file a formal complaint regarding Director Vance’s actions…” Comey started.

“Comey, I would think very carefully before finishing that sentence. Both Secretary Hagel and I heard McGee and Mincef inform you that the operation was compromised. We heard Director Vance abort the mission. An FBI mission that ended with a DHS agent dead. An FBI mission that ended with Mabus in critical condition. An FBI mission where an NCIS agent ended up shot and severely bruised from the look of things. And finally, an FBI mission where the NCIS agent was brought down by friendly fire.”

“Agent DiNozzo, how badly were you injured by that bullet?”


“A second bullet?” Hagel sought confirmation. Without a word, Gibbs picked up the back of Tony’s vest and handed it to him. After examining it, Hagel passed it to the Vice-President who examined it.

“I trust you realize, Director Comey, that had Agent Gibbs not demanded that Agent DiNozzo wear a Kevlar vest this bullet could have led to the paralysis and possible loss of a valuable NCIS agent.” The vice-president held the vest towards the camera mounted on the monitor. “While I would be concerned about an agent being hit by friendly fire, I am doubly concerned when an agent is hit more than once and with such potential for damage.”

“Agent Fornell, do you have any information regarding the friendly fire?”

“Yes, sir. Agent Patterson indicated that he thought he may have clipped Agent DiNozzo in the
melee. I have put him on desk duty, pending an inquiry.”

“No, he is suspended pending an inquiry.”

“Sir, he is a highly trained, decorated FBI agent…” Comey began to protest.

“Who put two shots into the back of a highly trained, decorated NCIS agent during a joint mission. He is on suspension pending an in-depth investigation. I will expect a report within three days, Agent Fornell.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Agent McGee, I understand that as the operation got underway you and Agent Mincef became aware that it was compromised.”

“Yes, sir. We found a program that was forwarding copies of Agent Fornell’s team mission briefings and updates to an unknown individual.”

“That was when you notified Director Vance?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You and Agent Mincef were able to track the leak?”

“Actually, Agent McGee himself tracked the leak.” Vance interjected.

“Excellent work, Agent McGee.”

“Thank-you, sir.”

“It was at this time, you identified the leak as Special Agent Ron Sacks at DHS. Is that correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

Comey spoke up. “I would like a formal reprimand for Agent Gibbs for jeopardizing the entire op.”

“The op where his agent was unaware of another player entering the game? The op that Vance aborted seconds later? Denied.”

Comey frowned. This did not appear to be going well.

“Director Vance, why did you decide to abort the op?”

“I was aware of the long-term antagonism between Agents Sacks and DiNozzo. I was concerned about Agent Sacks’ presence.”

“Director Comey, you did not feel that aborting the op was warranted?”

“No, sir. There was a mole in the FBI. I felt it was vital to uncover the leak.”

“Which Agent McGee had already done.”

“Agent Mincef was attempting to confirm that information.”

“So you decided that was more important than the safety of Agent DiNozzo.”

“Yes, sir.” Comey shook his head. “No, sir.”
“It’s one or the other, Comey.” The vice-president said dryly. “Once Vance had called the abort, did you advise your agents to move out and take down Mabus?”

“No, sir. We wanted to catch the mole in the act.”

“Director Vance, you elected to back up Agent McGee. Why didn’t you call another team for backup?”

“I did not feel that we had enough time to activate another team. I knew Agent Gibbs was on his way and that he needed backup asap.”

“When you arrived on scene, you chose to call the FBI out of their positions.”

“Yes, sir, I did. By the time Agent McGee and I arrived, the situation had denigrated and guns were drawn. I felt that the presence of additional agents would persuade Mabus to give up.”

The vice-president looked at Comey. “This is why you asked for an official reprimand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Denied.” The vice-president looked at Hagel. “I expect to see commendations on my desk this week for Director Vance and Agent McGee.”

“You’ll have them, sir.”

Comey grit his teeth. Commendations? They were getting commendations for destroying an op. He looked at DiNozzo who was looking proudly at McGee. The pup caught his eye. “Sir, I am unsure if you are aware of Secretary Mabus’ injuries.”

“I have been getting updates every five minutes.” The vice-president held up his phone. “He has been stabilized and is being prepared for surgery. The doctors are very optimistic about his condition. I have dispatched MPs to the hospital and issued a cone of silence.”

“You are probably not aware that Secretary Mabus was attacked by a dangerous animal and bitten. I demand that he be surrendered to the local animal control officer to be put down.”

The vice-president motioned to Gibbs who took Zuma from Tony and handed him to the VP. “This dangerous animal?” He held the pup up who wisely licked and wiggled showing how cute and friendly he was. He noticed the id case Tony discreetly held open. “This is Agent Zuma. He is authorized to protect his handler and other agents.”

“Sir. According to reports, Secretary Mabus suffered severe bruising and a puncture wound from the attack.”

All the men winced. “Be that as it may, he was instrumental in protecting Agent DiNozzo. Request denied. I will hear nothing further about it and neither will animal control, do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Clear your calendar for tomorrow morning. We will review the op at that time.” The vice-president motioned to McGee and he obediently cut the feed. “Alright, Vance, break it out.”

Vance moved to sit behind his desk. In the bottom drawer, he was relieved to find a new bottle of bourbon and clean glasses. He had to remember to thank Helen. He set out glasses, filled them and began handing them out. He paused and looked at Tony. “None for you. You have pain killers on
the way.”

“Which I can’t take until I get home.” Tony protested and was ignored. He made a grab for Gibbs’ glass and Vance watched him wince.

“You will take it when they arrive.” Vance ordered, pretending not to notice Gibbs slipping him a sip.

“Gentlemen, I am concerned about the efficacy of our plan.” The vice-president began. “I did not expect Mabus to choose violence as an option. I am concerned about the press and leaks regarding his condition. The death of Agent Sacks is another unexpected complication. I’m open to your thoughts on how to proceed.”

Hagel took a sip. “It is possible that we can utilize Agent Sacks as part of the explanation. Having a mole in the operation…”

“No.” Everyone turned to look at Tony.

“I beg your pardon, Agent DiNozzo.”

“I said, no. No to utilizing Sacks and no to blaming him for anything. No mention of a mole, nothing.”

“Agent Sacks pulled a weapon and was…”

“My brother.” Tony said flatly.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Agent DiNozzo, but his role…”

“Special Agent Ron Sacks, DHS was on his way to NCIS. By chance he was in the area when a capture went bad and came to the aid of his previous supervisor. Agent Sacks will be buried with full military honors and will receive a commendation.”

“Given your vehement requests for full justice in recent weeks, I am surprised that you are suggesting a cover-up.”

“Sacks was one of Mabus’ victim. Mabus had lied to him and twisted his mind. He admitted using his own son against me, his other son.” Tony cleared his throat. “I will go to hell and back to see Senior and Mabus pay for their crimes, but I will not allow another life to be ruined by Mabus. Sacks’ mother and his siblings do not deserve to have to bear the burden of the mayhem Mabus caused. Agent Sacks was executed in cold blood. I won’t see his family suffer any more.”

“And if it means cutting a deal to keep Mabus from revealing the information?” The vice president prompted.

Tony looked down at Zuma. “Cut a deal. Take the death penalty off the table.”

“I am shocked by your request. It appears to be at odds with the strict moral code you have demanded this administration follow. However, I realize that I have forgotten to take into account one of the tenants of your profession; to protect the innocent.” The vice-president drained his glass. “I will, of course, discuss this further but I believe that the President and Secretaries will honor your request.” He stood and held out his hand to shake Tony’s. “I respect your candor and your moral fortitude. If you ever look for another position, I would be proud to provide you with a recommendation. Hagel, we have a lot to do. Gentlemen, I will be in touch.”
“What on earth?” Daikininz looked at all the baby lambs on the lawn. Each was wearing a little footless onsie. The yard was a mass of pastel colors and a single splash of midnight blue.

“It’s okay, ArianaFelican is running Wolfnjag distraction at the moment.” BunnyBear27 said. “She’s going to text when we have to be back in the room.”

The group of lambs extended their front hoofs and brought their heads down and rear up. “And hold… breath out… breath in…”

“Now head up… slide your balance forward… bottom down… And hold… breath out… breath in… And up. Tap your bell…”

Immediately the sound of tinkling bells drifted across the yard. “Okay, plant your hooves together… and arch… And hold… breath out… breath in…” Obediently the lambs arched their backs. “And relax… and tap your bell…” Geminiangel clapped in delight. “Just wonderful! Okay, now would everyone who is going on the hike please join Merry.” A lamb went to stand next to the idiot and jumped up and down. Gemini then pointed across the yard to Sinatra in his midnight blue onsie. “Everyone interested in the dance therapy join Sinatra. And last but not least, QueenoftheDeere will be doing water aerobics in the pool.”

The lambs milled around for a bit then sorted themselves into three groups. Merry’s group could be heard baaing in cadence as they trotted out. Sinatra’s group was humming to ‘Can you do this?’ and MKM1963 and Psyche53 were helping the lambs out of their onsies and into swim caps. Kuzco trotted up to GeminiAngel leading a small group.

“Aren’t you so sweet? I’m sure DejaSue will appreciate your help. I’m so proud of you for volunteering. Give her our best, please.” The small group trotted to a waiting van.

“Geminiangel, what were you doing?”

“Downward dog.”

“But why?”

“It’s one of the basic Yoga poses.”

“Yoga?” Devon99 said. “Do lambs do yoga?”

“Of course. See I was reading this article…” Geminiangel rambled.

“Who left the idiot get hold of an article?” Bobdog54 asked.

“Oh, I didn’t hold it. Aussiefan70 held it for me.” Geminiangel said innocently. JulieMH took off to find Aussiefan70 before Wolfnjag found out.

“Why are the lambs doing yoga?”
“Don’t you want them to be healthy?”

“Of course,” Jane_x80 said. “But their babies, why aren’t they in the nursery?”

“Well, the article was talking about the importance of mommy and me classes and starting children exercising when they were young building healthy habits.”

Jane_x80 shrugged her shoulders. “Next.”

Chrissie smiled at the idiot. “Didn’t we agree that the lambs should stay in the nursery so Wolfnjag didn’t see them?”

“Yes.”

“So why are they out?”

“Well, Aussiefan70, Fairhaven74 and QueenBee4ever polled them to see what type of exercise sounded good. Merry wanted to take up running and there really isn’t room in the nursery.”

“That’s…” Nevarstar looked at the others. “That’s reasonable. There really isn’t a lot of room.”

Royalelephant pushed her way forward. “I assume then that some of the them wanted to do dancing and the others water aerobics.”

“Yes.” Geminiangel smiled.

ShadowWolfsDen took over. “What about Wolfnjag finding them?”

“ArianaFeileacan took her to the plant nursery to replace some of the plants that Nanny and Billy nibbled on. She’s going to text on the way home so we have time to get the workers out.”

“What workers?”

“The ones in the nursery.”

Buns1974 flipped 6of7 for the next turn, whooping when it came up heads. “Why are there workers in the nursery?”

“It wouldn’t do any good if they were out here.”

6of7 smiled kindly and focused on Wolfnjag’s advice. When confronted with the idiot speak softly, don’t make any sudden moves and ask specific questions. “Geminiangel, I know that the workers are in the nursery what are they doing?”

“Working.”

“Not specific enough, dear.” Chrissie0770 spoke up. “Geminiangel, please tell me what the workers are working on in the nursery.”

“They’re putting in more electric for the bottle warmers and the Xbox and TVs and curling irons.”

“Are they working on anything else in the nursery?” 6of7 asked.
“They’re putting up sound proofing so Wolfnjag can’t hear them.”

“Are they doing any other work in the nursery?” Fan asked. “Geminiangel?”

“Quick, we’re losing her.” Rosiesmomma cried. “If she gets distracted, we’ll never get her focused again.”

“Look.” Geminiangel pointed behind them.

“At what?” They chorused turning back again.

LadyDrak1075 sighed. “Too late.” She pointed where the idiot was surrounded by lambs.

“What is she doing?” Patricia asked.

“It looks like the Hokey Pokey.” Susanmp said.

Section 75

“How is he?” Jackson asked quietly.

“Still in pain.” Jethro complained. “He won’t admit it, but I can see it in his eyes.”

“Didn’t you give him another pill with his Shepherd’s pie?”

“They really don’t work for him.”

“Where’s Zuma?”

“Tony’s laying down on his side and Zuma’s cuddled up to him. They’re watching Turner and Hooch, together.”

“Thank the lord for that pup.” Jackson said somberly.

“You should have seen him, dad. He made a lunge and just nailed Mabus. Paramedics said he whined more about that than the bullet holes.” Gibbs smirked, then he too, became serious. “Thanks, dad, for buying him. Without him, I don’t know how the day would have turned out.” He laughed. “We’re going to need more treats. Every time Zuma moves Tony offers him a treat.”

“I’ll buy him a truckload.” Jackson vowed.

“I promised him the biggest New York strip steak I can find, when he gets old enough.” Jethro admitted.

From the living room, they could hear Tony laugh and Zuma barked back. “I was sure that second pill would knock Tony out.”

“I’m certain Jimmy will bring something with him.” Jethro said.

“I can’t believe how close I came to losing both of you.” Jackson poured a cup of hot black coffee for himself and Gibbs.
“I underestimated Mabus. I knew he felt backed into a corner but I didn’t think he would have the
guts to try something like this.” Jethro shook his head. “I almost lost him, dad. I almost lost Tony. I
just got him in my life and almost…”

“Not going anywhere.”

Jethro jumped up to help his husband over to sit at the table. “You’re supposed to be resting.”

“Movie was over.” Tony shrugged. “I think something’s wrong with Zuma.”

“Other than stuffing him full of treats?” Jethro joked.

“I was playing with his paw and he whimpered.” Tony ignored the treat comment. “I think they look
a bit pink.”

Jackson held his arms out. “Let me see. Hey, Zuma. I am so proud of you. Let me see your paws,
fella.” Jackson cuddled him in one arm and used his other hand to hold his front right paw steady.
“They are a bit pink.”

Jethro rounded the table and knelt beside his dad. Gently, he checked each paw. They were a bit
irritated.

“Is he going to be okay? He didn’t get hurt, did he?”

“He’s going to be okay, Tony.” Jackson comforted him.

“What’s wrong then?”

“Zuma isn’t used to walking on concrete. I think all that running and climbing on steps made his
paws a bit sore.”

“What should we do?”

“I have some numbing cream I use on my knee sometimes.” Jackson offered.

“I’m afraid that he might be scared or injure himself if it was numb.” Jethro paused to think. “Hold
on, I think McGee had that issue with Jethro.” He pulled out his cell and handed it to Tony.

“Mc Gee.”

“Tony, how are you feeling?”

“I’m fine, but Zuma isn’t.”

“What’s wrong?”

“His paws are irritated from running and climbing.”

“Slightly pink and rough.”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll be right over.” McGee hung up.

“Uncle Tim is coming.” Tony let Jethro place the pup carefully in his arms and crooned. “He’s going
to fix you right up.”
“Tony, have you been putting the ice on? This swelling hasn’t gone down.”

Jethro spoke up, “Off twenty, on twenty. I’ve been using those flat pads Helen bought.” Helen had purchased reusable, cold therapy packs that were rectangular and some eight inch elastic wraps to hold them in place. They were for when Tony wanted or needed to sit, like on the trip home.

“Is it a problem?” Tony asked.

“I’m concerned with the proximity to your kidney.” Jimmy said touching the area lightly. “I wish you had let me take an x-ray beforehand leaving NCIS.”

“If you keep taking x-rays, I’m going to glow in the dark.” Tony grumbled.

“Make it easier for Leroy to find you.” Jackson smirked.

“Dad!”

“Hello.”

“In the kitchen, McGee.” Jethro hollered.

“Seems to be the hub of the home.” McGee smiled. “Jeez, Tony,” he whistled through his teeth. “That looks awful.”

“I’ve had worse.” Tony passed it off. “It’s Zuma I’m worried about.”

“What’s wrong with Zuma?” Jimmy asked, concerned.

Tony held up one of Zuma’s little paws so that they could see the slight irritation. “He hurt himself coming to save me.”

Jethro’s hand itched. “Tony, it’s not your fault. We didn’t know that he was going to sneak away. I’m sure McGee can fix him.”

McGee pulled a tube of salve and some adhesive bandage. It was bright yellow with red hearts. “Sorry, Zuma, that and pink were all they had to choose from. They were out of the blue I used on Jethro.”

Zuma looked at the bandage and then at Jethro. “Not that Jethro.” Tony laughed. “Uncle McGee has a dog named Jethro.”

McGee pulled a chair up close and began to work on his paws. “My Jethro is a German Shepherd. One of these days I’ll bring him to play with you.” After rubbing one paw, McGee opened the bandage. Zuma sneezed and tried to back away. “It’s okay, Zuma, it’s just so that the salve doesn’t come off or get licked off.” McGee tried to take Zuma’s paw but the pup flailed and whined.

“Hold on, McGee. If he doesn’t like it, he’ll just chew it off. One of Ducky’s corgis did after surgery. I think I have something that might work out in the car.”

“Thanks, Jimmy.” Tony smiled at him gratefully.

“In the meantime, I’ll put salve on his other paws.”

When McGee took hold of another paw, Zuma brought the first one up and sniffed it. The pup
winkled his nose.

“Let’s see what’s in here.” Jimmy returned with a diaper bag. “I always keep a diaper bag in the car so I can pick up Victoria, if I need to. Here we go.” He held up some socks.

“Baby socks?” McGee looked confused.

“Well, his paws are about the same size. Also, they smell like Victoria, who Zuma knows.”

“Won’t he just pull them off?” Tony asked.

“Worth a try.” McGee said, taking the two pairs of socks from Jimmy. He held them out for the pup to sniff before taking the first pair and working a sock onto his front right paw. Zuma pulled it back when McGee reached for his other front paw. The puppy smelled the sock and nudged it with his nose.

“Leave it on, Zuma. It will make your paws feel better.” Tony took another paw in his hand and Zuma gave a huff, letting Uncle McGee put socks on his back paws.

“At least he’s not raising a fuss.” Jethro watched the pup, who was watching McGee.

“Is that the only ill affect you’ve seen?” Jimmy asked.

“He seems okay; just whimpered when I touched his paw.”

“May I?” Jimmy held his hands out and Tony carefully handed him the puppy. “Hey, Zuma, will you let me look at you for a minute?” Jimmy held him gently and carefully felt along the muscles in his legs. He listened to his heart. As he checked the puppy, the front door crashed.

“Where’s Auntie Abby’s angel?” Abby burst into the kitchen. “McGee said he was hurt.”

Zuma flinched and whined in Jimmy’s arms. “Hey, Abby. Could you say that again, at the same sound level?”

“What? Where’s Auntie Abby’s angel?”

Jimmy was examining Zuma’s ear carefully. “Now, could you say it lower?” He kept up his examination.

“Is something wrong, Palmer?” Jethro asked.

“Not really.” He looked apologetically at Abby. “I think the reason that Zuma sometimes reacts negatively is his ears. I think that when you talk at the louder, higher tone that it may be hurting his ear drums.”

“I’m hurting him?” Abby’s eyes filled with tears.

Jimmy winced. “Not intentionally. Just keep in mind that he’s a baby still. Try using the same voice you use with Victoria, until he’s a bit older.”

“I will. I promise.” Abby looked mournfully at the puppy.

Picking up on the look in Tony’s eyes, Jimmy carried the puppy around and placed him in Abby’s arms. “He loves his Auntie Abby. Here, why don’t you hold him while I finish examining Tony?”

Section 76
Tony heard the phone and tried to roll over to answer it. He moaned in pain and Jethro carefully moved him back on his side and said, “I’ll get it.”

Zuma gave a half-hearted snarl and Tony stroked him gently. He looked at the clock, it was only shortly after two am. “It’s okay. Go back to sleep.”

“Yes, sir. He’s very stiff and in pain. Can it wait until morning? I understand, sir. As soon as we can.” Jethro hung the phone up and cursed quietly.

“What’s wrong?”

Jethro turned on the bedside light. “Mabus took a turn for the worse. That was Secretary Hagel. You are Mabus’ next of kin and he has asked you to come to the hospital to speak with the doctors.”

“Why?”

“They need authorization for treatment as Mabus is unable to give it.”

“Shit.” Tony groaned as he tried to sit up.

“Let me help you.” Jethro carefully took ahold of Tony under his arms, helped him ease into a sitting position then turned him to rest on the side of the bed. “How’s your back feeling?”

“It’s there.” Tony went to stand. “Need to hit the head.”

Wordlessly, Jethro helped him stand and then let his husband go take care of business. When Tony returned, Jethro had an outfit waiting. “More blood?”

“Yeah.”

“Heavier?”

“About the same.”

“While we're at the hospital, we’ll have an x-ray done.” Jethro knelt, helping his husband step into a pair of khakis. “Button or pullover?”

“Polo shirt.” Tony knew it would be softer on his bruise.

“Wrap or pack?” Jethro smirked as he helped Tony onto a chair and assisted him into his socks and shoes. Fornell had stopped by earlier to apologize for his agent and to see how Tony was. Somewhere he had found a navy baby carrier and managed to have it embroidered with the words ‘Agent Zuma’ in white. It matched their caps perfectly. Fornell had joked that he wanted Zuma’s mommy to be able to carry him without a strain and the carrier would help hold the ice in place.

“Can we take Zuma with us?” Tony asked, a bit forlorn.

“Of course.” Although Jethro had initially been joking when he mentioned it, let some hospital bureaucrat try to stop them.

“What do you think, Zuma? Will you go with us?” As Tony spoke, Zuma opened a sleepy eye and gave a quiet bark.

“It’s settled, then.” While Tony was speaking, Jethro had pulled on his clothes with the ease of years of nighttime calls. Scooping up the pup, Jethro returned to help Tony up.
“Should we wake Jackson?” Tony asked as they made for the stairs.

“I’m up. Everything, ok?”

“We’ve been asked to come to the hospital by Secretary Hagel. It appears Mabus has taken a turn for the worst.”

“Need me to puppy-sit?”

“We’re going to take him along. Go on back to sleep, Dad. We’ll be back as soon as we can.”

“You call if you need me.”

“Thanks, Jackson.”

“Take care, son.” Jackson hugged Tony gently. “You need me, I'll come.”

“Tony.”

“Brad, are you one of Mabus’ doctors?”

“No, but you are my star patient. Anytime your name comes up, they call me.” Brad looked at the coat pulled snugly across Tony’s chest. “Few too many donuts?”

“Ha-ha.” Tony joked back. “I brought another member of my team.” He pulled the zip down a bit so the doctor could read ‘Agent Zuma’.

“I’m assuming that is not a baby.” Pitt stepped closer to peer down into the carrier. “You brought a puppy into the hospital?”

“Jethro and I brought a third agent who was instrumental in the take down of an armed criminal.”

“That’s the ‘vicious’ dog that bit his…”

“Not very vicious.” Jethro said joining them. He had run interference when a security officer had attempted to examine Tony’s bulge.

“Good to see you again, Agent Gibbs.”

“Just Gibbs, Dr. Pitt.”

“Brad, please.” The doctor smiled. “Congratulations on your marriage. I know you'll be very happy.”

Jethro cocked his eyebrow. “You don’t look very surprised.”

Brad laughed. “When a man orders a patient not to die? And the patient lives? That’s more than boss and subordinate.”

“What’s up with Mabus?” Tony asked.

Brad grew somber. “His doctor is waiting to talk to you.”

“We trust you.” Jethro spoke up.
Brad led them towards a cluster of chairs. He watched as Jethro helped Tony sit. “What’s wrong, Tony?”

“Just copped a round to my vest.”

“And a through and through that took stitches.” Tony threw Jethro a glare, but his husband continued, “The round hit between his spine and right kidney. Dr. Palmer treated him but he’s concerned about the swelling.”

“Passing blood?”

“Some.”

“Yes.”

Given the conflicting answers, Brad interpreted the responses. “Since Tony is admitting to something, I would assume that Jethro’s answer is more accurate?” He noticed Jethro’s quick nod. “We’ll do an x-ray just be sure there isn’t something more going on.”

“We’re here for Mabus.” Tony said grumpily. “You know, so urgent it had to be the middle of the night.”

“Sorry. Was worried about my most famous patient.” Brad joked before becoming serious. “Mabus was hit by three rounds. One here in his upper arm,” he pointed the position on his own body. “This was more of a deep graze, easily treated. The one that struck him in the upper chest here,” he pointed to just below his collarbone, “Can be removed with little trouble. It’s the third bullet that caused the most concern. That bullet ricocheted off a rib. It then traveled downwards, causing damage to his liver and intestines. Once he was stabilized, the team did abdominal surgery to try to repair the damage and remove that round.”

“Earlier this evening, Mabus’ vitals began to crash. He was rushed back into surgery. There was a chip off a rib that nicked the abdominal aorta up near where the rib deflected the bullet. This suddenly became a severe hemorrhage. The loss of blood caused a stroke on the operating table. It was here in the frontal lobe. The team immediately began treatment. In recovery he had another stroke, a larger one again, in the frontal lobe. Those strokes were contained rather quickly.” Brad looked from Jethro to Tony to be sure they were following his explanation.

“What was unexpected was a third stroke. This one was in the brain stem. These are notoriously hard to diagnose, particularly in a comatose patient. Luckily for Secretary Mabus, the neurologist, Adam Olsen, was in town to give a seminar. He diagnosed the condition about two hours ago. The concern is that a brain stem stroke can lead to numerous conditions. These can include: lack of coordination, weakness or loss of mobility on one side of the body, blurred/disturbed vision, inability to speak/understand speech properly, locked-in syndrome and/or a coma.”

Tony sucked in a deep breath. He hadn’t expected the situation to be that critical. “Why call me?”

“Dr. Olsen wants to perform surgery. He feels that Secretary Mabus’ best chance at recovery is to attempt to repair the artery. The resident neurologist, Dr. Asal Pianaran, believes that we should wait and see.”

“And you?” Jethro asked.

“Dr. Olsen is concerned that not operating may lead to additional strokes or permanent brain damage. Given the severity of the last stroke, I share that concern. That is not to say the surgery is not without significant risks. Mabus is currently unresponsive and unable to authorize treatment. As his next of
kin, Dr. Olsen wants you to sign for surgery.”

Section 77

Brad leads Tony and Gibbs past the MPs and into the private room across from the CCU nurses station. “Dr. Olsen and Dr. Pianaran, this is Agent Anthony DiNozzo, Secretary Mabus’ son.”

“Agent DiNozzo, I’m…”

“Finally. Did you not understand how critical the situation is?”

Tony and Jethro looked from the first to the second speaker. After sharing a look, Jethro turned to the second doctor, pegging the first for the typical suck-up. “I’m not sure that you are aware that Agent DiNozzo was also injured this afternoon.”

“The patient’s…”

“Mabus.” Tony interrupted the doctor again. “The patient’s name is Jarvis Mabus.”

“As I was saying surgery…”

“Is ill-advised in this situation.” The first doctor said definitively.

Noticing the pain lines on Tony’s face, Jethro turned to Brad. “He needs to sit.”

“Of course.”

Stepping in front of Tony, Jethro unzipped his coat. “Want this off?” Jethro tapped a strap on the carrier.

“Please.” Tony locked his hands under the carrier while Jethro unfastened it, removing it and ice pack. Jethro laid the sleeping pup next to Mabus on the bed. Brad came in with a chair and helped Jethro get Tony seated.

“If you are comfortable, could we review the patient’s condition?”

“As I am his doctor, I will be happy to explain your father’s condition.” The first doctor interjected.

“Look, I took two rounds today. I’m tired, cranky and in pain. I’m not interested whatever pissing contest going on between you two. Now, although biologically I am his son, I am not close to Mabus so you don’t need to refer to him as my father. As to briefing me, Dr. Pitt has already explained the situation.”

Having lost his personal bed warmer, Zuma poked his head out of his carrier, yawning. His nose twitched at all the smells. After seeing Tony sitting beside the bed, the pup looked around. Seeing the man in the bed Zuma slowly wiggled closer till he could rest his head on a warm hand and went back to sleep.

“Dr. Pitt is not a neurologist or your father’s attending physician. He had no right to discuss this case with you. I will be demanding that you be censured.” The first surgeon was incensed. “Get that filthy animal off the bed now.” He screamed.

“Yeah, no.” Tony said facetiously. “Agent Zuma stays. You however... Jethro.”

Jethro stepped around the bed and took the man’s arm. “Dr. Pianaran, Agent DiNozzo was targeted in the attack today. Agent Zuma is part of his protection detail.” Jethro could feel his husband
“You are no longer needed.” Jethro pushed the doctor forcibly from the room, to the amusement of the MPs. “Gentlemen, Dr. Pianaran is no longer authorized to enter this room.” He turned around and shut the door in the doctor’s face.

The other neurologist clapped. “Nice show. Why him and not me?”

“You’re abrupt and rude with tunnel vision.” Tony said flippantly. “I’m used to that. I married him.” Tony could almost feel Jethro’s hand itching. “That being said, Brad says you’re one of the best.”

“Any questions, Dr. Pitt couldn’t answer?”

Tony shook his head. “From my understanding this surgery, in his condition, is extremely dangerous. However,” he continued before the doctor could interrupt. “Brad clearly explained the potential for additional complications if we do nothing.”

“I have the films if you’d like to see them.”

“Not necessary.” Jethro placed his hand on his spouse's shoulder and Tony continued, grateful for the support. “If I can be blunt, too… My understanding is if we do nothing, chances are he will probably die or be in a coma, with little hope. If we do surgery, there is a low probability of him coming through it. If he does live through the surgery, his odds improve. Though he may still die, be brain dead or comatose for the rest of his life. How close am I?”

“Right on the button. The quicker we operate, the better his chances.”

“How come you didn’t object to the pup on the bed?”

The surgeon pointed to the monitors. “When the pup laid his head on the Mabus’ hand, there was a change in his vitals. Heart rate evened a bit.”

“If he were awake, he wouldn’t be that comforted.” Tony heard Brad cover a laugh. “Does he know we are here? Can he hear us?”

“Easiest answer. I don’t know.”

Brad spoke up. “Tony, there are conflicting theories. Mabus is in a coma. Yet, he responded to Zuma’s presence. Does he know what we are discussing? It’s hard to say. Can he respond to us? He hasn’t to this point. He isn’t opening his eyes or moving his fingers.”

Tony looked at Jethro and then the neurologist. “I need a few minutes.”

“I’ll go put an OR on standby, just in case.”

“Tony, I’ll be…”

“Stay, Jethro. You, too, Brad.”

“I’ll just let myself out.” The neurologist said, flippantly, as he exited the room.

Tony held his hand up by his side for Jethro to take. “Mabus, I don’t know if you can hear me or if you understand what the doctors have been saying. I’m sure if you were conscious that I’m the last person you would want to make this decision. Part of me just wants to walk out that door and forget I was here, but I can’t. So, here we are.”

Zuma lifted his head as Tony stoked his back. “It’s okay.” He soothed the pup. “Just this afternoon he took a bite of you but now, lying here, he’s comforting you. Strange how things work out, huh?
So what do we do?"

Tony took a deep breath. “What would you want? Crap. If it were me, I’d fight with everything to live. To live for Jethro, for my family. What do you have to live for? A trial? Prison? I have to make the decision because I’m your son. You killed the son who looked up to you today. The son who actually wanted to be your son.”

Zuma whined softly as Tony’s hand stilled. He gave a sad smile and started scratching the pup’s ears. He looked at the small pup wearing the frilly white baby socks on his poor paws. “If this was a movie, about now, you’d squeeze my hand or move a finger; even open an eye. You’re not going to, though, are you? This is all my responsibility to decide.”

“Brad?”

“Yes, Tony?”

“Get me the form, I’ll sign it. If there is a chance than I have to give it to him.”

Brad picked up a chart from the end of Mabus’ bed and pointed to the marked areas. “I’ll let Olsen know.” He exited in search of the neurologist.

“It’s up to you now, Mabus. May God have mercy on you.” Tony started to stand. “I’m done here.”

Jethro helped Tony up, who took the empty carrier, then picked up Zuma. Just outside they ran into Brad. “Ready for that x-ray?”

“I don’t think…”

“Yes.” Jethro declared.

Brad smirked and gestured to the nurse who was approaching with a wheelchair. “Great. Just happen to have transport right here. I think this guy should wait here.” Brad held his hand for Zuma to sniff. “I’ll bring him right back.”

Gibbs pulled out his phone and texted. “Upstairs now.” He sat in the small waiting area and put on the carrier on his lap persuading Zuma to crawl in. “Tony will be right back. Till then, we’ll wait here.”

The ding of the elevator caught his attention. “Here, one of these is for you.” Hagel sat down and sighed. “Where’s DiNozzo?”

“X-ray.”

“Mabus?”

Gibbs took the coffee. “Being prepped for surgery.”

“How did you know I was here?”

“On the phone you said get down here. Beyond that, Mabus hasn’t had next of kin for years, someone had to be his proxy. I’m DiNozzo’s, so it made sense. Why the call, Hagel? You could have signed for him, couldn’t you?”

“I could have.” Hagel took a long sip of coffee. “I thought I knew him. I’ve worked with him for years. Then today, I realized I didn’t know him at all. He shot his son in cold blood. Schemed to kill another.”
“No reason to drag Tony down here.” Gibbs shot back.

“Maybe I’m old fashioned. I thought DiNozzo had the right to decide. He is Mabus’ son. I know DiNozzo will probably never forgive him, but I thought DiNozzo deserved closure.”

“Next time you pull something like this, I will kick your ass.”

Hagel ignored the disrespect. “Next time, I may let you.”

“You the one who called Pitt in?”

“Knew he had treated DiNozzo for the plague and that Palmer didn’t like the looks of the injury. Thought we could kill two birds with one stone.”

“Thanks.” Gibbs took a long drink. “When Pitt’s done with Tony, we’re leaving.”

“I’ll stick around.”
“She charged 613 silk ties, 613 boxes and 58 rolls of paper to the house expenses account.” Woflnjag said.

“Why 613?” Fairhaven74 wondered.

“58 rolls of paper? Doesn’t she write on a computer?” Bridgette12 asked.

Wolfnjag snarled. “Who cares? The idiot charged them to the expense account!”

“How did the idiot get a hold of the charge card?” ArianaFeilacan asked. “I thought we locked it up after she bought enough soda to fill the pool.”

“We did.” BunnyBear27 confirmed.

“So who gave it to her?” LAG0802 asked. The cabal exchanged looks of innocence.

“I have another question.” ArianaFeilacan said. “Where is the idiot?” Again the cabal exchanged looks of innocence. They had gotten very good at fake innocence.

Jane_x80 raced in with Jillebeth. “They’re gone.”

“Who’s gone?” Wolfnjag asked.

“Uh… the… uh… the kids are gone.” Jillebeth said. “It was our turn to visit and they are gone.” She emphasized ‘our turn’ and nudged ArianaFeilacan.

“All of them?” ArianaFeilacan squeaked.

“There’s all of two of them.” Wolfnjag snapped. “I think 613 ties is more important.”

“Absolutely, Wolfnjag. I quite agree.” Psyche53 consoled her. “Why don’t you take a nice nap and we will hunt the idiot down? Here, Fan made you a nice Irish coffee. Just go into your room and relax. Fan will stay with you.” Fan nodded understanding that Wolfnjag had to be side-tracked.

“Let’s start outside.” LAG0802 smiled reassuringly at Wolfnjag as Fan lead her away. Once outside, Jillebeth burst out. “We went to the nursery to take our turn and the lambs are gone.”

“All of them?”

“Yep. And the kids. And Dakota. And Coors. And Isabella, Silver Bullet and Candy. And Spot. They are all gone.” Jane_x80 confirmed.

“Don’t panic.” Jesco0307 said. “We’ll find them. How are we going to find them?”

“Alright, first thing’s first. Who has the master code this week?” LadyDrak1075 asked.

“I do.” Chrissie0770 said.

“Issue an id10t alarm.” Psyche53 said.

“An id10t?” Susanmp asked. “Isn’t that a bit extreme?”

“The idiot is out there with all the baby lambs and all the other animals on her own. I think that warrants a full-out alert.”

Chrissie0770 dutifully entered the code. In minutes, cabal members were arriving on the run.

Daikininz, nevarstar, annette_ella, otrame, flowerpotgirl, Callasandra, royalelephant and Trout1986 were quickly briefed by Fairhaven74, Jesco0307, ArianaFeilacan, and LAG0802. “Alright, attention please,” ArianaFeilacan had won the fight over the bullhorn. “Cabal, we have a serious issue. The idiot has gone missing, again. Also, missing are all the pets including the… how many baby lambs are we up to?” Daikininz quickly checked her records. “the 27 baby lambs. This is a serious situation as she has somehow gotten ahold of the charge card.” There was a communal groan. “It is quite possible that she has taken them shopping or to an amusement park or Amelitta only knows. For this reason, we are going with a level two search and recovery scenario.”

“If this is only a level 2, what would be a level 1?” Deb3v asked. Around her, the
members were crossing themselves and muttering words of protection. “You really don’t want to know.” Trout1986 said. “You REALLY don’t want to know.”

“Alright, line up and see royal elephant and otrame for your hunting group. Then see annette_ella and Callasandra for your search area.” ArianaFeilacan reluctantly put down the bullhorn. Fairhaven74, Jesco0307, bobdog54 and Nevarstar were rapidly placing calls providing security numbers as required. “Are they almost done?”

“Just about. All airports, bus terminals and train stations are on alert. They’ve notified the FBI, CIA, DHS and all the agencies on the control list.” Trout1986 said.

“Are any cabal members missing?”

“Just two. QueeneoftheDeer and Aussiefan70.” ArianaFeilacan face palmed. “How did I know?”

Daikininz walked up. “The media group is scanning social media and news reports. The only strange thing they’ve come up with so far is an online ad for owls.”

“Owls?”


“Daikininz…” Rosiesmomma stepped up to her. “We also found this.” Daikininz looked at the paper. “No….”

“What’s wrong?” Trout86 asked.

“The local sanctuary is reporting the disappearance of 39 owls.” Rosiesmomma said.

“I’ve got another report,” buns1974 hurried up. “The owl house at the local zoo is empty. They are missing 52 owls.”

ArianaFeilacan raised the bullhorn. “Alright, Cabal, listen up. We have a possible lead. There is an ad for owls to report to a

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 78

It had been a good plan, for all the good it did. Jethro was beginning to get worried when he was summoned to a treatment room by a nurse. He found Tony laying on a bed waiting for Brad.

“Everything okay?”

“I want to go home.” Tony had dark circles under his eyes and Jethro could see he was in a lot of pain. “I’ve been poked, prodded, stood up, strapped down and not in a fun way.”

“Good, there you are, Gibbs.” Brad entered the room cheerfully. “So, Tony, I just looked over your test with the staff nephrologist and orthopedist.”

“What’s wrong?” Jethro asked as his gut twisted. He took Tony’s hand and felt his husband squeeze it tight.

“When I looked at the x-ray, I found the L-3 and L-4 vertebrae were chipped by the impact of the bullet hitting the vest. That’s why I sent you for an MRI of the spinal column, Tony. I wanted to be sure there was not any additional injuries to your vertebra or the spinal column itself. Thankfully, there doesn’t appear to be any compression fractures or other damage which is good. Unfortunately, the chips were in the area of your right kidney, hence the CT of the abdomen. One of the chips caused a laceration of the kidney and is causing internal bleeding. The kidney is also bruised.”
“English, please?” Tony pleaded.

“At this time, the three of us are in agreement that surgery is not required.” Brad held up his hand to stop Tony from speaking. “However, the situation could change. Now, ideally I would stick you to that bed for a couple days, but I know you. I will release you but…you will follow some instructions.”

“One. You are not permitted to do any type of strenuous activity. Grab a stack of DVDs and do a moviethon on the couch. Two. You will monitor the blood in your urine. If it increases, you are back here immediately. Understood? Three. I am giving you a couple of prescriptions and you will take them, on schedule. Four. If you have any increase in pain, stabbing or otherwise, or any numbness in your extremities, you call me immediately.”

“How serious is this, Brad?”

“Gibbs, at this time, I’m not overly concerned but we are dealing with bone chips. They are relatively small but it does weaken the individual vertebrae. They also could move. I know how much Tony hates coming to the hospital but I would like to have an x-ray every other day to check for movement. I would be okay if Ducky or Dr. Palmer took them. Otherwise, call me and I’ll leave a standing order.”

Tony looked even paler. “I’m not going to have to ride a desk, am I?”

“You will until that kidney heals. The chips may settle and not move. If they do move, we could do arthroscopic surgery and remove them. You will have some therapy, down the road. A lot depends on how well you listen to my instructions. This is your med schedule and a review of the instructions, what to look for and your prescriptions.”

“Is there anything for pain?”

“Didn’t Dr. Palmer prescribe something?”

Jethro handed him the bottle that was in his shirt pocket. “He’s had these but they really aren’t doing much.”

“Forgot you are so immune to pain meds.” Brad pulled out a pad and wrote a different script. “These should help. If not, we may need to try shots or intravenous. I’m sure your friends would be willing to help do that for him at home. If you need it, Tony, call me. I’ve got to run; I’ve got a meeting in ten minutes.”

“Thanks, Brad.” The two men chorused.

“Let’s get out of here.” Tony said, “I just want to go home.”

Jethro laid a sleeping Zuma down next to Tony and set about getting his husband ready to go home.

In deference to Tony’s back, Gibbs insisted on carrying Zuma. Not even puppy eyes could make him put the carrier on, to Tony’s disappointment. The puppy eyes also didn’t work on the nurse with the wheelchair who was waiting outside the door. At least once Tony was in the wheelchair, he was permitted to hold Zuma.

The puppy sat up in his carrier to look around. Now that Zuma was awake, he was anxious to get outside and empty his little bladder. Luckily for the pup, the nurse was experienced with puppies and produced a disposable pad to put in his carrier on Tony’s lap in case of an accident.
As the nurse wheeled him down the corridor, Tony noticed Hagel in a waiting room. “Isn’t that Secretary Hagel?” He asked Jethro.

“He’s waiting for the surgery to end.”

“I got the impression from Brad that the surgery wouldn’t take that long.”

Jethro’s gut clenched. “I’m sure he’ll let us know.”

“That’s Dr. Olson.” Tony motioned for the nurse to stop. ‘You are going to die and I will be there.’ He heard his own words. Tony paid no attention to Hagel’s approach.

“Agent DiNozzo.”

Tony swallowed hard. ‘You are going to die and I will be there.’ “He didn’t make it.” Tony said flatly.

“We removed the clot and I was in the process of suturing the artery when he suffered a massive heart attack.” Olson yanked off the surgical hat. “The cardiac team responded immediately but the damage was just too great. Secretary Mabus couldn’t be resuscitated.”

“You are going to die and I will be there.” Tony murmured.

“What?”

“That’s what I told him today. That he was going to die and that I would be there.”

“You know this isn’t your fault.” Hagel said standing next to him. “You made the right call. Jarvis would have risked everything for a chance to live.”

“Agent DiNozzo, once we opened the area, we were able to determine that the brain stem stroke was more severe than we realized. It is very likely that Secretary Mabus would have never recovered consciousness. He would have been comatose for the rest of his life.”

“I promised him that I would see justice for Sacks.”

“He is facing God’s judgment now.” Hagel replied. “Do you want to make arrangements?”

“I want Mabus’ body sent to Ducky.” Jethro spoke up. “Tony isn’t in any condition right now to make decisions. The doctor found the bullet that impacted the vest chipped two of his vertebrae and bruised his kidney. He also has a laceration on his right kidney from one of the chips. I’m taking him home now; we’ll discuss arrangements later.”

“Of course.” Hagel readily agreed. “I will take care of the paperwork for transferring Mabus to Dr. Mallard. I’m so sorry that you were injured so badly, Agent DiNozzo. Please do listen to the doctors’ orders. I’d hate to lose such a fine agent.”

Section 79

Palmer knocked softly but wasn’t surprised that Jethro answered almost instantly. “Morning.”

“Come on in, Jimmy. Wasn’t expecting you so early.”

“I got the call from Hagel that Mabus was going to be Ducky’s guest. He told me what happened. I was worried about Tony.”
“He finally drifted off about ten minutes ago. Brad upped his pain meds.”

“He saw Dr. Pitt? That’s good.” Jimmy smiled. “I didn’t like the look of the area.”

“You’ve got good instincts.” Jethro led Jimmy into the kitchen and offered him coffee. “The bullet impact did cause some internal damage.”

“How bad?”

“Two chips from Tony’s vertebrae. His right kidney was bruised and has a small laceration from one of the chips.”

Jimmy winced. “I knew I should have made him let me give him an x-ray.”

“Not your fault.” Jethro said. “I know how he downplays his injuries. I could have ordered him to submit. At least we know what we’re dealing with.”

“What’s Dr. Pitt recommending?”

“He gave Tony some anti-inflammatories, new pain meds and wants him to have an x-ray every other day to check for movement of the chip.”

“I know where I can borrow a portable x-ray machine.”

“Borrow?”

“One of my classmates just upgraded their portable. He let several of us know, in the event we were interested in purchasing it.”

“Doesn’t NCIS have one?”

“Not a portable.” Jimmy slipped in to a professional mode. “We have an excellent system in the morgue. I know Dr. Mallard has budgeted for one in a few years. That one would be used at the sites before moving the victims but it keeps getting crossed out.”

“How much does your friend want for the system?”

“Well it’s an analog. He had purchased it for seventy-five thousand but is willing to let it go for thirty which is still less than a new digital.”

“Call him and tell him you’ll take it.” Jethro took a long drink of coffee.

“What?”

“Call him and tell him you’ll take it unless you would rather have a digital.” Jethro said. “Look, Tony and I don’t plan to flaunt it, but we can afford to buy it.”

“Would it be only for NCIS use?” Jimmy asked tentatively.

Jethro eyed him closely but took another drink before speaking. “You have another use for it?”

“Well, I…uh.”

“Spit it out, Palmer.”

“I’ve been doing some pro bono work for a women’s shelter. They hide women and children who
have been abused. They call me and I usually meet them at a motel when they need medical attention.”

“Aren’t there required reports that have to filed?”

Jimmy flushed. “These people won’t go to a doctor or hospital for x-rays and treatment because of leaving a paper trail that will lead the abuser right to them.”

“You’re risking your medical license, aren’t you?”

“Someone has to help them.” Jimmy said earnestly.

“Don’t bother calling your friend.” Jimmy’s face fell. “Call a dealer get one of the new digitize things. I’ll transfer the funds into your personal account.”

Jimmy was stunned. “A digital? Personal?”

“I know Tony wants to help people. I can foresee him down the road developing grants to buy necessary equipment for situations like yours. Whether you want to use it for NCIS situations is up to you.”

“I would definitely. It will make it easier on Ducky in the field and for situations like with Tony. Gibbs, are you certain? Digital start at about forty thousand.”

“I don’t want you to buy the cheap one. I want you to get what you need to help those women and children.”

“What women and children? Good-morning, Jimmy.”

“Good-morning, Jackson.”

“Any more coffee?” Jackson retrieved his mug and joined the duo at the table when Jethro held up the carafe.

“Tony still sleeping?”

“With Zuma curled up under his chin.” Jackson confirmed. He had been awake and waiting when his boys had finally come home. He had fussed over Tony and Zuma and helped Gibbs settle them on the sofa. “What are we talking about?”

“Palmer has been helping a group that shelters abused women and children. He’s been providing medical care to them. We were just discussing a portable x-ray machine.”

“Portable?” Jackson harrumphed. “Didn’t know they made those.”

“A lot of veterinarians have started using them so that owners don’t have to try to bring animals in, thus injuring them further.”

“Come to think of it, I think I heard something about that fella that took over from Doc Milton. He had one of those army vehicles equipped.”

“Army vehicle?” Jethro mused. “You mean a hummer?”

“That’s it.”

“I’ve seen that done. Some police units were setting up portable labs in their hummers before they
were discontinued.” Jimmy spoke up. “They can do a lot of tests and that, on site.”

Jethro had a gleam in his eye. He had an idea and he knew Tony would be thrilled. Getting up, he crossed to one of the kitchen drawers and came back with a pen and pad of paper which he placed in front of Jimmy. “What would be needed to equip an SUV, say a Yukon XL, as a portable medical office?”

“Equip?”

“Well, yeah. I assume that you use elastic wraps, sutures, hot and cold packs; that kind of thing when you are helping the shelter. How do you haul them now?”

“Breena and I keep a rolling suitcase stocked. It’s in the rear of my car.”

“You and Breena are buying the supplies?”

“Ducky and Tony have helped.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Gibbs shook his head. “Stop by a dealer look at the SUVs. Measure the hold area. Find one that you can equip with that portable x-ray machine. Make a list of the supplies you need; I’ll take care of ordering it all.”

“Gibbs, I don’t know what to say.”

“Don’t talk, write.”

Section 80

“Hey, son. How you feeling?” Jackson lowered the book he was holding the moment Tony’s eyes opened.

Tony gave Jackson a wan smile. “Fine.” He noticed a distinct lack of warmth on his chest. “Where’s Zuma?”

“Leroy took him out a while ago. Woke up and started dancing almost immediately, poor fella. Leroy just scooped him up and took him out.” Jackson laughed. “Then Jethro ran out to get some supplies and took the pup along.” Tony groaned and went to sit. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Zuma’s not the only one who’s ready to dance.”

Jackson sat his book aside. “Alright, let me help you.” Jackson helped his son-in-law up gently and led him to the laundry room.

“Uh, Jackson. I need to pee not wash clothes.”

Jackson pushed the door open. A blanket now hung over the window and there sat something. “Tada.”

“What is that?”

“That is a deluxe portable potty for campers. Jethro went out to the garage first thing this morning, cleaned it up and brought it in for you to use.”

“I can use the toilet.”
“No steps for you right now. So this is your very own private bathroom.” Jackson watched Tony shaking his head. “It’s that or a bottle.”

“Love it.” Tony shooed Jackson out.

Jethro let himself in quietly. If Tony saw him now, Jethro would never live it down. Zuma had flatly refused to sit in his stroller. The pup had refused to be carried. He had whined and kept struggling to get down. The moment his paws hit the floor he would limp to his Agent Zuma carrier.

Finally, Jethro had placed the pup in the carrier and then in the stroller. The pup simply snarled. He picked up the carrier and cradled it. Zuma fusssed. Jethro vowed to strangle Tobias the next time he saw him. With extreme reluctance, he had finally donned the baby carrier. Once placed properly, the pup sat up cheerfully and wiggled until he could see out.

He threatened Tobias again when the pup refused to be removed from Jethro’s chest. He had to drive with the pup peering out of the carrier and over the dash. Jethro blamed the warning he got on the pup. A police car pulled him over just outside the development. The little traitor burrowed down in his carrier when the siren went off.

Jethro drummed his hand on the steering wheel while he waited for the officer to walk up to his window. “Good-morning, Officer.”

“Good-morning. You were doing fifty-seven in a thirty. Also, sir, are you aware that all children must be in a secured in a car seat?”

“This isn’t a baby. May I get my ID?” At the officer’s nod, Jethro tried to get to his identification but was hampered by the pack. “May I step out?” The officer stepped back and into a defensive position while Jethro got out and stood next to the car.

He took the ID folder. “Thank you, Agent Gibbs.” The officer moved where he could read the carrier. “Agent Zuma?” The officer said with a smile. Hearing his name, Zuma popped his head up out of the carrier. He barked and tilted his head in his cutest manner.

“He refused to get in his seat this morning.” Jethro pointed to the backseat. “He and my senior agent were injured yesterday when an op went bad. He’s being really clingy right now.” As if he understood, Zuma brought one small paw in a frilly sock up and out of the carrier. “His paws were irritated and he wouldn’t let them be taped.” Jethro explained, “He hasn’t fought the socks yet.”

The officer fought a grin. “Hey, was the op at the NCIS garage? I remember there was some chatter over the lines about a patient who was bit in the privates.”

“The man was holding a gun on my senior agent. Zuma took exception to it when he started firing.”

“You’re a hero then.” The officer held his hand out and let Zuma sniff. When the pup nudged him, he gave Zuma a good ear scratch and then gently shook his paw. “Do you mind?” The cop produced a smart phone. Jethro groaned internally but acquiesced as the officer stood next to him and Agent Zuma to take a selfie. Zuma had even deigned the patrolman a close-up. He had allowed the policeman to lift him out gently and hold him while Jethro took a picture of the two ‘shaking hands’. Finally, the officer left him stuff Zuma back in to his carrier and take off. At least he didn’t give Jethro a ticket.

It seemed to be the pattern for his shopping. Zuma had demanded his carrier and then had preceded to charm everyone in sight. At the pet store, the clerk had given him a squeaky toy that could hook to
his carrier. In the grocery store, Jethro had to stop constantly due to children wanting to meet ‘Agent’ Zuma. This had entailed more selfies. Jethro’s head was throbbing by the time he was done running errands and heading home to his husband. Thankfully, Zuma was exhausted and had curled up in the carrier for a nap. As he let himself in, he was congratulating himself on his stealth, when he heard his husband.

“Jethro, is that you?”

Jethro’s shoulders slumped. “I’ll be right in.” Dropping the pet and grocery store bags off in the kitchen, he carried his other purchases into the living room. “How are you feeling?”

Jackson was dozing in his chair, but Tony looked up from where he was lounging on the couch and snickered. “I wish I had my cell.”

“I’m going to strangle Tobias.”

Ignoring the threats, Tony took an interest in the one bag. He recognized the baby boutique where Jethro had taken him shopping for Victoria. “You went baby shopping?”

Jethro’s face took on a reddish hue. “McGee said Zuma’s probably going to have to use the salve for a week.”

“You know; you could pick those up at a department or even the grocery store.”

“They only had plain white ones and Zuma didn’t really like them.”

Tony made grabby hands for the bag and Jethro grudgingly handed it over. He pulled out several packages of baby socks in a variety of colors and patterns. “Zuma wanted pink? And white with red hearts?”

“I figured we owed Victoria a thank-you.”

Tony hated to admit it but he loved the baby socks that looked like running shoes. Jethro had got those in several colors. There were socks that looked like tuxedoes. There were socks with trains on them. There were even Washington National socks. The cutest in his opinion were blue with the superman emblem. There were eight pair, enough for two days. He held them up.

“He wouldn’t let go of them.” Jethro admitted. “He grabbed them in his mouth and just refused.”

Tony laughed and then moaned at the thought of the great Jethro Gibbs out stubborned by a fifteen-pound puppy in a baby store. “Don’t make me laugh.”

At the sound of Tony’s laughter, Jethro felt the carrier begin to move. A furry head poked out and Zuma yipped in excitement. Answering the unspoken demand, he lifted the pup from the carrier and put him on the sofa where he could get to Tony.

“Did you and daddy go shopping?” Zuma nosed through the socks scattered on Tony’s lap before latching on to the superman ones. Picking them up gently he pushed them into Tony’s hand.

“See?” Jethro pointed.

“Do you want your superman socks put on? Is that it?” Tony gathered the socks up and put them in their bag. “Tell you what. Uncle McGee is coming to check your paws. We’ll tell him to put these on you.” Tony tried to take them but Zuma shook his head.
“Told you.”

Tony scooped the pup up and cuddled him. “As soon as uncle Tim comes.” He let the pup lay them on his lap and Zuma concentrated on giving him kisses. “You’ll never guess what I found bedside me when I woke up.” Tony held up Rocky. “Did you leave him here to take care of me? You’re such a good boy, aren’t you?”

Zuma accepted his raccoon and settled down to chew on Rocky’s tail while Jethro told Tony all about their morning. Jethro grumbled as he told his husband and Jackson, when he was awakened by Tony’s laughter, about the shopping trip, the officer and the selfies. He also informed him the team, including Abby and Palmer, was off for another week pending the inquiry over Mabus’ shooting.

Section 81

McGee and Abby arrived at almost the same time. Abby bounced in to the living room and gave Tony a gentle kiss. Remembering Jimmy’s words, Auntie Abby coaxed Zuma away from Tony’s side triumphantly. “Uncle McGee told me about your paws, sweet angel.” Abby carefully rubbed a small paw. “He’s going to take good care of you. Just like we are going to take good care of you, Tony. I heard about last night and Mabus.”

Tony was carefully propped on the sofa with super soft pillows that had magically appeared when he complained that his left side was aching from lying on it. Tony wasn’t used to all the attention. Jackson or Jethro was always in the room ready to cater to his wants and needs. Jackson was currently in the kitchen so it had been Jethro’s shift. His husband was currently getting him a cold drink.

“How are you doing?”

“I don’t know, Abbs. I keep telling myself that I made the right choice, but did I?”

“You did.” Abby said flatly. “I stopped over to see Ducky this afternoon. Mabus wouldn’t have made it, Tony. The brainstem blockage would have killed him. The other strokes were severe but you gave him the only chance there was. His heart just couldn’t take the strain.”

“Abby’s right.” Jethro came up behind her and handed Tony a glass of iced tea.

“I swear I requested a beer.” Tony looked at the glass.

“No alcohol with pain pills.” Zuma looked up from Abby’s arms and gave a small woof at Jethro. “You don’t need more treats.” Zuma woofed. Exasperated Jethro dug in his shirt pocket and pulled out a treat. Zuma accepted it graciously.

“Way to hang tough, daddy.” Tony teased. “Isn’t that why you took the treats away from me?”

“I wanted him to eat some of his food. He needs proper nutrition. This was more of an after dinner dessert.” Zuma woofed again. “No more.” Zuma held up a paw looking pitiful. “Where is Rocky? Wouldn’t you like to play with your raccoon?” Zuma raised his head looking around. He woofed sadly.

With a deep sigh, Jethro turned and left the room. The minute he was through the door, Tony produced a treat from under his pillow and slipped it to Abby. She pocketed quickly as she heard Gibbs’ footsteps returning. In his hands, he held not only Rocky, but Zuma’s leather bone and squeaky bone. “Not a word,” Jethro glared at both of them.

“Hello.”
“Living room, McGee.”

“Could you give me a hand first?”

Jethro grumbled to himself as he headed for the front door. What on earth did McGee need help for? “What in the devil?” Jethro saw flowers, balloons and present bags littering his front stoop. “McGee, what is all this?”

“A couple of them are for Tony.”

“The rest?”

“For Zuma.”

“What do you mean for Zuma?” Jethro asked as McGee came forward with another armload and his computer.

“I think I ought to show you.” McGee turned to edge past Jethro and move into the living room, leaving Jethro to pick up the rest and follow.

“McGift giver.” Tony greeted him cheerfully. “What have you got?”

McGee dutifully walked over and handed him a couple bags. “That one’s from Helen and Diana. There’s one from HR and one from the security detail.”

Tony chortled as he pulled out a box of his favorite candy. “Score. What are the other bags for?”

McGee set down his laptop and quickly pulled up a web page. Jethro caught sight of it as he was carrying the other bags into the room. “Son of a …”

“Leroy Jethro!” drowned out the finish but the intent was clear. Jackson came to the door. “What are you bellowing…” The older man’s voice trailed off. “Is that…” He pointed.

McGee turned the screen so that Abby and Tony could see. There in a web post was the selfies the trooper had taken. Jethro in carrier with Zuma and his little stocking feet peeping out was blown up next to the one of the trooper ‘shaking hands’ with Zuma. The page proudly proclaimed Agent Zuma as a hero; a wounded hero.

“Oh my gosh.” Tony was flabbergasted.

“It’s gone viral.” McGee pointed to the gift bags piled around. “People have been dropping gifts off for the last few hours. Vance finally set up a receiving area. The security detail is going through all the packages to be sure they’re safe. This is what they have gone through so far.”

“Crap.” Tony looked at Jethro. “What do we do?”

“Open presents.” Abby bounced up and handed Zuma to Tony. She pushed Jethro with his bags to sit beside them. Zuma cocked his head and drugged Rocky over to peep into a bag. Dropping the raccoon, he stuck his head into the bag and began to back up growling. The adults watched as he struggled to pull something out. They laughed as he crawled deeper into the bag and began backing up again. When the object came loose, the pup ended up sitting on his rear on Tony’s knee. In his mouth he held a wing of a plush eagle chew toy. The look on his face had them all laughing. With a sniff Zuma, dropped the eagle got to his feet turned and picked up his raccoon. He began chewing on it.
“Definitely Daddy’s boy.” Tony laughed. Then he sobered, looking at the gift bags. “So what do we do?”

“Local shelter is always looking for extra supplies.” Abby spoke up.

“McGee, what’s that say?” Jackson asked.

“Basically it recaps the fact that Zuma participated in a criminal arrest. The trooper tells about his injured paws and how he has to wear baby socks. He does identify Zuma as being with an NCIS agent he spoke with this morning.”

“Could we add something to the page?” Tony asked thoughtfully.

“Like what, Tony?” McGee asked.

“Maybe a shot of Agent Zuma thanking everyone but asking that any gifts be given in his name to their local shelter.”

“Of course.”

“What do you think, Jethro?” Tony asked.

Jethro thought it over. “Abby, do you know the local shelter director?”

“Of course.”

“Could you call and invite her over?”

“What are you thinking?” Tony asked.

Jimmy arrived a couple hours later just as a woman with tear-reddened eyes was being helped to her car with armfuls of gift bags. She hugged Abby and McGee then helped them place their bags in the car. She dabbed at her eyes and hugged Abby and McGee again. Finally, she climbed in her car and drove off slowly.

Jimmy walked into the living room to find Jethro, Tony and Jackson wearing big smiles. Zuma was laying in his bed with his head on what looked like an eagle. His raccoon was still between his Superman socked paws and he was sleeping soundly. “Is that lady okay?”

“She just met ‘Agent Zuma’.” Tony laughed at the puzzled look on Palmer’s face and pointed him to McGee’s open laptop.

Jimmy saw Zuma sitting on the lady’s lap. She was holding what looked like a check and shaking the pup’s paw. Around her were the gift bags he had seen. Jimmy quickly read the attached text. “Wow. That’s fantastic. Director Vance will be glad to hear this, you wouldn’t believe the stack that they have at the office.”

“Mrs. Lamina is going to coordinate picking them up and distributing them to the area shelters. They’ll do a lot of good there. Even the baby socks.” Tony laughed. “His daddy saw that Zuma has plenty already.” Tony pointed to a stack of socks on the table. “Jethro took Zuma shopping or should I say Zuma took Jethro. By the way, here.” He handed Jimmy a bag.

“What’s this?”
“A little thank-you from Zuma to Victoria for saving him from the yellow with red tape of doom.”

“This wasn’t necessary.”

“I understand Zuma was quite picky when they were choosing them.” Tony told Jimmy about Jethro holding up a picture of Victoria on his phone in the boutique and pointing from the photo to the socks.

Jimmy held up a pair with tulle puffs on the toe. “I can’t imagine Gibbs picking these out.”

“I didn’t. Zuma picked those.” Jimmy jumped as Jethro spoke from just behind him. “I liked those.” Jethro pointed to several pairs that looked like white socks with colored shoes.

“Where are Abby and McGee? They didn’t leave without saying good-bye, did they?” Tony asked, easing the moment, to Jimmy’s relief.

“No, they are helping dad with something.”

“I looked over the results of Dr. Pitt’s tests and talked to him about his recommendations.” Jimmy smoothly changed the subject. “We need to treat this carefully, Tony. This could have been very bad just a fraction either way. I should have sent you to the hospital.”

“Hey, Jimmy. Give it a rest. I was wearing a vest; it should have been fine. Just my bad luck it hit where it did. They couldn’t have aimed better if they were trying.” Tony laughed. “Give me a couple days and I will be up and around.”

“No, Tony.” Jimmy said firmly. “You need to take this seriously. Follow the directions to the letter. You don’t want to have to have surgery or risk injuring your vertebrae even more. Now, I’ve got a checklist and you will answer me truthfully.” Jimmy held up a clipboard.

“Don’t get rough with me, Black Lung. I’ll talk.” Tony joked.

Jethro shook his head. “I’m going to go check to see if dad needs help.”

“What’s Jackson doing that he need so much help? Tell him not to worry about dinner. My freezer has a bunch more casseroles in it.”

“I’ll tell him. You answer the questions truthfully or I will.” Jethro warned his husband.

“So, has the blood in your urine gotten heavier, lighter or about the same?” Jimmy started down his list.

Section 82

Tony knew he and Jethro had plenty of company. He just didn’t know where they were. Jackson had disappeared first. Tony had assumed he had gone to the kitchen. He hadn’t seen Abby and McGee since they helped Mrs. Lamina to her car. Jimmy had kept him company when Jethro disappeared; only to disappear when Breena had stopped by with Victoria. Even Zuma had disappeared. The pup had followed Jimmy and not returned. Now and then bumps and mutterings came from the kitchen and basement areas, but Tony couldn’t make out the conversation.

Jimmy had built him a cushy nest of soft pillows in the recliner and Tony was grateful that he was at least off the couch. Victoria was next to the recliner in a bassinet Jimmy had set up where Tony could reach out and rub her back or play with her. Shortly after that, Breena disappeared. At least he knew where she had gone. He could hear her bustling around the kitchen and smelled the sweet
aroma of chocolate chip cookies.

After Breena had taken over ‘Tony-sitting’, they had discussed dinner for the gang. Tony had given her an overview of what was in the freezer. They had decided on a variety of dishes that he had frozen since he had not had time to replenish his lasagna stockpile.

As he watched Victoria nap, he savored all the different smells. The mini meatloaves with cheese and bacon teased the appetite. There was a spicy fiesta beef casserole with a cornbread top giving a slightly spicy aroma. One of his recent dishes was a hearty ham, potato and green bean casserole. Instead of a simple white sauce; he had added a mild white cheddar.

Being Italian, he loved pasta and had developed a casserole to mimic pierogis. Instead of making individual pockets, he layered the mashed potatoes between cheesy lasagna noodles from his favorite shop. Then topping it with more cheese. There were also a couple of vegetable casseroles to round out the feast.

“Can I get you anything?” Breena had come in to the living room while he was focusing on the food. In her hand was a saucer with a couple hot cookies which she handed him. “Maybe some cold milk?”

“No. I’m good.” Tony sniffed the cookies appreciatively. “How goes the kitchen duty?”

“You, my friend, are an amazing cook.” Breena perched on the coffee table. “I had to do the cookies first so I could fit everything in the oven. I’ve been putting together a salad but the smells are driving me wild. I’m dying to try the beef cornbread casserole but I don’t think I should while I’m breastfeeding.”

“It’s a little spicy.” Tony admitted. “Tell you what, when I get back on my feet I’ll make you one for your freezer.”

“Deal. Do I want to know what the squash casserole is?”

“It’s pretty similar to the vegetable lasagna but without noodles. I use a variety of different squash and vegetables with a simple cream sauce.” Tony ate a cookie happily.

“Different squash and vegetables?”

“I use butternut, zucchini, yellow, eggplant, mushrooms. I layer in spaghetti squash and it gives a pasta feel and slightly nutty taste. So want to tell me what everyone is doing?” Tony started on his last cookie.

“Yes.” Breena grinned. “But I’m not going to.”

“I’m injured.” Tony gave her Zuma eyes. “You’re supposed to cater to me.”

“The only thing I’m catering is cookies.” Breena took the now empty saucer and rose to return to the kitchen. She dropped a kiss on top of his head. “Take a nap.”

“Yes, mother.” Tony said mockingly. Unfortunately, for all his bravado, he found himself drifting off; his hand on Victoria’s bassinet protectively.

“Anthony, dear boy.” Ducky put down the magazine he had been thumbing through. “How are you feeling?”
“Just ducky, Ducky.” Tony quipped. He automatically checked for Victoria and saw her contentedly chewing on her fist.

“Time for your medication.” Ducky gestured to the glass of water and pills on a saucer on the table by his chair.

“Ducky, I…”

“Please do not make me call Jethro, dear boy. I believe his patience is wearing a bit thin.”

“Why?”

“Because Abigail… Ah,” Ducky stopped. “You almost had me. I promised not to divulge that…” Ducky stopped again. “Medication, if you please.”

Tony reluctantly swallowed the meds. “You know they don’t do anything.”

“I’m aware of your resistance to pain medications; however, we do need to draw as much inflammation as possible out of the area.”

“Is this career ending?” Tony asked bluntly.

“No, Anthony. I admit had the impact been directly on the spine, with the force of the blow and damage done; it could have impaired your physical performance. On the other hand, a direct blow to the kidney is a much more uncertain outcome. Worst case scenario would be removal of the kidney. You, my boy, are very lucky.”

“Woof!”

“There you are.” Tony patted his chair when Zuma raced into the room and slid to a stop, barely missing the coffee table. “Were you with daddy? Come on, you can sit with me.” Zuma walked over to Tony’s chair, looking adorable in his Superman socks. He placed a paw on the chair but couldn’t get a grip with his socks. Zuma barked again.

“Do not try to pick him up.” Jethro said from behind his husband’s chair as Tony went to move. Instead, Jethro scooped the pup up and held him. He went to sit on the corner of the coffee table facing Tony, while Ducky discretely went to the kitchen. “Two weeks ago today, I followed an order that gave me permission to find happiness… with you. I know it’s only been two weeks, but it feels so much longer and deeper. I’m thankful that I was ‘forced’ to marry you.”

Jethro shifted nervously. “When Brad gave you restrictions last night, I was thinking about you and our bed. About sleeping in our bed without you beside me. I decided I didn’t want that. So this morning, I called our family and they agreed to help me out.”

“With what?”

Jehro held his hand out to his husband to help him up from the chair. Then he handed Zuma to Tony and with a gentle arm around his waist, began to guide him through the kitchen.

“I’ve seen my portable potty.” Tony said. But Jethro confused him by moving, not towards the laundry room, but towards the garage.

“If there’s anything you want changed, we can. It’s still pretty rough.” Jethro said, a bit nervously as he moved a little in front of Tony to reach the doorknob. Tony just looked at him in confusion; until the door was pushed open.
Tony was shocked. The overstuffed garage had been cleared out. Drywall and paint, in a soothing blue, now covered the walls and the floor was covered with thick carpeting. A new king-size bed was placed with the nightstand from Tony’s apartment. One corner had a sitting nook with two comfy chairs, his flat screen television was mounted on the wall and a bookcase held some of his movie collection. There was a small room framed in with a door in the corner next to the house. There were large wardrobes to function for closets.

“We could only have a small bathroom. It only has a shower, a toilet and sink.” Jethro was becoming more nervous; maybe he’d took too much for granted.

“How did you…?” Tony turned to Jethro. “I can’t believe you did this, all in a day. You made us a master suite. It’s our own space.” Carefully, Tony launched himself at Jethro, giving him a passionate kiss and squishing Zuma in the process. “I love it. This is what everyone was working on?”

Jethro rescued Zuma and put him down on the carpet. The pup ran over to his little bed and laid down, watching them. “Dad did a lot of supervising. Abby helped with the water and wiring.” Jethro felt a sense of relief. “Luckily the old owners had put a garage sink and electricity out here so it wasn’t hard to modify. Breena helped with some of the décor.”

“Where is everyone?”

“They went out the kitchen door and came in the front after I came to get you. They wanted to give us a minute alone.” Jethro flushed a bit. “Happy second week anniversary.” Tony looked into Jethro’s eyes again and then put all his happiness and love into another kiss.

“So are you two gonna christen the room or come in so we can eat?”

Jethro put his forehead against Tony’s. “Remind me to strangle my dad.” He stole a kiss and then called out, “We’re coming.”

“That’s what we’re afraid of.” Jackson said dryly.

“I’ll help you strangle him.” Tony flushed. Lacing his fingers through his husband’s, Tony turned to walk back to the door.
“Aspirin Literary Society.” DejaSue cursed her tongue.
“Just what don’t you know? What is the Bourbon and Aspirin Literary Society?”
“It’s not really a what, more of a who… Get it, Owl Who.”
“Tell us about the Bourbon and Aspirin Literary Society.”
“Cabal DejaSue 2016.”
“What are you muttering about?”
“In the event of capture by the enemy, such as Wolfnjag, I am only required to give my cabal id. GeminiAngel says that’s what it says in the Genevieve Convent.”
“Uh…ArianaFeilacan…”
“What delphiskye?”
“You said to watch for strange things. Does that count?”
ArianaFeilacan turned to the where delphiskye was pointing. Outside the barn a flock of owls were flying a circle formation before entering through the open loft door. As the cabal watched, another formation started to flow out the open loft door and repeated the maneuver.
“Did anyone think to check the barn?” Psyche53 asked.
“Recall all members to the barn.” ArianaFeilacan didn’t even need the bullhorn. “Come on. You, too, DejaSue.”
The cabal began trooping across the yard. The barn door was locked and ArianaFeilacan pushed DejaSue to the front. “Call the idiot.”
“Geminiangel,” DejaSue looked around in desperation. “Run!”
Inside they could hear the lambs baaing. “Waddles, open the door, please.”
ArianaFeilacan called softly. “I need cuddles.” The cabal heard the lock snick and then Waddles baa’d and lunged at ArianaFeilacan. “It’s okay, how are you? Freeze, idiot.”
The cabal looked around in wonder. The barn had lambs, boxes and paper everywhere. The lambs were wrapping boxes with some difficulty. QueeneoftheDeer was in the loft demonstration how to grasp the ribbon on the gifts and then release them. As she did, Aussiefan70 sent another flock out. Each of the owls grasped a gift and flew out. When they returned the owls dropped their gifts in a target area and then returned to their perches.
“What in the name of heaven, do you think you’re doing?”
Sinatra came strutting over to Psyche53 and held up a chipped hoof. His midnight blue manicure was ruined and he baa’d his distress.
Geminiangel followed reluctantly. “I told you, I’ll repaint your hoof. Diva!”
“Baaaa.”
“Baaa right back.”
“Okay, you two. Stop fighting. What am I saying?” Psyche53 wasn’t sure that being in a cabal was good for sanity; however, sanity could be over-rated.
“Do you want… No. What are you doing here?” Callasandra asked. It kind of looked like fun.
“Getting ready for father’s day.”
“Father’s day?” Callasandra prompted.
Geminiangel pointed at the calendar on the wall. June 19th was circled in red. “We have the ties all boxed up. The lambs are wrapping them and the owls will deliver them.”
“The owls will?” ArianaFeilacan asked.
“DejaSue told me all about post owls.”
“Did you buy 600 silk ties on the cabal charge card?”
Geminiangel looked at Sinatra who sighed deeply and then walked over to a clipboard. After flipping the first page he baa’d. “No. We bought 613.”
“Why 613?” Fairhaven74 asked again this time there might be an answer.
“For all the fathers.”
“The lambs don’t have that many fathers.”
Sinatra looked at them balefully. “Baa. Baa baaaa baa ba.” Picking up a folder, Sinatra brought it over and gave it to Fairhaven74.
“Huh…” Fairhaven flipped through all the pages. “Uh…ArianaFeilacan. They bought for all the fathers. Theirs and ours.”
“Well, of course. Without your fathers, I wouldn’t have a cabal.” Geminiangel looked as if that explained everything.
“Alright, cabal. Spread out, we have lambs to help.” ArianaFeilacan ordered. “Some of you help QueeneoftheDoor and Aussiefan70 train the owls. “We’ve got a lot to do in a little time.”
“BAAA!”
“Yes, Sinatra. I will unlock the fingernail polish cabinet so the idiot can repaint your hooves.”
Chapter Summary

Thanks to everyone for waiting patiently this week. I felt that with the tragedy in Orlando, it was appropriate to have a 'moment of silence' writing wise. It is sad to know that this still happens in our country. I believe true love is so rare that I think it should be treasured once it's found. In lieu of a cabal story, I have listed those who lost their lives and would ask that you take a minute to think of their friends and family. Rest assured, the Cabal members, Spot, Coors and the rest of the associate Cabal...
BAAA
And you, Sinatra. Will be back next update. And you won't believe what they've been up to......

Chapter Notes

Stanley Almodovar III, 23 years old
Amanda Alvear, 25 years old
Oscar A Aracena-Montero, 26 years old
Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala, 33 years old
Antonio Davon Brown, 29 years old
Darryl Roman Burt II, 29 years old
Angel L. Candelario-Padro, 28 years old
Juan Chevez-Martinez, 25 years old
Luis Daniel Conde, 39 years old
Cory James Connell, 21 years old
Tevin Eugene Crosby, 25 years old
Deonka Deidra Drayton, 32 years old
Simon Adrian Carrillo Fernandez, 31 years old
Leroy Valentin Fernandez, 25 years old
Mercedez Marisol Flores, 26 years old
Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz, 22 years old
Juan Ramon Guerrero, 22 years old
Paul Terrell Henry, 41 years old
Frank Hernandez, 27 years old
Miguel Angel Honorato, 30 years old
Javier Jorge-Reyes, 40 years old
Jason Benjamin Josaphat, 19 years old
Eddie Jamoldroy Justice, 30 years old
Anthony Luis Laureanodisla, 25 years old
Christopher Andrew Leinonen, 32 years old
Alejandro Barrios Martinez, 21 years old
Brenda Lee Marquez McCool, 49 years old
Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez, 25 years old
Kimberly Morris, 37 years old
Akyra Monet Murray, 18 years old
Luis Omar Ocasio-Capo, 20 years old
Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez, 25 years old
Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera, 36 years old
Joel Rayon Paniagua, 32 years old
Jean Carlos Mendez Perez, 35 years old
Enrique L. Rios, Jr., 25 years old
Jean C. Nives Rodriguez, 27 years old
Xavier Emmanuel Serrano Rosado, 35 years old
Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz, 24 years old
Yilmary Rodriguez Solivan, 24 years old
Edward Sotomayor Jr., 34 years old
Shane Evan Tomlinson, 33 years old
Martin Benitez Torres, 33 years old
Jonathan Antonio Camuy Vega, 24 years old
Juan P. Rivera Velazquez, 37 years old
Luis S. Vielma, 22 years old
Franky Jimmy Dejesus Velazquez, 50 years old
The early morning phone call had Tony moaning as he tried to go for the nightstand and cell phone. “Stay down,” Jethro ordered and growled, “Gibbs” into his own cell. “Tony is not to be riding more than necessary. Here? Why, here? Don’t throw my own words back at me, Leon. Nine o’clock. Fine.”

“What is nine o’clock and why do I think I am not going to like it?” Tony looked at the clock. “It’s nearly seven. I never sleep that late. And nine o’clock?”

Jethro hid a smirk. Tony might laugh at his caffeine addiction but his husband took a cup to jumpstart his brain some mornings. “Vance was letting us know that we would be having a nine o’clock meeting and that since you are restricted, the meeting will be here.”

“In our bed? I don’t think that’s appropriate.” Tony wisecracked.

Jethro tousled Tony’s hair. “Up and at it. We have time to get you showered and dressed.”

“I have a coffeecake in the freezer that I could set out to have with our coffee. Just a half hour in the oven.”

“Tell me where it is and I’ll get it while you decide what you want to wear. No suit and tie.” Jethro ordered, “You’re out sick and it won’t hurt to remind them of it.”

“Polo and khaki, got it.”

By the time their guests had arrived, all three men in the Gibbs household were up and dressed. To his disgust, Zuma had also been brushed and suffered having his teeth cleaned. The pup was in his bed, located in the kitchen, shooting evil eyes at Jethro and Tony while he chewed on Rocky Raccoon. Tony watched as Zuma snarled between chews almost as if the pup was complaining to the raccoon. “Something tells me that he is not happy with us at the moment.” Tony pointed to the puppy.

“Because he acts like Leroy without coffee?” Jackson joked.

Jethro looked at the pup and then his family. “It’s a good thing he can’t hold a gun.”

“As long as he doesn’t go Mabus on us.” Tony joked before closing his eyes and the humor draining away.

“Tony…”

“Guess it isn’t that funny, is it? Mabus is dead. So is Sacks. This whole thing has been one giant SNAFU from the start.”

“Not all bad.” Jethro reach for Tony’s hand. “You’ve got me and you’ve got dad.”
“I’d like to think that if Sacks had lived, we could have got past the lies. Been brothers; at least friends.”

“It wouldn’t have happened.” Quipped a petite African American woman with brown eyes, dressed in a crisp black dress who stood just inside the foyer. “They told me the door wouldn’t be locked and that I could let myself in.”

“They?” Jethro asked.

“Director Vance and Agent McGee. They’re waiting outside. I’m Clarissa Sacks, your ex-stepmother.”

“Please, come in. Sit down. Can I get you anything?” Jethro pushed on Tony’s shoulder to make him stay seated.

Clarissa watched the interplay. “Just coffee. Black, please. I understand you were injured in the … what did you call it? The giant SNAFU?” Her words almost dripped ice. “Forgive me, that isn’t why I came.”

“Why did you come?” Jethro asked sitting the coffee in front of her. He could see his dad gripping Tony’s hand under the table.

“I was told you had asked to see me, Agent DiNozzo. They also informed me you were on medical leave. Therefore, the director was kind enough to bring me by.”

“I appreciate that, Mrs. Sacks. Please call me Tony.” Tony swallowed a lump in his throat.

“I’m sorry about Ron.”

“I know that you never got along. I’m sure his arresting you didn’t help matters.”

“Were you told what happened?” Gibbs asked.

“All the sordid details? Like my son hacking the FBI? My son trying to help that bastard escape? The fact that said bastard shot our son in cold blood?” She took a precise sip of her coffee before sitting it back down.

“You said he wouldn’t have got past the lies.” Tony stated.

“Jarvis has been twisting his head since he was thirteen. He managed to get to Ron when he started boarding school. By the time I realized, it was too late. Jarvis demanded limited contact through the court. Told the judge he wouldn’t go for custody but that his son wanted to know about him. Of course, Ron was eager for it.” Clarissa played with her cup handle.

“Jarvis is why he went into the FBI. Told him grand stories of being an agent and about you.” Clarissa took another sip of coffee. “It’s not like Ron didn’t know about you. Everyone in the family knew about the various Mabus scandals. Jarvis just put all the blame on your mother and eventually, you. For years he poisoned Ron’s mind about the ‘other child’ with the millionaire family. The golden child who breezed through the academy, police stations and finally NCIS. All it took was dropping your name, just before you two met.”

Clarissa took a deep breath and let it out. “I tried but the damage was too deep and the hatred too well-fed. I encouraged my cousin to take him on at DHS. I thought if there was space between the two of you his obsession would fade. Ron demanded to know everything so I told him all I knew about you. Born in Italy. Brought to the US. I thought he truly wanted to know about you. Instead, he went looking for your adoption file. He arrested you before I could stop him and that bastard just
encouraged him.”

Clarissa looked at her watch. “You asked to see me and I’m doing all the talking. What did you want?”

“I wanted to say how sorry I am…”

“Stop.” Clarissa interrupted him. Standing up, she straightened her dress. “If you’re expecting gratitude for covering up the truth of Ron’s death, know this. I don’t care if the world knows the truth, it means nothing to me. My son is still dead. For his sisters’ sakes, I could say ‘thank you’, but it doesn’t mean anything. We don’t care about the funeral and the pomp and protocols. It won’t bring my son back. The only good thing out of this is that the bastard is dead.”

She walked deliberately towards the front door, pausing only once. “You were with him and Dr. Mallard told me about your words. Maybe that makes you feel better. Maybe that eased his suffering and for that I can thank you but if you’re expecting a fairytale ending, don’t. You wanted to meet me. You have. Don’t come to the funeral. Don’t call. You aren’t part of my family. My daughters and I don’t want you in our lives. They have no interest in meeting you or talking with you. I know that it wasn’t your fault, directly, but the fact remains that if it weren’t for you and Jarvis, my son, my only son would be alive. I’ll see myself out. Good-day, gentlemen.”

“Well. I never…” Jackson shook his head. “How could she…”

“She’s right. If it weren’t for me, we wouldn’t have been there. Sacks wouldn’t have been killed.” Tony was white with shock.

“You think Sacks would have been content to remain Mabus’ secret? At some point, whether or not you were there, he would have demanded recognition. I doubt Mabus would have taken that lightly and would have found a way to get rid of him.”

“I concur.” Secretary Hagel said from the foyer. “Please don’t get up. This is officially an informal visit to check on Agent DiNozzo’s welfare. I apologize for Mrs. Sacks. I’m not sure exactly what she said but I can see from the looks it wasn’t pleasant.”

“Not your place to apologize, Secretary.” Jethro motioned Hagel to a seat. “Can I offer you some coffee?”

“Who made it?” Hagel asked causing Tony to smirk.

“We have the colored dishwater which DiNozzo favors and real coffee. Dad made both.”

“Dishwater, please. My gut can’t take any more of that battery acid you drink.”

“Where are my manners?” Tony shook his head. “Secretary Hagel, this is my father-in-law, Jackson Gibbs. Jackson, this is the Secretary of Defense, Franklin Hagel.” The two men shook hands across the table.

“Mr. Gibbs…”

“Just Jackson.” The older man interjected.

“Jackson. You must be very proud of your son and son-in-law.”

“Always have been.”
“They are a credit to the service of our country.”

Jethro set a cup of coffee in front of Hagel, clearing away Mrs. Sacks’ as he did. “Why the snow job, Hagel? What do you want?”

“Let’s wait for Vance.”

“While you wait then, answer something for me.” Jethro spoke up. “The other night when you called and demanded Tony come to the hospital; you really didn’t need him. You held his medical proxy.”

“I told you I wanted Agent DiNozzo to have the chance at closure.”

“Over his wife?”

“Ah.” Hagel sat is coffee down. “Half expected you to ask that question that night.”

“I was a little more concerned with my husband’s well-being at the time.”

“How is Mrs. Mabus taking her husband’s death?” Tony asked.

“There is a Mrs. Mabus, but only just.” Hagel admitted. “Heidi Mabus moved out almost six months ago. She indicated that he had become very angry, difficult and confrontational. In return for her not going to reporters with her allegations, Mabus agreed to a divorce and generous settlement if she filed in her home state. He did force the concession that she would ‘appear’ in public as needed until the divorce gradually became public. Only a few of us knew the truth.”

“Good-morning, Gibbs, DiNozzo.”

“Director.”

“Leon.”

“It’s nice to see you again, Jackson.”

“Nice to see you, too. Well, I’ll leave you boys to talk and go watch some television with Zuma. Come on, pup.” Zuma looked up at Jackson. “Come on, we’ll go watch some news.”

Zuma considered the offer and then stood up and started carefully across the kitchen dragging his raccoon. Jethro got up and went to pick the grudge-holding pup up. He planned to carry him to his grandfather and save his paws.

“I hear you are now Agent Zuma.” Hagel stood and rounded the table holding out a hand for Zuma to sniff. “I hear you are also on medical leave.” Zuma left Jethro to hold Rocky and stretched his head out to allow the man to scratch his ears. Hagel snickered. “Are those superman socks?”

“He picked them out.” Jethro defended himself. Handing the pup to his dad, he also handed over the raccoon. He automatically poured Vance a coffee and came back to the table. “So now what?”

“We need to discuss the funeral details.” Hagel said bluntly.

“What does that have to do with us?” Tony asked.

“Funeral plans must be made.” Vance spoke up. “The question is what role you wish to play. As his son, you could…”

“No.” Tony shook his head.
“Give it a bit of thought, DiNozzo.” Hagel advised. “You are entit…”

“No. I don’t plan on acknowledging Mabus as my biological father.”

“If it comes out later…”

“We’ll deal with it.” Jethro took his husband’s hand.

“What’s the cover story to be?” Tony asked.

“The official story is that Mabus was contacted by someone claiming to know about an illegal immigration ring. NCIS, DHS and FBI were working jointly on the case. Mabus and Sacks were meeting the informant when the meet went bad. You, Mabus, Sacks and the informant were shot. The assailant was also killed.” Hagel said simply. “Sacks and Mabus will be buried with honor. The question is your role.”

“Mrs. Sacks made her opinion clear. She does not want me to attend Ron’s funeral.”

“Is Heidi Mabus willing to fulfil the role of grieving wife?” Jethro asked.

“She is currently living in New York. I contacted her the day he was shot and have been in contact since then. She arrived late last night and is staying in their home. Heidi is still legally his wife and has agreed to go through with the funeral.”

“Does she know…”

“The truth?” Hagel shook his head. “No. She was given the official story.”

“What about me?”

“She knows about you.” Hagel admitted. “She overheard Jarvis talking to Sacks. When she confronted him he became angry and…”

“He hit her, didn’t he?” Jethro felt his gut clench. “That’s why she really left him.” Hagel simply nodded.

“Bastard.” Tony muttered. “Every time I think it can’t get worse, it does. I really won the father lottery between him and Senior. What god did I piss off? I mean, do I have a ‘kick me’ sign on my back?” Tony was becoming distraught.

“It’s okay, you’ve got me and dad.”

“I will inform Heidi that you do not plan to participate and let her go ahead with the arrangements.” Hagel stated.

“Is that all?” Jethro asked worried about Tony’s emotional well-being.

“No. I want to thank you for making arrangements with Mrs. Lamina to deal with the tributes for Agent Zuma,” he said dryly. “There have been several requests for Agent Zuma to speak at various schools and events.”

Tony let his head fall forward until it hit the table letting it bounce a couple times until Jethro slipped his hand between his husband’s head and the table. “I don’t think Agent Zuma is interested in public speaking.” Jethro said sardonically.

Vance and Hagel exchanged looks. When they didn’t immediately speak, Tony looked up. “What
now? No, don’t tell me. They want Zuma on ‘The Tonight Show’, don’t they? No, I know, the President is going to give him the key to the country.” Gibbs hit him lightly on the back of the head. “Thank you, boss.”

Vance just shook his head. He was used to the two agents’ antics. “If you could focus for just a few more minutes, DiNozzo, we’ll leave you to your pain meds. We have a request that I promised to pass on.”

Section 84

“Are you sure you’re feeling okay?” Jethro asked his husband as he pushed Tony’s wheelchair along the corridor.

“I’m fine. Just a bit nervous. Are you sure you wouldn’t rather go in alone?” Tony wavered.

“We don’t have to do this.” Jethro said stopping the chair next to the door and coming around to kneel beside Tony.

“Yes, we do.” Tony looked down into the pup carrier. “How about it, Zuma? Are you ready?” After a nap in the car, the pup was much happier and had forgotten his anger over the early morning grooming. Poking his head out, the pup looked around. Tony rubbed his ears and Zuma squirmed until his paws were holding his head up out of his carrier. “You ready? Want to go in?” Tony crooned. Sitting up straighter, Tony gave Jethro a smile. “Let’s do this.”

Jethro stood and knocked on the door. It was opened by a young brunette with red-rimmed eyes. “Can I help…” She looked down to see Tony and tears came to her eyes. “You came? I can’t believe. Uh…” She let the door close behind her.

“Thank you so much. I wasn’t sure you’d be able to come. Did they tell you about Ethan?” she asked.

“The lady who contacted our boss told him about the accident and Ethan’s parents. Jethro called to talk to his doctor to get clearance for our visit. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“I’m all that he has now.” She said sadly. “I’m sorry, I’m Carey. Carey Richards. I’m Ethan’s aunt.”

“I’m Agent Tony DiNozzo and this is my husband Agent Jethro Gibbs. And this,” Tony tickled under Zuma’s chin. “This is Agent Zuma Gibbs.”

“Thank you for coming. Ethan hasn’t shown much interest in anything since…” She swallowed hard. “Since my brother and his wife were killed. With the broken bones and the traction, I know he must be bored. He doesn’t want to talk or anything, he just lays there. One of my friends was here and she was showing him some videos on her tablet and when she showed him the one about your dog, he just…” the woman shook her head. “She told me she was going to call and try to get ahold of you but I really didn’t think you’d come.”

Tony reach out and took her hand. “How are you holding up?”

“It’s tough. Jacob and I lost our parents several years ago. Marianne was an only child. Her parents are very elderly and are out in New Mexico. I’m really all that Ethan has left.” She smiled tremulously.

“Ethan is a bit restless, Carey.” Another young woman opened the door a crack. “Is something… I told you.” She smiled brightly. “Director Vance said he would call you. I just knew you would come.”

“You’re Becca? Thank you for calling us.” Tony said brightly. “Mush, Jethro. We have an Ethan to
meet.” The two young women giggled which was Tony’s intent. Jethro gave them a long-suffering look but obediently moved to push the chair as Becca held the door open wide. Carey entered ahead of them, announcing, “Ethan, you have visitors.”

The eight-year-old was lying on the bed with his hips and legs encased in casts; a bar between his legs. His gaze was fixed on the TV that hung over his bed. The slight twitching of his hands the only sign that he heard his aunt’s statement. “Hey, Ethan. Hope you don’t mind our stopping by.” Tony said jovially. “When Zuma heard, he insisted.” At his name, Zuma gave a woof of agreement and the boy’s face turned in their direction, a look of surprise on his face.

“Agent Zuma?” The boy said softly. The pup barked and wiggled his paws.

“He said he’s happy to meet you, Ethan.” Tony said.

“Dogs can’t talk.” Ethan replied.

“Of course they can. Zuma, do you want to get out of your carrier?”

Zuma looked at Tony and then at Ethan. “Ruff.”

“See?”

“Here let me.” Jethro stepped around and picked the pup out of his carrier. “Do you want on sit on the bed?” Zuma barked once and Jethro sat him carefully on Ethan’s bed after a quick nod of approval from Carey.

Zuma walked up the bed carefully until he could sniff the hand Ethan held out. He was wearing his Superman socks and he carefully held out a paw. “He wants to shake hands. Look, Aunt Carey.”

“I see. Best not keep him waiting.” The young woman’s eyes were full of unshed tears.

Jethro walked to the rear of the room where he could keep watch. The other young woman drifted over to stand by him. “Thank you, Agent Gibbs. Carey has been so worried. She hasn’t even wanted to leave Ethan to make funeral arrangements. They have to have closed casket so the funeral director said there wasn’t a hurry.”

“The funeral director is being helpful, then? Friend of the family?”

“No. The hospital recommended him, but he’s been very kind.”

“Had they been close?”

“Carey has been a great aunt, but she was going to school. She dropped out after the accident.”

“Georgetown?”

“Howard. Pre-med.”

“Surgeon?”

“Research. She was interested in Alzheimer’s research. That’s how her dad passed. Carey always said that her mom just lost her will.”

“It happens.”

They were silent for a while as they watched. “Does she live in DC?”
“She lived in a dorm. Said it was easier.”

“Year round?”

“Jacob insisted that she stay with him and Marianne over the summer to save money. They were so proud of her.”

“They owned a house in DC?”

“Rented over in Virginia. They were saving for a down payment. Carey paid the rent for the month but the landlord is anxious for her to clear out the townhouse. I told her I’d stay with Ethan but…”

“It’s very hard. Probably just needs some time.”

“Both of them.”

“How long will he be here?”

“The hospital social worker, Mrs. Enognirac, is trying to sort out a rehab hospital for Ethan but there’s something wonky with the insurance.”

“Wonky?”

“Something about his dad dying first and he was on his dad’s insurance. I don’t really understand and I know Carey doesn’t either. The social worker is trying to help but… I wish Carey had a lawyer.” She smiled brightly as she watched Carey, Ethan and Tony playing with Zuma. Jethro had gotten a couple wooden cars he and his dad had made and put them in Zuma’s carrier. The little pup was using his nose to ‘drive’ his car to Ethan’s delight. “I can never thank you enough for what you’ve done today.”

“You care about them.”

“Carey and I are closer than sisters. I’ve known her for… wow… nearly fourteen years. We went to middle school and high school together.”

“Not college.”

“Carey’s really smart. She got a scholarship that helped her. I’m doing part-time at the community college. It’ll take me longer but I’ll get there.”

“Medical research?”

“No, that’s Carey’s dream. I’m studying to be a nurse at the moment. I have almost all my classes except for the core done. I’ve taken a couple semesters off and have been saving up money to take time off work to do the practicals. It’s going to be a while now.” A knock on the door drew everyone’s attention but Zuma and Ethan’s. They were racing in the Indianapolis 500.

“Dr. Melinger.”

The older man waved Carey down. “I just thought I’d stop by and see if I could get an introduction to this ‘Agent Zuma’ everyone is talking about.” He approached the bed delighted to see the happiness in the small boy’s face. “Ethan, want to introduce me to your friend?”

“Agent Zuma,” he said with perfect manners. “This is Dr. Melinger. Dr. Melinger, this is Agent Zuma from NICS and his partners… Agent Tony and…”
“Agent Jethro,” Tony said in a mock whisper.

“Oh, yeah, Agent Jethro,” Ethan said.

Dr. Melinger held out his hand and took a small paw. “I’m pleased to meet all of you, especially you Agent Zuma.” The doctor laughed as Zuma barked. “I hate to break this up, but it’s time for Ethan’s x-ray.”

“Awww.” Ethan moaned.

“Hey, champ, we all have to do it. He,” Tony jerked his thumb at Jethro. “He made me have an x-ray before I got here.”

“Really?”

“Yep. Every other day.” Tony confirmed.

“Wow. Is it cause you got hurt when Agent Zuma saved you?”

“Yes, it is. That’s why Zuma has to wear socks. His paws were hurt. I don’t like x-rays and he doesn’t really care for the ointment and socks, but it’s important. Agents have to do a lot of things they don’t like.”

“I guess.” Ethan looked sad. “Will I ever see you again?”

“I’m sure that we’ll be in touch. Agent Zuma will see to that.”

“Good bye, Agent Zuma.” Ethan hugged the pup who kissed him all over the face. “Thank you, sir, for bringing them.” He looked over at Jethro.

“Oh, wait.” Tony looked at the doctor. “Just one more minute. I almost forgot Zuma brought you a present.” He waited while Jethro retrieved it from the bag on the back of the wheelchair and then handed the gift bag to Ethan. Simultaneously, Jethro picked up Zuma and helped him back into this carrier.

Ethan reached into the gift bag excitedly. “Carey, look! It’s Agent Zuma. He’s even wearing his socks.” Thankfully the baby boutique had found another plush pup in stock. Tony had insisted on adding the Superman socks for authenticity.

“I’m sure if you asked Dr. Melinger he’d let you take Zuma with you.” Tony prompted.

“Really? Can I, Dr. Melinger?”

“Absolutely.” The doctor was delighted with the turnaround in the boy’s emotions.

Zuma, Tony and Jethro retreated in a flurry of good byes and thank yous. Outside the door, Jethro stopped and came around to look at his husband, noting the lines of pain etched on Tony’s face. “We’re going to leave here, stop and get something for you to eat and then it’s pain pill, time. No arguments.” He smirked, “After all, agents have to do a lot of things they don’t like.”

“Yeah, yeah use my own words against me.”

Section 85

“So what did your interrogation uncover?” Tony asked happily eating a white chocolate, raspberry crisp muffin from Hansen’s. Aalrik had even carried Tony’s cappuccino to the car to say hello and
meet Agent Zuma, of course. He handed a Hansen bag to Tony who peeped in to find several cookies.

“What are these, Aalrik?” Tony held one up.

“They’re something I just thought the pup might like. They’re puppy treats.” Zuma’s ears perked up. “I thought Agent Zuma would give me his opinion. The bone-shaped one is Autumn Oats. It has pumpkin and squash pureed. I used a lot of oats with the flour and some molasses to sweeten it up. The top has a thin layer of minced sweet potato and carrots. The heart shape is a Love’n Nuts. It has a slightly crispier texture and the flour is crossed with corn meal. Also there is a nice protein base with creamy peanut butter. The apple shape is Happy Harvest. It has wheat flour and applesauce. I added a touch of spice to give it a nice aroma but no nutmeg. Nutmeg is toxic.” Aalrik clarified. “The round ones are Sweetie Pies. I used rice flour, pureed sweet potatoes, a drop of honey and some egg. Really basic. Lastly the stars are the Zuma Treat. I used a bit of chicken broth, eggs, powdered milk, rice, honey and chicken pureed like baby food.”

“What interrogation?” Jethro asked taking a sip of his special Java. “Don’t forget to take your meds.”

Tony pulled a frown but obediently took the pills with a drink from the bottle of water Jethro had purchased. “I saw you and Becca talking. Spill.”

“Carey and Jacob lost their father to Alzheimer’s. Their mother died of a broken heart, according to them. Ethan’s parents Jacob and Marianne rented a townhouse. Carey stayed with them over the summer as she worked to save for tuition. Carey is doing pre-med and wants to go into Alzheimer’s Research. Becca and she have been friends since they were about Ethan’s age. Becca wants to be a nurse. She’s been attending part-time but can’t afford to take off work to do her hospital rotations.”

Jethro paused for another drink. “The landlord is pressing for the townhouse to be cleared out. The insurance company is trying to avoid covering Ethan’s medical bills. A social worker, Mrs. Enognirac, is trying to help but has limited resources. Ethan will need rehabilitation and the kids will need an appropriate home to live in before Carey can bring him home.”

Tony licked the last of the crumbs from his fingers. He looked at Zuma who had curled up to nap with Rocky. “So what’s the plan?”

“What plan?”

“Puh-lease. I know you, Jethro. How do we help?”

“I was thinking. Those condos where Helen and Diana live. They’re handicap compliant, aren’t they?”

“Yes. That’s one of the reasons that Helen choose there; for the elevator and the convenience.”
“If Carey had a three-bedroom unit, then Becca and she could share.”

“We could introduce her to Helen and Diana. They could support each other. That would be great.” Tony said enthusiastically. “I can arrange for a moving company to pack up everything for them and store it. So, housing handled. Scholarships for nursing and med school?”

“Yep. Also a trust fund for Ethan’s education.”

“They’re going to need money to live on. Stipends attached to the scholarships?”

“That would work and we could also provide a stipend for Ethan’s care. Something useable for the little things.”

“How do we make it happen?”

“You can call Mrs. Enognirac. Get the details needed, even ask her to look at the condo. Get recommendations for the rehabilitation center. We call the attorney Moretti recommended and he can work out the details.”

“The medical insurance?”

“Let the attorney deal with it.”

“Cover story?” Tony asked. “Inheritance?”

“Life insurance.”

“What about Becca?”

“Hmmm.”

“You said Cary and she’d been friends for years. Maybe Jacob set it up for her like another sister.”

“Works for me.” Jethro agreed.

Tony felt his phone vibrate. “Forgot to turn the ringer back on after we left the hospital. I don’t recognize the number. Special Agent Anthony DiNozzo. How may I help you?”

“It’s Becca. Becca Peterson. I snitched your cell number from Carey.”

Tony pushed the speaker button. “Hi, Becca. Are Carey and Ethan okay?”

“More than. Your gift just arrived and before you deny; I know it had to be you. I know the aide said it was from some children’s organization but I know better. I checked and that organization doesn’t exist. They don’t have anyone but me, so it had to be you. I wanted to say ‘thank you’. I want to tell you that you shouldn’t have, but you should have seen Ethan’s face when he saw the Ipad and the XBOX package. I can’t begin to tell you how happy he is now. I wanted you to know how grateful I am. The restaurant gift cards are so wonderful, too. Carey is just so overwhelmed by them. She and Ethan are talking about where they would like dinner from. Did I tell you he hasn’t let go of the puppy you gave him? Not once. All I had been hoping for was a visit. How do I ever repay you?”

Tony tried to answer but there was too big a lump in his throat. He looked at Jethro, helplessly. “No need. Someday when this is past, just take some time to relax with your family and enjoy life. Take care of each other.”

“We will. God bless you both.” The two men could hear the tears in her voice when she hung up.
Jethro reached out with his right hand and linked fingers with Tony. “You did good, husband.”

“We, did good.” Tony smiled and clarified.

“Better talk to the attorney about setting that organization up. We may need it again.”

Section 86

It surprised Tony that he really wasn’t missing work yet. He, Jethro and Jackson had fallen in to a comfortable routine. First thing in the morning, Jethro would help Tony dress and shower. Then while Jethro showered, Tony would get Zuma’s bag of socks and spread them out. The pup would examine the offerings and then pick out a pair. Taking them carefully in his mouth, the puppy would lay them in Tony’s hand. He would carefully clean Zuma’s paws and rub salve on them before slipping on the socks.

Tony smiled as he sat on the bed, Zuma sprawled over his lap. The pup was so relaxed; he was even letting Tony give his fur a good brushing with only minor grumbling. As he brushed, Tony grinned at the little blue and white athletic shoe socks. Zuma had looked the socks over twice but the Superman socks were in the laundry basket. Evidently the blue socks were the next best choice.

“He looks about asleep.” Jethro said, coming in to the room drying his hair.

“At least he’s not putting up as much trouble with getting groomed. He was so angry yesterday.”

“But today, you combed your hair and then combed his. He wants to be like his mommy.” Jethro smirked.

“I’m not his mommy.” Tony protested. Zuma grumbled and tilted his head. He rolled over and exposed his belly to the comb. “You are such a good boy.”

“Hey, Zuma. Where’s Mommy?” Jethro asked. Zuma tilted his head and looked from Jethro to Tony. He gave a short whine when Tony stopped paying attention.

“That is not a fair test. Is it, sweetie?” Tony resumed his stroking.

“Ready?” Jethro held his hand out to help his husband to his feet.

Tony put a disgruntled Zuma on the bed. Rising he ended up pressed against Jethro. He could feel their joint pleasure at the touches. “I think fate has it in for me.” Tony said as he slipped his arms around his husband.

“How so?”

“We get married and have to take McGee on our honeymoon. We get to go to Italy and you get shot in the…”


“Now, you’re almost healed and I get shot twice during a sting by the FBI agents. I don’t think that’s all coincidence; ergo, fate has it in for me.”

“Did you just use ‘ergo’?” Jethro tapped the back of Tony’s head gently. “We can still do this.” The kiss was just as wonderful as on their private balcony in Palermo, until Zuma barked.

“Boys? You up?” Jackson called. “What do you want for breakfast?”
“Since I can’t have what I want...” Tony turned away. “Any requests?”

“Scrambled eggs?” Jethro helped Zuma to the floor.

“Ham or bacon?”

“ Yep. ” Jethro said.

Tony just laughed and made a face at him. “Let me check the fridge. ”

McGee paused his game and clicked on the private message window.

Agent Bob Mincef: Good-morning, Agent McGee.

Agent Timothy McGee: Good-morning. And I told you. Tim or McGee.

Agent Bob Mincef: Sorry. I hope I didn’t message too early.

Agent Timothy McGee: Used to being at work by now. You?

Agent Bob Mincef: Came in early. I’m trying to compile all the reports into one for Agent Fornell.

Agent Timothy McGee: He makes you call him Agent Fornell?

Agent Bob Mincef: Tobias or Fornell. Just don’t feel I’ve earned that right yet. You wouldn’t understand.

Agent Timothy McGee: Trust me. When I came over from Norfolk, I was petrified of Gibbs.

Agent Bob Mincef: Hard to believe. You’re a bit of a legend for those coming up in cyber areas.

Agent Timothy McGee: How’s the investigation going?

Agent Bob Mincef: Director Comey is…

Agent Timothy McGee: I can imagine. Close to being done?

Agent Bob Mincef: I’m compiling all the communications that were sent or received among all participants. I’ve got to pull the ballistics report regarding the shots that hit Agent DiNozzo. Then I’ve still got to get all the media pulled together. Blast, it’s Comey.

Agent Bob Mincef: Now I’ve got to go through all the agents involved from all agencies and provide dossiers for the report.

Agent Timothy McGee: Send me a list and I’ll do the dossiers for you.

Agent Bob Mincef: Seriously?

Agent Timothy McGee: Yeah. I’ve probably already got a lot in my directory already. Vance wants those, also. Every time I do one, I save it. I have several on the FBI already.

Agent Bob Mincef: You’re a lifesaver.

Agent Timothy McGee: No problem. Send it to my NCIS email.
Agent Bob Mincef: I owe you one.

Agent Timothy McGee: Buy me a cup of coffee sometime. What time’s the report due?

Agent Bob Mincef: 15:00 hours

Agent Timothy McGee: I’ll have them to you by lunch.

Agent Bob Mincef: Thanks, again.

Agent Timothy McGee: Got the list. I’ll start on them now. Talk to you later.

“You are not Ambassador Nimbob of Momnarth Pern.”

“Sorry, sir.”

“Agent McGee, right? You work with Gibbs.”

“Yes, sir.”

“So what was so important that you bumped the ambassador’s call.”

“Sir, I… uh…”

“If you felt it was important enough to hack my computer, you can spit it out.”

“Yes, sir. Mr. Vice-President, I was assisting Agent Bob Mincef with the report for Agent Fornell. I was only helping with providing dossiers on the agents involved.”

“At ease. I’m fine with NCIS and FBI working harmoniously. Lord knows between Gibbs and Fornell there’s been enough disharmony. Go on.”

“Well, I had never worked with Agent Patterson so I didn't have a dossier already prepared. I started compiling information and well, sir… I found this.”

A small window opened on the vice-president’s screen and he obligingly opened the visible link. “Is this really his?”

“Yes, sir. I wanted to be sure and I may have used a back door to … uh…”

“I am well aware of your hacking abilities, Agent. Just saying you verified it will suffice. Don’t tell me anything that would make me have you arrested.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you have any other evidence that might corroborate this?”

“Yes, sir. I’m sending you an email with attachments now as well as a list of organizations where Agent Patterson is signed up.”

“I’m assuming he used an alias.”

“Stonewall69.”

“Ahh… the riots.”
“Yes, sir.”

“I appreciate the information but I am a bit surprised you brought the information directly to me instead of Director Vance. I’m assuming you haven’t told either DiNozzo or Gibbs, either.”

“No, sir.”

“I’ll take care of this. And… good work, Agent McGee. Now can you get Ambassador Nimbob?”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.” McGee logged off. He hoped that he had made the right decision going to the vice-president.
This section does involve some hostility towards the LGBT community. I apologize for it coming so soon after Orlando but it had been in the works and it would have been a bit difficult to scrap the story line. I do apologize.

On a lighter note, I have been a bad idiot lately, but no one has called me on the names of my original characters; Mrs. Enognirac and Mrs. Lamina. Snickers. You did pick up on poor Rocky. Smirks.

“Okay.” Geminiangel rubbed her aching back. “136 hooves are painted in red, white and blue so far.” She looks over where QueeneofftheDeer and Patricia still had Nanny, Billy, Bambi and Fawn waiting.

“Baaaaahhh.” Sinatra marched over to ArianaFeilacan who was overseeing the nail polish tables; which was also known as making sure the idiot didn’t screw things up and making sure all the polish got back into the locked cabinet where the idiot couldn’t get it.

“No, Sinatra. The red and white are necessary.”

“I don’t think that “My voice is a little Norse” is appropriate it is more teal than blue.”

“No, not “Baroque…But Still Shopping” either. It has too much sparkle and is all white.”

“Baa! BAAA! Ba ba ba ba... ba ba ba ba... ba ba ba ba...”

“Yes, we know that jane_x80 gave you the gift certificate that bought the OPI for you. The theme is till red, white and blue.”

“BAH!” The black lamb stomped away.

“No, Patricia and I are almost done.”

“How are you doing, Aussiefan70?”

“I’ve got the rabbits and the clones nails done. Kiwi is being a bit difficult. Every time I finish a paw, he gets into the eucalyptus and smudges them. Kiwi, hold still.”

“Parker, could you come hold Kiwi’s eucalyptus for him to eat while Aussiefan70 is painting his nails?”

“Sure!” Parker had just finished putting finishing touches on the folders for the cabal members.

“Geminiangel!” Patriciasita called.

“What? Is it Wolfnjag?”

“No. We’re having an issue with the owls.” Fairhaven74 spoke up.

Be right there.” The cabal now housed eight owls who had decided to move in rather than return to the reserves. “Are they having problems with the flying routine?”

“Not exactly. They’ve been practicing the last few days.” Patriciasita pointed at the maypole which had been decorated with red, white and blue ribbon.

“The problem is that now their nails are painted.” Fairhaven74 explained.
Barney the barn owl was waiting patiently and Geminiangel bowed her head to his majestic stare. “Who may I help you, Your Majesty?”

“K-r-r-r-ick k-r-r-r-ick k-r-r-r-r-ick k-r-r-r-r-i-r-r-r-r-ick.” Barney held out his beautifully painted talons. “k-r-r-r-r-i-r-r-r-r-ick.”

“Yes, I see. Gripping the wreaths would hide your talons. Let me think. Let me think. Oh, Patriciasita, could we use a ribbon to put a loop around the wreath?” Geminiangel turned back to Barney. “That way you could pick the loop up with your beak and your talons would be visible.”

“K-r-r-r-ick-k-r-r-r-r-i-r-r-r-r-ick k-r-r-r-r-i-r-r-r-r-ick.” Barney announced and the trio awaited confirmation from the other owls.

“Hooo Hooo hooooooo.” The two barred owls spoke up.

“Screeeeeeech.” The Eastern Screech owls voiced their opinion.

“Clack….clack…clack.” Came from the small white owl. If she didn’t know better, Geminiangel would think she was a snowy owl.

“K-r-r-r-r-ick.”

“Great! Thank-you, Your Majesty.” Geminiangel turned and saw Mimic having his manicure finished. “Wow, Mimic. Looking good!”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 87

“So what’s up today?” Tony asked as they finished the breakfast cleanup. He had been permitted to sit and scramble eggs. Now he was sitting, drying dishes. “Fornell hasn’t interviewed us for his report. We could…”

“Not going to the office,” Jethro said. “If he needs anything he can come to us.”

“Well, it’s a nice morning…”

“Not going to the park. You’re supposed to be resting.” Jackson spoke up.

Tony frowned. “I could…”

“Not going through the boxes in the basement. If you need to go through them before the move, we’ve plenty of time.” Jethro took the plates and put them in the cabinet.

“Zuma…”

“If you groom him again, I will not save you from his puppy glare of doom.” Jackson spoke up on the pup’s behalf.

As Tony pouted, Jethro knelt down in front of his husband. “Tony, please. This injury could have… It could have cost you your career with NCIS. We have to take this seriously. Give your kidney and back time to heal.”

“I feel so useless.” Tony was a bit ashamed. He knew Jackson and Jethro loved him and were trying to protect him.

“We’ll find you something to do.” Jethro held up a finger before Tony could interrupt. “Not physical lifting and stretching. No carrying things.”
“There’s nothing to do.”

“Want some cheese with that wine, son?” Jackson quipped. Jethro laughed as Tony flushed. “You told me about that boy in the hospital. The one who lost his parents.”

“Ethan.”

“You said that you and Jethro used a fake group to deliver that care package.”

Jethro rose his knees cracking. He gave Tony a light smack when his husband smirked, knowingly. “What about it, dad?” He moved to sit next to him.

“You could use your down time and work on making that group real. I know that you and Tony want to help people. There’s a lot of people who are in need and even more who are users. Might set some rules and guidelines. Make sure that the money helps those who really need it.”

Tony worried his lower lip as he considered Jackson’s words. “You mean, like an application or something? That seems so cold.”

“Doesn’t have to be an application but some sort of referral process or vetting procedure after contact is made.” Jethro said thinking aloud.

“What about that social person?” Jackson said.

“Mrs. Enognirac?”

“Yes. Could she help refer people?”

Tony looked at Jackson and then Jethro. “She would know who really needs help. Would she be allowed?”

“She’d have to talk to the family first, I’m sure.” Jethro replied.

“Are you going to stay with one hospital or reach out to others? If you reach out, you would need a contact at each.”

“You’ve evidently thought about this a bit, Jackson. What do you think we should do?” Tony asked.

“Nope. Not my call. I may have a few questions to help guide you.”

“We need a pen and paper.” Jethro obligingly got up and fetched one for his husband. “First thing, I guess, is the name. Do we stick with the one we gave the Richards?”

“What did you give the Richards?” Jackson asked curiously.

“The AZ3G Foundation.” Tony said sheepishly.

Jethro held his hands up. “He came up with it.”

“I was under pressure. It was all I could come up with that quick.”

“Not exactly catchy.” Jackson said. “AZ3G?”

“Agent Zuma Three Gibbs Foundation.” Tony explained.

Jackson looked at this son. “Three Gibbs?” He mouthed.
Tony clarified. “It’s us. We started this because a little boy wanted to meet Agent Zuma. Then the three of us, Three Gibbs.”

“Son, this is your money.”

“No.” Tony denied flatly. “It is our family and our money. We decide as a team.” He was vehement about it.

“Dad, Tony and I had this talk in Palermo. I felt like you about the money, but Tony convinced me that we can do so much good. If Tony had refused the inheritance, it would have been in limbo forever. His mother had already terminated her rights. I wanted him to put it in his name, but Tony was adamant. This may seem sudden but Tony and I have realized we’ve been together for years. I trust no one as much as I do him.” Tony reach out and took his husband’s hand as Jethro continued. “We are married and it is going to work. We’re going to stay that way. We are family. We are in it together. That includes you and fuzzball.”

“I need you. All of you. I don’t know how to be family.” Tony dropped his gaze to the table top. “The DiNozzos supposedly have money. Senior never really shared it. It kept me in military school and out of his hair until I was eighteen. Once that school year ended, I was disowned. My one aunt left me a small trust. With that, an athletic scholarship and working through the year, I managed college. I want this money to do good. I want to help people who don’t have anywhere to turn, but I need you and Jethro to guide me. Please, Jackson.”

Jackson hadn’t seen his son this committed since Shannon nor as approachable. Leroy had seemed to shut down after losing his girls. Now, Leroy had opened his heart again and so had Jackson. Tony was good for Leroy and Jackson’s relationship. Tony reminded him of a lost puppy; hopeful that the stranger will rescue him but used to being kicked instead. Now that Jethro and he had married, Tony seemed more settled, more comfortable. Jackson looked intently at the two men and threw up his hands. “Fine. Name to be settled later. First question, who do you want to help?”

Section 88

By lunchtime, the Gibbs men had done a good outline of the focus of the charity. They had defined who they would focus on, mainly children. There was an outline of the types of help they would provide: medical, education, transportation and/or in some cases housing. Mrs. Enognirac and her peers would be contacted and given a list of general guidelines. Patients and families meeting those criteria would be referred to the AZ3G foundation. The two older Gibbs men were still not committed to the name, but Tony liked what it symbolized.

During the long discussion, Zuma had finished his morning nap and had wandered in carrying Rocky. He permitted Mommy to hold the raccoon while the pup had a drink and a snack. He laid down on the seat of his high chair and barked for Rocky. Zuma had watched the three men as they discussed their ideas. Now and then he would remind Mommy that his ears needed attention. Luckily the men were nearly done when Zuma decided that he needed to go outside. Leaving Rocky to his mid-morning nap, Zuma had gone to Daddy and had pawed his slacks until Jethro had scooped him for a trip outside.

“Want me to help you into the living room for a rest?” Jackson eyed his son-in-law. “You look tired.”

“I think I’ll go lay down in the bedroom. Maybe take a quick nap.” Tony replied. He used the table to help pull himself up.

“Need a hand?”
“I’m okay. Maybe I’ll watch a little TV.”

“I’ll let Leroy know.” Jackson watched his son-in-law walk slowly to the new master suite. He looked at the backyard where Leroy was tossing the pup a ball. It was good to spend time with his family. Jackson had thought his and Leroy’s relationship was destroyed forever. He thought about the store and his house, there really wasn’t anything there for him now. Maybe it was time to let make Maxwell an offer on the house and the store.

“Give it here.” Jethro wrestled the ball away from the pup who huffed at him. “You have to give it to me if you want me to throw it, you silly thing.” He tossed the ball to the other end of the yard and with a disgruntled look Zuma took off after it. His phone started ringing and he answered it as he watched the pup stalk the ball.

“Hey, Abbs. Slow down. What… Abbs.. I need you to calm… Who… How did…Alright.” Shutting off the call, Jethro raced across the yard to pick up the puppy who dropped the ball in surprise. “We got to get to Tony.”

Jackson was sitting in the kitchen enjoying a quiet cup of coffee when Leroy rushed in carrying Zuma. “Where’s Tony? Dad, where’s Tony?”

“Bedroom. Leroy, what’s wrong?” Jackson got up and started across the kitchen as Leroy said nothing. “Leroy?”

“Tony. Shit, Tony.” Jethro pushed the door open to find Tony sitting on the edge of the bed, the TV remoted gripped in his hand and his face white.

“They… How…” Tony asked.

Jethro grabbed the remote muting the TV. “Abby just called. She’s on her way.”

“Leroy, what’s going on?” Jackson stared at the reporter on the screen flanked by pictures of Sacks and Mabus.

“Some reporter dug up the connection.” Jethro had pulled his husband against his chest after dumping Zuma into Tony’s arms. The pup was picking up on the stress and was whining and trying to give Tony kisses. “They broke the story that Ron Sacks was Jarvis Mabus’ son. They also put together the Agent Zuma angle. Director Hagel and Vance are on the situation.”

“Do they know about me? Oh, God, Jethro, they don’t know, do they?” Tony pleaded.

“No, Tony.”

“Gibbs… Gibbs…” McGee was hollering as he entered the front door.

“I’ll get it.” Jackson patted Tony’s shoulder.

McGee was panting from running from his car. “Jackson, it’s out.”

“Just relax, son. We know. Abby called Leroy, but Tony had already turned on the TV.”

“How’s Tony?” McGee was still catching his breath.

“A little shaken. Leroy’s in the bedroom with him now.”

“I’m here.” Tony walked shakily into the kitchen cradling Zuma and Rocky. “How, McGee?”
“A reporter was doing background on Sacks. He recognized the name of Clarissa Sacks and tracked it back. Her grandfather was one of the first African American Congressman in the wake of the Civil War. Her family has always been prominent in politics. He stumbled upon her divorce and put the pieces together.”

“What if they track down my mother? My adoption?”

“Tony, it won’t happen.” Jethro again reassured him.

“Tony, your files are buried so deep no one will be able to access them.” McGee added.

Tony looked at him and his expression changed. “McHacker, what did you do?”

“McGee.” Gibbs looked at his junior agent.

“I may have changed them to classified, encrypted them and buried them under a couple of layers of misdirection. Trust me, they are safe. If they even start to get close, I’ll know.” McGee assured him.

“Thank you.” Tony said sincerely.

McGee just gave him a nod. They were family. “There is something we should talk about.” His serious tone sent shivers down Tony’s spine.

“Let’s talk in the living room.” Jackson encouraged. “Tony, you need to rest.” Jackson and McGee lead the way from the kitchen and helped Jethro get Tony settled into his nest of pillows on the recliner. Zuma curled up on Tony’s lap contentedly, gnawing on Rocky.

“Alright, McGee.” Gibbs looked at him. “What’s up?”

“I was helping Agent Mincef with dossiers on the agents involved. I stumbled over something and I…” McGee looked down. “I contacted the vice-president about it.”

“You went to the vice-president,” Gibbs’ tone was low, “before me, Vance or Hagel?”

“Gibbs, it…” McGee took a deep breath and lifted his head to look into his boss’ eyes. “Yes, I did. The information involves a member of the FBI team. I felt it was important to be sure that this was handled outside of the MCRT or FBI office.”

“What did you find doing Agent Patterson’s dossier?”

“How did…” McGee shook his head. This was Gibbs, of course he knew. “I was compiling information about his action reports and was searching his files for any reference to the day of the action. I found an email that made me suspicious of Agent Patterson’s behavior on the day of the shooting. I decided to try to identify the person with whom he was corresponding.”

“What did he say?” Tony looked at his partner. “What did he say?”

“The email Patterson received said “Well?” and he replied “One hit, one miss. Perfect shot.”."

“What else, McGee?” Gibbs asked. “Just spit it out.”

McGee shook his head slightly. “Patterson said, “He was wearing a vest. That wasn’t in the plan. If he hadn’t been wearing the vest, there’d be one less.” Tony…”

Jackson sat in stunned silence. It was bad enough his son got shot. It was horrible that it was friendly fire. For it to be deliberate? He couldn’t even process that.
“It wasn’t an accident.” Gibbs said. That fear had been gnawing at him since Monday. Sure, there were accidental incidents of freely fire. A highly decorated agent who hit one person twice in the same area had been improbable. Jethro had trusted Fornell to get to the truth. He hadn’t thought about McGee finding the evidence. He had focused on caring for Tony and praying he was wrong.

Jethro looked at Tony in concern. His husband appeared to be frozen in place; his face white with shock. “Tony,” Jethro knelt beside the chair and pulled his husband’s hand from Zuma’s fur.

“He shot me. He meant to… to…”

“But he didn’t. He didn’t succeed.”

“Thanks to you. You forced me to wear the vest.”

“Told you. I’ve always got your six.” Tony lifted his other shaking hand and pressed it against Jethro’s cheek as his husband whispered. “I will always have your six.” To the world it was probably a totally unromantic act, but to Tony it was a declaration of Jethro’s feelings and he felt his heart warm to his husband’s declaration.

“Why, McGee? Why did this man shoot my son?” Jackson swallowed his disbelief.

“I was able to track him using the username Stonewall69 to a website for an online neo-Nazi group. It was encrypted and was secured. I was able to use his name and get in. The group promotes the use of violence and terrorist tactics. The group is openly hostile towards the LBGT community. The news of Gibbs’ and Tony’s marriage was widely discussed online. Patterson had discussed the opportunity that being selected for the mission provided. He said if the opportunity came, he would take Tony out and eliminate one blight on the law enforcement community.”
“Yes.” Bobdog54 affirmed. “RSVPs are coming in. We have some volunteers that are going to come in once the parade starts and they will finish setting the tables and chairs. They are also going to fire up the grills and get things cooking.”

“Our guest of honor?”

“ArianaFeileacan is going to get her here on the premise of discussing the idio…cabal issues.”

Geminiangel smiled missing DejaSue’s slip. “Can I see the guest list?”

Geminiangel read down the list. 6of7, 1997padme, Alyse_SaFyre, annette_ella, ArianaFeileacan, Aussiefan70, Bandcadet1, bobdog54, bridge12e, buns1974, BunnyBear27, Callasandra, CantDanceLovetoRead, carbo21, Chalithra, Chiefrazz, Chrissie, Chrissie0770, countrygirlita, daikinz, DejaSue, delphiskyve, devon99, EmmaSimone, exileena, Fairhaven74, fan, Felmyst, flowerpotgirl, Goddess74, HappyGuest, HoneyB, jane_x80, jesco0307, Juanita, JulieMH, kegu, Kiki_L, LadyDrak1075, LAG0802, Linda123, magpie1600, MamaT, MarieKiki19, Mihoshi_Jackson, MKM1963, neisgirl2014, nevarstar, NewDawn, njflkf, otrame, panchajaviera, Parker, Patricia, PatriciaSita, poppaea_sabina, psyche53, QueenBee4Ever, QueeneotheDeer, Royalelephant, Shadowcat88, ShadowWolfsDen, Sharon, snusa1, Spiderprincipi, Teresah49, Trout1986, usatraveler.

“Wow, we’ve really grown.” Geminiangel motioned over royalelephant. “How are we going to have enough room during the parade?”

“Just follow me.” She took the idiot into the back of the barn. “We were able to get a really good deal on a couple more springboard passenger wagons.”

“How are we on power?”

“Ta da!” Royalelephant pointed to a couple of tractors. “Each one can pull a wagon. And over here is the Cabal Alliance flat bed. “There’s a nice tree for Kiwi to perch on. The Dakota and the others can just mill around. The rabbits and the...uh...clones will be in this area up front with Bambi and Fawn. Billy and Nanny have decided that they would like to ride with the ponies, too. Everyone is going to wear their leotards, tutus, etc.”

“Wonderful! The owls are going to carry the wreathes and ribbons in front of the dancers.”

“BAAAAA! BAAAAAAA! BA BA!”

“What now?” Geminiangel took off for behind the secret curtain. QueenBee4Ever was squaring off with Sinatra, in front of all the lambs. Their new leotards were adorable; a nice navy color with red and white accents and lots of sparkle. “Oh, you all look just lovely.”

“Baa.” Sinatra protested.

“And handsome. So, what’s the problem?”


“Sinatra wants to include “Anarchy in the USA” in the routine.” QueenBee4Ever said.

“That’s not exactly patriotic.”

“Yes, it does have a nice beat.”

“Baa ba baa ba... ba ba ba ba... ba ba ba...”

“Baa ba ba... ba ba ba... ba ba ba...”

QueenBee4Ever snickered as the idiot and the lamb argued.

“It ties in to the guest section? What guest section?”

“Well, Sinatra and I were talking. Several of the cabal are from the United Kingdom and it seems a bit strange to have them here to celebrate our declaring war on them. We also have several people who are from other countries. We thought we could include a few tunes for them; national anthems and popular songs.”

“Nice idea. I don’t understand how it ties in?”

“Baa ba ba... ba ba ba... ba ba ba...”
“NO! You can’t include “Anarchy in the UK. That is just… just…”
“That’s what I told him.” QueenBee4Ever said smugly.
“QueenBee4Ever has approval for and control of the music list, Sinatra. No “Anarchy in the USA” or “Anarchy in the UK.”
“Baa. Baa baaaa baa ba.”
“You keep that up, mister and you won’t be in the parade.”
Holds his hoof up to Gemiangel. “BAAAAA!”
Gemiangel pointed. “Corner now!”
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Chapter Summary

Sorry for the absence! I was without a laptop for the past two weeks. I "lost" mine to my nephew and had to order a new one and re-install everything. Finally.... That's the good news....

Our beloved Wolfnjag has had a very rough time. Her father took a nasty fall and had to have surgery. He may need another pin in his arm. Just recently while trying to save him from another fall, Wolfnjag fell and bent the plate in her arm. They had to operate to replace the plate, but she developed an infection which delayed her hospital release by another two days. She is thankfully out of the hospital but is in a lot of discomfort. She will be unable to "corral" me for a few more weeks. Please keep her and her father in your thoughts while they are recovering.

Also, please be kind. Amelitta and I are flying without a beta :-) temporarily.

Chapter Notes

It was quiet. Immediately the hair on psyche53’s neck stood up. It is never quiet. Creeping in to the study, he moved to the secret door to the nursery. Opening it, it was even stranger. Each cot held a sleeping lamb. Even Sinatra the Diva was sleeping. Nanny and Billy were cuddled up together; as were Fawn and Bambi. Even Rosiesmomma who was on nursery duty was snoozing in the rocker. Prepared bottles on the table next to her. Tonight’s feeders, Fan, Chrissie, devon99 and Susanmp were sleeping on their own cots.

Shutting the door, psyche53 looked around the study. This was bad. No idiot sitting at her desk procrastinating. No muse taking up the couch and distracting the idiot. No QueenoftheDeer assisting the idiot in her new crazy endeavor. This was really bad.

“What’s taking so long?” Rafe_dragos whispered through the window screen. “You were going to sneak in grab the Clear Appalachian Tea and get out.”

“There’s something wrong.”

“What?”

“Everyone’s sleeping soundly.”

“And that’s wrong?”

“With this cabal?” psyche53 drawled. “Worse than that the idiot is gone.”

“This is bad. Do we hit the idiot alert?”

“And explain why we were here?”

“Blame it on Gibbs’ gut?”

“Might work.”

“Who’s on call this weekend?”

“Oh, crap.” Psycho53 held out the list. “It’s inmates watching the asylum; QueenoftheDeer, QueenBee4Ever, Aussiefan70 and Patriciasita. They’re just as liable to join her.”

“We could hit the alert. Maybe they’d bring her back.”

“If the alert isn’t cancelled in a ‘timely’ manner, it rolls over to Wolfnjag.”

“What’s a timely manner?”
“Do you really want to find out?”
“Good-point. Grab the Clear Appalachian Tea and let’s get out of here. I don’t want to be anywhere close when Wolfnjag finds out.”
Psyche53 grabbed two jugs and made a swift retreat.

“More tea, Wolfnjag?”
“Please…hic… Oh, pardon me. What kind of tea is this again?”
“Clear Appalachian Tea. It tastes great with lemonade doesn’t it.”
“My, yes.” Wolfnjag smiled happily.
“Now you see why the British like lemon in their tea.” Aussiefan70 spoke up. “Hey, want to sing ‘Tie me kangaroo down Sport’?” She said busily filling out a karaoke song form.
“I don’t think I know that one.”
“It’s easy.” Aussiefan70 snickered. She leaned over to where GeminiAngel was industriously filling out forms. “What are you doing?”
GeminiAngel held up the slips all filled in for Wolfnjag. On the papers were a wide array of titles including “Walk like a man”, “It’s raining men” and “Bitch”.
“When she’s sober, she’s gonna kill you.” QueeneoftheDeer patted her. “Been nice knowing you.”
“I’ve got it all on video. If something happens to me, it goes on YouTube.”
“It was nice of your husband to let us, well…wolfnjag…do karaoke between sets.” QueenBee4Ever said.
“I gave him a jug of tea.” QueeneoftheDeer waved at him cheerfully.
“How many more do we have left?” QueenBee4Ever asked.
“About five… maybe six…” GeminiAngel shrugged. “I can mak….get more if we run out.”

QueeneoftheDeer’s husband finished ‘Secret Agent Man’ to wild applause from the idiot. “That was for ‘The Idiot from The Cabal.’ Now we have a special performance. Help me welcome back, our songstress of the night, Wolfnjag.”
The idiot helped her stand and pushed her towards the stage. “My tea…hic…”
“You can have more after your song.” The cabal table stood up whistling.
“All right…Hic.. What am I singing?…”
“Remember,” QueenoftheDeer’s husband said patiently. “You just need to read the words.”
Aussiefan70 took a look at the title. “Isn’t that a duet?”
“Not tonight.” GeminiAngel pointed the cell phone towards the stage. “Sinatra made me promise to make her sing this. In return, he promised all the alliance would go to bed on time and be good all night. Besides. It’s going to be hilarious.”
Wolfnjag began to read as the words scrolled by:
“I remember every little thing
As if it happened only yesterday
Parking by the lake
And there was not another car in sight
And I never had a girl
Looking any better than you did
And all the kids at school
They were wishing they were me that night

And now our bodies are oh so close and tight
It never felt so good, it never felt so right
And we’re glowing like the metal on the edge of a knife
“What’s wrong?” Jethro stepped out of the kitchen and gently pulled his husband back against him. He wrapped his arms around Tony’s waist and rested his chin on his husband’s shoulder. After McGee had left, Tony had laid back in the recliner and pretended to sleep while the two Gibbs men flipped on a sport channel and tried to make small talk. Eventually Tony had excused himself to use the bathroom and hadn’t returned. Concerned when he didn’t return, Jethro had spotted him out the kitchen window.

“I got a text from Heidi Mabus. She asked if I could meet her at the funeral home.” Tony gave a big sigh. He watched the puppy bouncing around the yard. Zuma had been very happy to join him outside.

“Ah…” Jethro said. “What do you want to do?”

“Pretend that I never got the text.” Tony sighed. “She said she needs to talk to me and that the funeral home is under protection by the Secret Service so safety isn’t a concern with the shooter still out there.” Tony laughed. “If she only knew…”

“What are you going to do?” Jethro rephrased his question.

“Want to drive me?” Tony replied.

“I’ll be there by your side every step of the way. Got your six. Always.”

“Can we take Agent Zuma?” Both men laughed as the pup’s ears picked up.

“He is part of your protection detail.”

“Help me change.” Tony asked. “I should look a bit more…”

“Let’s go.” Jethro whistled for Zuma who simply looked at him.

“I don’t think he likes being whistled at.” Tony laughed. “Come on, Zuma. Let’s change your socks.” Zuma pounced one last clump of grass and then came running.

Jethro just shook his head. “How long until his paws are healed?”

“McGee said they would probably be healed in another week. He’s bringing a different salve over. His vet said it would help toughen up Zuma’s paws. That will probably be another week. The vet also said that we should take Zuma for a wellness check. That way we can be sure that he’s totally healthy. McGee said the doctor has a list of vets he could recommend.”

“Why not him?”

“He didn’t want us to feel that he was pressuring us in to using him.”

“Is he good?”

“Puh-lease,” Tony smirked. “Abby lets McGee take Jethro to him.”
Jethro rolled his eyes. “Will he take Zuma has a patient?”

“McGee made an appointment in two weeks. That way he can make sure that Zuma’s paws are healed and toughened up.”

Jethro knelt down and picked Zuma up from where he was pawing his leg. “Are you impatient?”

“Just like daddy.”

“I thought I’d been very patient.” Jethro smirked. Tony flushed and lead the way into the house.

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The young officer leaned down to look in Tony’s window. “Agent Gibbs, Agent DiNozzo, Director Vance let us know you were coming. You can park right by that door. Is…” The agent flushed a bit before continuing. “Is that Agent Zuma?” He looked at the puppy in the backseat. “My little boy saw him on the internet. Could I…”

Tony poked Jethro who rolled his eyes at his husband. Putting the car in park, Jethro grudgingly got out and opened the back door. He lifted an eager Zuma and Rocky out of the puppy seat and handed him to his husband.

The agent held his hand in the window and Zuma gave him an approving sniff.

“Would you like to hold him? I could take a picture for you to show your son. How old is he?”

“Really? He’s two. He’s been saying ‘Zoom, Zoom’ every time he sees Agent Zuma’s picture.”

“What’s his name?”

“Riley.” The agent handed Tony his smartphone before taking Zuma gently and cuddling him against his suit, uncaring of puppy hair. “He’s wearing his socks.” The young man moved his hand near Zuma’s paw, which was glad in his black and white trainer socks; afraid to take his paw and hurt the animal. Is he badly injured?”

“Thankfully, no. The vet says he should be all healed in two weeks.”

“That’s great.”

Tony brought up the phone’s camera and took a couple stills of the young officer and the puppy. Then he switched to video. “Hey, Zuma. Can you say hello to Riley? He’s a fan.”

Zuma looked at Tony and cocked his head in confusion. He barked at Tony and Jethro before moving his head back so the nice agent could scratch his ears. The young man was doing a wonderful job. Zuma placed his paw on the agent’s other hand.

“Agent Zuma says ‘Hi’, Riley. He was really happy to meet your dad today.” Tony turned the video off and went to hand the phone back. By this time two other agents had moved to the car. Tony bit his lip to keep from laughing at Jethro’s grimace as he watched the pup handed to the other officers in turn. Tony obligingly snapped pictures and video for them.

Eventually, Zuma was handed carefully back to Tony who slipped the pup into his NCIS carrier. Jethro slipped the car in gear and moved to park while Tony and Zuma waved good-bye to the secret agents. “About time they got back to work.”

“Ooo, Zuma. I think Daddy’s jealous.” Tony teased. “They didn’t ask for a photo with Agent
Jethro grimaced as he parked the car. “Don’t move, until I come around.” As Jethro opened Tony’s door, the funeral home door opened and a man appeared with a wheelchair.

“Good-afternoon, Agent DiNozzo, Agent Gibbs. Director Vance let us know that you were coming and were injured.”

“How did Vance know?” Tony said.

“I texted him.” Jethro said as he helped his husband into the wheelchair ignoring Tony’s protests.

“You texted?” Tony acted shocked and received a gentle slap as Jethro took the wheelchair and guided him through the door the other gentleman was holding.

“Director Vance informed us that due to your injuries, you will not be able to attend the services. Mr. Sacks is in the room at the end of this hall. Secretary Mabus is in the room to your right. I am sorry for your loss. I know who hard it is to lose a colleague. Please feel free to spend however long you wish.”

“Thank-you.” Tony struggled to keep his face blank. Part of him kept whispering, not colleagues, father… brother… “Mrs. Mabus contacted me…”

“Of course. Mrs. Mabus is in with Secretary Mabus. We just finished the final details.” The funeral director stepped back and left Jethro push Tony towards the room. Just outside, Jethro leaned down and whispered in Tony’s ear. “You don’t have to do this.”

“Yes. I do.” Tony replied quietly. “Let’s get it over.” He took a deep breath and pushed the door open so Jethro could wheel him in. Near the casket stood Heidi Mabus. She was a young, tall, slim blonde dressed in a tasteful navy dress. When the door opened, she turned to face them.

“Agent Gibbs, Agent DiNozzo. I’m pleased to meet you although the circumstances could be better.”

“It’s Tony, ma’am.”

“Oh, please. Don’t call me ma’am. I may be your stepmother but I’m hardly old enough to be your mother.” Tony ducked his head at her words as Mrs. Mabus looked a bit flustered. “I didn’t mean to say it that way. Please, I would like you to call me, Heidi. Hopefully, we can salvage some relationship from this mess.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Tony was at a loss of what else to say.

Heidi moved gracefully to the small grouping of chairs. “I asked the secret service to let us have some privacy.” She picked up a computer bag sitting next to the chairs before sitting down and motioning Jethro to join her. “When I left Jarvis… I guess I should go further back.”

Jethro reach out to take Tony’s hand and Zuma popped his head out of his carrier sensing Tony’s distress. Seeing this Heidi smiled. “You must be the famous Agent Zuma I’ve been hearing about. I understand you took a bit out of Jarvis. There were many times that I would have paid you to bite it off.” Her tone was a bit bitter.

“Jarvis and I were only married for seven years. I didn’t find out about you until about two years ago.” Heidi glanced towards the open casket. “I loved him when I married him. He really knew how to sweep a girl off her feet. We’d only known each other three months when he proposed… My
family has been in politics for years. I’d heard the rumors but I was convinced that I was his first and only love.”

“Seems he used that a lot.” Jethro stated.

“He did.” She laughed ruefully. “We’d been married for five months when I realized he was having an affair… Of course, I confronted him. I was too young, he had more in common with her. They stopped for drinks after work and would just talk. She seduced him, but it was a one-time thing. He’d never see her anymore. I don’t think he did honestly.” She scoffed. “He went looking for something new. I knew by the time we’d been married for a year; it was a mistake. I was too embarrassed to admit it. To admit how stupid I was.”

“Not stupid. Young.” Tony said. “That seems to be his MO. Not your fault.”

“Thanks for saying it, but the fact is I stayed.”

“You left in the end.”

“We’d been married a little over two years when I knew that he was hiding something. Well, something more than usual. I’d never really paid much attention to our finances. He set up a separate account for me. For all his faults, he was very generous. Then the bank called, there was an issue with a funds transfer. I called Jarvis. He was livid with me. After that, I started paying attention. There were calls from a man. I never got his name. He would just tell me to warn Jarvis that he wasn’t playing games.”

“Jarvis would get irate and threaten to divorce me if I didn’t stay out of his business. I knew he was bluffing. With his aspirations, he needed me.”

“Aspirations?”

“Jarvis wanted to be president. He had planned to run in the next election. It was all he talked about.” Heidi smiled sadly. “It was all he really wanted.”

“What happened?” Tony asked quietly. He cuddled Zuma closer.

“Shortly over a year and a half ago, I came home early from a ski trip. Jarvis was in his office on the phone. He was yelling at the person on the phone; telling him that he was tired of being blackmailed. Then Jarvis told him that he could end it that day. He said he could call you up and tell you that he was your father. He told him that he would assure you that he just found out and wanted to be a family. Jarvis said having you for a son would only be an asset to his campaign.”

“Did he use my name?”

“Just your first name, Tony.”

“How did you know it was me? Tony is a common name.”

“He called the person on the other end, Mr. DiNozzo.”

“Well, damn.” Jethro uttered the words without meaning to do so. “Forgive me.”

“Oh, please. Let’s mild to what I said. Of course, I didn’t let on that I’d heard what was said. After that, I began watching more closely. I tried to be careful but…”

“He caught you.” Jethro said flatly.
“About six months ago, I was going through his office. He was supposed to be on his way to Phoenix for a meeting. His flight was cancelled and he came home. I’d never see Jarvis that angry.”

“Why take the risk?” Jethro was puzzled.

“I had decided to leave. I wanted some security, some leverage to protect myself and …” Heidi looked down for a moment. “Anyway, I was looking in his files, when he walked in. He slapped me and then … he picked me up and threw me onto a low table and I rolled off onto the floor. I remember looking up at him and hearing him tell me that he could kill me and no one would know. His voice was so cold. Jarvis told me if I ever said a word, he would see to it that I disappeared.”

“I’m so sorry.” Tony reach his hand out to her. He placed his hand on hers. “I’m surprised you still had the courage to leave.”

“I couldn’t stay. Once he left, I panicked. I grabbed everything I could. A portable hard drive. His laptop. It’s all in there. When I got to New York, I filed for divorce and I told him that if he contested it I would take this bag and my medical reports straight to the press.”

“Oh, my god. You were pregnant. That’s why you decided to leave.” Tony’s gut clenched. “He caused a miscarriage, didn’t he?”

“Yes.” Heidi sighed. “No one knows. I didn’t tell anyone what happened. I laid low till the bruises on my face and arms went away. When the call from Director Hagel came, I felt this overwhelming sense of … relief.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Heidi swallowed hard and struggled not to cry. “When I heard that you and Ron were involved, I knew I was being given a ‘cover story.’ It’s alright, I don’t have to know the truth. If I had had the guts to go to the press, maybe at least Ron would still be alive.”

“It wasn’t your fault.” Jethro also reach out. He slid his hand under hers and linked fingers between with Tony; squeezing her hand between theirs. “What happened was Mabus’ doing.” He could feel her hand tremble at his tacit confirmation of a cover story. “You are not to blame.”

“Thank-you, Agent Gibbs.”

“Jethro.”

“Jethro.” She gave him a sad smile. “I can’t change what’s happened but I want you to take this. It’s probably too late to do much good…”

“It may be quite the opposite.” Jethro reassured her. “I’m sure you are aware that Tony’s adopted father is awaiting trial. We knew that Mabus was aware of his dealings. What you have there may be enough to prove Senior’s involvement.”

With still shaky hands, she held out the bag and Jethro took it. “Well, I need to check with the funeral director. Since the news about Ron being Jarvis’ son, a lot of plans for the service had to be reworked.”

“Why?” Tony looked confused.

“Dual memorial service followed by private burials. Neither Mrs. Sacks or I are in favor of it, but that’s the how the upper echelon wants it. Show of unity.” Heidi shook her head. “Please stay as long as you like, Agent… Tony. I’m sure you have a few things you’d like to say to him.” Standing
she leaned down and gave Zuma a good scratch on his ears. “Thank-you, Agent Zuma.” Without another word, she walked away in search of the funeral director.

“Damn.”

“You can say that again.”

“Da… Nope, don’t feel like the joke.” Tony sighed. “Just when I think he couldn’t be a bigger bastard; he proves me wrong.”

“You read to go?”

“Could I have a minute?”

“You sure?”


Jethro nodded in understanding. “I’ll take Zuma here out for a quick pit stop and then I’ll be back.”

“Thanks.” As the man and pup left the room, Tony wheeled himself towards the open casket stopping beside it. The funeral director had done an excellent job of covering the surgery scar. He didn’t look any different than he had in the parking garage. Then Tony realized he did. The hatred and arrogance were gone.

Section 91

“Guess you couldn’t hold on to that in death.” Tony said not realizing he was speaking aloud. “You just had to go and die, didn’t you? You just die and leave the rest of us to clean up your mess. If it weren’t for your wife and Ron’s family; I’d blow your reputation to bits. I’d let the whole world see how big a bastard you really were. How many more secrets have you tried to take to the grave? How many lives have you just destroyed or stood by and watched be destroyed? Why? Damn you, why?”

“He was an immoral, sadistic bastard. I’m sorry for startling you, Agent DiNozzo.”

Tony had jumped and almost upset the chair trying to turn to face the person speaking. He was surprised to see Ron’s mother standing inside the door. He was even more surprised when she walked up to stand by the casket.

“I owe you an apology for yesterday morning. I had no need to be so rude.”

“No apologies are needed. I understand.”

“You’re a forgiving man; unlike him. I think that’s one reason I was so rude. Please, let me explain,” Mrs. Sacks insisted. “When I see you, I see what my son should have been. I raised four loving, respectable daughters, but I couldn’t do the same for Ron. He poisoned Ron’s soul. When he was smaller, I believed that he would grow up to be loving and giving, but as he grew older; I saw him in my son. Ron’s attitude, his arrogance. I couldn’t change him.”

Tony didn’t know what to say so he stayed silent.

“I hated you.” Mrs. Sacks looked at him briefly. “Not for your birth. That wasn’t your fault. But, from the moment that man told Ron about you, I hated you. You were all my son talked about. How perfect you were. How you used your influence to get into NCIS.” She wiped away a stray tear. “But I saw you. I saw how you faded in the background when the press was around while my son
tried to take the limelight. My son had become his father and you hadn’t.”

“Ron was a good agent.”

“But not a good person.” Mrs. Sacks admitted. “Not like you. I saw your adopted father arrested after you turned him in and I despised you for being everything Ron should have been. If he had lived, you would have arrested him, wouldn’t you? You would have seen that he paid for everything he’d done.”

“I’m no saint, Mrs. Sacks.” Tony said firmly. “I would have offered him the chance to take a plea deal.”

“On the condition that he not involve Ron in the situation?” She smiled wryly. “Agent Fornell told me. I think that made me hate you even more. I know that’s not rational but it just showed how good a person you really are. Even after everything Ron did, you would protect my son.”

“My brother.”

“Yes. Your brother. Dr. Mallard told me what you said to Ron, but after seeing you this morning, Director Vance told me he had something I needed to hear. Did you know every word you said to Ron was captured by the wire you were wearing?”

“I’m sorry. Director Vance had no right…”

“Yes, he did. You are his agent and I did not show you the respect you deserve. You really meant it.”

“What?” Tony was confused.

“When you called him your big brother. You would have made him take you to a ballgame and you would have just accepted him.”

“I’d have badgered him until he took me to shut me up.” Tony admitted.

“I heard the sincerity in your voice and I heard my son. Maybe if he had lived, maybe you could have made a difference. The one that I couldn’t.”

“I’m so very sorry. If I could…”

“Don’t. We can’t turn back time. We have to play the cards we’re given. They are holding a joint service for Ron and him.”

“Heidi told us.”

“She’s a good person. He used her, too. Married her for her political connections, just like me.” Mrs. Sacks turned to him. “You are welcome to attend. You can sit with the family.”

“No.” Tony said softly with a trace of sadness. “It’s better that I don’t. If I sat with your family, the press would wonder and only dig up things best left buried.”

“You’ve earned the right.”

Tony swallowed hard. “I appreciate that. I don’t want to make this harder for you or your daughters. It’s best that I miss the service due to my injuries.”

“Director Vance told me about your kidney.”
“Wow, he’s becoming a regular Chatty Cathy.” Tony grumbled.

Mrs. Sacks broke into a real smile. “He wanted me to know how you suffered. I know how difficult bone chips are to heal. Your sister, Jocelyn is an orthopedic surgeon specializing in the spinal column. That is, if you don’t already have a specialist.”

“I actually don’t. Dr. Pitt and Dr. Mallard have been overseeing my recovery.” Tony couldn’t help his curiosity. “Is she the youngest?”

“No,” Mrs. Sacks saw the longing hidden in Tony’s eyes. “Actually, Lucinda is the oldest. She went into criminal law. She’s been well-known for freeing several innocent men. Works with Project innocence pro bono. Lucinda is now a prominent defense lawyer. Jocelyn is the second oldest. From the time she could talk she was focused on being a doctor. She’s making quite a name for herself in the field. Now, my third daughter, Camilla also went into law. She worked her way up from prosecutor. She’s not a court judge. Makes for some interesting discussions around the holidays. The youngest is Madeleine. She has a doctorate in the classics and is considered an authority on national and international cinema. She does seminars for various universities. She is also founded a charity for children.”

Tony laughed slightly. “I’m a big cinema buff. I have a huge collection. Jethro and I are setting up a charity for children ourselves, AZ3G.”

“Unusual name.”

“Stands for Agent Zuma and the three Gibbs.”

“Things are hard right now. Emotions too raw.” Mrs. Sacks showed vulnerability for the first time since Tony had met her. “Maybe once things have settled down… I think maybe… maybe the girls… maybe your sisters… would like the opportunity to meet you.”

“I’d like that.”

“Well, I guess I should get to my meeting. Mrs. Mabus and I need to finalize the details. Get this farce over and take my son home.” Turning on her heel, she headed for the door.

“Mrs. Sacks.”

She turned slowly. “I think, given the circumstances… Call me Clarissa, Tony.”

“Thank-you, Clarissa.”

Nodding, she left the room. Tony felt the tension drain and he slumped in his wheelchair. He turned to look at Mabus for one last time. “You tried to destroy everything you touched but you didn’t. You failed. I won’t let your shadow darken my life. You can’t destroy me. I have a new life now. I have something you never cared about. Love. I have Jethro and he loves me. I have Jackson who is more of a father than you could ever hope to be. And I have my NCIS family. I hope God has mercy on your soul.” He left the ‘I don’t’ unspoken.

Tony was grateful to Jethro for not trying to start a conversation on the way home. After Mrs. Sacks, Clarissa he corrected mentally, had left, Jethro had quietly entered the room. Taking hold of the chair, he had wheeled Tony out to the car where a secret service agent had helped Jethro get him in the car. The secret service man had taken the wheelchair and left the two men drive off in silence. Even Zuma was quiet. Getting fawned over was evidently exhausting, Tony thought looking into the backseat where the pup had curled up around Rocky. It was over. Tony took a deep breath and let it out slowly. No more living in the past. Just the future. As if Jethro read his mind, he held his hand
out and linked fingers with his husband. Just the future.
Chapter Summary

I'm b..b..a..a..c..c..k.k.k.k.k! Our dear Wolfnjag is still recovering so a big thank-you for rafe_dragos for stepping in to help!!

Chapter Notes

“What have you done?” Ncislaadict123 stared at the kitchen in horror. Every inch of counter space was full of bowls, knives and baskets.
Geminiangel lifted her head wearily. “Huh??”
Duchess forced her way past. “Oh, my… heavens… This place is trashed. Wolfnjag is going to kill you!”
“Nuh-uh.” The idiot said coherently. Well, it was coherent in her mind.
QueeneoftheDeer entered from the study. “All the lambs and allies are sleeping. Sinatra feel asleep leaning against the wall claiming he wasn’t tired.” She snickered.
“Patriciasita and Psyche53 are on shift now but I doubt they hear a peep or baa all night long. They were exhausted. Oh, but tomorrow, we have to get ArianaFeilacan to open the cabinet. Jane_x80 volunteered to give manicures to the first five who fell asleep. Oh, and Sinatra’s is c…h..i...p..p…e…d.”
“Chipped…” The idiot’s head lifted in fear.
“SHHHH. If he hears you…” Rafe_dragos whispered. “He’ll through a fit and we will never get to sleep without giving him a hooficure.”
“Nooooo.” She whimpered.
“What’s wrong, idio… Geminiangel?” Magpie1600 stuck her head out of the pantry. “Oh, hi! Nice of you to stop by to help. We’re just finishing up in here.”
ShadowWolfsDen slipped past her. “We wouldn’t say no to some help cleaning up though. Is she asleep?” Points to where the idiot was drooling on the tabletop and moaning about diva lambs.
“Seems to be.” QueenBee4Ever leaned over and whispered. “Where’s the clear Appalachian tea?”
“Hmmm….”
“I have a TimTam for you….” Aussiefan70 whispered in her other ear.
“…blue hooves…”
“Yep, she’s out of it. If the idiot doesn’t want chocolate, she’s down for the count.
Nyre_The_Black_Rose, would you grab her other arm?” Aussiefan70 asked. “We should pour her into bed. Oh, and could someone, not QueeneoftheDeer, tell Amelitta to take the night off?”
“Why not me?” QueeneoftheDeer asked indignantly.
“Two words. Broken wings.” QueenBee4Ever said laughing.
“When she’s drunk, she keeps trying a cartwheel.” QueeneoftheDeer shrugged helplessly.
“That’s faintly… disturbing…” Jan Bartley said. “Is it always like this around here?”
“Yep.” The cabal chorused.
“How could you let the idiot destroy the kitchen like this?” NCISgirl2014 was aghast.
“For once, she didn’t destroy it. She’s been working hard.” Magpie1600 spoke up defensively. “We stopped by to check on her and found her trying to salvage Wolfnjag’s
garden.”
ShadowWolfsDen chimed in. “The lambs were harvesting and husking the corn. Then
the donkeys were carrying the baskets in.”
“Don’t forget Kiwi and Coors!” QueenBee4Ever spoke up. “Coors pulled him along
the row on a cart and Kiwi pulled all the carrots.”
“Don’t forget, William, Nanny, Bambi and Fawn harvested the tomatoes with the help
of the clones.” QueeneoftheDeer added.
“With dear Wolfnjag down, there was no one to take care of the garden.”
ShadowWolfsDen took pity of the confused cabal members. Grabbing hold of both
door handles to the pantry, she threw the doors open wide. There on the shelves were
row after row of canning jars filled with green beans, tomatoes, carrots and all the
vegetables Wolfnjag had cared for so diligently.
“You and the idiot did all that.”
“To give her credit, the idiot and Sinatra had things pretty well organized. We just
jumped in to help with the peeling and chopping.”
“And the cooking.” Aussiefan70 interjected returning to the kitchen. “We refused to let
her around the stove or a canner of boiling water.”
Duchess began stacking the bowls nearest her. Without a word, NCISgirl2014 started to
draw the sink full of hot water. Accepting the first stack, she placed them in the water
and added dish liquid.
While they started washing the dishes and canning tools, Ncslaadict123 looked at the
cabal. The ones who had been involved in Operation Wolfnjag’s Garden had a satisfied
but weary look on their faces. “When was your last meal?” The group exchanged
puzzled glances. “That’s what I thought. Sit down at the table, I’ll see what we have in
the refrigerator.”
“Sandwich would be fine.” Magpie1600 spoke up.
“You need something more than a sandwich.” NCISlaadict123 said firmly. “Hey, there
are some casseroles in here. Looks like they just need baked till warmed. Shouldn’t take
more than a half hour or so.” The directions had been written on the foil with a black
sharpie pen.
“Who made them?” Aussiefan70 looked around the table.
“There’s a note.” Rafe_dragos pointed to an envelope on another casserole dish.
“What’s it say??”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 92

Fridays were the best. Well, they were the best when you were working, Tony thought. When
you’re already off, there’s no anticipation. Just dread, he thought looking at the clock. The memorial
was to start at eleven-thirty.

Jackson and Jethro exchanged glances. The previous evening after Jethro had told his father about
Heidi Mabus, Tony had recounted his conversation with Clarissa Sacks. The bag of evidence was
still on the coffee table. They had decided to have McGee review the information before bringing
Vance or Fornell in.

“Tony, why don’t we take Zuma to the park for a while?”

“So I can sit and watch? Know what you are trying to do, Jethro. I’m going to watch the service; you
don’t have to… You could take Zuma running.”
“Nope. Told you. Got your six. If you want to watch we will, it’s just that…” Jethro struggled for the words. “I don’t want it to upset you.”

“It probably will. But I have to watch. I need to, for those he has hurt.”

“Tony,” Palmer stuck his head around the front door, interrupting the conversation. “Up for a little company?”

“Always, Black Lung.” Tony joked.

“Someone wanted to come see her Uncle Tony.” Palmer maneuvered the stroller in and shut the door.

“We were just going to the living room.” Jackson said. “Let’s get this little angel out of these blankets.”

“Set up?” Tony asked quietly.

“Not that I know about,” Jethro said, “but…”

“Rule 39,” Tony gave a wry laugh. “All of them?”

“Well, probably just the NCIS family. I know Leon and Ducky were going to the service as the NCIS representatives. Fornell went as his previous partner.”

“Just Abby and McGee, then?” Tony pondered as Jethro followed him into the living room where Palmer was helping Victoria out of her blankets and sweater; while she was giving little whimpers of disapproval. Gibbs grunted non-committedly. With the team, who knew?

Finally free of the coverings, Victoria was smiling at her god-father. It was not gas, no matter what anyone said. Breena had dressed Victoria in one of the dresses that Tony and Jethro bought on their first shopping trip. The dress was white with pink, purple and yellow pastel flowers and an impossibly full skirt held up and out by tons of pastel tulle. The waist had a matching lavender sash that tied in the back. When Victoria sat up, the dress puffed around her.

Palmer laughed as he held Victoria out to Tony. “If you can find your god-daughter in all this dress, you can hold her and I’ll go get the portable bassinet.”

“No need,” Gibbs disappeared into the other room. “I was cleaning out some stuff to get ready for the move.” Gibbs wheeled in a lovely handmade bassinet in beautiful wood tones. The bedding was done in baby pink and white. “Figured Victoria could use this and save dragging one back and forth.”

Palmer saw the small nod Tony gave him when he looked to him in clarification. It confirmed his suspicions, this bassinet had belonged to Gibbs’ daughter. In that quick glance, Palmer understood and didn’t make a big deal. “That’s great! I know Victoria loves visiting her uncles.”

Tony laughed. “She looks like a little princess. Are you my princess? How’s my girl today?” Victoria gave a loud coo as Tony tickled her chin.

Instantly nails could be heard scrambling across the kitchen floor. Zuma tried to make a quick stop at Tony’s feet by planting his front paws on the floor but the socks and forward momentum had him sliding sideways as his body moved past the pup’s paws. The small pup hastened to scramble to his feet and he quickly put his paws on Tony’s knee near Victoria’s feet. He barked at her and she cooed at him. Zuma’s tail wagged with excitement.
“Want him, too, I suppose?” Jethro smirked at Tony. “Hogging the god-daughter and the pup.”

Jackson and Jimmy watched as Jethro scooped Zuma up and placed him carefully on Tony’s lap; helping his husband settle the two where the little girl and puppy could talk to one another. They snickered as Zuma placed a gentle, sock-clad paw on Victoria’s sock-clad foot. Both were wearing the white socks that looked like they had shoes; Victoria’s were black and Zuma had picked red.

As the men watched the two ‘talked’ back and forth. Zuma gently and carefully patted his god-sister with his paws as he yipped and whimpered. In turn, Victoria waved her arms and cooed at him, sometimes catching her dress causing the tulle to ruffle and wave. When that happened, Zuma would poke at the soft material with his nose. The first time he sneezed and drew back indignantly to the infant’s delight.

“You two are going to be good friends, aren’t you?” Tony cuddled the two taking comfort in their love for him and each other.

A tentative knock startled everyone. Jethro went to the door and found a subdued Abby. “Do I look okay?” She asked quietly. Jethro looked at the toned down makeup and the lack of spikes. Abby wore a simple black lace dress with matching gloves. Her hair was in a simple twist. “I mean, we aren’t going to the funeral, but we are in a way. …I wanted to show respect for his family. I mean, I know he didn’t really know them. Well, he knew Sacks but not as his brother…”

“Shh, Abby.” Gibbs kissed her on the top of her head. “Tony will appreciate you showing up. You look fine.”

Abby gave a big sigh of relief. “I brought some cupcakes. My mom always made food for funerals and I wanted to do something.”

“You came. That would have been enough.” Jethro coaxed her into the house. “Tony’s in the room with Dad, Palmer and Victoria.” He gave her little pushes until she entered the living room and then went to sit next to Palmer on the sofa.

“Tony, I…”

Tony looked up into Abby’s eyes and smiled. “I’m glad you’re here.” He motioned her to sit near him on the ottoman. He looked at her dress and the sadness in her eyes. “Thank you for coming to be with us. Zuma, doesn’t Auntie Abby look nice?”

Zuma looked at Auntie Abby. The pup wasn’t used to her being so quiet. He reached out a paw for her hand and she held one out for him. Laying a paw on her glove, he gave a small yip and then looked back at Victoria and yipped at her. In response, Victoria looked at Abby and cooed.

“Well, hello, Victoria. You look pretty in those pastels. Not that pastels aren’t pretty.”

“I think she’s a bit early to rock the goth, Abbs.” Tony smiled. With a wink at Palmer, he whispered to her. “Of course, Halloween is coming.”

“Oh, no, you two! You are not dressing my daughter as Elvira, mistress of the night.” Jimmy leaned forward on the sofa. “Breena would have your heads and mine.”

“Ah, Jimmy. Just a cute black skirt with maybe a pair of black leggings.” Abby pleaded. “She would totally rock.”

“We could make her a Disney princess.” Jethro spoke up. “Remember that pretty mint green dress with sequins or that pale pink with the lace underskirt with the pink parted overskirt. They had that
Abby gave him a scathing look. “A princess? Really? A little paper doll cut out. Jimmy, they have these little skirts with lots of tulle. I saw one with silver dusted spider webs on it. A little black top with a silver spider. She would rock the costume.”

“I don’t know, Abby. She really doesn’t have the goth attitude.” Tony pretended to consider his god-daughter’s appearance. “Maybe we should break tradition. I know, maybe something a little Victorian. I saw a very simple, but elegant deep purple satin layered dress. We could dress her up as Beth from Little Women.”

“No. Breena and I will pick her costume when the time comes. They make cute ones for infants. Pea in a pod. Pumpkin.” Jimmy teased.

“You wouldn’t dare!” “Not my little princess.” Tony and Abby both glared.

“Don’t listen to Daddy, princess. Uncle Tony will see you have a wonderful Halloween. You want to be a fairy? A dress with lots of sparkle and wings. Just leave it to Uncle Tony.”

Jethro looked at where Victoria and Zuma were watching the three-way argument. Zuma had edged up to lay his head on Victoria’s pillow…uh, skirt. She had managed to get her hand around and lay it on his paw. She cooed at the pup who chuffed in delight. “Just a thought, but they could go as Dorothy and Toto.” He gestured to where the baby and puppy; making everyone say ‘aw’ at the cute picture.

“Woof.” At the loud bark, both Zuma and Victoria jumped.

“Zuma,” Tony tried to get a hold of the pup who was trying to burrow into the recliner whimpering. “Easy. Look it’s just Uncle McGee and your cousin Jethro. Come here you silly thing.”

“Jethro.” Abby twisted around and grabbed the German Shepard around the neck. “I’ve missed you.”

“Abby, you just took him to the park last weekend.” McGee shook his head at the look she gave him. “I thought maybe Zuma would like to meet Jethro. I didn’t know Palmer and Victoria were here. I can tie him out back.” McGee offered.

“Not a problem,” Palmer smiled. “She loves dogs. I thought it was just the corgis but when we went for a walk the other night, all kinds of dogs in the park came and peeped in her stroller. She loved it.”

“If you’re sure,” McGee managed to move Abby enough untangle the leash.

“Let me have the god-daughter.” Gibbs stood and moved to take Victoria. If Tony didn’t get the pup soon he was going to claw his way through the fabric.

“Thanks.” Finally, Tony managed to get a hold of two paws and a belly. Bringing him around to his stomach, Tony tried to stretch the puppy out. Zuma refused drawing into a knot and trying to get into Tony’s shirt. It was then Tony felt the dampness.

“Do you want me to take him?” Jethro asked.

“I got him.”

“Don’t hurt yourself.”
“Zuma,” Tony crooned. “Hey, everything’s okay.” As he spoke he managed to accidentally knock a glass of water into his lap.

“Tony.” Gibbs handed Victoria to Jackson. “Here let me help.”

“Careful,” Tony handed him the shaking puppy. “I got him wet, too.”

Palmer helped him stand. “Here, let me help.”

“Jethro, can you…”

Gibbs was already in position. “We’ll be right back.” He escorted his husband and the pup off for dry clothes. Once in the bedroom he looked at Tony suspiciously. “Why did you knock that water on yourself?”

“Someone had a bit of an accident and I didn’t want to embarrass him. Could you clean Zuma up while I change?”

Gibbs carried Zuma into small bathroom and turned on the warm water. “You are so lucky, pup, you don’t realize how much he loves you.” Zuma gave a soft yip. “Me, too. We must be the luckiest critters on earth.” Gibbs stripped off the pup’s socks and gently washed his back legs.

By the time the duo returned to the bedroom, Tony was pulling on a clean shirt and trying to tuck it in. Jethro placed the pup on the bed and went to help. “You okay?”

“Just trouble reaching the back.”

“Turn around.” Jethro sent another prayer of thanks up. After four days, the bruising was just starting to fade. The past few days it had seemed to be getting darker, but he could see some areas developing into an off-green tone. If not for the vest, Tony could have been paralyzed or killed.

“I’m okay.” Tony said softly.

Jethro helped him tuck the shirt in and then helped him sit on the bed. Zuma immediately cuddled into Tony’s side. “Are you okay?” Tony scooped him up. “Want to pick some clean socks?”

Jethro handed them the bag and watched Zuma pick out socks. He leaned in the doorway and watched the puppy immediately headed for the shoe-like socks. He grabbed the black set that matched the ones that Victoria was wearing making Jethro smile.

“How did I know you’d pick these ones?” Tony checked the paws and found that Jethro had already put salve on.

“Ready?”

“Can you help me with his carrier? I think he might feel safer.”

By the time the two men returned to the living room. Tony’s recliner had clean sheets and pillow cases. “I popped your sheets in the washer,” McGee said.

“Thanks, McGee.” Gibbs helped him into the recliner. “If I get you another drink, will you not spill it?”

“Promise. I’ll have a beer.”

“Dad, Jimmy, McGee, Abby?”
“No, we helped ourselves.” Abby said as they held up different bottles and cans.

“Brought you one, also.” Palmer handed Gibbs one of his favorite beers and Tony a soda.

“Uh, bartender, there’s a mistake. I specifically requested a beer. This isn’t a beer.”

“It is. It’s a root beer which is the strongest thing you’re getting till you’re off the meds.”

Tony opened his mouth but the head slap stopped his retort. “I was injured. You shouldn’t slap an injured man.”

“It was your back not your head. Deal.” Gibbs made his way around the room to where his father was playing with Victoria.

“Nope. Not till your beer is done. This little angel doesn’t need exposed to that at her age. Do you, sweetie?”

“How’s Zuma?”

“Feeling a little insecure.” Tony was looking down at Abby who was sitting on the floor next to Jethro who had his head down looking sad. “What’s wrong, Jethro?” The German Shepherd put a paw over his nose.

“I think he feels guilty for scaring Zuma.” Abby said.

“There was a bag here in my chair.” Tony started to feel around and Palmer handed a zipped bag to him. “Come here, Jethro. Come to Uncle Tony. I have a treat.”

“Ooo, are those the cookies that Hansen’s makes for service dogs?” Abby bounced.

“And you know this how?”

“Jethro and I stopped in the other weekend when we went to the park. He had a the Love’n Nuts cookie and loved it.” Abby informed Tony.

“This is the Autumn Harvest.” Tony held up the treat. Jethro looked to McGee and at his nod, stood up and went over to Tony. The dog took the treat carefully, laid it on Tony’s knee and then whined at the carrier. “I don’t know if he’s ready, but let’s try. Hey, Zuma. Come on up. Look who wants to play with you. Come on.”

Reluctantly, a small head appeared and drew back as Zuma found himself face to face with the German Shepherd. Picking up the treat, the older dog held it out offering it to the pup. “Aww,” Tony crooned. “…you are such a good cousin. Look, Zuma, Jethro wants to share a treat with you.” The pup looked from the huge dog to Tony and then back at the treat. Tentatively, he wiggled further up in the carrier to hook his paws over the top. The pup gave a gentle wuff and waited. When the older dog didn’t move, Zuma cautiously moved his head forward and took the treat.

Jethro watched quietly as the pup laid the treat on his front paws and nibbled it. After a minute, the pup looked up from the treat into the other dog’s eyes. Picking the treat up in his teeth, he bravely offered Jethro a bite. The room watched the two dogs sharing the cookie. “I belief it is crisis averted,” the human Jethro said.

“Thank goodness.” Tony said.

McGee opened a small bag he had brought along. “Jethro, want to show Zuma your toy.” He held
up a large blue dumbbell squeaky toy. The older dog turned in puppy mode; literally bouncing over Abby’s lap to get to the toy. As he grabbed it, it squeaked loudly and he turned joyfully to leap back to Tony and Zuma.

“What you got there, Jethro?” Tony said.

The dog squeaked the toy again. Not to be left out, Zuma burrowed down into his carrier and then his head popped up again with his squeaky bone. The two dogs took turns making their toys squeak.

“What you got there, Jethro?”

“Gibbs.. Jethro?” Jimmy recognized the gesture the older man made. With a grin, Jimmy turned and executed a perfect Gibbs’ slap to the back of McGee’s head. When McGee turned on him, Jimmy simply pointed at Jethro.

“You couldn’t bring a quiet toy, McGee?”

“They’re getting along,” McGee offered.

“And we’re getting headaches.”

Tony snickered. It was funny to see someone else getting head slaps for a change. “There are some more treats in the pantry. Why don’t you fill the bowls in the kitchen and give them a couple more treats, McSqueaker? Zuma’s go bag is by the door. If you empty it out on the kitchen floor, they may decide to play where there’s more room.”

“You has a go bag?” Palmer asked.

“He is Agent Zuma.” Jethro said deadpan.

“Gotcha.” McGee carefully picked up Zuma who had emerged from the carrier to try Jethro’s dumbbell. Carrying the toy and pup, he led Jethro into the kitchen.

Tony looked at the clock and sighed. “Alright, hand over my god-daughter. It’s time to turn on the TV and I want cuddles.”

Chapter End Notes

“Give me a minute.” Setting the oven to preheat, NCISlaadict set the dishes on the counter and grasped the note.

“Dearest Geminiangel,
Zuma told me how hard you, the alliance, and the cabal are working to make sure Wolfnjag’s garden gets put up for winter. Thanks for the fresh tomatoes and squash. I’ve sent a batch of treats for the alliance. Zuma dropped them off in the nursery. The ones for Kudzu and the lambs are lamb-shaped. The ones for Coke and Chips and the clones are bunny-shaped. And so on… Don’t worry I made sure that while they taste like a treat they are nutritious. Jethro stopped by with a small keg of Bud for Coors, too. Since I know you, after what two years? I figured you and the cabal wouldn’t be eating right. I took the liberty of having Amelitta drop by and pick up some of my lasagna casserole. Just cook them till warm and enjoy!
Love,
Tony
P.S. Any chance of my back healing soon?"
Geminiangel tapped her fist like a gavel on the edge of her desk. “Okay. Who is the spokesman for the alliance?”

“Okay. Let’s try this again. Hey Jude, have you all picked a person to speak on the alliance’s behalf?”
“I wasn’t being animalist. The use of person didn’t insinuate that you all needed a human to speak on your behalf.”
Rufff. Grr.
“I know that the alliance is a valuable asset to the cabal. Dakota, please, just which member of the alliance is going to speak to the committee?”
Ee-ore….yonk yonk ore eeeore.
“Oh, each species was going to elect an individual? Isn’t that going to be a lot of speakers?”
“I didn’t say you couldn’t. I just think the committee would appreciate speaking with just a couple per… representatives. Maybe one for the animals with four legs…”
“NO! I didn’t mean that only animals with four legs were important.” Geminiangel rubbed her head. This was almost as bad as the last chapter had been.
“The committee has a lot of work and I’m sure that they would appreciate it if only a couple speakers presented your requests.”
“I did not say that the Committee for interspecies alliance was too busy to hear your concerns. For the love of…” Geminiangel took a deep breath as an owl dive-bombed her. “I’m sure that QueeneoftheDeer would love…. Ah! Just a minute. Where are Kudzu and Sinatra? Sinatra, do you still have the emergency cell phone Jane_x80 gave you? And does it have GPS?”
“Baa! BAAAA! Ba ba ba ba… ba ba ba ba… ba ba ba ba…”
“I know she told you to only use it in an emergency or if you need a hooficure. I think she’d be okay with this.”
“Baa ba… ba ba ba ba…”
“Yes, if she’s angry, I’ll take the blame.”
“Ba ba ba ba… ba ba ba…”
“What do you mean I owe you a bottle of OPI for using it? You little shyster.”
“BAAA! Ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba” Sinatra started to turn.
“I didn’t say I wouldn’t pay.”
“Babababa… baba ba ba… ba ba”
“I don’t have it on me. I’ll give you an IOU.”
“BAAA! Ba ba ba.”
“What do you mean, it’ll be two bottles for interest?” Geminiangel grit her teeth. “This is blackmail. Fine, two bottles. Kudzu,”
“Mwaaaaaa..”
“I know you were elected secretary of the Interspecies Alliance. Do you have the
QueeneoftheDeere ducked the incoming owl. “Your majesty.” She recognized Barney the barn owl who ruled the roost. “How may I help you?”

“K-r-r-r-ick k-r-r-r-i-r-r-r-r-ick k-r-r-r-i-r-r-r-r-ick k-r-r-r-r-r-ick. K-r-r-r-r-ick.”

“An important communication from the Interspecies Alliance.” She accepted the rolled folder. “Thank-you. Have a safe flight.”

“K k-r-r-r-i-r-r-r-r-ick.”

“Hmm… We the members of the Interspecies Alliance due this day request immediate attention to the poor living conditions provided by the cabal… Huh?” QueeneoftheDeeer looked over at QueenBee4Ever. “Did you know we are providing poor living conditions?”

“Listen to this: We demand…
1) In house DJ
2) Dance floor
3) Piano lessions, guitar lessons, saxophone lessons….”

“Good grief!” QueeneoftheDeeer skipped the list of musical instruments.

4) In house cosmetologist
   “Sinatra.” They chorused.
5) On demand transportation to the library, shopping center and zoo
6) Satellite TV
7) Tickets to the Puppy Bowl
8) Wet bar
9) Snack machine
10) New leotards, dance shoes
11) Pay phone”

“Where did this come from?” Callasandra took the folder. “Hmm… it looks like all the alliance signed or hoofed it.”

“Who is watching the alliance today?” QueeneoftheDeeer asked.

“Let me check. Well… since the committees are all meeting today. It was a skeleton crew. With Wolfnjag sick it is…. is… oh, no… the idiot is alone with them.”

“Call an Id10t alert!” QueeneoftheDeeer hollered.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There was something about the smell of a baby that was soothing, Tony thought cuddling Victoria close. There was a baby smell, not that smell, but a pleasant one of powder and lotion and sweetness. There was also a warmth that soothed the spirit. Peace talks would go much better if each participant were holding a baby, Tony mused.

Thankfully, he had baked the night before. Abby had raided the cookie jar and the brownie box and the cake plate, in addition to grabbing her cupcakes. The group were enjoying the treats. Tony noticed that Jethro was keeping the cookie jar close to his end of the coffee table and was inhaling the chip-a-peel cookies. Tony was glad he had made a triple batch while munching on his own cookie.

“Welcome, friends.” The reporter’s normal exuberance was slightly dampened and her first words
silenced those in the Gibbs’ living room. “Today our country says good-bye to two heroes. As many of you are aware, Monday was a tragic day. Secretary of the Navy Jarvis Mabus and Special Agent Ronald Sacks of Homeland Security were murdered in a shoot-out. I’m now being joined by Franklin Hegel, Secretary of Defense. Welcome, Secretary Hegel. Let me extend my sympathies for your loss. You and Secretary Mabus were long-time friends, I understand.”

“Did anyone know Hegel was being interviewed?” Tony asked looking around the room. “Must have been need to know.”

Secretary Hegel took a breath. “We were. Thank you.”

“We were shocked at the bombshell on Wednesday. If not for the diligence of my assistant producer, the connection would not have been made. Was this family deliberately hidden? Were you aware that Agent Sacks was Secretary Mabus’ son?”

“Of course. You have to understand, Jarvis, Secretary Mabus and his son were close but Agent Sacks did not want to trade on his father’s name. He wanted to make it on his own and he did. Agent Sacks was on one of the premier FBI teams before being offered an advancement and joining Homeland Security.”

“The release of details about the incident on Monday has been sporadic and incomplete. I know that we have been assured that there is no active investigation on-going. Can you take our viewers through exactly what happened on Monday in the parking garage at the Naval Criminal Investigative Services building?”

“I’m sure that you and your viewers will understand that some information is classified, but I will provide what information I can.” Hegel took a sip of water.

“An informant contacted Secretary Mabus indicating that he had information on a smuggling operation being run by members of the US Navy.”

“What type of smuggling?”

“Purportedly members of the navy were smuggling illegal aliens into the country. Of course, Jarvis...Secretary Mabus as the Secretary of the Navy contacted Director Leon Vance of NCIS and the lead MCRT was assigned to the case.”

“I’m sure our viewers are familiar with NCIS acronym but for those who are not familiar with MCRT, would you mind defining it?”

“Of course. MCRT is stands for Major Case Response Team.”

The reporter looked at him coyly. “Would our viewers know any of the members of the team? Maybe someone who’s been in the news?”

Secretary Hegel gave a laugh. Gibbs and Tony knew instantly this was pre-arranged.

“He’s going to out you on ZNN?” Palmer asked indignantly.

“I think we were outed a couple weeks ago,” Jethro said wryly.

“No, I... Yes, but... I meant...”

“Easy, Black Lung, he’s just yanking your chain.” Tony gave his husband a smile. “Our team was bound to be revealed. It’s going to be public knowledge.”
“I’m sure you are aware that Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs and Agent Anthony DiNozzo are members of that team.”

“I’m sure that our viewers remember Agent DiNozzo’s father was arrested a short time ago.”

“He’s a very brave man. I understand, Agent DiNozzo was severely injured that day.”

“Thank-fully, he was wearing a bullet-proof vest.” Hegel said gravely. “If not, today’s ceremony may have been for three. As it stands, Agent DiNozzo took two bullets. One was minor, the other chipped his spine and caused severe bruising to his kidney.”

“Viewers, let’s take a minute of thanks to Agent DiNozzo and his husband, Agent Gibbs for their efforts and a prayer that Agent DiNozzo heals quickly.” She bowed her head for a few seconds. When the reporter raised her head, she had a small smile. “I understand there was another agent injured that day and he seems as much a hero as his partners...”

“No, no, no, no, no,” Tony chanted under his breath and Jethro snickered. It was no use, as in the corner of the screen appeared a picture.

“I’m being told that we have to take a quick break. When we come back, we’ll talk to Secretary Hegel about one of his newest and most popular agents.”

“McGee, quick. Get her number on this...” Jethro demanded passing his cell to McGee.

“Jethro, what are you doing?” Tony asked. His husband simply smirked as he took the phone from McGee.

“Welcome back. I understand that Agent Zuma was injured that day. We have been contacted by many young viewers who are extremely concerned. Can you tell us how severe were his injuries?”

Hegel faced the camera, “Let me assure you that Agent Zuma is currently recovering alongside Agent DiNozzo. He is a very young agent and has not had the time for the pads of his paws to toughen up. The vet has assured us that he’ll be fine. Agent Gibbs has been treating his paws with a salve and will be switching to one that will help toughen his paws.”

“I understand that is the reason for Agent Zuma’s unusual footwear.” A close up of Zuma in his Superman socks peeping out of his NCIS carrier appeared.

“They aren’t strictly Navy issue, but it does help keep the salve on. He really isn’t old enough to understand how important it is to follow doctor’s orders and take your medicine.”

“Viewers...” The reporter cupped her hand around her ear dramatically. “It appears that Agent Zuma is watching our broadcast and has sent a message. Slowly, please.... Agent Zuma wants to extend his deep sympathy to the families of Secretary Mabus and Agent Sacks for their loss. He is also grateful for the concern expressed by your viewers.” She listened a bit without speaking. “Agent Zuma would like to thank everyone for the get-well gifts they have sent to him but he asks that you consider sending them to your local shelter. Agent Zuma says he is well cared for and loves his family very much, but there are many puppies out there who will grow up to be heroes and who need a little extra help and love.”

The reporter smiled. “What a lovely thought. Thank-you, Agent Zuma for calling in. Maybe when you’re better you would join me one night on the show.” As she spoke, a third picture popped up and Jethro cursed. It was a shot of him wearing the carrier with Zuma proudly displayed.

Jethro glared at Palmer who had delivered a Gibbs slap. “I think I liked it better when you were
“scared of me.” Palmer simply pointed at Jackson.

“Leroy Jethro!” His father scolded with a smirk. “Watch your language.”

“I’d like to thank Secretary Hegel for taking the time to talk with us,” the reporter said as the show returned from a commercial. “He had to join the other VIPs filing in to the memorial service. We are being told that the families will be the last to enter. Before he left, Secretary Hegel provided a brief overview of the operation. He was unable to provide full details due to the classified nature of the op.”

The reporter straightened and put on a solemn expression. “Monday afternoon, Secretary Mabus, Special Agent Sacks and our favorite MCRT team,” she gave a small smile, “met the informant in the parking garage of NCIS. An FBI strike team, headed by Special Agent Sacks’ former partner Tobias Fornell, were in place for support. Instead of providing information on the supposed smuggling ring, the informant attempted to assassinate Secretary Mabus. In the subsequent shoot-out, Agent Sacks was killed, Agent DiNozzo and Secretary Mabus were gravely injured. Secretary Mabus was rushed to the hospital where he succumbed to his wounds early Tuesday morning. The assassin was also killed but his identity is being suppressed for security reasons.”

“There is a very somber feeling here today. A tragedy striking so close to the heart of our government. We find ourselves taking whatever happiness or lightness of heart we can find. I asked Secretary Hegel earlier about a rumor that has been making its way around the capitol. After confirming the information, he indicated that it would be fine to set the record straight and that he did not feel that it would be disrespectful to the family of Secretary Mabus.”

Tony looked around at the other puzzled faces. “What rumor?”

She allowed a measured smile to curve her lips. “If you recall I talked earlier this week to one of the first responders at the scene. While NCIS medical attended Agent Sacks and Agent DiNozzo, he provided aid to Secretary Mabus. At that time, he declined to comment on the rumor.”

“Oh, my...” McGee stared at the picture of the paramedic. “That’s the paramedic that had me... uh, detach... Zuma from Mabus’... uh...”

“She wouldn’t...” Tony said with bated breath. “Everyone will know that Zuma bit his...”

“It seems as if during the shootout one of the MCRT became confused and rather than attacking the assassin; he attacked Secretary Mabus.” The reporter smirked. “Yes, viewers, it is confirmed that Agent Zuma in the zeal of his first real mission latched on to the... shall I say, delicate part... of Secretary Mabus’ anatomy. One of the MCRT had to give him the command to, uh, drop... his attack. Secretary Hegel assured me that before the last surgery where Secretary Mabus finally succumbed that Agent Zuma visited him in the hospital and properly apologized. One hopes that as Agent Zuma grows, that he will be able to reach the jugular, not the... other part. Thanks for providing us a spot of levity on such a tragic occasion, Agent Zuma.”

The reporter straightened her papers. “I’m being told that the family is about to enter. That is Heidi Mabus. She is the widow of Secretary Mabus and was on vacation when the incident happened and immediately flew back. She is escorted by Secretary Hegel.” As those at the Gibbs house watched, the petite blonde in black walk past the casket pausing as if to offer a prayer and then touch the casket to say good-bye.

“Nice.” Tony spoke up. Turning Victoria slightly, he pointed towards the screen. “See how well she pulled that grieving widow ensemble together.”
“Ensemble?” Jimmy asked. “Should you be telling my daughter this?”

“Explain.” Jethro said simply.

“Take the dress. Nice and simple. Classic lines. Midi length. Not showing too much leg. Then there is the material, crepe. Holds up for the service. Sleeves. Widows never show bare arms even in the heat of summer. Now, she has chosen full sleeves of black lace. Perfect for the spring weather and not bare. No gloves. Interesting choice, but it showcases her hands. But, the piece de resistance is the veil.”

“The veil?” McGee asked. “Does it really matter?”


“Too over the top.” Tony confirmed. “The widow could really care less. Knowing how Heidi really feels, she nailed the widow role.”

“Son, she isn’t wearing a real widow’s veil.” Jackson corrected.

“Ah, not the type the always in fashion Jacquelyn Kennedy donned; true elegance and grace is mostly lost on modern times.” Tony said sadly. “This is the contemporary twist combined with the grace. The headband is not as simplistic donned nor as fancy as the headband/fascinator that Celine Dion wore. Celine’s veil was more a reverse mantilla. It was appropriate for a Catholic service. Here, Heidi has chosen a more intricate but still classy headband. It echoes the lace of her dress. Custom-made, I’m sure. I’m glad she chose to only wear the veil on half her face. It is just coverage enough that it’s hard to see her eyes. Sensible heels. Perfect.” Abby nodded in agreement.

Jethro shook his head and took a long drink of beer. “I can’t believe you’re an expert on women’s funeral fashion.”

“You should hear him on club wear.” Abby said enthusiastically.

“The Sacks family is now entering. I believe that is Agent Sacks’ oldest sister Lucinda Sacks. She is a criminal lawyer and has successfully defended many high profile clients. Following her, I believe is Jocelyn Sacks-Trulmen. Dr. Sacks-Trulmen is a highly regarded orthopedic surgeon. Camilla Sacks is now entering. The honorable Ms. Sacks is a circuit court judge. And the last sister is Dr. Madeleine Sacks, a world renowned expert on cinematography. She is also founder of “A day in another life.” The foundation gives sick children a chance to cast themselves in their favorite film.”

The four sisters filed past Mabus’ coffin and each paused briefly before moving to the other side where Ron’s coffin was placed. Each sister stood for a moment head bowed before taking their seats. “And now viewers, Mrs. Clarissa Sacks is entering. She is being escorted by Agent Fornell.”

As she entered, Clarissa walked steadily. Like her daughters, she had chosen a classic black midi dress but had opted for a stylish fascinator with a bird cage veil. When she came abreast of Mabus’ coffin, she paused for a moment and then broke protocol and stepped over to Heidi who rose. The two women exchanged quiet comments before they shared a brief hug. Only then did Clarissa and Fornell move to the empty seats facing Ron’s casket.

“And that is total class.” Tony said. He cuddled Victoria closer as the service began.
There have been some requests for the recipes for some of the dishes that Tony whips up so direct from Tony’s Cookie Jar:

Chip-a-peel Cookies:

2½ cups of flour
2 tsp baking powder
¼ tsp baking soda
2/3 cup shortening
½ tsp salt
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
1½ tsp vanilla
1 cup mashed banana
1 cup chocolate chips
(The original recipe called for semi-sweet but be adventurous. Tony and I like to mix them up a bit.)
Nuts
(There were no nuts in the original recipe but I love banana with walnuts. Tony likes to add a few macadamias or pecans.)

Beat shortening until creamy. Add sugar and eggs one at a time.

Stir in vanilla and flour mixture alternately with bananas.

Fold in chips.

Drop by teaspoon on ungreased cookie sheet.
(Tony and I use parchment paper.)

Bake at 400 degrees for about 12 minutes. ENJOY!
Chapter Summary

I'm back... Forgive me?

Zuma barks. "We interrupt the Cabal Antics to give you a little tail... Huh? That's what I barked. Fine! To give you a little tale. Cabal antics will resume when Amelitta & the idiot make up. We hope you enjoy 'A Turkey Tail...Tale'."

Chapter Notes

“I believe you are losing weight. You’re looking a bit…well, flat.” Thomas strutted around her in concern. “Are you feeling ill?”
“I feel fine.” She delicately fluffed her feathers and settled them tightly against her body. “I’m not sure you are eating enough.” Thomas spread his tailfeathers in an impressive display. “We’ve been getting plenty of sweet corn lately. You need to eat more and fluff your feathers out a bit more when the humans are around. You’re making my rafter look bad.”
“Yes, sir.” She pledged; not meaning a word of it. Every year, a new Tom came on board and thought that he ruled “the rafter”. She had been here long enough to know her way around the yard. “We’ll see, she thought to herself, who rules the roost come January. She watched “Thomas” as he called himself parade past the other hens. She might not be the youngest or the prettiest, but Henny prided herself on being smart. Settling comfortably on her chosen nest, she readied herself to lay an egg.

* * *

“They’re coming. They’re coming.” From her quiet corner, Henny heard the others tittering. Thomas had his feathers in a full display. She watched as he herded the rest of the hens towards the front of the yard where the humans could see their attributes.
“Look at that turkey. It is getting really big and plump.” Henny watched Thomas’ feathers ripple with pride. “Let’s take it.”
“That’s the tom, Susie. Your grandma likes to safe the tom for Christmas when there will be more people at Christmas. We’re going to pick the prize hen from the others.”
The doorway to the yard opened and the humans entered the yard.
“Why is that one sitting back there?”
“Ah, that’s the old lady of the roost. There is her fourth winter with us.”
“Really? I thought you only kept them a year, maybe two.”
“That’s true, but this turkey...” The man walked to where Henny sat and reach in under her pulling out an egg. “She produces eggs all year around. Of course, during the winter, we eat them. In the spring, she’s good for several new hens.”
“But all turkeys lay eggs.” The smaller human said.
“Well, all hens do.” The man agreed.
“So why keep her?”
The man suddenly reach out and grabbed Henny from her nest and held her with her wings pinned. Smoothing his hand down her front he said, “Here, see her breast. Not much meat there. Look at her legs, they are not really plump. We could pick her but she isn’t the best of the lot.”
The small human carefully touched Henny feeling the thinness. “Poor turkey.”
“Maybe not so poor. She may not be a prize hen but I keep her because she produces a lot of quality hens.” The man carefully released Henny who crept back onto her nest. “So what do you say, we pick a nice plump hen out before your grandma thinks we got lost.”

Thomas watched proudly as the man complimented his hens. The man walked among them checking to be sure that they were nice and curvy. He was pleased as the man praised their figure, their bountiful thighs and their healthy feathers. He was thrilled as he heard the man talking about finding the prize hen. Thomas thought about the various hens. When he considered a prize hen, his favorite, Marietta would be at the top of the list; nice shapely legs, full breast and plenty of energy. Trust that Henny to make the whole yard look bad. When these humans were gone, he was going to have a long talk with her. A sudden commotion caused Thomas to look around in alarm. The larger human had grabbed Marietta. As he watched the human took her out of the fence. Thomas rushed to the door but was unable to reach her in time. The smaller human took off towards the house across the open lawn while the older human took Marietta towards an old stump.

Henny watched Thomas as he stared at the scene unfolding. It was all fun and games in the spring and summer; food, frolicking and all the hens. Well, he was about to learn a lesson. Henny didn’t even flinch at the sound of the axe. She had seen this many times. With the fall came the sweet corn and then… whack. It had only take one time for Henny to catch on. No sweet corn for her. In fact, she was careful to eat only a minimum; making sure she stayed nice and not plump.

“Marietta!”

Henny sighed as Thomas staggered around the yard in shock. It was a shame really. Every year the same shock to each Tom. Of course, not as big of a shock as Christmas would be. That year’s Tom would run desperately around the pen, but it was inevitable, he would be dragged by the human out the door and … Come spring, there would be a new Tom or a new Thomas. Maybe she’d splurge on her diet a bit tonight. A few pieces of sweet corn, but tomorrow she would be back on the straight and narrow. No plump breast for this hen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Section 94

Zuma and Rocky were curled up in his special chair dead to the world. Tony smiled at him as he scooped mounds of mashed potatoes into a large cast iron skillet.

“That is one tired puppy,” Jackson said.

Tony smiled at Jackson. “Jethro and McGee wore him out.”

When McGee was ready to leave, Zuma had been upset and did not want to allow Jethro to leave. The puppy had kept plopping down on McGee’s feet. Finally, McGee had taken both dogs into the backyard to play and had wrestled with them. Zuma had been almost staggering on his paws but still blocked McGee’s exit. The men had laughed when Cousin Jethro solved the issue. The German Shepherd had simply stepped over to the pup and picked him up by the nape of his neck. Zuma had dangled helplessly waving his paws from the big dog’s jaws. Jethro had brought him over to Tony and placed the pup on his lap. Zuma had whined tiredly but had given in to the inevitable and had barked good-bye before collapsing.
When Tony and his family had moved to the kitchen to start the evening meal, Zuma had allowed himself to be carried to his high chair. After several drinks of water and a few mouths of food, he had barked and waited for Rocky to be brought to him. Almost immediately, he had curled up and fell asleep.

“Anyone think it was a coincidence that McGee and Abby both had a date tonight?”

“Rule 39.” Jethro and Tony chorused. “There are no coincidences.”

Tony paused in smoothing the mashed potatoes into a level fluffy layer. “Do you think McGee is considering make a move towards the coffin again? What about rule twelve?”

“We’d be a little hypocritical, wouldn’t we?” Jethro looked at him wryly. “If we can make it work, who’s to say they can’t? McGee is a lot more mature and Abby… Well, McGee is a lot more mature now.”

Tony shook his head. “Abby has settled down a lot, too, Jethro. They’ve both dated in the interim and for the feelings to last that long… Maybe this is the right time for them.”

“If it isn’t, then …”

“I know, you’ll boot McGee back to cyber crimes.” Tony laughed.

“Nope,” Jethro shook his head. “Finally got him trained good. I’ll slap them behind the head.”

Tony just laughed. “Now, all I need to do is to pop this in the oven for about forty-five minutes. Then a layer of shredded cheese and voila, Shepherd’s pie ala Tony.”

“I will pop it in the oven.” Jethro had come around the table and picked up the cast iron skillet. “That skillet alone is over your weight limit. I still think you could have used a regular pan.”

“It wouldn’t have tasted the same.” Jackson and Tony chorused.

“More coffee, dad?” Jethro brought a fresh pot to the table.

Jackson immediately held out his mug. “Any more of those chip-a-peel cookies, son?”

“Someone cleaned out the cookie jar earlier.” Tony noted the look of disappointment on both men’s faces and the lack of repentance on his husband’s face. Turning, he moved to the counter and opened the bread box. “I do have a loaf of Hulu bread.” Bringing it to the table, he handed it to Jackson with a cutting knife.

“What’s Hulu bread? Isn’t that for sandwiches?”

“Not mine. This is a snack bread.”

“When did you make this?” Jackson placed a slice on a napkin passing it to his son, he could see the moistness and the nuts.

“When you and Jethro ran to the lumber store to buy things that I do not know about to make something I am not allowed to ask about. Zuma and I whipped up a couple loaves.”

Jethro moaned as the flavors melted on his tongue. “Loaves?”

“I put several in the freezer. I’ll be going back to work and won’t have as much time to cook or bake. I want to stock up for late nights.”
“A couple more weeks and then desk duty.”

Tony maturely stuck his tongue out at his husband. “I still want to have some stuff made ahead. It’ll soon be too hot to cook. If I have casseroles pre-made, I can stick them in the oven and just warm them.”

“Lasagna?” Jackson looked up from slicing another piece of bread.

“The green kind?” Jethro chimed in.

Tony paused in shredding cheese for on the pie. “If Mr. Williams is right, we could be moving in, around the end of October. It might be nice to have some casseroles and desserts stocked up as I’m sure that we’ll have a lot of help moving. I’d rather sit down to a meal, but there isn’t a lot of room in the freezer.”

“Room in the basement for a big one.” Jethro avoided Jackson’s swat as he grabbed for another slice of bread.

“A big one?”

“A big freezer.” Jethro took a drink of coffee and savored his stolen slice. “Yours was the right size for a bachelor but we have a large family. We could use a large freezer. I’ve been considering putting one of those all refrigerators in the basement.”

“All refrigerators?” Jackson queried. “Do they still make them?”

Tony carefully wrapped the cheese back up in its protective cloth and wrapping. “You mean like that one on the design show we saw the other night?”

“Yup.”

“You watched a design show, Leroy?”

“Jethro and I are looking at ideas for the house.” Tony stepped in before Jackson could tease Jethro. “We could keep a lot of drinks cold that way.”

“Why don’t go look and see what we can find? We know that there will be plenty of room for them at the new house. We’ve got several months to get through and they would make summer easier.” Jethro finished his coffee.

“It would.” Tony agreed.

Jackson snuck another small bite of the Hulu Bread. He looked at his two sons and smiled contentedly. Marriage was good for his boys. And for him.
“Ducky is dropping him off. They already had lunch plans.” Jethro reminded Tony as he helped him out of the car.

“Hello, you must be Mr. Gibbs.”

Tony watched in amusement as the salesman took in the puppy in his NCIS carrier. And recognition in five… four… three… he counted down.

“Agent Zuma.” The salesman eyes opened wide. “That’s Agent Zuma. That means you’re Agent Gibbs and DiNozzo. My wife is going to be thrilled when I tell her. Listen to me going on. My name’s Wayne Ashton. With your injury, Agent DiNozzo, I know you shouldn’t be walking too much. Give me just a minute.”

Tony discreetly poked Jethro in a silent demand to be nice. Of course, he also surreptitiously counted the fingers on his right hand. Who knew a salesman would have such a grip?

The salesman emerged from the building dragging a chair. “Why don’t you have a seat right here and I’ll be happy to bring anything you’re interested in to you, Agent Dinozzo?”

“Tony, please. I…”

“That’s very helpful.” Jethro said politely sealing Tony’s fate.

When Tony saw his husband move to slip out of the carrier, he spoke up quickly. “That’s kind of you. I guess Zuma will have to give his initial opinion instead. You don’t mind if he tags along, do you?”

“Not at all. You should have seen the looks on the other sales agents when they realized who you were.” Wayne gestured to where sales persons were peering out at the group. Self-consciously, Tony gave a little wave and then settled into his chair.

As Jethro turned towards the salesman, Zuma whined and began to wriggle in his carrier. Giving in to the inevitable, Tony held out his arms. “Give him here.”

Jethro tried to hide a smirk of triumph as he slipped out of the character. The look on his husband’s face told him that he wasn’t doing a very good job. Carefully, he sat the carrier on Tony’s lap and hooked it over the shoulders to ease the strain on his husband. Automatically, Zuma stilled and looked around.

“Traitor.” Tony teased the pup. “You know without one of us along we’ll be stuck with a black box with black interior.”

“Who has the 1970 Dodge Challenger?”

“Your dad helped refurbish it.” Tony countered.

“And pick the colors.” Jackson confirmed walking up to them. He shook hands with the salesman. “Jackson Gibbs. I’m protecting Tony’s interests.”

“Just call me Wayne. What do you have in mind?” The salesman interceded.

“Well, as you know we’re agents and sometimes need to use our personal vehicles. Has to be dependable with good gas mileage.”

“But…” Tony interrupted. “It will be the family car. There has to be plenty of room for all of us.”
“And us is…” The salesman prompted.

“Well, Jethro, Jackson, me and last, but not least, a safe place for Zuma.”

“Don’t forget. We sometimes have Ducky or McGee or Abby along.” Jackson spoke up.

“What about storage?” The salesman asked.

“We have to have room for Zuma’s stroller and our go-bags.”

“What range?”

“No object.” Tony spoke up. “We’re doing a cash sale. But it needs to look good, too.”

“Well, I’m sure that you’ve done your research. What it sounds like you’re describing is a large, luxury family SUV. The top seven in US news and world report are the Cadillac Escalade, Land Rover Range Rover, Mercedes-Benz GL-Class and G-Class, Toyota Land Cruiser, Lexus LX, Lincoln Navigator and the Infiniti QX80.”

“Not a Mercedes.” Tony said quickly. “Too boxy looking.”

“Well, that’s good. We don’t carry them.” Wayne smiled. “We do have the Cadillac, Lincoln and Lexus. Now the owner of the dealership has a couple of other dealerships, I can have the Infinity, Toyota and Land Rover here within a half an hour. Now any other requirements?”

“No white.” Jethro spoke up. “Not black.” He added reluctantly.

“Nothing overly flashy.” Tony confirmed.

“Among the models there are basically the same color choices. Favorite color?” The three men looked at each other as Wayne listed off colors. “Silver? Gray? Blue? Green? Red?...”

Zuma perked up his ears and barked definitively. “We have one vote for red.” Tony laughed.

“Not a flashy red though.” Jackson spoke up.

“Jethro?” Tony questioned.

“Not overly bright. We want something sedate for work.” Jethro hated the dimming of Tony’s excitement. “Maybe something like a dark red, perhaps in metallic sheen. With chrome accents…” He was happy to see the spark return.

“Anything like that, Wayne?”

“Actually, I do. If you give me a minute, I’ll run in and give the other dealership a call.”

“You really don’t mind red?” Tony asked.

Jackson smiled as Jethro’s stern façade crumpled. “No. It is a family car and it should reflect our family.” Zuma yipped. “That includes you, Zuma.”

In the end, it came down to a choice between a Midnight Sapphire Lincoln, a Firenze Red Land Rover, a Brandywine Mica Toyota and a Red Passion Cadillac. All of the SUVs had been tested for Zuma’s car seat and been test driven by Jethro and Jackson while Tony and Zuma greeted fans, took
video and selfies and signed autographs.

Finally, the choice was narrowed to the blue Lincoln and the Cadillac. It had been a close call, but Zuma had finally crawled into the Cadillac behind the driver’s seat and refused to come out again. Fortunately, the rest of the Gibbs family agreed with him; liking the extended version’s legroom.

“Looks like he votes for the red.” Wayne laughed. It had been fun interacting with the three man and opinionated pup. Zuma had taken one look at the Infiniti and refused to put one paw into the vehicle regardless of all the coaching and even attempted bribery with a puppy treat.

“Let’s get the paperwork done.” Jethro said. He could tell Tony was getting tired and wanted him to get home to rest.

“While you’re doing that, I’ll put Mr. Bossy’s car seat in and take him a walk.” Jackson scooped his grand-pup out of Tony’s arms and Zuma looked at him with narrowed eyes almost as if he had understood the slur on his character. “Do you want his stroller, too?”

Jethro looked at his husband. “No.” He decided. “Why don’t I call in an order for dinner and pick it up on the way home?”

“Usual suspects?” Jackson asked.

“You know, Abby will be bouncing off the ceiling to see the new car.” Tony reminded his husband.

Jethro shrugged. “Call Ducky, he’ll round them up.” He watched as Wayne began shepherding his husband into the sales office.

“Want me to stop at Hansen’s?” Jackson offered. “Pick up a cake for dessert or something?” Jethro’s mouth started to water and Jackson smirked. “I’ll pick up some muffins, too.”

“Thanks, dad.” Jethro strode off after Tony and Wayne.

Zuma whimpered. “None of that, mister.” Jackson turned the pup to face him. “Your dads have to do the paperwork so that they can take your car home. In the meantime, let’s get your car seat moved out of Leroy’s car. Then, we’ll get your leash and you can make a pit stop before the ride home.”

Later as Tony looked around at his family laughing and joking, he had that feeling. Darn his Gibbs gut. He couldn’t see anything that would disturb him but then the phone rang. Jethro grabbed the phone and when Tony saw the look on his face, he knew.

“It’s Senior.” Jethro said hanging up the phone. “He’s regained consciousness and he’s asking for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Hulu Bread (Extra points if you can get Jethro to Hulu! Naked! In the bedroom!)

Ingredients
3 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups granulated sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup chopped macadamia nuts (If you can’t find macadamia nuts be creative; use almonds or pecans or walnuts or a mix. Just be sure to add them to the dry ingredients and stir them well. It makes sure that the nuts mix in properly. Tony said to tell you that.)
3 eggs, beaten
1 cup vegetable oil
2 cups mashed ripe bananas (about 5)
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 (8-ounce) can crushed pineapple, drained, with 4 teaspoons liquid reserved
1/2 cup confectioners’ sugar (10x sugar)

Instructions
1. Preheat oven to 360 degrees F. Will make two 8- x 4-inch loaves. Grease and dust with flour. (Or use that wonderful baking spray that does it for you. Tony says not to use the spray; it’s cheating. I do!)
2. In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt; stir in macadamia nuts. In a separate bowl combine eggs, oil, bananas, vanilla and pineapple; mix well. Pour wet mixture into dry mixture, stirring just until dry ingredients are moistened. Spoon batter into prepared loaf pans.
3. Bake 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 hours, or until a wooden toothpick inserted in center of loaf comes out clean. Cool In pans 10 minutes; remove from pans and let cool on wire racks.
4. In a small bowl, combine confectioners’ sugar and reserved pineapple liquid. Drizzle over cooled breads.

This freezes really well. It makes it even moister.
“Did they buy it?” Amelitta asked stuffing her leotard into her duffle bag.
“Seemed to. Vt_girl1701 wants to send the lambs to negotiate on my behalf.”
“They don’t suspect anything?”
“No. Not yet.”
“So….”
“Yeah…” Geminiangel looked around the room.
“Got any more tea?”
“Muses aren’t supposed to drink.”
“Muses aren’t supposed to be assigned to idiots.” Amelitta flinched. “Sorry, reflex.”
“So, what’s next?”
“Got a new assignment. Time to spread my wings and fly.”
“You aren’t supposed to fly until your wing heals again.”
“I’ll take a cab.”
“If you wait till morning, I’m sure Coors would give you a lift.”
“Best to take off now. You know, muses don’t get tied down. We’re one with the wind.
We flit from place to place, mind to mind, universe to universe…”
“You’re just trying to make me face them all alone.”
“Yup.” Amelitta gave a grin. “Well, Idiot. Take care of yourself.”
“You, too, Amelitta. I packed a snack for you. There’s a quart of tea in it.”
“Thanks.”
“So…”
“Yeah…”
It was quiet in the office alone. Geminiangel toyed with sneaking in to the nursery but didn’t want to risk waking anyone up. Morning would be soon enough to tell everyone that Amelitta was gone.
It was very late, but she wasn’t in the mood to sleep. Pouring a glass of tea for herself, Geminiangel sat down at the desk and turned on her computer. Maybe she’d put out another recipe and try to distract them. As she began to work, she started to sing softly,
“And now… the end is near… And so I face the final curtain… something something something something something… Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew, When I bit off more than I could chew....”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Section 96

“I’ll be right outside if you need anything.” The guard shut the door to the infirmary room and Gibbs could see him take up a guard position.

“You’re not Junior.”

“Obviously.” Gibbs said dryly. The last few weeks hadn’t been kind to the other man. Dressed in infirmary issued pajamas, Anthony DiNozzo, Sr. bore little resemblance to the scion of New York society. During the two weeks since the attack, the bruises had faded to faint echoes attesting to their initial severity. His left arm was in a cast held to his chest.
“Did you tell him I need to see him?” Senior said pathetically. “They... they murdered Jeanne. Does he know? He’s all I have left. I need my son.”

“Nine point eight.”

Senior looked at him in confusion. “What?”

“Your performance.” Gibbs said. “I give it a nine point eight. The cast, bruises and bedridden act were worth at least two points.”

“Act? Junior is all I have left. Is it so unbelievable that I need my son?”

“Yes. And his name is Tony, not Junior. So, cut the crap. We both know that you have no feelings for Tony; so what do you want?”

“It was worth a try.” Senior laughed.

“Why did you insist the warden call him?”

“I want out of here. He owes me that much.”


“He was never worth much. You’ll see.”

“I have seen,” Jethro smiled. “Tony is a hundred times the man you will never be.”

“Oh, please, spare me the sap. Keep it for the masses who don’t know better.”

“You hate him. Why?”

Senior looked deeply into Jethro’s eyes. “Get me into witness protection.”

“No dice. No deals. That was the agreement when Tony turned you in.”

“Might have known it was the little bastard’s idea. I knew he was responsible for this.”

“Tony wasn’t responsible for your mistakes. The drugs, the trafficking, blackmailing Mabus.”

“You have done your homework.”

“His widow had the records.”

“Not all of them.” Senior sneered. “That little bastard has ruined everything in my life from the day I laid eyes on him.”

“He was a baby; not capable of ruining your life.”

“Our life was perfect.” Senior mused. “We were young, rich, beautiful then we had to fly to Italy for that damned funeral. I didn’t want a kid, but Eleanor had decided we need a baby, an heir. When she saw the brat, she was fixated on it. She was certain it was a sign and that it was meant to be our son. Just because she couldn’t have a child of her own.”

“Don’t you mean, you couldn’t?” Jethro interjected.

“My, my, you have done your homework.” Senior turned back to face Gibbs.
“When you were incarcerated, they subpoenaed all your medical records. Vasectomies weren’t that common in the seventies. I guess you never told her the truth.”

“She wanted kids, an heir, a family. We were at the pinnacle of society. Hell, we were society, Eleanor and I. I didn’t want some squalling brat ruining our life. So, yeah, on one of my business trips, I had the matter taken care of. No need for anyone to know.”

“You let her believe it was her fault.”

“So what? She wanted that brat; I got him for her. Never did see what she saw in it. But, heh, happy wife, happy life, right? I let her bring it home with us. We flew back to New York. I hired a nanny but Eleanor didn’t want a nanny, she wanted to be his mother.” Forgetting his invalid act, Senior pushed back the sheets with his good arm and crawled out of the bed. He went to stand by the bar-covered window. “It wasn’t a month until it started. Eleanor kept getting these photos of her and it. Someone was following her. Pictures of them at the park, the store, on the street - they just kept coming. Then the phone call. Mabus! He had tracked us down; told me that he thought he might need his son back. I told him to take him, but Eleanor… She was attached to it. Told me she loved it. That red, squirming, mewling brat.” Senior shuddered. “I didn’t see how she could but, she cried and cried. So, I paid what he wanted.”

“It didn’t stop though. The pictures kept coming and periodically the calls. I paid and paid but it didn’t make a difference. Eleanor was frantic all the time. Drove her to the bottle. I knew when I walked into the house, I could always tell that an envelope had come, knew when I walked through the front door. She’d be stinking drunk and grasping onto him as hard as she could. I paid through my teeth for that brat.”

“Mabus thought he had me trapped. I remember the call that came the night of Eleanor’s funeral. How he said that maybe he should come get his son; since he could provide him a mother.” Senior laughed harshly. “You should have heard him, when I told him to come ahead; that I’d never wanted the little bastard. God, I could use a bourbon. Don’t suppose you could get me a bottle?”

“Nope.” Jethro said dispassionately.

“You’re nearly as worthless as he is.” Senior complained.

“So you decided to turn the tables on Mabus?”

“Figured he owed it to me. I had to raise his bastard.”

Jethro snorted. “Tony raised himself and thank God he did. I’d hate to see what we might have become if you or Mabus had raised him.”

“It’s time to go.” Tony said from the door.

“Junior…”

“Don’t even try it.” Tony said emotionlessly. “I told Jethro it was a waste of time to come here. Don’t ask for me again. As far as I’m concerned, you’re nothing to me. Don’t call, don’t write, hell, don’t breathe for all I care.”

With a shrug, Jethro moved to join his husband. “At least now, you know the whole truth. You can put this behind you.”

Without another word, the two men left the room leaving the guard to lock the infirmary door with a definite click. The man by the window suppressed a grimace at the sound. He would never get used
to that he was sure. Looking out the window, he tried to figure out where it had slipped out of his control.

“You okay?” Jethro asked as he helped Tony into Cranberry, as Tony insisted on referring to the car.

“Yes.” Tony looked at him a bit surprised. “You were right.” He punched Jethro’s arm when he smirked. “I could never understand what I did to make him hate me. Now I know. Absolutely, nothing.”

Jethro shut the door and went around to the passenger side. As he put the key into the ignition, Jethro saw Tony smile. “Ready to go home and face Sunday dinner with the family?”

“Yes, let’s go home.” Tony confirmed.

Chapter End Notes

No Cooking for Tony this chapter unfortunately. However, he did send a long this quick dip.

Pumpkin Dip

Ingredients

1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese, softened
2 cups confectioners' sugar
1 (15 ounce) can solid pack pumpkin
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice
1 teaspoon frozen orange juice concentrate

Directions

In a medium bowl, blend cream cheese and confectioners' sugar until smooth. Gradually mix in the pumpkin. Stir in the cinnamon, pumpkin pie spice, and orange juice until smooth and well blended. Chill until serving.

Best served with ginger snaps, shortbread cookies or vanilla wafers.

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