Stranger In Paradise
by Leydhawk

Summary

Xover! If you like my other sexy romantic stories, please give this a try even if you don't follow H50. It's a Tim-centric, character driven love story with Navy SEAL and Hawaii governor's special task force leader Steve McGarrett. When Tim goes to help on a case with the 5-0 team, he has no idea that the dominos will start falling to give him a relationship he never expected.

This verse will be expanded with alternate endings and branching of the story, but this is the original.
Chapter 1

Bombs exploding in shopping districts had even more ramifications in Hawaii than elsewhere with the economy's dependence on tourism. The Five-0 team was working hard following leads when a pale, overdressed NCIS agent walked in and informed McGarrett he had been sent to help.

"We're pretty sure it's the same group NCIS was tracking two years ago before they went dark and the case went cold. There's a heavy cyber element to it, so my Director offered my services to the governor. What do you have?" Special Agent Timothy McGee told McGarrett when the task force leader stepped into his way, blocking access to their offices. It was obvious to Tim that the handsome Navy reservist was unhappy with a stranger showing up.

"Look, I am here to help you, so stop giving me the *stare* and start telling me what I need to know. I've stared down someone way worse than you, McGarrett: *you don't scare me.*" McGee was rather surprised as he realized that what he was saying was the absolute truth. Gibbs had years of practice breaking suspects with his gaze, and McGarrett's 'head back, looking down his nose' only seemed arrogant to Tim, not intimidating.

McGarrett's shoulders relaxed and he nodded once, giving his approval that this man with his steady gaze had passed his test. This geeky haole had more stones than he'd expected when NCIS Director Leon Vance had notified him McGee was coming. Vance had said he was a field Agent on the Major Case Response Team, not one of their cyber expert mole people, but he'd still figured he'd be able to cow the man merely with his attitude, and here he was calling Steve on the attempt! He kind of liked him already. Besides, he had the prettiest eyes Steve had ever seen. That had to count for something. He jerked his chin toward the next office.

"Kono's working on the laptop we found. She hasn't been able to break the encryption so it's all yours. Get me something to take these guys down before they blow anything else up."

McGee suppressed an eye roll and followed the direction he'd been sent and settled down to work with the much more pleasant Police Officer Kono Kalakaua. She was younger but seemed to be running police specialist level decryption, and she was enthusiastic. It was great to work with people who had more than a cursory knowledge of computers. He used one of his personal decryption programs and got into the laptop in under two minutes, but then, that was why he was the expert.

"Wait... I've never seen anything like that. How did you-" Kono was agog that the man had put a thumb drive in and then was suddenly past all the barriers she'd been struggling with for the last half hour.

"It's just a program I wrote. I'll leave you a copy," Tim said dismissively, already wading through the data he'd found.

She mirrored what he was looking at on their big screen so she could watch without crowding him. He was going so fast that she kept having to bite back a request for him to explain what he'd done. He wasn't there just to teach her, but she hoped she could learn from him nonetheless. When he set a bunch of in-depth searches to run on their computers, he finally sat back from his laptop and looked around.

"That will probably take a while. So, is there a place close by where I can get a good cup of
"You're a coffee drinker, Kono?" He asked Kono with a smile.

"You've been working for three solid hours, McGee: The coffee's on me. C'mon," McGarrett interrupted. Tim gave Kono a helpless shrug, and she smiled appreciatively that he'd acknowledged her abrupt dismissal. Then he followed the team leader out.

"You broken that encryption yet?" Steve asked. McGee frowned, unsure to what he was referring. Then he realized that McGarrett had no idea how fast Tim worked.

"Yeah. There wasn't much on that computer. The most questionable thing was some possibly underaged Japanese porn. But I got a few account numbers from some budgeting software that was loaded and I ran those down."

"Shell corporations?"

"Yeah, but there were transactions routed through some satellites they shouldn't have accessed, so I've set up some sniffers while we check out associated accounts."

The nod McGarrett gave was more knowing than the blank look he would have gotten from Gibbs and he filed the information away that this man had more tech skills than Tim had expected.

"That's good work," he complimented as they arrived at the coffee cart. McGee smiled ruefully. That was what he'd done in the first half an hour.

"Tip of the iceberg. You wanna know what else I'm doing or do you just want to know when I find actionable intel?"

McGarrett reassessed McGee. He looked at him and realized he was older than he'd assumed from his baby face, probably near his own age. And he could tell he was used to being undervalued. He tilted his head. "That all your team usually wants?"

"Uh-huh. They trust that I'm getting the right info, but they don't really care how," Tim shrugged. Steve considered.

"Give me the short version. I don't want to take up your time getting updates when you could be breaking the case for us."

McGee told him briefly about all the avenues he was exploring as they walked back into the office. Steve shook his head.

"You did all that in three hours? Woulda taken us days."

Tim shrugged. It felt really good to have his skills acknowledged but it wasn't actually relevant to the case, so he changed the topic. "I thought you had a bigger team than this?"

"Lou Grover is over at the police department running something down. Chin Ho Kelly's in the hospital. Appendicitis with complications, but he's doing okay."

"He's your tech guy?"

"We all pitch in."

Tim nodded. This team already seemed more fluid than Gibbs' did, everyone able to do at least basic computer forensics as well as perform the more physical aspects of the job. Although McGarrett seemed built for the physical aspects; he was every inch the fit SEAL, not having gone
soft at all since he'd become a reservist. An impressive specimen of a man with a body that made Tim's mouth go dry. They reentered the common area of the office and Tim sat back down on the folding chair he'd been using with his laptop balanced on the edge of a shelf.

"You can use my office," McGarrett offered, and McGee gratefully moved into the more comfortable space. Steve now knew he'd earned it and he even felt a little bad for how Tim had had to work for the last few hours.

But while he sat at the big desk in the comfortable chair, it took all McGee's years of practice working around DiNozzo to focus while the Five-0 team snarked at each other in rapid-fire. Detective Danny Williams and Lieutenant Commander Steve McGarrett seemed to be unable to function together without the repartee and their voices rose and fell throughout the days with very little pause, save when they were out chasing every tenuous lead. They seemed happier doing legwork than waiting for electronic intel. Grover got in plenty of shots on each of them as well, and even the quiet Kono sent a few zingers into the mix. Each night Steve dismissed them for a few hours of sleep, and Tim was grateful to get even that much rest. With a threat like this, he knew that Gibbs would have had them sleeping at their desks, unwilling to spare even the few minutes it would take for them to go home. It bothered him vaguely to feel even slightly critical of his boss, but he was too exhausted to argue with himself.

Finally, McGarrett and Williams got into a yelling match that made Tim wish he'd brought noise canceling headphones, and when Kono reported a more plausible possible lead from their friend and regular informant, a huge Hawaiian named Kamekona, Danny took off like he'd been catapulted, but with disastrous consequences. Not long after he'd left, Tim hacked a server with a large number of terrorist emails, all in a cypher that he and McGarrett figured out. They bounced ideas off of each other and solved the riddle in minutes, and Tim was impressed with how fast Steve's mind worked, and how well they meshed. As McGarrett leaned near over Tim's shoulder to see the screen and they worked together to decode the recent emails, Tim felt his face flush at the warm closeness of the other man. By the time they'd waded through the last few days of messages, they realized Danny had gone straight into the same trap which had ensnared two previous investigators and gotten them killed in Georgia and Naples.

Williams was taken hostage rather than being killed outright by the leader of the terrorist group, his import having been reinforced by messages Tim and Steve had concocted and inserted onto the email server. Tim offered to call in Marine support from the local command, but the idea was dismissed off hand as something that would take too long. Steve was again taken aback at the quiet authority Tim displayed as he succinctly argued his point, but McGarrett knew that he was right and the lead time for a military operation would jeopardize his partner's life. As Kono, Grover, and McGarrett geared up to go for their rescue attempt, McGee insisted they take him with as a field trained addition to their team. Suspecting that it would be easier to convince Steve by adopting the same raised, argumentative tone he'd been listening to from the Commander and the Detective for the last four days, Tim switched how he'd been talking to the leader and stepped up and got right in McGarrett's face, grasping at some of the bits of personal information he'd gleaned to get his point across.

"Yeah? You lost your dad? I lost my dad right before Christmas. I know what it's like to lose family that you didn't know you were dependent on until they're gone. I also know what it's like to have your real family be people who aren't your blood. We're gonna find Danny, McGarrett. I will find Danny, then you and I are gonna do some talking. We're more alike than we seem."

"Then do it! Find him and then a steak dinner's on me, McGee," Steve snapped in response. In the heated moment, he refused to admit that Tim had been an incredible asset and that he was much more perceptive than Steve had imagined. The computer geek McGarrett had pegged him as was
showing he had a steel spine in that lean, far from frail frame along with a brilliant mind, and the combination was beyond intriguing. And those eyes of his shifting color like the ocean, from green to turquoise to blue and back further roused Steve's interest, but he tucked that away to better focus on getting his partner back safe and taking down the group that was bombing tourist traps. Tim hauled his laptop with them in Steve's big truck, peripherally wondering how often the man needed such a vehicle and if he was compensating for a lack below the belt with it. Shaking off where that thought might lead, he worked on a triangulation while he strapped his bulletproof vest on as McGarrett aggressively drove in the direction Tim sent him.

To McGarrett's surprise, it turned out that McGee was also a crack shot when they got to the beef processing plant they discovered the group had been using as a headquarters. After using binoculars to identify the type of detonator being used, Tim assessed, then took out the unit as one of the terrorists was holding it up while he made a speech about why they were doing what they were doing. With the bomb threat out of the way, the Five-0 team moved in and Tim continued to cover them while they freed their teammate. SWAT arrived in time to support the final takedown, and they shared a group congratulations before EMTs took Danny to have his concussion and assorted injuries checked and the rest of them went back to the office to file paperwork.

There was so much less red tape with the special task force that McGee was honestly shocked. He put his notes into files organized so that all his NCIS paperwork would be easier to do either on the plane or after he returned to Washington, then eagerly packed up to go back to his hotel. But instead, McGarrett ordered Tim to his place when everything settled. McGee tried to object, knowing he would be heading back to the mainland the following morning and wanting a little bit of peaceful time on the beach before he left, but Steve wasn't about to let him go easily. There was so much more to the Agent than his initial assessment had suggested, and he decided that it was time to see just how many more layers he could uncover before the man left.

In his room, Tim showered and put on jeans and a polo shirt before he drove over to McGarrett's place. He wasn't sure what the plan was, but the intensity of the look Steve had given him had Tim wondering what he was in for. Maybe he would get to see a more relaxed side of the guarded man, but it seemed more likely he'd end up working another case or chasing some lead; Steve reminded him of Gibbs with his almost pathological need to work. The opportunity to spend some personal time with the first man he'd been attracted to in a while was too strong of a lure, even if Tim resigned himself to nothing more than flirting.

When he arrived, he found McGarrett prepping a grill. Maybe Tim had read him wrong and this would be a team get together? But there were only four beef-peppers-pineapple kebobs in the kitchen as he moved through. So probably just the two of them. What was it with hard-ass men and cooking meat over open flame, he wondered. And why was it completely irresistible to Tim? He sighed as his thoughts reminded him of Gibbs and tried to redirect himself to standing firm with Steve.

"Hey," McGarrett greeted. "There's beer in the fridge." He gave McGee a nod as he went past him and picked up the tray of kebobs. Tim felt that look low in his gut, but steeled himself against his response. God, the man was gorgeous! Tim cleared his throat.

"Um, thanks, but... I'm not sure I should stay," McGee told him. He took a deep breath and squared his shoulders. Steve turned his head and looked quizzically at him. He continued moving with that perpetual motion of the active, fit, avoidant male. Tim shook his head. "I don't think we're on the same page here."

McGarrett put the kebobs on the grate and took a pull from his beer before moving to take the platter from the raw food back into the kitchen. "How do you figure?" He asked as he passed Tim,
brushing by him deliberately. Tim swallowed. He was definitely reading McGarrett's intentions right. The back of the man's free hand had just barely grazed his crotch, flaming his attraction and reassuring him that he had better leave, quick, or he'd end up doing something he would regret.

"I'm leaving tomorrow, so you're looking for a quick fuck. That's not something I generally do," McGee said, keeping his voice level. Steve washed his hands and dried them before he returned to stand immediately in front of Tim. He was close, and McGee's breath caught at the sense of contained power just on the verge of release from the body bare inches from his own. If he was ever going to break his own rule against one night stands, this was the moment...

"Nothing 'quick' about it when I fuck, Tim," McGarrett informed him, quirking an eyebrow. It was a matter of fact statement, but said in a low voice that already had McGee's cock responding.

Tim smiled tightly. "I bet you don't get turned down very often. But I don't have one night stands. And I don't fuck. Maybe I was wrong about us being more alike than we thought," he said, shaking his head. He was definitely going to regret this when he went home. McGarrett was sexy and it was apparent he'd be a skilled lover. He stepped to the side to move away from him, then turned to go. A strong hand on his shoulder stopped him and he looked back.

"I bet you're not often wrong, either. What makes you sure you are now?"

Steve's voice was still low and seductive, but Tim saw a flash of vulnerability in his eyes, quickly covered by the confident façade and it made him recalculate. He raised an eyebrow in question, but didn't move away from the hand on his shoulder.

"It would be perfectly understandable for you to request a couple of personal days so you could check out the islands before you go back," McGarrett said. Tim's mouth twisted in a wry smile.

"It's still a one night stand even if it's spread over a couple of days, Steve. I'm a writer: you're not going to get away with semantics with me. I appreciate the offer, though. You should call me if you're ever in Washington. I can introduce you to the person you're likely to be in twenty years," McGee replied. Hell, he was already regretting turning McGarrett down! He huffed as he headed toward the door.

Steve really wasn't used to being turned down, and it put him into hunter mode. He wasn't sure he could actually break through the walls Tim was putting up, but he wanted to try. There was something so special about him, and he found himself needing to figure out what it was that pulled him so strongly.

"Hey Tim! You gotta eat. Stay for dinner," Steve called after him. There was something in his voice... The arrogant Casanova-persona was gone, and he just seemed to be asking for something real this time. Tim closed his eyes and grit his teeth. Damn... Sincerity from the tightly barricaded former SEAL? It tugged at his heart as well as his groin. He'd never been able to break through the military reserve he'd witnessed in the people he'd cared about who armored themselves with it, but he sensed that maybe he could with McGarrett, and he wanted to know what was behind that mask. He wanted it badly. He turned back and nodded.

"Those kebobs do look good," he admitted. The smile McGarrett gave him was worth staying for dinner with the potential awkwardness of taking his leave right after. "I'm more of a wine drinker, though. Want me to run out for a bottle?" The social lubrication of alcohol was appealing. He'd just have to make sure he didn't drink to the point of impairing his judgment, or his ability to drive himself away.

"I've got something that will go great with this. C'mon outside and have a seat."
Dinner was delicious, and Tim relaxed with the good wine and conversation. They sat in low chairs on the beach, Tim almost asking how Steve could afford oceanfront property before he realized it was the McGarrett family home. That had to be difficult with Steve's past, living in the house he'd basically been thrown out of as a teenager when he was sent to school on the mainland. So they talked shop, discussing cases, then Tim started asking about the islands and was pleased that Steve became even more animated. Better still, more of his mask seemed to slip as he described hidden waterfalls and coves accessible only by kayak or canoe. It sounded like a magical place and Tim reconsidered requesting a few more days to play tourist. His studious look and frown were obvious tells that his mind was no longer on the topic at hand, and McGarrett tensed. McGee noticed and gestured that all was well.

"You're really making me want to stay those extra days, Steve, but I don't want to give you the wrong impression. I said I'm not interested in meaningless sex and that hasn't changed, but I'm really enjoying your company and I think I'd like it if you'd show me more of your home. If we can keep things platonic," Tim said plainly. He saw the calculating look that passed over Steve's face, but it disappeared behind a charming, handsome smile, and he agreed. Tim shook his head internally. He'd get a fabulous, insider tour of Hawaii, but he was going to have to be on defense against his own attraction to someone who was more guarded than even Gibbs or Tony. He snickered a little, realizing that the consolation if he did fall to McGarrett's charms would be probably some of the best sex he'd ever had with a guy. And since a smidge of his self-respect would vanish along the way, he girded himself and made the choice to either ignore or acknowledge and dismiss any flirtation. He sensed he needed to be forthright with Steve.

McGee sent the requisite request for leave forms from his phone and checked his watch before he called when the time difference meant he was more likely to get Gibbs after he'd had some coffee to make sure his boss was okay with him staying a few more days. Tim decided not to look a gift horse in the mouth when Gibbs actually encouraged him and wished him a good vacation, sounding pleased for him, but after he hung up, he stared off, frowning, disturbed by the call. Did Gibbs suspect that he'd met someone? And what did it mean if his boss was encouraging him to follow through?

Steve slapped him on the back as he returned to the room, having excused himself to give Tim privacy for his call but stopping in concern at his expression.

"Everything okay?"

Tim nodded. "Yeah. My boss said to have a good time. It's just weird, because he's not usually all that encouraging."

"Gibbs, huh? Yeah, I've heard of him. That's who you were talking about with the stare, right?"

Tim nodded. "Uh-huh. Sorry, but after more than ten years of Gibbs, you didn't faze me a bit. Now before I joined his team, I would have been a quivering puddle from that look from you."

McGarrett smiled, trying to imagine an unsure, green McGee. "I bet you were cute. Did you stutter?"

Grinning, McGee nodded. "Oh yeah. I was fat, too. Typical computer geek. No glasses, though, but cheap suits and wide ties..." He realized he was flirting and that he was standing too close to McGarrett. He cleared his throat and stepped back. "I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be a tease. I should head back to my hotel. What time should we meet up tomorrow?"

They made their plans and Tim drove back to his hotel. He took a cold shower and went to bed. McGarrett stayed up longer and had a good wank before he fell asleep to thoughts of the dexterous
fingers and calm demeanor of Special Agent McGee.

The next two and a half days were filled with wonder and beauty with only a little adrenaline as Steve insisted Tim see the view from Kalaupapa cliffs on Molokai. He'd worked hard to overcome his fear of heights but still felt the rush when confronting them. Tim snickered and arched an eyebrow at the sign to Phallic Rock, the other destination from the trail head at the base of the cliffs. Steve's smile and eye roll were more relaxed than Tim had seen since he arrived in his office, and it pleased him to see the man lowering his guard. They talked off and on while they trekked to the overlook, and Tim accepted the ribbing he got when he asked if there was poison ivy in the jungle. He gamely told his stories about his encounters with the noxious plant and enjoyed Steve's laughter, even if it was at his expense.

"You got it on your junk? Oh man! That takes days to clear up!"

"Oh yeah. So I think it's understandable that I asked about it here!"

"Yeah, I suppose. But that it happened twice! Damn, you were green."

"Eager to be accepted as a real field agent."

"Well, you've impressed me. That shot with the detonator..."

"I spend a lot of time at the range. I helped Gibbs hold off a group of Afghani men who were intent on destroying the women's shelter we were at. Never even got a thank you from him," Tim mused, his voice trailing off. But he'd known Gibbs was proud of him.

"You were in Afghanistan?"

"Yeah, on a case a few years ago."

They talked about Tim's brief time in country, and then his questions encouraged Steve to talk a little about this own time there. Lots of his ops were classified, of course, but he shared funny moments with his SEAL team at their camp and odd interactions with locals that stemmed from the people's spotty knowledge of American culture that mostly came from the entertainment industry. The language barrier had once led McGarrett's team to a laundry rather than the restaurant they were trying to find when they'd been in a city. Finding that they had the same taste in common that they'd both enjoyed the local cuisine was another warm bonding experience.

Their evenings they spent on the beach by Steve's house, and Tim thrilled at the way the other man continued to unwind and become more open with him. He even told some stories from his childhood, and the contrast of a normal (by island standards) upbringing with the way Steve's late teens had been made Tim wonder what sort of person he'd have been if he'd been able to complete school and had his mother at home. The man before him had so many emotional wounds from being so abruptly uprooted just after losing his mom, McGee was sure he'd have been an unrecognizably different person if his life's path had gone a more normal route.

On their last afternoon together, they hiked to a secluded place with a beautiful waterfall and sat and shared a bottle of wine Steve had secreted along in his backpack. Two glasses made Tim bold.

"You haven't pushed, Steve. I appreciate that. You've relaxed and I think I'm seeing a side of you not everyone gets to. What's up with that?" He asked, unsure what the response was he wanted. He shrugged mentally and decided that whatever he got was okay. Steve looked thoughtful at the question so Tim allowed him time to answer.

"I don't know what it is about you, Tim. There's something... I feel good, with you. Like...peaceful,
somehow. Why is that?" McGarrett was surprised to hear himself admit what he'd been thinking ever since McGee stood up to him when he walked into the office to help with their case. The calm, quietly confident way Tim had proceeded throughout the investigation had been a good influence on his own volatile nature.

Tim considered. "I guess with me...what you see is what you get. I'm a lousy liar, so I don't lie. I think...maybe you were in the game too long. SEALs, well, you train to see and deal with the absolute worst. I'm a Navy brat but I never served. I just want to help people," he said.

Connections slotted into place in Steve's mind. "You're a Navy brat, and your dad passed away before Christmas. You're Admiral John McGee's son!"

Tim nodded and shrugged. He'd made a sort of peace with the loss of his father, but still had too many regrets to think of him comfortably.

"I had to work with your old man a couple of times. What a hard ass!"

Tim nodded and smiled sadly. A lump formed in his throat and he tried not to think too much about it. He looked over at the water cascading across the rocks, the spray making rainbows in the afternoon sun. The sussurating sound soothed him like the background static on one of his jazz records, and he tried to let his mind blank out.

Steve moved over beside him and slung his arm across Tim's shoulders. He did it without thinking, just trying to let him know he really did understand, as well as drawing some comfort from the shared pain. "I'm sorry, man. I'm sure you miss your dad. I know I miss mine."

Suspicions flared in Tim, alarm bells ringing in his mind. His self-confidence tanked at the most awkward times, an insidious voice inside him telling him that there was no way this god-like specimen of a man was actually bonding with him, geek and loser. He stood and moved away from Steve toward the edge of the pool.

"You okay, Tim?" Steve asked. His stomach clenched at the tension rippling the other man's back. His lightweight button down shirt clung to his skin and showed that Tim was suddenly shaking.

Tim shook his head and tried to talk himself out of his suspicions, but he realized that he didn't know Steve McGarrett well at all. Shit. He was leaving tomorrow either way, and he was confident he could get back to his hotel on his own if everything blew up here, so... Maybe he'd be proved wrong and the nagging temptation he'd fought down could be reconsidered. If they truly were establishing a real relationship with actual emotional ties, he'd consider adding a physical variable to the situation. There was something so familiar and right in this odd connection they had... It was worth the risk. He turned and looked McGarrett right in the eyes.

"Has this all been an elaborate ruse? I can't imagine that you could actually want me enough to be devious and underhanded, but you're goal driven and this has all been too perfect, leading up to just now, about our dads."

Steve frowned. He'd thought they were really connecting, like maybe he was making one of those friends you knew you could count on even if you didn't see him for years. "What are you talking about?"

Tears filled Tim's eyes at the shame that filled him when he considered the possibility that he'd been played like a harp. "When I told you I didn't want to sleep with you, I saw you...calculate. I know that look. God, I've seen Tony give that look when he really wants a woman... Now, these last two days, have they just been you figuring a way to accomplish a goal you set yourself? Are
you really that cold, Steve?"

McGarrett's eyes widened. "Tim, no! No way." He began breathing hard. He stood and went to his friend. "God, no. I-" He licked his lips. "Tim, I told you. There's something about you. I... I trust you, and that doesn't happen like this, with me. Too much shit, too many other people have... Even the people who prove themselves, there's this tension, this doubt I can't ever get rid of. But you... You would never turn your back on a friend, would you? I'm betting you never have, in your whole life. You're... You're totally unique in my experience. I want to be your friend. I want to be...worthy of you, somehow. I can't explain it any better than that."

Tim's jaw dropped. He believed him. But he'd never imagined Steve felt that way about him, that he saw something in him so special. Steve was an amazing man. And that he found something in Tim worthy of trust and more... It was humbling.

"I'm sorry I doubted you." Tim watched the hope in Steve's eyes, showing him just how unguarded he was willing to be. All his walls were down, he was leaving himself completely open and exposed and there was no way Tim could not answer that vulnerability with something of himself. There was a trust that Steve was giving him, and not giving lightly. The swell of emotion he felt at that seemed to wash away all the reasons he usually kept himself safe and chaste. The pull to explore physically what they had been exploring mentally and emotionally with each other over these two days overwhelmed him. "Steve, if you'll still have me, I think I...want you. Then both of us can have this night in our lives when we can be ourselves with no masks and just trusting and have...joy. Together. And then we'll have the rest of our lives as friends we know we can count on, no matter what, knowing we saw each other, and we didn't back away."

"I'm not giving you the chance to second guess yourself. We're going back to my place, now." He grabbed Tim's hand and dragged him back to the truck, enjoying Tim's breathless laughter all the way.

Once Tim had made the choice to give in to the raging attraction he'd been suppressing, he found he couldn't stop grinning. At least until they got in the front door at Steve's house and he finally pulled close and kissed him. The man's mouth was like nirvana, and McGee could feel the kiss through his entire body. He felt at once desperate for more and languid, like he wanted to stay just as he was forever.

Steve broke the kiss and smiled. "Damn, Tim. I knew it would be good, but you taste like..." He licked his lips. "Butter toffee or something. What is that?"

McGee shook his head. "I have no idea what you're talking about. Just get back here." He crushed his mouth to Steve's, leaning in to press his body against the other man. The firm, muscular chest and powerful arms around him were making Tim feel buzzed.

They stood in Steve's living room kissing for several minutes, arms around each other, tongues battling and exploring, laughing a little at each other's reactions. Tim finally slid his hands under the back of Steve's t-shirt to touch his skin and feel the hard curve of his ass as he dipped his long fingers into the back of Steve's pants, and that broke the stalemate.

Moving away, Steve's warm hand ran down Tim's arm and took ahold of his. He pulled him toward the stairs and Tim felt his breath coming short as they entered Steve's bedroom. He was really doing this! He was going to sleep with someone he wasn't in a relationship with, whom he'd only met a week before... It was terrifying and hot and if this was the thrill Tony got screwing around, Tim actually understood. Although he doubted that DiNozzo ever required the emotional interaction that had brought Tim to this moment.
"Holy fuck!" Tim whispered, gasping. Steve chuckled and flexed just to watch Tim's eyes bulge. By the time he met Steve's gaze again, Tim was in a haze of lust for the incredible body before him. "Steve..." He took a shaky step forward. "I really wanna suck your cock," he confessed. It was Steve's turn to have his jaw drop. He hadn't expected that kind of bold language. He closed the distance between them and started tugging to untuck Tim's shirt.

"Yeah, well, I want yours, too. It's time to get naked so we can discuss it further," Steve said, his voice low and sexy. Tim snorted.

"Fuck discussion," Tim contradicted with a smile. He helped Steve pull his shirt over his head and barely let him have a glimpse of his pale skin before he plastered himself against him just to feel what that hard muscle felt like against him. His nipples hardened at the surprising softness of Steve's chest hair as he shifted back and forth to rub them against it. They kissed aggressively, and the room was filled with the sounds of moans and wet lips and tongues.

Eventually, Tim's mind resupplied him with the thought of swallowing Steve's cock, smelling him, tasting his seed, and his hands moved back around to the front of McGarrett's cargo pants. The motion kickstarted Steve as well, and he retained the practicality to know they'd be faster removing their own clothes. He pushed Tim's hand to his own jeans and broke the kiss. "Get naked. Now."

Tim grinned and did as he was told, disrobing faster even than he had when he was at Johns Hopkins and got a caustic chemical on his clothes. They tumbled naked onto the bed, and Tim immediately started moving down Steve's body.

"Nah. No no no," Steve said. Tim growled and looked up at him in question, his face flushed, eyes dilated. "I told you I want you, too. C'mon; sixty-nine, man."

"Um," Tim paused uncertainly, frowning.

"You've never done it," Steve observed. "Believe me, it's alright. Get on top, turn around. It'll be good, I promise."

Tim again obeyed, finding it awkward and rather exposed-feeling with his legs spread, but as soon as he realized he was positioned exactly to give his attention to Steve's erection, he no longer cared. Some odd part of his mind observed that Steve driving a big truck had nothing to do with compensating. The dick in front of him was a little bigger than average and just perfect for sucking. Licking the moisture gathered in his slit, suppressing a sound at the taste, then swirling his tongue around the head, he was pleased at the affirmative Steve groaned out and he got serious, taking him deep enough that when he breathed through his nose he could smell the musk of McGarrett's groin and he closed his eyes ecstatically. Being a closeted bisexual, he never got enough of men, and being with Steve was like winning the lottery.

"Ungh!" Tim's voice came out in a garbled moan as Steve started in on his cock. It was only moments before McGarrett had to grab Tim's hips so he could fellate him instead of just having his mouth gaggingly fucked. Tim pulled off for a brief apology. The hard suck Steve gave was his only reply, and McGee moaned again brokenly. Trying to concentrate on giving as good as he was getting was taking every brain cell he had, but Tim wasn't about to complain. He could feel Steve shaking under him, and a growing knotting of the fit man's stomach muscles even while his own climax was approaching like a freight train. He didn't know what Steve was doing exactly, but it was the best thing that had ever been done to him and then suddenly he came, crying out around Steve's cock, shaking and shuddering through until he could resume his own task. It was only a few moments more before McGarrett's whole body arched and Tim's mouth filled with the salty
fluid. He found himself whining in little pants as he licked him clean, *God, it was so good*, and then he was struggling not to collapse from the boneless reaction to what they'd just done. Steve half sat up, helping Tim shift over and turn, ending up sprawled across the magnificent chest with his head on Steve's shoulder.

It was a long while before either of them had any thought beyond the stupefication of post orgasmic bliss. When Steve sighed contentedly and started stroking Tim's hair, both of them began to come back to reality, and they lay together companionably. McGarrett returned to puzzling out what it was that made McGee different from anyone else he'd ever known.

"It's your goodness, Tim. You shine with it. All the shit you've seen and you still...believe. It feels good, being around that," Steve said softly, running his fingers through Tim's hair. Tim's heart ached for him. There was a lost kid in Steve who wanted so badly to trust and love but who'd known nothing but betrayal and heartache. He raised his head and kissed him.

"You deserve someone special. Why are you so alone?"

"I'm not. I got my team, y'know. I'm alright."

Tim kissed him harder. "You're a good man, Steve. Whatever that light is that you see in me... You can find that in someone who lives here."

Steve's free hand slapped Tim's ass. "Jesus, Tim! Don't fucking talk to me about finding somebody else when we just had sex! What's wrong with you?"

Tim laughed. "Good point. I'm sorry. You should pine away for me when I'm gone. We can Skype every night. Except for the problem of the time difference. Maybe beat off together via FaceTime while one of us is at work! We could-" he stopped abruptly at the look on McGarrett's face.

"Whooa, Steve! Hey, I was joking. I didn't... I..." He swallowed. "I don't know how to do this. You're... God, you're amazing. You're drop dead fucking gorgeous, and you're witty and you've been so incredible... I've never been with someone like you. It's like the president of the chess club going to prom with the star quarterback. I'm not... I want you to be happy. I want you to not be so isolated, so alone. I'd be here for you, if I could, if you'd have me. But I'm not here. I live on the other side of the planet. I'll be your friend. I'll be whatever I can be from Washington, but I can't stand to think you're going to just shut everyone out the way you do as soon as I'm gone."

McGarrett stared into the ocean-colored, guileless eyes and let himself wonder, just for a moment, what it would be like to have someone like Tim to come home to; someone who would be true and honest and good, who would completely love and accept him. To be able to relax and let go regularly with someone who'd always support and love him... Then he shook his head to clear it. That wasn't possible.

"Yeah, it's a nice dream, Tim. Let's just have tonight. You up for another round in a bit? I bet I can make you come your brains out-"

"Stop! Don't...don't do that. Don't deflect and make this cheap and meaningless. That's exactly what I don't want this to be, what you agreed it wasn't *going* to be. I'm not asking for promises of forever, but if this is all just nothing but physical for you after everything... Don't make me regret it. *Please*, don't tell me it really *was* all lies and seduction..." Tim's heart was beating fast and his gut was twisting. This was why he didn't do one night stands. The intimacy of *sex meant* something to him, and he couldn't stand the thought that Steve could be playing a game.

But looking at the other man, he saw conflict and confusion in him, not smugness or triumph. They stared at each other and slowly the tension drained away. Steve brought his hand up and stroked
his fingers down Tim's cheek.

"Not cheap, and definitely not meaningless."

Tim nodded and kissed him, moving up and tugging his shoulders to allow Tim to wrap himself around Steve protectively. With reluctance, Steve settled into the foreign position, but Tim's long fingers traced soothingly across his back and neck, and he found himself melting into the caresses and actually enjoying being held.

They got up after a while and grabbed dinner, leftover ham and pineapple pizza that was in Steve's fridge, then they returned to the bedroom. Tim went back down to the living room briefly and returned with a couple of items from the day pack he'd used for their hike. Steve had sprawled back on the middle of his bed naked, and Tim's mouth went dry at the sight.

"What's that?" McGarrett asked. McGee blinked, enraptured by the gorgeous man laying with one knee cocked out. He held up a couple of condom packs and a small tube of lube. "You had that with you the whole time?! I thought you hadn't planned on having sex!"

Tim blushed and sat down on the bed facing up toward the headboard so he could focus on Steve's face instead of his body. "Be prepared," he quoted.

"You were a Boy Scout?" Somehow Steve found that the most believable thing he'd heard in a long time.

"Well, I went through Cub Scouts and became a Webelos but I never made actual Boy Scout. We moved around too much."

McGarrett grinned. "Okay, so what are you ready for now, then?"

Tim tilted his head and raised his eyebrows. "Isn't it obvious?"

"Well, yeah, but... Um, which way?"

"We'll figure it out," Tim shrugged. He put the items on the nightstand and lay down with his face propped on his bent arm. He studied Steve, running his fingers across his chest, admiring, memorizing. He was surprised that the über-masculine Navy SEAL hadn't assumed about the roles they might take and he allowed himself to consider what it might be like to top the Adonis body before him. It was a heady thought.

Watching Tim's intent look, Steve felt his mind slipping into neutral, just relaxing in a way he never let himself. With McGee here, touching him, he could let go and just exist for a while. It was peaceful and more pleasant than he'd ever thought it could be with someone in bed. It was warm and affectionate and some part of him soaked it up like one of those resurrection plants that could dry up for years but flourished again when properly moistened.

Tim leaned down and kissed Steve's shoulder lightly. He slowly shifted over and hooked his top leg over his partner's near one, applying pressure so Steve opened his hips more. He did so without resistance, and the contented look in his eyes never wavered. Tim started skimming his fingertips over Steve's nipples, watching them contract, and seeing the way his eyelids drooped over expanding pupils. He might really let Tim do this! Tim's breath caught, and he grew serious about rousing Steve's body. He dragged his lips over the tattoo on his arm, then moved to his neck and finally kissed him softly. He met Steve's gaze and raised an eyebrow as he ran his hand up the inside of his thigh and teased a finger back behind Steve's balls.

Steve was floating. His body was at once totally relaxed and in a state of heightened awareness. He
was feeling something he wasn't sure he ever had before; a surrender that his instincts told him had the potential to win him everything. He found himself nodding and smiled faintly at the stain of pink his answer brought to Tim's cheeks.

McGee kissed him languorously and resumed trailing his fingers all over Steve's body. Now that he knew the destination, he could enjoy the meandering path that led to it. He didn't know if Steve had ever bottomed, but he knew from personal experience that if he got him aroused enough, even average prep would be enough for him to have an easy time of it.

McGarrett was far from docile as he returned Tim's caresses with his own. He pinched Tim's nipples and reveled in the cry that wrought. They smiled at each other and nipped and sucked and kissed and pinched and bit in their thorough explorations of each other's bodies. McGee found a hot spot along Steve's ribs on his right side and worked it until the man was gasping and twitching. In return, McGarrett sucked on Tim's sensitive fingers until he was moaning and rutting against Steve's hip. When he finally released the digits, Tim narrowed his eyes and chose to retaliate by using the saliva as a lubricant to start fingering the other man's ass. One finger was quickly joined by a second and McGee kissed Steve passionately as he slowly moved them in and out.

When he released McGarrett's lips to move to his neck and ear, he trembled at the curses and grunts Steve gave, and he twisted and spread his fingers, listening raptly to the sounds he made. When the swearing devolved into repeated groans of Tim's name, Tim reached out with his free hand for a condom and the lube. Once he had them, he withdrew his fingers and settled full-length atop McGarrett and kissed him before he spoke.

"I want to watch you while I make love to you," he said softly. Steve's eyes widened at the phrasing, and Tim's mouth quirked. "I told you I don't fuck, Steve. I'm just checking if face to face is okay with you."

McGee ignored the extra shine in McGarrett's eyes as he nodded and kissed him again for a while before he rose up and put the condom on. He lubed himself, then used his slick fingers to stretch the other man a bit more while he stroked Steve's cock with his clean hand.

McGarrett shuddered at the dual sensations, closing his eyes and letting his body just go with the pleasure. Even when he'd slept with other men, he'd maintained some control over what they did and how they did it, so this was a new experience. Without that instinctual trust he had in Tim, it would never have been possible, so he knew this to be a singular occurrence and savored it.

McGee waited as long as he could, giving Steve every chance to relish the unique feeling, but eventually gave in to the desire for the next step. He slowly removed both hands and lifted Steve's thighs, lining up with his entrance and going just until the head was inside. The heat and pressure were fantastic and Tim's whole body shook as he gave McGarrett time to adjust. When he felt the initial tension relent, he moved forward, taking his time, until he was buried completely. He waited again, and finally took up a slight motion, staying deep and just rolling his hips rhythmically, knowing he was stimulating Steve's prostate with each pulse.

It was perfect at first, rocking together like a boat, gasping, sighing. It was like the ocean, with a tide of sensation building up. Comforting, like relaxing in a hammock, lulled by motion. But a storm was coming, waves crashing over them as the intensity increased. Steve was tumbling through, couldn't find time to take a breath. It was like he'd eaten it on a freak wave; he didn't know which way was up, and the disorientation made his heart rate skyrocket, lights were bursting behind his eyes and he couldn't breathe!

"Wait...no. Tim, stop!" Steve cried and Tim jerked back, withdrawing and settling back on his heels.
"What! Steve! Did... Did I hurt you? Are you...okay?" Tim panted, trying to calm himself down enough to check in. Steve was shaking under him, and his head was still thrashing back and forth and he was gasping: nearly hyperventilating, but his eyes were shut tight, his forehead beaded with sweat and scrunched up in a frown. Tim cupped his cheeks and stopped him moving. "Steve, hey. Hey!"

His eyes snapped open and met Tim's. It took a few seconds, then he swallowed and twiched away from the hold on his face. Tim sat back, giving him space. Steve turned on his side and Tim watched helplessly as he shivered.

"Steve, I'm sorry if I hurt you. Really. I thought I was reading you right, I thought you were enjoying it, and-"

"I was!" McGarrett practically moaned it into the pillow. The incredibly vulnerable state he'd found himself in when his automatic defenses had reared up inside him berated him for allowing himself to relax into such a state. But some part of him was mourning the loss of the deeply peaceful mindset as well. For those moments, he'd been unadulteratedly happy for the first time since his family was torn apart by his mother's car "accident".

Tim lay down beside him, facing his back but not daring to spoon him. He gently stroked his hair and watched his shivering ease at the touch. He scooted forward and let his legs bend and his knees just touch the back of Steve's thighs. He twitched, then settled further, and Tim allowed his chest to meet Steve's back. He kept his hips and erection away from the other man, but the contact of his skin seemed to calm him, and he let more of their legs meet even as he rested his lips against Steve's neck.

Tim's quiet presence at his back settled the long-ingrained defensive reaction Steve had succumbed to. He wanted to reestablish the connection they'd had, so he reached back and pulled Tim's hips forward, arching his back in silent request.

"You sure?" Tim breathed the question to the back of Steve's ear. McGarrett nodded and Tim moved close, carefully pushing back into him as Steve held himself open for it. They shuddered in unison, and Tim pulled him close, holding him across the chest. Steve's arm covered his, and he twined their fingers together.

McGee began to gently rock his hips again and Steve moaned. His cock was pressing right against that spot inside him, making waves of pleasure spread throughout his torso, shooting down his legs and making his hands tingle. He tightened his grip on Tim's fingers and joined the movement, pushing back into the pressure.

"Oh, God, Steve," Tim groaned. He thrust harder and McGarrett shook with his body's reaction. They were so close to each other, with so much skin contact that they were like one being, undulating in their enjoyment of the pleasure they both felt.

Increasing the pace and pressure, Tim felt like his entire being was becoming centered on that point of connection where he was enveloped inside Steve. Heat and friction and sweat and breath...So good. So good!

"Ngh. Ohhh... Ngh!" Steve grunted and sighed and writhed. Bottoming had never been like this for him. He'd never felt like he wanted it to go on all night, or that he might be able to come just from that.

But he wouldn't have to wait and see. Tim tugged his hand free to slide down McGarrett's contracting abs and wrapped around his cock.
"Tim!" Steve gasped. His hand, bereft of its grip on Tim's, twisted into the pillowcase and tightened painfully on the fabric. Their movements increased, growing almost frantic as Tim stroked in time with his hips snapping forward. It felt paradoxical; they wanted to keep going just as they were, forever, but that sense of yearning toward completion was compulsively driving them as well.

"Steve...fuck! Yes, Steve!" McGee's voice rose as he neared climax, his rhythm breaking into stuttering, hard jabs.

"Aaahh! Tim! Tim!" Steve roared, his whole body riding the building pressure of impending release. God! He needed to come but wanted to stay suspended in this moment, too.

Tim bit his lips and tasted copper, trying desperately to hold back until Steve came. His legs were shaking as he stroked the other man furiously, then McGarrett arced and tightened, a long groan escaping him as he spilled over Tim's hand and Tim let himself go, wailing at the sensation of Steve's ass rippling along his shaft, milking the most powerful orgasm he'd ever had from him.

They held position, both their bodies contracting in muscular spasms of ecstasy until it finally broke and they released simultaneous long breaths, every bit of tension melting out of them as they surrendered into exhausted bliss.

Tim woke to darkness with Steve stirring and shifting away from him. He was awake in an instant, grabbing for the condom and taking care of it quickly, ignoring how the dried come on his hand pulled at his skin. He rolled away from Steve to deposit the prophylactic in the wastebasket, then turned back, hoping to return to sleep holding each other. But Steve was sitting up on the far side of the bed. He wasn't moving, and in the dark, Tim couldn't read if he seemed tense and potentially upset or not. He gently put his hand on the other man's waist.

"You okay?" McGee asked quietly.

McGarrett was still processing what had happened. He rarely bottomed, and had only ever done so for a quickie, usually having been challenged into it, and laughing all the while. One of the SEAL teams he'd worked with years ago had ended up discovering they were all bisexual and the four of them had fucked in every combination possible. The sensual, drawn out encounter he'd just shared with Tim wasn't in his standard repertoire and he wasn't sure how he felt about it. It had been tremendously intense, but...

Tim sat up and moved closer. He kissed Steve's shoulder then rested his cheek there. He decided that the best way to get through to him would be to invoke his protectiveness. "You're kinda freaking me out, Steve." That roused him from his contemplation as Tim had known it would.

McGarrett turned his head and captured Tim's mouth, moving around so he could put an arm around him. The kiss was simple and sweet, and when he broke it, his smile came naturally.

"Mahalo, Tim."

McGee frowned. "Doesn't that mean good-bye?" He'd heard the word said as he left stores and restaurants.

"Means thank you."

"Oh," Tim nodded in relief. He smiled and nuzzled Steve's cheek. "Well, mahalo to you, too. That was amazing."

McGarrett let out a long breath. "Mahalo nui loa. Thank you very much." Yes, gratitude was a big
part of what he was feeling. He nodded and kissed Tim lightly. The rest of his confusion about his reactions could just get stuffed back in the box where all his unwanted emotions went. "Hey, let's get cleaned up and get some sleep, alright?"

Tim followed, still a little uncertain, but feeling better when Steve pulled him into the shower with him. Long, deep kisses as they stood under the spray melted his remaining concerns, and Tim leaned into him, enjoying the closeness.

They didn't stay in long, and Steve didn't hesitate to indicate Tim should sleep with him. He returned to his comfort zone, drawing the other man into his arms protectively. Tim smiled, content that they were okay and that Steve was relaxing as he listened to the already slow heartbeat get slower and his breath even out.

Laying wrapped in strong arms, McGee realized he liked it. A lot. It wasn't a sensation he ever got sleeping with a woman. He pondered that. Don't Ask Don't Tell had been repealed. And as a civilian, it had never really applied to him anyway. If he wanted to openly start dating men, well, the worst that would happen would be DiNozzo teasing him. Maybe all this time he'd spent looking for Ms Right had gotten in the way of him finding a person to share his life with. It was a comforting thought, and he drifted off to sleep to it.

When McGarrett woke in the morning, Tim was asleep with his back to him. It wasn't quite dawn, and he didn't know how late of a sleeper his companion was, so he got up and quietly went downstairs and started a pot of coffee. It hadn't quite gurgled to completion when McGee came down the steps in boxers, rubbing his eyes sleepily, making Steve grin. His hair was sticking up like a rooster's crest on one side and for the first time Steve really got to look at all the acres of pale, white skin. It was beautiful.

"Coffee?"

Tim grunted what was probably assent since he actually reached for the pot without getting a mug ready. Steve intercepted and filled a mug then handed it to him. Tim took a sip, his eyes still half-lidded. Getting himself some of the brew, Steve guided Tim to a chair and sat down beside him.

After a few minutes and more than half his cup, McGee took a sharp breath and seemed to awaken the rest of the way. He cleared his throat and looked over.

"Good morning," he said. A smile was playing around the corners of his mouth.

"Aloha," McGarrett said, leaning in for a kiss.

"Now I know that means goodbye," Tim said, his brow wrinkling.

"Hello. Goodbye. Love. Depends on context. What time's your flight?"

"1330."

"Commercial?"

"Yeah, it's better than another eight hour military flight in a jump seat." Steve shrugged and Tim rolled his eyes. "I bet you're just like Gibbs and you like military flights."

Steve flashed a quick smile. "That who you think I'll be in twenty years? Isn't that what you said about coming to Washington? You'd introduce me to the man I'm gonna become?"

McGee nodded. "Yes indeed. You two already have a lot in common." He looked at the extra
Tim shrugged. "Coffee's fine for now. You have any thoughts on what to do before I leave?"

Steve leaned back in his chair, extending his legs and crossing his ankles under the table. He narrowed his eyes at Tim. "I was thinking about nailing you to the mattress," he said, his tone completely conversational and casual. Tim laughed.

"Well, if you insist..."

The humor set the tone, and they joked as they headed upstairs.

"I think it's the least I can do as a good host," McGarrett said.

"Wait wait wait... How do you figure this is you doing me a favor?"

"It'll be me doing you, period, man. I've been dreaming about your ass all week!"

"Then I would say that I'm doing you the favor by letting you have it, that's all," Tim said, grinning. McGarrett shoved him back onto the bed and Tim laughed again as he bounced. He blushed when he thought about Steve on top of him, pistoning into him and shook his head. "Never mind. We're both winning here."

Steve climbed on top of him and those were the last words for a long while. They rolled around, kissing and mock wrestling, rubbing against each other at every opportunity. It was fun and felt relaxed and joyful and Tim wanted to spend hours just doing that. He was on top and had pinned Steve's hands over his head, knowing full well that the SEAL was letting him do it, when his thoughts grew serious.

"You will always be so special to me. This time, with you... Thank you, Steve. Really."

McGarrett looked up into those ocean eyes and had to swallow a lump. "Yeah, Tim. Me too."

Dropping the playfulness, Tim leaned down to kiss him like he was oxygen. Steve rolled them over and took charge, stripping Tim's boxers off and wrapping his fingers around his hard-on. He bit his ear and then whispered to him.

"You think you can come twice? I wanna make you howl, man..." McGarrett's voice was gravelly and McGee shuddered and nodded helplessly. Every nerve in his body seemed oriented toward the other man's touch, and he knew he'd do anything for Steve right then.

"Watch me," McGarrett ordered, maintaining eye contact as he stroked him, enjoying how he writhed and panted as he got closer and closer. When Tim tensed, almost there, Steve grinned an evil smile and stopped.

"Steve... C'mon..." McGee whined. Steve kissed him, silencing him with his tongue shoved into his mouth. It was a different kind of play, but one he enjoyed and that he knew would give Tim an earth-shattering orgasm. Eventually. He squeezed the flesh in his hand and gave a couple of rough strokes before stopping again. Tim moaned into the mouth on his, trying to break away, but Steve kept his lips tight on him while he edged him twice more. McGee thought he was going to go mad. That talented hand kept giving him exactly what he wanted, then snatching it away. And with his tongue in Tim's mouth, he could barely breathe, let alone voice his protest. It was diabolical, but heavenly at the same time. The next time Steve stopped, Tim finally couldn't stand it and grabbed
ahold of his wrist and shook his head violently. Steve twitched his hand away and moved to bite Tim's throat as he stroked with feather lightness. Dragging air into his lungs, Tim then begged shamelessly.

"Please, Steve! God! Please!"

McGarrett moved his mouth to his ear and gave firm pressure again, sliding up and down, faster and faster. "Give it to me, Tim." He growled, and Tim howled as he pulsed, convulsing, holding Steve's shoulder with bruising force. When he collapsed back, he tried to glare at Steve, but his puffy lips and sated gasping made it absurd and they both started laughing, Tim breathlessly.

"You are a sadistic bastard, McGarrett," McGee snickered. He was sweating and shaking as his body calmed.

"I told ya I'd make you come your brains out, didn't I?"

"Oh god, did I," Tim huffed. "Jesus! Now you wanna fuck me? I'm so exhausted I'll be a cold fish!"

Steve kissed him gently and Tim let his amusement drain away. They stared at each other for long moments.

"I don't wanna fuck you, Tim," McGarrett said quietly. "I'm not sure I can do what you did last night, but what I want... It's not coming from physical need for release. I want to touch you, to hold you and slide into you and move until we both shatter because you see me. You know me, somehow, and I know you and we're always gonna have the memory of this time, together." There was a slight tremor in his voice as he spoke, and Tim reached up and pulled his face down and kissed him tenderly. When he let go, Tim's eyelashes were wet and he smiled.

"Yeah. I get that. And I want you, like that. I want to make this memory, today, right now. Don't sell yourself short. You're about to make love to me and we're going to have that forever."

McGarrett kissed him and they shifted around until Tim remembered they hadn't cleaned up after his first orgasm. "Let's take a minute to rinse off, okay? I want this to be perfect, and that doesn't involve dried come on your hand and in your chest hair."

"Now that's romantic," Steve snarked, rolling his eyes.

"Oh shut up."

They rinsed off and came back to the bed, settling down facing each other.

"Perfect, huh? I don't know if I can live up to perfect."

Tim smiled fondly. "I think you've got pretty good instincts, McGarrett, so I'd say just go with what feels right and we'll be fine."

Shaking his head at the pert response from McGee, he smiled as he leaned forward and kissed him. For Tim, the powerful orgasm he'd had had taken the edge off completely, and he relaxed and returned Steve's kisses without urgency. That seemed to settle him down, and McGarrett took his time, thoroughly mapping Tim's mouth, which still, unusually, tasted somehow like toffee to him. While he enjoyed being kissed so long and lovingly, Tim wanted to always remember what Steve's lean, hard muscled body felt like, and he ran his hands over his back and arms and chest.

McGarrett moved on to Tim's neck, then down his chest to tease his nipples. Listening to his
partner's gasps made him smile. He was painfully hard, but the analytical part of his mind kept reminding him this was their last time, so he drew out the foreplay for an age before he snagged the lube and started prepping McGee.

Tim was over the moon from Steve's drawn out, sensual kisses and caresses. When one of his thick fingers breached him, McGee froze, the feeling overwhelming him.

"Ah! Wait! God!" Tim gasped in a strangled voice. McGarrett started to remove his hand from between the pale thighs, but Tim's hand moved with lightning speed and clamped on his wrist. "No! Don't-don't let go... Just... Give me a sec..."

Their eyes met and the flushed, desperate look Tim was giving him made Steve twitch, including the finger that was buried inside him.

"Aaahh! Steve!"

McGarrett felt a primal need to just roll Tim over and mount him, but he closed his eyes and breathed through it.

The vice-grip on his wrist eased, but when he didn't move, Tim started moving his hand for him, pushing against the digit to take it deeper, then slowly withdrawing only to go again. Steve moaned as Tim fucked himself with Steve's own hand. He extended a second finger and Tim cried out and threw his head back into the pillow when both entered him. The long throat so exposed gave McGarrett an outlet for his primal instinct and he sank his teeth into it as he took control of his hand back from Tim and started twisting and spreading his fingers.

McGee cried out when he brushed his prostate, and Steve made sure to do that over and over. Tim's body jumped and jerked and his head whipped back and forth on the pillow and it was just too much. Steve rolled the condom on, added lube, lifted Tim's legs toward his chest, and sank into him.

"Steve!" Tim shouted, his eyes flying open to watch his lover's bliss as he started moving in long, deep strokes. McGarrett stared down at him, his breath heaving as he plunged in slowly over and over. The expressions on both their faces were raw and ecstatic, but completely open, laid bare to each other, and Tim felt tears fill his eyes.

"Tim...oh, Tim..." He moaned. McGee grabbed him by the back of the neck and pulled him down for a sloppy kiss. When he released him, Steve propped himself up so he hovered with his face right above Tim's, watching every moment and drinking in every bit of the emotion pouring through those beautiful eyes.

"Oh, yes, Steve. Yes!" Tim panted. The motion of their bodies sliding with each other, the deep connection he felt, like Steve was touching his very soul, sent the tears in his eyes overflowing back to dampen the pillow beneath his head. Seeing the tears, Steve was catapulted into a whole new level of affection and understanding. Tim was such a sweet and gentle soul, so different from anyone Steve had ever been with. He wanted to protect him and feel safe wrapped in his arms, too. He thrust, understanding that he was making love, possibly for the first time in his life.

Physically, it was hot and tight and Tim, this guy who'd showed up and torn through his defenses and could have destroyed him but instead welcomed him and encouraged him, and they were sweating and gasping and he didn't ever want to stop, but it was too good, too right, and he was building toward a staggering climax but he needed Tim to come, too, wanted the perfection of flying apart, shattering, together, and he reached between them and wrapped his fingers around Tim's cock and stroked him and thumbed his glans and slid up and down and in and out and it was
like the gears of a roller coaster clicking over, ratcheting up the tension and the top was right there, just within reach, and he looked down at Tim's amazing eyes, sea green ringing wide black pupils, staring into his soul and pouring light and love and goodness into him, renewing him, making him believe in those possibilities of life and love and goodness because he'd lost that and Tim had found him and he was giving him everything, another chance at hope and then the need coiled tight in his belly and it was echoed there in those eyes and he screamed as the bottom dropped away and he was flying, no parachute, but Tim was with him, and they'd catch each other and it was perfect, perfect, perfect...

They barely spoke at all after they'd finally roused. They shared another shower, and then Steve drove Tim back to his hotel. Tim packing, then Steve taking him to the airport, using his badge to get himself out to the gate, was both romantic and painful as their moments together slipped away. Listening to the boarding calls and watching each other like they were a lifeline was tearing Tim's heart into pieces and he could see his helpless hurt mirrored in Steve's eyes.

Finally, Tim nodded toward the gate and looked sorrowfully at Steve.

"I don't want you to be alone when I'm gone."

McGarrett looked away. He didn't want to get into this in public. McGee stood straight and looked right at him, and when Steve glanced back, he was caught by the gaze.

"I'm going to find someone. I want to know that you will, too." Tim tilted his head. "Please...tell me you'll try."

That moment he'd had, when he'd imagined how different his life could be if he had someone like Tim in it, came flooding back to him, along with the yawning impossibility of it. "It's a dream, Tim," he scoffed, his chest tightening. "A dream people live out every day. Tell me you'll try."

And there was just no possible way to refuse that earnest, honest hope in Tim's eyes. Steve nodded. Tim swallowed hard and gave a sad smile. He glanced to the side. "I'm boarding, my friend," he said, his voice thick and just on the edge of breaking.

They hugged, and if it lasted longer than a purely heterosexual embrace, if their bodies pressed closer than was normally socially acceptable, neither cared what anyone around them thought. McGee's eyes were bright as he pulled back. "Mahalo," he whispered. Steve's face pinched, his forehead wrinkling and his mouth drawing into a hard line as he held back the emotion filling him.

"Mahalo, Tim. Aloha..."

Tim smiled and turned, walking away, trying to keep his step firm but feeling his stride stutter as he heard Steve's voice.

"...nui loa."

Before he passed beyond view, he looked back and smiled. "Me too," he said, knowing Steve would read his lips for the short phrase.

So Timothy McGee left the islands changed forever. He only hoped Steve McGarrett would make those changes too.
A/N Thank you FlyingPiglet for introducing (indoctrinating?) me into H50. I'm a huge McGee fan and have often maintained that he's the most shippable character because he'd be good for anyone. Cue challenge from Flyingpiglet when she dismissed any possible pairing of McGee and McGarrett. Thank you for the amazing Beta on this. It wouldn't be the same without your input.

Translations: Mahalo=Thank you; Aloha=Hello, Goodbye, Love; Aloha nui loa=Very much love.
Chapter Two

Back home in the grey light and smog, McGee walked around like he was shell shocked for the whole first day. He was vaguely aware that a couple of people asked if he was jet lagged but didn't remember if he answered affirmatively. Trying to sleep was terrible. He laid in bed and relived the night and morning with McGarrett but despaired when he already found the memory of how Steve smelled fading.

The team had caught a case while he was gone and they had it so well in hand that he was relegated to fetch and carry errand boy for much of his second day back as they worked to have every bit of evidence in precise order before they moved on the influential Navy Captain who had risen in the ranks through careful blackmail.

After going on the lunch run, he was sent to work with Abby on the evidence. She flew at him in her enthusiastic excitement for his return from Hawaii, hugging him breathless.

"I'm so glad you're back! There's too much sunshine that close to the equator for pale people like you and me. Let me see," she grasped his shoulders and held him at arms length, inspecting his skin for sun damage. "Oh, good! You must have used that spf 50 sunblock I gave you. Did you wear long sleeves like I told you? I-" she stopped mid-rant, turning his head and looking at a mark on his throat. "Ohmygod! How did you get bitten?! What kind of a terrorist bites..." The absurdity of that idea caught up to her and she covered her mouth. The much more likely hypothesis was that he'd been bitten in an amorous encounter. "You hooked up! You didn't stay those extra days to put yourself in unnecessary risk of malignant melanoma like I warned Gibbs! Who was it? Was she pretty? When were you going to tell me?!

"Abby! I've only been home a day. I'm jetlagged and trying to play catch-up with this case. When would I have had the chance to tell you?" Tim said, deflecting.

Abby's eyes narrowed as she considered, then her expression cleared. "Fair enough, McGee. But you're here now, so spill! Did you bring pictures? Was she an exotic native in a grass skirt?"

Tim choked on the image of Steve in a grass skirt and tried to cover it with a cough. But his blush was too telling. His best friend knew him far too well.

"C'mon, Timmy! You have to tell me!"

"Later. I really need to catch up on this case. Can I help with one of the hard drives?"

Grumbling, Abby let him help with casework for a while. Once she saw his shoulders relax some, though, she launched her second attack.

"I know how sad you were when you and Delilah decided you couldn't do the long-distance thing anymore. You're not trying that again, are you? But you're not a quick, meaningless fling type, anyway. What happened?"

Tim closed his eyes. He and Steve had agreed to be friends. But he'd never been good at going from lovers to friends. Case in point, it had taken him years to be comfortable being friends with Abby without constantly remembering or feeling inappropriate things about her. He hoped that the distance would make it easier with Steve, but he hadn't gotten so much as an email or text from the man since he'd been back, and he couldn't bear to be the needy one initiating contact.
Abby saw the pained expression on his face and came around the table to stand next to him. "Did you fall harder than she did? I know how you can be. I'm sorry, Tim, but maybe if you talk about it I can help you get the right perspective on it. Who was she?"

"I really don't want to talk about it, Abby."

She backed off and watched him. Over the next couple of hours, she saw him dive into his work, then watched as memories took him back in time and his face went pale or flushed depending on his thought process. Shaking her head, when she saw him blush again, she plowed ahead again.

"That's it! Tell me. I'm your best friend, Timmy. Why won't you even tell me her name?"

"Abby… Why is it so hard for you to accept that I want to keep something private?"

"Because you love telling me about your girlfriends. You love getting my take on things, and my advice. You never would have ended up getting serious with Delilah without me."

The look Tim gave her at that declaration made her realize that if he weren't the man he was, he might blame her for all of his emotional pain that stemmed from staying in a relationship with a woman he'd been ready to break up with. She had convinced him to continue on with Delilah instead of putting the brakes on it, and all those months later, when he had finally realized that guilt wasn't a good reason to stay in a relationship, he had never once said 'I told you so'. She bit her lip.

"It's personal, Abby. It was something special, but we're not taking it any further, so I don't want to talk about it."

The discomfort Tim displayed in his kinesthetics made Abby reevaluate what might be happening. Her eyes widened and she nearly jumped up and down.

"McGee! You strayed. You crossed the fence. Why didn't you tell me it was a guy?"

"What?" Tim's stomach sank. He had hidden his bisexuality from everyone in DC and had never expected even Abby to figure it out.

"What?" Tony's voice sounded from the doorway and Tim's heart stopped. He had planned to tell his friend, but had not been able to figure out the right time or place to do it. "Whoa! Back the truck up! McStraight-and-Narrow plays for both sides? What the hell?"

Speechless, mortified, and unable to cope with Tony finding out in this unexpected way, Tim rushed past him and pounded up the stairs, trying to get back to the squad room where he could bury himself in his computer, safe behind his monitors. But Tony wasn't letting it go and rushed after him. Abby followed, wringing her hands and calling to Tony, begging him to be quiet, be nice, even threatening him but DiNozzo was on the scent and spoke a mile a minute, tossing McNicknames at his probie's back.

When the train of three marched into the squad room, Tim had his head down trying to ignore Tony, and Abby was practically in tears telling Tony to stop. Ellie looked up from her desk and asked what was going on.

"We just found out Mc Closet here is gay." Tony snarked. He loomed over where McGee was hunkering down in his seat, trying to focus on his email.
Bishop cocked her head sideways and got a kind of puzzled look on her face. "Tim's not gay, Tony, he's bi."

Every head within hearing range of that swiveled to look at her. That included a clerk walking by, and two of Balboa's team on the other side of the office partition. Tim closed his eyes and slowly dropped his head to his desk.

"You knew?" Tony exclaimed, incredulous.

"You didn't?" Ellie retorted.

Tony turned back to Tim, angry and hurt. "Well apparently I'm not part of the 'in' crowd. Why were you keeping it such a big secret from me, Probie?"

Gibbs looked up and spoke in his quiet, deadly tone. "It's called keeping your private life private, DiNozzo. Something you don't seem to know much about."

DiNozzo looked around in shock, then grabbed his jacket, gun, and badge and mumbled something about going to get coffee. He didn't meet anyone's eyes as he left. Abby started after him, but Gibbs said her name softly and she stopped.

Tim stood abruptly, grabbing his own things and hurrying after Tony. Gibbs let him go.

Bishop looked up and bit her lip. "I thought everyone knew," she said defensively.

"Everyone did. Except DiNozzo," Gibbs said. "Abby, are you done with those hard drives?"

"Gibbs! How can I –"

"Need that evidence, Abs."

She stared in the direction Tim and Tony had both gone, but finally sighed and left to return to her lab.

McGee caught up with DiNozzo outside their building and fell into step with him as he walked to the coffee shop down the street. They both got their drinks and took them back into the brisk afternoon, walking over to a bench in the small park across from their building.

Tony stewed as he drank half his cup before his words finally boiled over. "You told Bishop?!

Tim shook his head. "I didn't tell anybody. I had no idea anyone knew. I promise I didn't keep it from you particularly, Tony. It's not a part of me that I'm comfortable sharing. I've hidden it since I was a teenager."

"Why?"

Sighing, Tim shrugged. "It was just another thing my father would have disapproved of. I had already disappointed him in so many ways, and this was so personal, I could never face him finding out."

"But you lied to me, Probie! To me! I'm your friend, how could you not tell me the truth?"

"I never lied, Tony. I swear. I'm not gay, I like both, but that's not an answer I ever gave you. You asked on several occasions if I was gay, and I always said no. That's the truth. I… I'm sorry I misled you."
Tony sighed. After a few moments, though, his signature smile spread over his face. "So you hooked up in Hawaii, huh?"

Tim laughed in surprise. "I am not going to kiss and tell."

"Kissing. And…?"

"No, Tony! I'm not saying anything else!"

DiNozzo slapped him on the shoulder and together they stood and went back into their building. It wasn't until they were up in the squad room that the serious teasing commenced.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

For Steve, the return to his normal life was made painfully thoughtful when he left the airport with melancholy threatening to make him maudlin, and he went to see Chin on his way back from the airport. Immediately, the older man knew something was up.

"You got the guys," Chin said, referring to the terrorists. He was stretched out on his couch, still not moving around too much but he claimed he felt immeasurably better than he had when his appendix had burst.

"Yeah. Fanatics, man." He shook his head. Then the focus of all his attention returned like a compass to Tim. "Kono tell you we had some help from NCIS?"

Chin nodded. "Told me he shot the detonator right out of the guy's hand."

Steve grinned at the memory, feeling proud of Tim's marksmanship. Chin's head cocked at his expression.

"She said he was a lot of help. Left her a bunch of new programs to help with the computer forensics," he commented, watching McGarrett's closely. The team leader turned away and nodded, but not before Chin saw unusual emotion in his boss' eyes. "Kono also said that you were showing him around these last few days. Since when do you play tour guide?"

"He earned it. Worked his ass off from the minute he walked in the door, and never expected so much as a thank you. I think his team in DC really takes him for granted."

Chin suppressed a smile. "You try to poach him?"

"Nah. He loves his team. And from what their Director said, he's the golden boy of their Agency. He's being commended by the new Secretary of the Navy."

"Sounds like he must have some ego. Did he and Danny clash?" The astute observer asked, trying to draw his friend out without being obvious.

"No way. Tim's so quiet it was like he wasn't even there except he just kept giving us leads. The only person he butted heads with was me, but he was just making sure I took advantage of his skills. I'm not sure there's anything he can't do."

Chin's eyebrows rose at the praise. And the tone of McGarrett's voice, along with the look in his eyes told him that he'd been right when his gut had indicated that there was more going on than Kono had mentioned.

"Did you two get out to see the island at all or just stay in bed these last few days?"
Steve's double take was classic. "Uh, what?"

Chin just looked calmly at him, waiting for a response with his head tilted.

"We went to Molokai, to the cliffs. Some other trails," McGarrett said, ignoring the blatant question about whether he'd slept with McGee.

"You take him on Tantalus Drive?"

"No, I did not. I wasn't trying to seduce him, Chin."

"Then why did you walk in here looking like you did when Catherine decided to stay in Afghanistan?"

Steve froze. He hadn't equated his feelings for Tim with what had happened with Catherine, but the loss felt the same. Chin waited, letting Steve process his shock.

"Look, I barely know him. It doesn't make any sense that I..."

"Since when does love make sense?"

"Wait, no. Uh-uh. Who said anything about love, man? So I screwed the guy, so what? Sex and love aren't the same thing. Maybe...maybe I regret not having more time with him. Maybe I wonder if it could have been something, but I did not say anything about love, Chin."

Letting him vent, Chin waited patiently. When the rant wound down, he raised one eyebrow.

"He's a pale computer nerd from the mainland. How'd he get in my head like this?" Steve asked softly.

"Sounds like it was something special."

McGarrett stared out into space, thinking about the incredible trust he had spontaneously been filled with for Tim. He didn't know where that had come from, but it had felt comforting and pure and good, just like Tim. Maybe that was what he needed to look for in a partner.

"You ever trust somebody from, like, the first moment you met them?" Steve asked.

"Trust is more your issue than mine."

Steve nodded. "I just knew from the first moment that he was the most purely good person I had ever met. I trusted him that fast."

Chin waited.

"He thinks I can find that in someone else, someone who lives here. He doesn't want me to be alone."

"That's generous. Why not him?"

McGarrett shook his head. "We're both completely rooted where we are. I could tell how much he loves his job in DC. And this is home, here, for me."

"So you keep one perfect memory that a real relationship can never measure up to? That doesn't seem fair."
"What's that supposed to mean?" Steve asked defensively.

"You have a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but if you look for something that will be like that, that intense and perfect, you'll always be disappointed. He didn't do you any favors, man."

"Shit, Chin. You're a ray of fucking sunshine."

"I'm not saying it's not worth looking for, but you have to know that a real, day-to-day relationship has all kinds of bumps and turns. It's never going to roll smoothly, no matter how much you love them or how perfect you are for each other."

They sat quietly together for several minutes, until Steve couldn't stand the introspection any longer. Chin didn't miss that McGarrett skipped refuting his use of the word love this time.

"Look, can I get you anything, you need food or beer or something?" Steve asked, standing and getting ready to leave.

"Kono's got me everything I need, but thanks."

"Alright. I'll catch you later, man," McGarrett said. His face still had a pinched, uncomfortably thoughtful expression as he left. Chin shrugged to himself; McGarrett could do with some self-examination.

But Steve stuffed it all down and dove back into work.

Danny noticed the newfound drive and bemoaned Steve pushing the team harder than ever. He lectured McGarrett about the dangers of burnout and the need that mere humans had for downtime. He addressed it several times, to no avail. When mistakes were made during a case that was the third in a row he'd had them on with less than four hours turnaround time between each, he finally acknowledged that he was pushing them too hard. So instead of pushing the whole team, he began running further, faster, and working out harder between cases. He met another Steve while running stairs in the stands of his high school stadium and, remembering his promise to Tim, he invited him to dinner. Other Steve was distinctly not Tim, and McGarrett didn't even bother with a goodnight kiss. Weeks later, a new clerk named Mat started working in the Palace and his pale, mainland complexion drew Steve. Another lackluster date and Steve simply gave up. He swam several miles every morning and went surfing with Kono twice a week. He started training harder than he had in years but he still couldn't drive the image of white skin and a ready smile, of ocean tinted eyes and an incredibly generous spirit, out of his mind.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Months passed. Tim kept tabs on Steve peripherally, staying in touch with Kono and starting an email friendship with Chin, offering to help out with any of the technical aspects of their cases. He clung to every mention of McGarrett, but couldn't bring himself to message the man directly. The normal long hours of work became ordinary again. Then when Tim checked his email on a Tuesday morning and found a message from Steve McGarrett, his jaw dropped. It was concise, simply stating that he had been called to NCIS headquarters and had a flight due in at 1300, and he asked if Tim might pick him up from the airport. Looking at his watch, Tim realized that McGarrett's plane would already be in the air. He figured if he wasn't there to pick the man up that he'd just take a cab, but he wanted to be there for Steve, and his heart jumped at the thought of seeing him again.

At the office he got the okay from Gibbs to go pick McGarrett up from the airport. He was hard-pressed to sit still for the morning working on paperwork from their last case. Tony had been the
lead on the kidnapping, since Gibbs had finally gotten his shoulder reconstructed after all the injuries it had sustained over the years. Their boss had been particularly taciturn that morning, but McGee didn't even register it through his excitement at Steve's imminent arrival. He carefully reined in his nervousness when Steve disembarked the plane. McGee had used his badge to get himself out to the gate to see McGarrett all the sooner, and the brief, manly backslapping hug they had shared had only been a little bit of a letdown. They didn't really start talking until they got into the parking garage.

"Did you try?" Tim asked as they got in his car. McGarrett couldn't believe that McGee drove a Prius, a tiny little egg car, and yet Tim had so much quiet strength it actually worked for him: he didn't need a big truck or flashy artificial penis-mobile. "You didn't, did you. Damn. Am I gonna have to enlist the help of your team? Think Kono knows any fantastic gay surfers? I've emailed with Chin a little; maybe he knows someone who-"

"I tried, okay? But tall pale haoles are usually tourists and that's not gonna work because you want me to find a partner for life and shit."

Tim glanced over and saw Steve's twisted expression and knew that Danny would surely have labeled it 'aneurysm face'. He tried not to smile.

"Uh-huh. You realize that whoever you find, man or woman, doesn't actually have to look like me. Hell, it could be that little M.E. Max! He's a good guy, right? And he's a lot like me. But you actually have to date in order to-"

"Two dates! I've had two dates, Tim. But halfway through dinner, I couldn't stop thinking about you, okay? Comparing, judging... This is your fault, alright?"

McGee's breath sighed out in a rush. He didn't know what to say. Relief and disappointment warred in him. He drove in silence.

"What about you? Find Mr Right?" McGarrett had to ask. It hurt to imagine, but Steve needed to know.

"No. Funny, 60-80 hour work weeks with unpredictable scheduling doesn't go over any better with dating men than it does with women. So I'm putting up with hazing from DiNozzo that's almost as bad as my first year with MCRT because I came out as bi, but I haven't gotten a second date with anyone I've seen since Hawaii," Tim said, shaking his head.

"To be fair, you never had a second date in Hawaii, either..." Steve teased, his relief making him almost lightheaded. McGee rolled his eyes and tried not to smile at the almost mocking half-grin McGarrett shot him.

"Yeah yeah yeah. I broke my rule about one night stands because you were just too hot." He hid behind a flat sarcasm.

"I seem to recall we both enjoyed ourselves, Tim."

The smile on Tim's face was almost shy, and his eyes flitted over to Steve's, then back to the road. "It's so good to see you. Did Vance say why he needed you to come all the way here?"

"No. Seemed kinda reticent to say anything at all." McGarrett realized that he hadn't actually given it much thought. He'd been purely focused on getting to see Tim again.

"Is it going too far to say I hope he's offering you a job?" Tim asked in a rush. He'd been daydreaming about that as a possibility ever since he'd read the message from McGarrett that
morning.

Steve's gut tightened at the question. He'd actually been hoping maybe McGee would get reassigned to the NCIS Pearl Harbor office. He said as much and enjoyed the blush that colored the Agent's cheeks.

"So...you want to stay with me while you're here?" Tim tried to sound casual.

"Guest room or your room?" Steve licked his lips, belying his calm expression.

"My room or the couch is all I can offer," Tim said, shrugging. God, he hoped Steve would say he'd stay with him, in his bed, and they could have fantastic, amazing sex again.

McGarrett groaned. "I think we better see why I'm here before we make too many plans. If I'm here to work, we don't want to get too distracted."

McGee was disappointed but pleased that the other man had admitted he was a distraction. And it warmed him to know Steve had at least casually thought about him coming to live in Hawaii.

They drove straight to the Yard, and they were met by Gibbs in the squad room. The stony expression on his face dropped McGee's stomach to his feet when he saw it.

"What's happened?" He asked immediately. Gibbs turned to a somber DiNozzo and nodded once. He approached and stood at McGarrett's elbow.

"Lieutenant Commander, if you'll come with me?" Tony said formally. Steve's face hardened and panic rose in Tim.

"Wait! What's going on?" He begged Gibbs.

McGarrett nodded to DiNozzo and preceded him while McGee stared helplessly. "Boss?"

When DiNozzo and McGarrett had disappeared toward Interrogation, Gibbs finally met Tim's eyes. "You're gonna have to recuse yourself. McGarrett is under investigation. It's unofficial right now, but if charges are brought, you need to not be any part of this."

"What?! Why? Because we're friends? I helped with the investigation when my sister was a suspect!"

"Your sister's not military, McGee! And you know damn well why you can't be a part of this," Gibbs snapped. Tim's face lost all color. He'd had no idea that Gibbs knew about his relationship with McGarrett.

"We're friends," he said, trying for a firm tone and ending up sounding almost questioning. His cheeks heated when Gibbs gave him the look, and he started to shake. "Please, Boss. Give me something. What do they think he's done?"

"Run roughshod over every possible procedure. The governor of Hawaii might be willing to look the other way, but he's still a Naval Officer and the military is concerned about him representing them. Misuse of military hardware, unauthorized missions... There's a list a mile long," Gibbs said, leaning in close and speaking softly. Obviously, McGee wasn't supposed to know any of it.

"I could talk to Vance..."

"It's from higher up. I convinced Leon to let me talk with McGarrett unofficially first, but he
insisted you recuse yourself."

"Vance knows?" Tim's voice squeaked softly. Gibbs patted him on the shoulder, squeezing gently, obviously trying to reassure him it was okay to be out. They looked at each other for a long moment, then Gibbs took a sharp breath and turned to go after DiNozzo and McGarrett.

"Thanks, Boss."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

By 1800, McGee was a wreck. He'd been working cold cases with Bishop all afternoon while both Gibbs and DiNozzo unofficially questioned McGarrett. It was a few minutes after the hour when the trio emerged from Interrogation, indicating they were done for the day. Gibbs settled at his desk while DiNozzo and Bishop gathered their things to leave.

"Boss, if I've recused-"

"You two get outta here. Need both of you here in the morning," Gibbs said. Tim nearly fell as he grabbed his stuff and hustled Steve to the elevator. He turned to Tony and started to ask him about what had happened, but DiNozzo shook his head.

"Can't say. Don't ask me," the Senior Field Agent told him. The doors opened and he slapped McGee on the back. "Have fun tonight," he said cheekily as he sauntered past toward his car.

"Goodnight, Tim," Bishop said as she, too, left the two men. She'd been watching everything that went on all day like it was her favorite television show. He was pretty sure she'd heard Gibbs' explanation to him of why McGarrett was there, but she hadn't dared ask anything further as Tim had buried himself in work the instant Gibbs had walked away. They exited the elevator, but Tim paused, letting his teammates get out of earshot before he turned to Steve.

"My place or Yard quarters?" McGee asked quietly. The stoic mask McGarrett had maintained since the moment Tim watched him walk away with Tony that morning cracked, and Steve gave him a tight smile.

"If you've recused yourself, let's take advantage of it."

McGee returned the uncomfortable expression with a grim twist to his lips and they headed for his car again. Once inside the vehicle and off the Yard, Tim asked how the questioning had gone.

"I'm not supposed to talk about it, y'know," Steve replied. Tim arched an eyebrow and glanced at him. "Yeah. I'm answering for every little infraction. It's gonna depend on who reads Gibbs' reports, I think."

McGee sighed. "I kinda figured. Gibbs understands about the rules needing to be flexible, so I'm sure he'll be putting everything in the best light possible."

McGarrett grunted in acknowledgement. He hated the thought that his fate rested in someone else's hands, but he was reassured that Tim's trust in Gibbs was absolute, and while the former Marine had been quite hard on Steve, he hadn't thrown his full weight as an expert interrogator at him.

Surprisingly quickly, they arrived at McGee's apartment, and McGarrett grinned as he got the tour, which took all of thirty seconds. The place was so completely Tim that Steve felt at home instantly. He stowed his bag in the bedroom, to Tim's poorly hidden pleasure, and they left again to go get dinner.
Their silence was more than companionable on the way to a Persian restaurant McGee thought McGarrett would enjoy; it was sparking with their attraction and anticipation for the rest of the evening. They enjoyed their meal, meat cooked in front of them over an open fire, with Steve catching Tim up on how the rest of the Five-0 team was doing, but a subtle seduction was happening as well. When their eyes met, their gaze lingered a little longer than it would have if they didn't have the unspoken agreement that they were going to have sex when they got back to Tim's place. Pressure of their knees, one against the other's under the table, was an invisible element that had both men breathing slightly faster, and had them both declining dessert in their eagerness to be alone.

In the car, even for the short ride back to his apartment, Tim found himself hardening in anticipation, and Steve took full advantage, palming him through his trousers with his left hand, still looking forward as if he wasn't doing anything. McGee groaned.

"Fuck, Steve," he breathed. McGarrett's chuckle was evil.

"That's the plan, McGee," he snarked. As soon as Tim pulled into his parking space, he released his seatbelt and attacked him, kissing him hard and returning the grope, feeling that Steve hadn't physically been nearly as casual as his pose had indicated. He was rock hard and throbbing. Steve struggled to get free from his own seatbelt with Tim practically climbing into his lap. He banged his knuckles, Tim knocked his head against the roof, and they both started laughing. They hurried to get into the apartment and started stripping the moment they were in the door, while kissing each other. When Steve's shirt hit the floor, Tim moved back enough to see.

"Oh my god, man, are you even more ripped than you were before?" McGee panted, staring, caressing each curving line and hard ridge with his eyes. The comment unexpectedly made Steve self-conscious. He knew he'd compensated for missing Tim by staying busier, which had included more and tougher workouts. He was back in fighting trim as he hadn't been since actively being deployed with a SEAL team. When he didn't respond, Tim met his eyes and read a devastatingly raw expression there. "Oh," he whispered. Then he stepped forward and wrapped his arms around the frozen form. He buried his face in Steve's neck and breathed in the scent he hadn't gotten to experience enough to become familiar with. He pressed his body full length against the other man's and just held tight. He let the emotions he'd suppressed except for a few miserable nights of crying well up and he shook with the power of it. When he started to tremble, it broke Steve's paralysis and he clawed at Tim's back, trying to hold him closer, choking on feelings he never acknowledged. They clung together for a few minutes before they slowly started to relax.

McGee was the first one to draw away, cringing slightly at his own neediness, not understanding that he'd been met at the same intensity. McGarrett was better at facing problems head on, and he put both his hands on Tim's face and forced him to look at him.

Looking into those eyes that kept so much hidden as they shifted color with his environment, Tim swallowed a gasp at the openness he saw. Steve looked utterly vulnerable as they watched each other, and Tim understood that they were on equal footing. It might feel as if they were perched on a ledge, and that everything beneath them could crumble and they'd be dropped into an abyss, but they were there together. The overly dramatic writer in him wondered that if they both fell, maybe together they could fly, and he had to smile at the thought.

"C'mon, Steve. Let's go spend all night making love to each other. We've been apart too long," he said softly. McGarrett's face relaxed, the stress lines on his forehead and around his eyes smoothing until he looked years younger as he smiled.

"You better have lube and condoms, man, 'cause all night barely sounds long enough," Steve said,
resorting to humor even though his voice was rough with emotion.

Tim smiled crookedly, recognizing the defense mechanism. He took the powerful man's hand in his and gently led him to his bedroom, closing the door behind them and turning back, ready to kiss his lover. But Steve took control the moment the door clicked, pushing Tim up against it and kissing him, then moving in wet trails down his long neck.

Knowing that McGarrett was reacting to his own feelings of exposure and vulnerability, Tim relaxed and enjoyed the skilled mouth and hands as well as the hard body pinning him. Admittedly, he was getting a huge rush from having Steve go this wild for him of all people. He smiled and laughed at the enthusiasm then he gasped and a giggle devolved into a groan as McGarrett pinched his nipple.

"Oh, yes, Steve..."

Tim put his arms around him and grabbed a double handful of his ass, pulling him tight against his own hips and spreading him a bit. The full body shudder that earned him brought Tim to an even higher level of euphoria and he laughed again as he rubbed against Steve.

McGarrett pulled his head back to check the look on Tim's face, and his knees weakened at the sparkling eyes that returned his gaze.

"I love this, Steve. I love..." Tim almost felt the word slip out but instead he grinned and bucked his hips. "Every inch of you. Every moment... Oh, man... I want you. I want you to make love to me until I come so hard I pass out. Then after a rest, I wanna return the favor. How's that sound?"

"You got a cock ring? I'd love to edge you until you beg while I pound your ass..."

Tim closed his eyes and swallowed hard. "You are just wicked, you know that? But sorry, I don't have any sex toys at all."

"I'll make do. I'm gonna take you from behind so I can hold you and edge you, then we'll finish face to face so I can watch when you pass out. Gotta give you just what you ask for, Tim. Gotta give you everything..."

Tim's body was quaking with desire. "Steve... Oh, yes..." He dreaded that experience of being taken right to the cusp and denied, but he knew that Steve was right and his orgasm would be spectacular. And just knowing it was Steve McGarrett doing it to him, this gorgeous, incredible man... He was already feeling overwhelmed. And yet his own insecurities still came up when he looked down between their bodies as Steve started unfastening his pants and he was reminded of the stark contrast between them. His belly was white and soft. He was thinner than he sometimes had been in the last ten years, but even when he'd gone overboard and been truly skinny, he'd never had anything like the kind of definition of Steve's tanned body. He felt his cheeks flush.

"I think you're getting the better deal here," Tim muttered.

"What's that supposed to mean?" McGarrett asked. His frown was back and he studied Tim's expression for an instant before he reached up and smacked the back of his head. McGee's eyes popped in shock.

"Did you just Gibbs slap me?" He asked incredulously. Steve shrugged. He'd witnessed Gibbs administer such a blow to DiNozzo when he'd gone off on a tangent during his questioning and the automatic, "Thank you, Boss," that had been Tony's reply had given Steve the suspicion that it was a normal occurrence.
"Had to snap you out of that. Worked, too. Gibbs is a smart guy." Steve smirked.

Tim laughed. "Yeah. Yeah, he is. But Steve, I don't get how you can..."

"Stop. We're not talking about this. I'm gonna show you that I find you as attractive as you find me. Get outta those pants and onto the bed. Now."

Tim automatically obeyed the command and stretched out naked on the middle of his bed. Steve made more of a show getting himself undressed, and Tim stared raptly. He'd gained inches in muscle, and his body rippled as he moved. Tim was awed. Then that god-like creature came crawling up the bed and laid down on top of him and he was lost; the weight was numbing yet sensitizing, somehow. He melted under it.

McGarrett set about showing Tim how much he appreciated his body. The light body hair let him lave the man all over for long minutes without constantly dealing with hairs in his mouth. And the shivering responses he got were going straight to his cock. Tim's erection curved up to his belly and jumped at Steve's ministrations even though he never touched it. When he finally moved up between Tim's thighs and started licking and tonguing his balls, Tim cried out incoherently. Grinning, McGarrett pinned the pale man's hips to the bed while he moved his mouth up the smooth, throbbing shaft, dragging his lips as he went. He breathed hotly on the head and Tim sobbed. Those needy sounds were music to McGarrett and he glanced quickly to the nightstand and nodded to himself at the tube and foil squares sitting out. He'd seen them when he dropped his gear off, but wanted to verify they hadn't been moved. He wanted Tim's nervous system occupied when he needed to move to get them, so he started sucking his cock, pulling hard on the head, reveling in the taste of him until Tim shouted, then he released him and went for the supplies.

Kissing Tim hard, he whispered to him. "You ready for me to drive you insane?"

It took several seconds for McGee to regain his faculties enough to respond. He blinked, staring into Steve's eyes, then finally nodded. Steve kissed him again, more tenderly, then indicated Tim should roll over, which he did readily. The trust in the response warmed Steve and he kissed sensuously down the other man's spine before he got lube on his fingers and started stretching him. The needy little whines and gasps were making Steve shake. He loved controlling everything another person felt, and doing it to Tim was perfection.

Tim's awareness had narrowed to Steve. His body, his breath, and the sensations he was causing Tim to feel were all he could imagine existed. The fingers penetrating him, rubbing inside him until he nearly came just from that, were more important than anything he'd ever known. And when they withdrew he pushed back, trying to get them back, inadvertently ending up on his knees exactly in position for Steve to penetrate him with something much better.

McGarrett pushed in, moaning loudly at the heat and tight, quivering pressure on his engorged cock. He stopped with just the head, wanting to give Tim a chance to get used to it, but Tim shoved back in wanton need and they both cried out with the feel of sudden consummation. Steve fell forward and leaned heavily on Tim's back for a moment.

"Oh god, Tim..." He gasped. His brain reengaged and he propped himself on his left arm while he reached around to carefully encircle the base of Tim's hard-on with the thumb and first finger of his right hand, trying to find the right pressure to keep the other man from coming. Then he finally started moving, slowly at first, then faster as he heard Tim start cussing.

"Fuck! Ah, Steve... Shit! Yes...oh yes, Steve, damnit... God! Steve... Ah!"

Huffing his own effort to control himself, McGarrett found a rhythm and just rode hard, closing his
eyes and focusing on the sound of Tim's voice as a bit of a distraction from the incredible feel of the ass his cock was buried in.

"Ah! Ah! Oh god! Steve! Gonna...oh!" When Tim's cries rose, he tightened his grip slightly and stopped thrusting, holding position as McGee gasped and sobbed. God, he loved that! Especially someone as smart and reserved as Tim McGee: he had him under his control completely. Steve bared his teeth and waited until Tim began to relax, then he started humping again.

"Aaaahh! Steve! Yes! Fuck!" Tim grew louder each time Steve edged him, but he waited, barely keeping himself from climaxing, until the only thing Tim was verbalizing was, "Please! Please!" at nearly a scream. Then he finally pulled out roughly and practically threw Tim over onto his back, shoving his legs up and pushing back into the welcoming sheath of Tim's body in bare seconds. When his hand returned to Tim's cock, he stroked as he rammed into him, and stared worshipfully at the tomato-red, tear- and sweat-stained, agonizingly ecstatic face below him. Three-four-five thrusts and Tim's body locked, his mouth wide in a voiceless scream as he shot his load all over both of them, hitting his own face and spurting up as far as Steve's chin as well. The sight, the smell, the silent shriek and the clenching on his dick sent Steve soaring over the edge with a grunt that grew to a groan then a low roar as he finished pulsing everything he had into his lover.

He fell, stupefied, onto Tim's chest and lay in vague consciousness at the tremendous experience. Every time with Tim was more powerful than the last, and he wondered groggily if anyone had ever died from too-intense sex.

It was Tim's shuddering breaths and snifflies that roused him. He pushed himself up so he could see him and found McGee biting his trembling lower lip and trying unsuccessfully to suppress his weeping. Steve brought his left hand up and used his thumb to gently force Tim to release his lip, then he kissed him softly and slid that hand beneath his shoulders to hold him, resting his cheek against Tim's.

"It's okay, babe. I understand. Me too, Tim. God... Me too," he whispered. Tim calmed quickly with the reassurance and Steve kissed him again, then slowly shifted so they could disengage and Tim could lower his legs to the mattress.

McGarrett rolled to one side and removed the condom, throwing it away. He snatched tissues from the box on the nightstand and cleaned them both up, focusing on the tasks rather than letting himself really process the level of intimacy they'd achieved. When they were as clean as a cursory wipedown could make them, they exhaustedly pushed and pulled at the bedcovers and got underneath them.

Steve settled on his back and turned to look at Tim, his arm extended partially, wanting him to curl up against his side but not wanting to ask. His fingers twitched, exposing his uncertainty. Tim's wide-eyed, shell-shocked expression softened. He switched the light off and snuggled next to Steve, putting his head on his shoulder after kissing it. McGarrett sighed as he drew Tim closer and brought his other hand up to stroke his face.

They didn't speak. Tim was certain that if he said the words that were fighting to jump from his throat that he would scare Steve off permanently, so he pressed his lips together and just tried to enjoy the safe warmth of the man he found himself falling hopelessly in love with. Steve was keeping his own mind studiously blank, employing mental techniques he'd learned originally as counter-interrogation skills but that he'd adapted to maintain the calculating mental acuity he was known for having. Feelings were too messy and complicated to handle, so he did what he could to not have to deal with them. He just enjoyed the wonderful presence of Tim beside him and willed
himself to sleep.

But Tim's mind wouldn't rest. He worried about why Steve was in DC, why Gibbs was the one running his interrogation. Every way he looked at it, it didn't quite fit. As far as Tim knew, none of Steve's infractions should have merited the intercession of MCRT. What if Gibbs... But he wouldn't, would he? Gibbs and Tim had an unspoken understanding...sort of. But Tim had never dated a man who was so much like Gibbs himself. Might it have sparked an irrational jealousy? Or a rational jealousy, since he was sleeping with Steve? There was no way Tim was going to allow this relationship to detrimentally affect Steve's career. He had to know. Carefully, he eased away from Steve and stealthily grabbed his clothes, saving putting his shoes on until he was out in the hallway.

It was just after 0100 when Tim opened the front door and quietly stepped into the darkened house. It felt almost like deja vu after all the times he'd imagined coming here for a private talk. He'd just never felt like he could lean on Gibbs the way Tony did; like a dad. And other than a few actual sleeping dreams, he'd never allowed himself to actively fantasize about other possibilities of what a late night visit might bring about. He headed toward the back of the house, but his steps faltered halfway across the living room, the frisson of awareness crawling down his neck telling him that he wasn't alone.

"It's late, Tim." The voice came softly out of the darkness. Using his first name. God, that always made his heart twist, just a little, and this time even more so. When Tim turned around, he could barely make out the figure sitting on the sofa, shrouded in shadows. As Tim watched, the faint light of a streetlamp glinted off a glass that was slowly raised, then after a moment lowered back down to rest on the arm of the sofa.

A shiver chased down Tim's spine. He knew that coming here tonight would change things between him and the man who was sitting patiently in the dark. He didn't want it to, but he couldn't see a way to avoid it, so he was doing what he needed to when faced with a difficult situation. He straightened his shoulders and met it head on.

"I expected to find you in the basement," he said, keeping his voice steady and his tone light. He watched as the glass raised and then lowered once more.

"Figured you'd come by tonight. Didn't want you breathing in the sawdust. Bad for your allergies." It was almost enough to break Tim's resolve. This man had always cared for him, watched out for him. How could Tim even think of asking him…. But he needed to know, and the only way to get the answer was to ask the question.

"Gibbs," he said quietly, "what you're doing with Commander McGarrett…the interrogation, the accusations… Is it—" He took a deep breath, steeling himself. "I need to know it's not about me."

Something inside Gibbs gave way, and he clenched his jaw, swallowing down the flash of pain. That Tim could ask him that, question his motives, his integrity, told him all he needed to know. He took a deep breath, let it out slowly. There was no point in wishing things were different. He couldn't go back and make different choices. All he could do was move forward with what he had. Or rather what he no longer had. The chance for anything more had just slipped away like sand in a clenched fist; it had been trickling away for years.

"It's not about you." Despite his reputation for iron self-control, the words sounded raw, and Tim instinctively took a step toward him. He wanted to see Gibbs, to read his face and eyes as he'd learned to do through all their years together, but more than that, he wanted to make his point very clear. There was no way Steve's career should suffer because of their relationship.
"He's not a threat, Gibbs." It occurred to him suddenly that this could be far more personal than
he'd thought, and the aggressive tone in his voice vanished. "He's not going to take me away."

"He already has, Tim. I knew it the day you came back from Hawaii." Again the glass was raised.
Again the voice was raw. Tim's chest tightened. "You're in love with him."

"Yes." The glass stopped on its way back down, hanging suspended in the faint beam of light. "But
he lives half a world away. When this is over he'll be going back home. I won't be going with him."
He tried to keep his voice steady, but he heard the plaintive note in it and knew Gibbs would have
as well. The glass finished its descent, resting again on the arm of the sofa.

"You will when he finally gets his head out of his ass and asks you to."

"Gibbs—"

"In the twelve years I've known you there've only been three times you've challenged me head on
and didn't back down. Once was for Sarah. Once was for Penny. Tonight was for McGarrett. You
fight for the people you love, Tim. No hesitation, and no sense of self-preservation. You'll sacrifice
everything for them." When the glass raised this time, Tim could see it tremble slightly in the light.
The voice lowered to a hoarse whisper. "It's how I knew I wasn't one of those people."

"That's not true!" Tim cried, his need to protect Steve at odds with his loyalty to Gibbs and the
feelings he'd nursed for so many years. "You know how I feel about you, Gibbs."

"Yeah, I know, but I'm not sure you do. We've known for years there was something between us,
and we've also known we couldn't do anything about it while you were my subordinate. But twice
you've been off my team, Tim. Once when Vance split us up, and again when you all turned in
your badges. Either of those times we could have started something, seen where it went. But you
wanted to come back to the MCRT, and you couldn't have done that if we'd been in a relationship.
You had to choose, me or the team."

"It wasn't just my choice, Gibbs! When I was in Cybercrimes, neither one of us... It-It wasn't like
that—"

"It was exactly like that. For what it's worth, it looks like you made the right choice. You've found
something with McGarrett that I couldn't give you."

Tim's head dropped in defeat. There was no arguing with the man when he got that implacable tone
in his voice. Besides, he knew in his heart that Gibbs was right. All these years they'd danced
around this, recognizing the feelings between them but not openly acknowledging them, and he'd
been content to let it ride. In the back of his mind, he'd thought he and Gibbs would have their shot
once Gibbs retired, and he was willing to wait because he didn't want to give up the MCRT. Being
a field agent was a pinnacle in his career that he had never dared to dream of until Gibbs came
along. But he'd been ready to sacrifice his place on the team, his place in Gibbs' life, for Sarah. He
would have done it for Penny as well if it had come down to that. Yet he'd never even thought of
doing it for Gibbs.

"I'm sorry. I never meant—"

"Don't. You have nothing to be sorry for. You've found what you needed, Tim. That's a good thing.
Not your fault that it wasn't with me." Tim nodded, unable to speak. He turned toward the door, but
Gibbs' voice stopped him. "What's going on with McGarrett...it's not about you, Tim. And it's not
just about him. It's about me."
"What do you mean?"

"Haven't you wondered why he got dragged all the way to D.C. for his dressing down when there's an NCIS office at Pearl? And why I'm the one interrogating him when nothing he's done falls under the purview of the Major Case Response Team? SecNav is using him to prove a point to both of us."

"What point would that be?"

"That no one is bulletproof." Gibbs sighed. "Times change. People who were willing to look the other way are on their way out or already gone. They're being replaced by people with iron-clad rule books and 20/20 vision. If we learned anything from our dance with Parsons, it's that get-out-of-jail-free cards have expiration dates. Remember that, Tim. Make sure McGarrett remembers it, too."

"I will."

There was silence for a long moment, neither of them quite ready to end the conversation they'd waited twelve years to have, but also having nothing left to say. Finally Gibbs shifted on the sofa, and the glass made one last ascent. Gibbs tilted the tumbler back, finishing the bourbon in two deep swallows before he leaned forward and set the glass on the coffee table. "See you tomorrow, McGee. 0700. Don't be late."

Tim nodded. "Goodnight, Boss."

Tim's movements were heavy as he closed the front door behind him, knowing that it would be a long time before he crossed the threshold again, if ever. His heart felt splintered, aching for the chance they'd missed, and for the man he was leaving behind, alone in the dark. He cared about Gibbs, and hated knowing how hurt he was. He tried not to wish that he'd made other choices earlier on. But Gibbs had admitted that Steve was giving him something the older man couldn't, or wouldn't, and he had to read that as tacit approval. They'd both been party to ending up like this, with the ashes of possibilities warm underfoot.

He raised his head as he headed down the walk, his steps quickening.

Steve was at home waiting for him.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim slipped back into bed and worked his way carefully back into Steve's embrace. He almost wanted to cry, he felt so conflicted. He'd just closed the door on any potential future with Gibbs, and he wasn't even sure Steve would ever want anything permanent with him. He fell into a restless, exhausted sleep. He woke later, still wrapped in Steve's arms. He wiggled free less carefully than he had the first time and went to empty his bladder, and when he came back he saw he had not been subtle enough in his second retreat. Steve was awake, his eyes catching the moonlight from the window as he sat up in the bed and watched Tim return. He saw the reflection of pale light on Steve's teeth as he smiled while Tim climbed back in with him.

"You glow, man," McGarrett said. "You're so white…"

"Not all of us can live in the tropics, Steve," Tim replied. "Besides, I don't tan. Unfortunately it's red or white, that's all."

"Well, I loved seeing how red your face got earlier."
Tim laughed, his face heating. They lay back down and he snuggled up against Steve again. He was suddenly thinking about the second half of their plans, and he started running his fingers from Steve's ribs all the way down to his knee and back up. McGarrett hummed at the attention. The arm he had around Tim caressed his back and side as well.

"You know, we're both awake now… So, any particular requests? You did what I asked, exactly as you said you would, and I'm thinking it's only fair to return the favor," Tim said quietly.

Steve's mind was flooded with ideas of positions or techniques he could ask of Tim, but he trusted the other man to take things in directions he never would have thought of. He trusted Tim, full stop.

"You do whatever you want to me, Tim. I just want you…" He said, his voice thick.

"Oh God, Steve," Tim moaned. He rolled over until he was laying directly on top of that body he admired so much and kissed him. Both their bodies were warm from sleep; relaxed and pliable. Suddenly all Tim wanted was to make this last. They lay there kissing and gently sliding against each other for a long time. Feeling Steve's arms so strong and protective around him, Steve's powerful hands stroking his back running his fingers through his hair, Tim felt lost in the moments. Eventually, the hardness of them trapped between their bellies brought urgency to their movements and Tim moved his mouth to Steve's throat, then up to his ear.

"Steve... I want to freeze the moment. I wanna stay like this all night... It's heaven, being here in your arms..." He breathed. A shiver ran through the man beneath him.

"Tim, oh, yeah, Tim..." Steve ran his hands down to Tim's ass and held it while he thrust upward. "Want you... Fuck. You have no idea how much I want you."

Tim smiled and bit his earlobe. "Yeah, actually, I think I do. Steve, I want to be inside you, to feel you... I want to make you feel as good as you make me feel. I love...being here with you. Oh...Steve."

"Mmm. You gonna tease me the rest of the night?"

"I should. That edging kink of yours is diabolical."

Steve laughed. "The look on your face when you came kinda contradicts that."

"When I finally got to come. I thought I was going insane," Tim complained. He went back to biting and sucking on Steve's neck and ear. "Maybe someday I'll get to return the favor."

"So you think we will get to do this again?" Steve asked, trying to sound casual but failing completely. He felt the muscles in Tim's back tense.

"God, I hope so," Tim breathed, then kissed Steve passionately. McGarrett huffed in relief. The belief that their time in Hawaii would be the only chance they got to have to be together had made it intense but bittersweet. This time, with this revelation that Tim would like to continue being his lover, swept away the bitterness and Steve felt a rush at the sweetness.

"Tim... Please, really, I want you. Now, babe, please," Steve choked. Tim shuddered at the words and reached for the lube and a condom. He slid to one side so he could encourage Steve to bend his legs and open up for him, which he did readily. Tim propped himself up on his elbow so he could watch Steve while he slipped two fingers into him. "Yes! Fuck, Tim! Shit. More. More."

Twisting and spreading his fingers, Tim tried to hurry the preparation, but it wasn't fast enough for Steve. "Screw the fingers. Goddamn! Tim, I want your cock in me. C'mon, now, do it, please!"
Tim was gasping, the desperate pleading from the Navy SEAL sending him into euphoric rapture. "I don't want to hurt you," he panted.

"Jesus, I can take it! I want you, Tim!" Steve growled. Tim rolled the condom on and then moved between Steve's legs.

"This okay? We can...use another position. Last time-"

"Tim. I want it just like this, man, I promise." He raised his legs and held his knees, positioning himself exactly.

Tim nodded and lined up, slowly pushing into him. "Aaahh!" He cried, falling forward and laying atop him, a broken sob catching in his throat.

Steve was in ecstasy. Tim, on him, in him... It was just what he'd wanted. This surrender to someone he trusted totally was addictive; it let his mind rest in a way it never could otherwise. He let the feelings well up inside him and the physical sensations overwhelm him, losing himself in what Tim chose to do, what Tim gave him.

"Yes! Tim! Ooohh... Tim... Tim... Tim..." He moaned as Tim moved slowly, rolling his hips and taking him higher with each motion. The rush of this was more powerful than a HALO night drop into enemy territory. He was aware of every inch of Tim's body where it touched his, and he felt every neuron firing pleasure into his brain with the contact.

Tim felt it, saw it, when Steve gave himself over utterly to the lovemaking. His body opened, relaxing further, and Tim sank deeper into him. He felt like he was being drawn into him and disappearing, becoming part of Steve in some actual physical way. Leaning in, he kissed Steve's lips just to have some sense that they hadn't fused together. The kiss seemed to snap them both out of the trancelike state they'd been in and suddenly they looked at each other and laughed.

The walls he'd built over so many years, on the bones of so much broken trust, vanished from Steve's awareness as Tim looked into his eyes and touched his soul. He felt lighter than he could ever remember feeling, and with a smile, he arched and squeezed his body on Tim inside him. Tim threw his head back and cried out, seeing lights exploding in his vision. Steve laughed again, the abdominal contractions tightening him in further pulses, which elicited a squeaky whimper from Tim, making Steve laugh more. Tim collapsed onto him, gasping.

"Oh Jesus, Steve. Oh fuck. Ah! God!" Tim panted. Steve only laughed harder, continuing the cycle until Tim pulled out and flopped over beside him. Then he finally could appreciate the humor and he giggled breathlessly.

Their laughter died down and Steve rolled over and put his arms around Tim. He was smiling so big it felt like he'd never stop and it felt good and comfortable.

"So why'd you stop?" He asked, which set Tim laughing again. Steve relished holding his lover as he shook with mirth, rocking him lightly.

Drawing back, Tim took in the broad smile. His heart was overflowing with joy and love. He wanted to say it, but he knew with certainty that if he did, that smile would vanish and the walls would solidify between them and he might very well lose Steve forever. So he smiled and enjoyed the feeling as much as he could with that shadow over it.

"Well? We gonna get back to it?" Steve asked.

"Am I supposed to perform on command now?"
"What happened to anything I wanted, huh?"

"Oh don't get all mouthy with me. Who do you think I am? Danny?"

"No, no, no. When Danny says he's going to do something, he does it."

"Wow. You don't know how done you are."

"Done? How is that?"

"I have half a mind to tie you to the bed and edge you until sunrise."

And just like that, the walls were back up. The stress lines returned around his mouth and eyes, and his brow wrinkled. Tim's jaw dropped.

"Whoa. Steve, hey I… What did I say?"

Steve took a deep, shuddering breath. He wanted to tell Tim, but part of him was afraid he'd see how damaged Steve was. Another part of him wanted to slap himself in the head. Tim was well aware that he was damaged goods.

"I don't do well with bondage, man."

In one of those intuitive leaps Steve had seen Tim make about him, he saw Tim realize what kind of situation would have precipitated the sort of response he'd just given. And thankfully, there was no pity in his eyes, only a little sadness; but simple acceptance overlaid all of it.

"Okay then. I still need to make you come so hard you pass out. I can't have Danny be the only person in your life who does what he says he'll do," Tim said, smiling. He leaned in and kissed Steve sensuously.

The playfulness returned between them, and they rolled around on the bed kissing, stroking, and nibbling on one another. Part of Tim watched Steve closely, trying to stay aware of the other man's mental state. He only relaxed completely when Steve did. And that wasn't until he once again knelt between Steve's thighs. The urgency of the beginning had eased and Tim took his time using his fingers to pleasure Steve and prepare him. Being penetrated by Tim did something to Steve. It had a calming effect, even just a single finger was like flipping a switch and Steve was in another realm. Tim watched it happen and marveled at it. He was humbled to be the cause of such a response in the powerful, heavily guarded man. Watching him shift and arch onto his fingers as he stroked inside him, and listening to the cries he made as his prostate was stimulated sent him into raptures as well. When Steve's beautiful eyes opened and he looked up at Tim and asked him for what he wanted, Tim was helpless.

There was none of the humor and jocularity as Tim pushed into him this time. That sense of joining, of fusing into one overwhelmed everything else. This time, he welcomed it. And now that he had admitted to himself that he was in love with Steve, Tim relaxed and let the feelings flow through him. He thought he felt an answering of emotion from Steve, although he doubted the man would ever speak it. But they had these periods of physical joining that bordered on transcendent. Each time it had been this way. Tim was completely overwhelmed as he moved his body with Steve's. He slowly rolled his hips and Steve moaned. Their fingers twined together where Steve had ahold of his knees, but Tim pulled them up above his head and pressed down on top of him and Steve wrapped his legs around Tim's torso. He looked into Steve's eyes as he thrust gently. Steve's head lifted slightly in a quest for a kiss, which Tim readily supplied. Even when they broke it, their mouths stayed close to each other's, and they shared breath and sound as they moved.
Steve also was feeling totally overcome. All he was sure of was that he had never felt as cared for as he did with Tim making love to him. He gasped and groaned and pushed his hips harder into Tim's. Tim sped up in response, the feel of Steve shifting to meet him driving him wild.

"Steve! Ohmygod... Oh, Steve!" Tim choked out. The look in Steve's eyes was the most tender he'd ever seen anyone direct at him and he felt his eyes start to burn. He bit his lip, not wanting to cry, but also not wanting to close his eyes and miss a moment of that expression.

Steve pulled one hand free and cupped Tim's face, using his thumb to pull his lip free of his teeth. "I told you, it's okay. I got you. We're good, babe. We're good," he said.

Tim buried his face in Steve's neck and let the tears fall as he continued sliding his body against him. Steve stroked his hand through Tim's hair and freed his other hand to be able to hold him.

"Babe...god! This is so right... Never felt like this before, Tim. Ah! Yes!"

Tim drew back to look at Steve's expression and felt his climax building at the gloriously debauched look he got in return. Lips puffed from all the kissing, Steve's eyes were glazed and half-lidded. And knowing that he, Timothy McGee, had this person he admired and adored looking totally fucked-out, drove him wild. He slammed forward just to see how Steve writhed, then curved his spine so there was room between them for his hand to grip Steve's cock. He stroked roughly in time with the movement of their hips and shook in response as Steve shouted.

"Fuck! Yes! Tim! Tim! Yes!"

Ramming into the tight heat, sobbing in reaction to feeling more intimate than he ever had with anyone, Tim's voice rose, too, crying out Steve's name until finally their bodies smashed together and petrified like an erotic statue.

Tim lay there, spent beyond tears, with Steve's muscular legs clamped around him. Steve more deliberately remained still, wanting, as Tim had earlier, to freeze the moment. They had this bubble of unification, of serenity, and he wanted to find some way to capture a piece of it to get him through all the times when he was lonely beyond endurance and bereft of all comfort.

But time advances, and the position became uncomfortable. Tim pushed himself up, and Steve reluctantly released the grip he'd maintained with his legs. Withdrawing, Tim moved around so he could throw the condom away and grab for tissues. He cleaned them up, briefly considering a shower but too exhausted to suggest it. When he lay back down, they were facing each other and they pulled close, arms encircling and legs entwining. Their faces were so close their lips nearly brushed as they whispered to each other.

"Aloha," Steve said. Tim's breath caught. "I told you what it means, now." Tim nodded. "But, uh, the literal translation means 'sharing breath' or 'sharing the breath of life'. Kinda... Like we are right now. So... Aloha."

Tim swallowed his disappointment. It was a beautiful sentiment, even if it wasn't the one he'd wanted. "Aloha, Steve. And mahalo nui loa."

"Thank you, man. Staying here with you is...the best." The words weren't what he wanted to say, but what he was feeling he was incapable of verbalizing. Aloha came the closest, with all its meanings.

When morning came, they didn't have time for any further intimacy, so they showered separately and Tim drove them back to the Yard.
Steve's hard mask was back in place as soon as he stepped out of the elevator into the squad room. But the look in his eyes softened as he glanced at Tim before being escorted back to Interrogation by DiNozzo. McGee's eyes were big, and his expression gentle and worried. Steve winked then walked away, his back ramrod straight. Tim shook his head and settled in to start what he figured would be a hell of a long day.

He had no idea how right he was.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

A/N Co-writing credit on this chapter goes to FlyingPiglet. The film noir scene with Gibbs was entirely her creation, with minor tweaks from me, and the entire story is half her brainchild. Thank you!
Chapter Three

McGee got a phone call midmorning and rushed out a few minutes later. When Bishop asked where he was going, he said his sister needed something and he'd be back.

It wasn't until after lunch that Ellie started trying to call him, but his phone kept going straight to voicemail. By 1400, she was getting worried and ran a trace on his cell phone. It showed he was on the Yard, and she decided to investigate before interrupting Gibbs and DiNozzo in Interrogation with McGarrett. Finding Tim's leather jacket with not only his cell phone but his car keys and badge inside, all stuffed into a dumpster, Bishop sprinted back towards HQ, calling Gibbs with a 911.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim woke tied up in the back of a commercial truck. He tried to orient himself but the lack of windows made it difficult. He was able to retrieve his hidden knife and cut his bonds but the door was locked from the outside. He would have to wait until the truck stopped and his abductors opened it before he could make his escape attempt.

When the time came, he was ready. But he was not ready for who it was he overpowered, knocked down, and knelt on the chest of with his knife to the man's throat.

"Trent Kort? What the hell is going on?" McGee asked as he scoped the area. He was in the woods somewhere.

"Gibbs' puppy is all grown up and grown teeth," Kort said, smirking.

"What's going on? Don't make me ask you again."

"You probably won't believe this, but I'm actually here to help you and your team."

Tim's eyes narrowed. "You're right. I don't believe you."

"You want to let me up?"

"Not really. I'm pretty comfortable."

"Your team is in danger. Do you realize that every time you knock down one pin, there are consequences? Haswari kills Kate. One of you kills Haswari. Mishnev kills Diane. Fornell kills Mishnev. Don't you think there's anyone else out there who's going to want revenge now? I've got a line on someone wanting to take out the rest of your team in retaliation. We need to track them electronically because they're too well guarded in person and you're the best."

"Why not ask for help?"

"Would you even have listened?"

"I'm sure you could have gotten a message to me that I would have listened to. You didn't have to trick me using my sister and then kidnap me."

"But isn't this so much more fun?"
Tim's skin crawled at the look Kort was giving him. It was a caricature of sexual flirtation and Tim became very aware that he was sitting on top of the man.

"I'm not having fun. Gibbs might have fun when he gets to bust your ass for this, but this isn't my idea of a good time. Where the hell are we?"

"New York. There's a small airfield a few hundred yards that way," he jerked his chin to the side. "There's a plane waiting. We're going across the pond to a location in Poland where you can work safely and securely. When you get me information on who the lynchpins are, they'll be removed and you can come home knowing your team is as safe as you can make them."

"Why should I believe a word you say?"

"Because you don't have a choice."

Tim heard a soft footstep to one side and started to roll off Kort just before the butt of a rifle came down on his head.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

McGee's head pounded when he woke again. He was on a jet of some kind and an immaculately dressed Trent Kort sat across from him. His mouth was dry and had a faint metallic taste. He catalogued the information, realizing he'd been drugged and not knowing how long he'd been unconscious.

"There's a file on the seat beside you. Whether you want to believe me or not, I'm telling you the truth. I need your help to take down the rest of the threats set in motion by Mishnev's death."

Tim glared at him. The CIA agent passed him a bottle of water, and he took a long drink before he picked up the file. Ten minutes later, Tim was hooked. If even half of what the file read was true, they needed him, just as Kort had said.

"Let me at least tell Gibbs that I'm okay," McGee said. He knew that everyone would be frantic, but he worried Gibbs might go totally off the rails and come after him solo, putting himself directly in the crosshairs of some very dangerous men.

"No. No one can know anything about this. Their intelligence network is too wide. They won't care that the little NCIS ants are scrambling in their anthill in Washington, but if they get wind of this operation, we don't have a chance. Do as you're told, and you'll be home in a matter of weeks."

"Gibbs will move mountains to find me. It's better if I let him know not to come looking."

"You may think he's Superman, but he is a big fish in a little pond. We do this my way, or you wait until the bodies start to drop of people you love, then you try to play catch-up. You are their only hope."

McGee was half certain that Kort was quoting Star Wars at him to try to convince him, but he calculated that if he convinced the CIA Agent that he was cooperating he would get access to a computer. That would be all he would need to let his team know what was happening. He was confident that he could do it in a secure manner that would not endanger them, but he would take every precaution. He nodded slowly and resumed reading the file.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

The NCIS team went into motion the moment Bishop notified Gibbs that Tim was missing.
Abandoning the interrogation of McGarrett, Tony and Gibbs returned to the squad room, and Steve followed, his gut clenching when he gleaned that Tim was in danger.

Ellie felt the pressure as both senior team members turned to her to work the tech magic that was usually Tim's purview. She put every effort into it. Calling up surveillance cameras in the area near where she had found Tim's jacket, they were able to trace a Navy pool sedan until it left the Yard. Within a few blocks of its egress, they lost it. Then the real work began.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

When they got to the apartment where Kort expected Tim to work, his stomach dropped. It seemed set up for long term, and that was not what he wanted to deal with.

"How long do you expect this to go on?" He asked belligerently.

"As long as it takes."

McGee was warned repeatedly not to attempt to contact his people, but, as he had planned, he began writing tiny programs which were on a time delay. If this took more than two weeks, and he didn't reset the programs, everything he had found would be emailed to Abby, Gibbs, Tony, and Bishop. That included everything he could find on his location. He didn't trust Kort's reassurances that he would be safe while he was working, or that he would be returned home when he was done. But the work was important, and he reluctantly admitted to himself that he couldn't risk notifying them that he was okay, but only make the contingency in case that changed, so he dove in and spent eighteen hours a day tracking online.

Tim was surprised that he was left alone in the apartment for hours each day, once he noticed. He was working so diligently that it only registered that he had no guardian when he went looking for coffee and there was none. The next time he saw Kort, he asked about it and the CIA Agent assured him that there were additional Agents outside watching. But when they once again ran out of coffee (he was practically mainlining it like Gibbs), and he went outside to find a store and buy more, he saw no one else and so tried to be vigilant in watching out for any problems.

The next time he had to go out, it was midafternoon and he was thinking hard about his current search, so he didn't see the three men who shoved him into a van. He fought but felt the jab of a needle in his neck. His last thought before the drugs took effect was disbelief that he was being kidnapped from his kidnapper.

The absurdity of his double kidnapping was the least of Tim's worries when he woke in a literal dungeon with metal manacles on his wrists attached by a heavy chain to the wall. Then the Russian-sounding men came, and he was dragged out intermittently and beaten. When returned to his cell, he lay exhausted and thought longingly of Steve. Once the demands began, the requests coming from a well-dressed man who showed up after he'd been brought out for his fifth beating, Tim started using his memories of the short time he'd had with Steve to avoid considering answering the questions. He didn't say anything, worried that if he started talking, he wouldn't be able to control what came out. That the questions were all about his team made Steve the safer topic to dwell on, since they never asked about him. Part of his mind catalogued the individuals who tormented him, memorizing height, weight, hair and eye color, plus any distinguishing features, as well as committing to memory everything about the well-dressed man, including every word he said. The Slavic words that were repeated among his captors he memorized phonetically, and he listened hard enough to be relatively sure that they weren't speaking Russian, but that it was a closely related language.

But such potentially constructive tasks only took a few minutes of Tim's days, and the rest he chose
to give over to recalling every shade of color he'd seen Steve's eyes, and giving the anatomical name of each muscle he'd seen under Steve's tan skin. He replayed every moment of time they'd been together, and pondered where Steve's muddy east-coast accent came from. Time had no meaning, there was only the work of filing away details of his tormentors, awkwardly trying to sleep, and contemplation of Steve.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Twenty-four hours passed, then thirty-six. No one's contacts had heard anything about Tim. Their second straight day of running down dead end leads was interrupted by the arrival of the Secretary of the Navy. She went to Vance's office and soon after the team, including McGarrett, was called up. Steve had been doing anything he could think of to assist the MCRT, but was relieved when SecNav released the reins on them. She had taken a special shine to McGee, and everyone knew that his skills were globally dangerous in the wrong hands, so she wanted him found immediately. Her 'any means necessary' order relaxed something in Steve, and, ignoring the irony of being questioned regarding his maverick tactics and now having authority to do more of the same, the moment he walked out of the director's office, he started making phone calls and cashing in favors.

While scouring through every possible angle on anyone who might have taken McGee, they did start to run across rumors of a group that was gunning for the MCRT. McGarrett was read in on the entire Mishnev case, as the intel they were receiving seemed to stem from his old contacts. Abby was able to track threatening emails to Ukraine, and both Gibbs and McGarrett started talking to contacts in the region, preparing for every kind of rescue op they could think of.

Another week and a half passed before Trent Kort called and confessed that he had been the original abductor but that he had lost McGee. They had a solid direction, now, and a probable location, enormous though it was. They geared up for cold weather and headed out.

Abby tearfully saw them off, begging them to bring her Timmy home. She and Steve had locked eyes the moment they met, and an understanding had passed between them. They both cared deeply about McGee, though in different ways, and recognized the suffering in the other. When she bid them farewell, she and McGarrett shared another long glance, and she was reassured by the grim nod he gave before he broke eye contact. If anyone could bring Tim home safe, it would be her team, assisted by this tough as nails SEAL.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Kort showed up at the tiny apartment that Gibbs had arranged for in Kiev, only to have guns from every person present pointed at him.

"Is that anyway to treat someone who's here to help you?" He asked.

Tony surged forward. "Help? It's your fault that Tim's in trouble!"

"I see. The only part of this that you even see is that your puppy is gone missing. I guess a thank you for trying to save your lives would be too much."

Gibbs put his gun away and slammed Kort against the wall. "Later." He stepped back and glared icy blue daggers at him. "What do ya got?"

"I've got a line on where he's being held. There will be a fancy party there in two days, and that's our opportunity."

"Did you get us invites?" Tony asked incredulously.
"I'm already invited. Well, one of my aliases. I should be able to retrieve him, and you all can be my backup," Trent smiled.

"You're going in alone?" Bishop asked.

"That's not gonna happen," DiNozzo said.

Gibbs glared at him some more. "Tell us everything."

They spent hours going over the intel that Kort had acquired. According to his information, Tim was being held in the dungeon of a cliffside castle on the coast of the Black Sea.

"So you get us invites," Tony insisted.

"You don't get it. As I told McGee, these people are too well protected. A frontal assault, or surprise guests, will blow everything. The only reason I have an invite is from a cover I spent years building. And I'm probably burning it to the ground with this."

"Tell me about the cliffs," McGarrett said quietly, stepping in for the first time after the others asked all the right questions. He listened intently, running over all of the sources that he'd been able to contact, but as he had deduced, climbing would still would be the best manner of ingress.

"You're insane," Kort said flatly to him.

"He's a Navy SEAL, don't underestimate him," Ellie interjected. Gibbs glared between Kort and McGarrett. While he knew that his shoulder would keep him from being as active of a participant in the rescue as he'd like, he hated leaving Tim's safe return in either man's hands.

"I can get us a boat, and I can climb. You keep their security out of the dungeon, and I get him out. That's the only way this will work." Steve's voice was low and menacing, with a no nonsense edge that warned everyone not to fuck with him.

"Depending on what's been done to him, he may not be able to walk, let alone climb down a cliff," Kort said. DiNozzo groaned and Bishop turned pale. No one had wanted to think of what was being done to their teammate. Gibbs wanted to snap at the CIA Agent that they'd rappel, not climb, on their descent, but he knew he was using semantics to try to regain control, so he kept silent. He was going to have to trust McGarrett, loathe though he was to put Tim's safety in anyone's but his own hands.

"I'll be ready to improvise," Steve stated flatly. He'd kept his emotions on lockdown since hearing that his lover had been taken, and his scowling determination had kept the NCIS Agents from talking to him too much. There wasn't anything he wouldn't do to see Tim safe.

"If you're determined to follow this ridiculous plan, you'll need to memorize the layout," Kort sneered, and called the plans for the castle up on his laptop. He succinctly informed them of where the party would take place, the ways the blueprints were inaccurate, and the likely placement of guards.

Steve was relieved to have hard intel to focus on, and he took over the planning for the op smoothly, his experienced professionalism reassuring the NCIS team and gaining him grudging respect from Kort.

With no direct access to the dungeon, of course, McGarrett would have to blend in at the edges of the party in order to get to it. So, not only would he have to climb treacherous cliffs, he'd then have to don a tuxedo. The James Bond references flew fast and furious from Tony, until triple glares
from Kort, Steve, and Gibbs finally managed to quiet him. For a while.

McGarrett was calling in every marker he had in the region to get the supplies and support they would need. He continued to focus on the op, unable to allow his mind to stray to his worry for Tim. They made their way toward the Black Sea, and Kort split off, promising to stay in touch. If he could. The NCIS team didn't plan on his assistance, having learned better. They each simply prayed that his intel was correct. To go through all of this and find no Tim beneath the castle would be unthinkable.

The evening of the op came. They had Bishop ensconced in a cottage, running their communications, listening in on the frequency the guards used and keeping the men apprised of the information. Tony, Gibbs, and McGarrett were taking a fishing boat to make their way to the castle.

DiNozzo was loading their supplies from the dock when he heard the argument begin. 'Clash of the Titans,' he thought.

"He's my responsibility!" Gibbs declared.

"Well he's a whole hell of a lot more than responsibility for me," McGarrett retorted. "Is that all you feel for him? Responsibility?"

"You don't know anything about it," Gibbs growled.

"You don't know anything about it," Gibbs growled.

"I know you never thanked him for that shot he took in Afghanistan."

Tony wondered what shot McGarrett meant. He knew they'd been in a standoff when the UN troops had arrived, but McGee had never given specifics about it. He'd have to dig up the report and see what he'd missed. Or ask Probie when they got him back, because they had to get him back.

"Afghanistan?! We're in Ukraine, if you hadn't noticed."

"Do you even care about him beyond what he can do for you?"

"You want to talk about feelings?"

"I want to talk about appreciating when you have something extraordinary, not pissing it away."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"From working one case with Tim, I know more about how he thinks and feels than I think you do after more than 10 years!"

"It's time for you to shut the hell up."

"Make me," McGarrett's voice was sinister. Tony strained to hear Gibbs' response.

"Tim knows exactly how I feel about him; how I've felt since the first day I met him. Just because he chose you doesn't mean he and I don't still care about each other."

DiNozzo's eyebrows flew up. Boss and Probie?! What the hell?

"You didn't care enough to fight for him, so I'm the one going in. It's gonna be someone who truly gives a shit about him who comes to get him out of that hole."
"You're going in because I can't make the climb, and that's the only reason."

"How convenient-

Tony walked in, deliberately interrupting Steve's last, vicious statement, and rushed to push the two men apart. They were standing nose to nose, and the voices ringing in the tiny wheelhouse were low and deadly sounding. When both sets of flashing eyes turned on him, DiNozzo raised his chin and met their gazes, although his stomach threatened to rebel. Then he focused on Gibbs, although his words were addressed more toward McGarrett.

"McGarrett's going in because you had surgery on your shoulder a month ago. You'll cover us from the boat with your scope and rifle, like we planned."

"That bastard Kort had better run far and fast. After I get Tim back I'm gonna find him and any hurt that Tim's taken, I'm gonna do to him," Steve muttered, turning and leaving the wheelhouse to assess the supplies he planned to take.

DiNozzo gave Gibbs a look like he wanted to ask about what he'd heard, but he saw a flash of raw misery in the older man's eyes that told him everything he needed to know. The parental protectiveness Gibbs had always shown for Tony and Kate and Ziva was different from how he'd treated Tim, and now DiNozzo understood why. He just didn't know how he'd missed it for all these years.

After an interminable wait getting to the vicinity of the castle, DiNozzo and McGarrett stood on the deck to help find the best spot for Gibbs to anchor. As they chugged through the chop, DiNozzo finally couldn't restrain himself anymore. The forbidding silence from the SEAL was intimidating, but after working for Gibbs, he had learned that there were times when pushing himself to speak in a direct and serious way was necessary.

"Tim is important to all of us," Tony said. "I know you'll bring him back."

"Damn right I will," McGarrett stated flatly.

"You don't know me, and you don't know Gibbs. You're judging a situation without all the facts. Either one of us would die for him. We wouldn't be here if that wasn't true. You know that we are all off the reservation."

"With the blessing of the Secretary of the Navy."

"We'll still be disavowed if anything goes sideways."

Steve could easily read the worry in DiNozzo's face and eyes. He knew Tim's team cared about him, but he also knew none of them felt the way he did. And none of them had the capabilities that he had. He shrugged and faced forward again.

McGarrett and DiNozzo took the dinghy closer to shore. The waters at the base of the cliffs were treacherous but Steve was confident he could get where he needed to go. He readied himself to slip overboard but stopped.

"I'll get him back," he said, and had only a moment to register Tony's gratitude before he slid into the cold water and began to swim.

Years spent pushing himself past his endurance served McGarrett well as he fought first to keep off the rocks and then to switch his gear from wetsuit to climbing on the tiny ledge he'd spotted. The wetsuit went into a waterproof bag right next to his tux, then he started to climb. He barely
paused the entire way, but had to stop below the rim on another tiny outcropping to change into the
formalwear. He was exceptionally careful for the last ten feet of the climb, aware of the slickness
of his shoes and the need to still be clean and creased once he was in the garden at the top of the
cliff. He stashed his equipment beneath a stone bench in the shadows and then stood and walked
confidently toward a stone patio.

Their intel led him to a french door into the ballroom where the party was being held. He got
inside undetected and casually took a glass of champagne as he wandered the short distance to the
staff entrance to the kitchens below stairs. He ditched the glass and went into stealth mode, but
nearly crushed Kort's windpipe when the CIA Agent appeared from around a corner. Kort's sneer
as they battled momentarily until each recognized the other grated on Steve, but his next words had
his frustration flowing out of him with the prospect of being minutes from Tim.

"I've distracted all the guards between here and his cell. Keep it dark, there are light sensors, and
go back to the cliff through there." He indicated a cleverly disguised servant's door just down the
hall. "Wait for them to unveil the cake and when they begin to sing to their birthday boy, I will
have my people loop their video surveillance feed off the cliff for fifteen minutes. That had better
be enough or the change in the tide will reveal the deception."

"You're gonna pay for this," Steve informed him. Kort shook his head.

"You really wouldn't believe how much I regret what's happened to the boy."

"You're right. I don't."

Kort nodded, then turned on his heel back the way McGarrett had come. Steve turned and moved
discreetly down into the stoney depths of the castle.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim swallowed a groan as he heard the rusty squeal of the door at the end of the passage opening,
rousing him from contemplation of calculating the number of gray hairs Steve had. He took a deep
breath, ignoring the ache in his chest as he did so, and tried to clear his mind. Hunger, thirst, the
constant pain and not knowing how long he'd been held contributed to the fog as he tried to center
himself.

Part of his mind registered that it was strange he wasn't seeing any light. When they came for him,
they usually had ridiculously bright lights that they shone in his eyes as the first bit of discomfort
presaging the torment to come. There was sound at his door, now, but it wasn't a key in the lock.
There was a scraping noise for a minute or so, then the door swung open. The faint red light
coming down the hallway from the door at the bottom of the stairs revealed only an outline of a
man with broad shoulders and slim hips. Tim squinted, noting that the lines of the person's clothes
were sharp, like a suit, instead of the slumpy sweatshirts his guards usually wore.

"Tim?"

McGee nearly passed out. "Steve?" Tim rasped, not even recognizing his own voice. Rescue! He
hadn't dared hope for it. And for it to be McGarrett was beyond surreal. This had to be a dream, but
he swallowed a giggle and tried to make a smart remark. "Are' you little short f'r stormtrooper?"

"Getting you out of here," Steve growled. The slurred words indicated that Tim was either drugged
or injured.

"M shackled t' wall." He finally started giggling. "I'm lit'rally 'n dungeon, shackled t' wall. Not my
The laughter was a horrible sound, and Steve hurried in and used a red pen light to examine the restraints. He picked the antique lock in moments and winced in sympathy as Tim groaned when his arms were lowered from how they'd been extended above his head.

"Can you stand?" Steve asked, already shifting to help him up.

"If you want, I c'n fly, Wesley..." Tim muttered, then chuckled hoarsely again. He was getting in some great movie references. He'd have to remember them to tell Tony. Steve shushed him and helped him to his feet. Tim must have lost twenty-five pounds at least, and he felt as light as Kono when McGarrett got them moving out the door and toward the stairs. He practically had to carry Tim up them, the man was so weak, and he nodded to himself that their primary plan to BASE jump in tandem and be picked up by Gibbs and DiNozzo would be feasible. Focusing solely on executing the op kept Steve from falling to his knees in relief that he had Tim back, safe, or soon to be.

Tim went along quietly, only a little confused as to what was going on, even when Steve stripped him in the chill darkness outdoors and forced him into a wetsuit, although he couldn't help but protest when the SEAL then strapped him into a skydiving harness.

"Shut up!" McGarrett hissed, covering Tim's mouth. "This is our way out. No choice. You just gotta trust that I'll get you to the water safe, and Gibbs and Tony'll get us onto the boat."

McGee moaned, wanting to cry. Steve relented from his steely commanding and cupped Tim's face. He looked into his eyes. "Babe, you gotta trust me. Can you do that?" Tim slowly nodded and kissed him quickly.

"For luck," he rasped, then grinned crookedly at the Star Wars reference. Steve just nodded.

"Close your eyes if you need to. Just let me take control, okay?"

Tim nodded again and did as he was told. The short jump was terrifying, and he bit his lip until it bled to keep from screaming. Once they were in the water, it was better, but the shock of the dunking on top of all the trauma he'd survived already was too much, and he drifted out of consciousness, unaware even when he was wrapped in warm blankets and held securely by Steve in the corner of the wheelhouse as Gibbs captained the boat to safety, looking often at them to reassure himself that his Agent and friend was safe. Friend. That was all he'd have left once Tim got what he deserved when he and Steve finally committed to each other. It would have to be enough.

Tim woke in the infirmary of Incirlik Air Base in Turkey. He had no memory of the flight on the seaplane that had met them and gotten them across the Black Sea. His recollection of the rescue was sketchy, but he was giddy with relief when he understood he was safe. Steve slumped sleeping in a chair next to his bed, Tony and Bishop were on a cot nearby, with Tony snuggled up to Ellie's legs and her arm slung across his thigh and hanging awkwardly off the side. Gibbs stood opposite McGarrett, but Tim let himself drink in the presence of his lover before he turned his eyes to his boss.

The older man was sipping his inevitable cup of coffee, but he seemed worn and tired. There was a look in his eye that Tim had never seen before, and his muddled brain tried to analyze it. Relief? Regret? Despair? Resignation? He didn't know.

"Hey, Boss, you okay?" Tim said as softly as he could. He didn't want to wake Steve just yet.
Gibbs nodded, and his eyes flicked to McGarrett. "He's good."

"Yeah. His Five-0 team is really something. Boss, thanks for getting me out of there."

Gibbs nodded. He reached out and rested his hand on top of Tim's, and the younger man felt his throat tighten at the gesture. For a moment, Tim easily saw sadness and vulnerability in the blue blue eyes and all the feelings he'd had for his boss echoed through his heart. He blinked rapidly and nodded back. It was some kind of acknowledgement, letting Tim know it was okay to lay them to rest, and while Tim's mind whirled with thoughts of what might have, could have, and now would never be, he felt a sense of loss he couldn't face. No matter how much he loved Steve, Gibbs would always have a piece of his heart. Gibbs stroked his thumb across Tim's fingers once and then stepped back, letting him go literally as he did symbolically, shutters closing in his expression with a sense of finality that made Tim want to snatch at his hand. The wounded man's fingers twitched, but he held himself back, understanding how difficult it must have been for Gibbs to even make the gesture of release. The ache in his chest went so much deeper than the breaks and bruises from his torture.

"Kort says the CIA has moved on the intel you gave them. The group that took you, the one that was looking for retaliation against all of us for Mishnev, is done."

Tim sighed in relief. "Good." He wearily closed his eyes and it seemed like only a moment passed, but the next thing he knew there was a bunch of medical personnel moving him onto a gurney, telling him that he was going for another MRI. His eyes darted around and his anxiety eased when he saw Steve was still in the chair at his bedside.

McGarrett saw the frantic glance and moved to Tim's side to reassure him. "Just the doctors doing their thing, man. It's okay. I'll be here when you get back."

Tim nodded and relaxed as they wheeled him away. He let himself drift off again. He was so tired...

Steve followed out into the hallway. He saw that Gibbs had been standing next to the door, drinking more coffee. He met his eyes, and a look passed between them. While Tim had been missing, Steve had been so distraught he had only been able to focus on the rescue. All the time he'd been sitting beside Tim's unconscious form, he'd finally let himself think about what Gibbs had revealed on the boat. Gibbs loved Tim, and he had for a long, long time. Steve didn't understand why they had never done anything about their feelings, for he could finally admit that he knew Tim reciprocated Gibbs' affection. Small looks, comments, and Tim's repetitive references to his boss made complete sense in this new context. Steve wasn't sure if he and Gibbs would now be battling over the injured man, and he narrowed his eyes in challenge. The older man shook his head once, and the sorrow in his eyes was so profound that Steve nearly blanched. Then Gibbs turned and headed down the hall, away from the direction Tim had gone.

Steve knew he'd won, but the victory felt poignant and he vowed to himself that he would be worthy of the sacrifice the old warhorse had made. He'd take care of Tim to the very best of his abilities.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

They decided it was best to get McGee back to Washington as soon as it was safe for him to travel, so it wasn't long before he found himself taken to the airfield. He felt like he had been examined by every doctor, PA, CNP, and corpsman on the base, and he was glad to be heading home. Then he saw the plane waiting.
"Military transport," Tim groaned. Gibbs and McGarrett looked at one another and shook their heads.

Tim was more comfortable on the flight then he could have imagined he would be, because he and Steve were given the overnight bunk for extended flights. It was still a narrow bed but Steve squeezed up against the wall and cushioned Tim by keeping him held close in his strong arms. They had hours, and after Tim had slept for a long time, he woke and shifted so he could see his lover's face.

"You came for me," Tim said quietly. Steve smiled. The SEAL had lost words when they'd laid down together and he realized that all the passionate drive to get Tim out and see him safe was stemming from a bond he hadn't let himself acknowledge. "I know it's cliché, but thinking about you, about seeing you again, kept me calm." McGarrett nodded and nuzzled his face against Tim's neck. They lay quietly for several minutes, but although Steve's presence was comforting, his lack of comment was not. Tim began to worry, wondering if Steve thought him too damaged now, to want. He only vaguely remembered the actual rescue, but he knew he hadn't been very cogent and that he had laughed a lot. What if McGarrett was only being nice to him now because he felt responsible? Tim had to know. "Will you please talk to me? Even if you're going to tell me that when the plane lands you're going home and you don't want to hear from me again?"


Steve's incoherence almost brought Tim's maniacal laughter back. He closed his eyes and swallowed it down, though. "I think I broke you," Tim said, trying for a teasing tone.

The words still wouldn't come to Steve, so he turned to action and, in the tiny bunk began trying to get his hand into Tim's pants. Putting his hand on top of Steve's, Tim held it, keeping him from unfastening his fly.

"Stop. Steve..." He couldn't figure out how to ask him what he was doing, so he tried again for levity. "I heard Danny call you a Neanderthal, but this is ridiculous."

Steve's throat tightened and he mouthed Tim's neck. His breath was shaky, and Tim could feel the tremors in him all through the powerful body pressed against his back.

"Steve, please," Tim's voice had a catch and Steve squeezed his eyes shut.

"You were gone. Didn't know...what to... Didn't know how much you meant until... Tim, I – I went crazy. Was like losing my father - losing everything... I couldn't... Had to focus on getting you back, couldn't think of anything else... Now, you-you're here and... God, you're safe... And I can't," Steve choked and he struggled not to pull Tim tightly against him, knowing it would hurt him, but needing more contact, more bonding, needing to reassure himself that Tim was alive and safe and here.

Turning over carefully, Tim's breath still hissed in pain, but he settled nose to nose with Steve and kissed him gently. "It's okay. I get it. And you're here, and I'm here, Steve. A little worse for wear, but... You did it. I'm starting to think there's nothing you can't do. God, you and Gibbs are like Superman. Or you're Superman and he's Jor-El, except I get the impression you guys don't like each other."

Steve barked a laugh. "You're such a geek, babe." But he was smiling, and he was speaking in a complete sentence. Tim had broken the terrible tension in him with his gentle prodding, and Steve was so grateful. "And Gibbs and I... I think we understand each other better, now."
"Good. You're all so important to me, and I just wish I could have introduced you to them in better circumstances. Weren't you in custody? How did you end up spearheading my rescue?"

"I think the SecNav really likes you. She's practical enough that she knew we had to get you back as soon as we could, so she gave us the order of any means necessary. I'm still in the Navy Reserves, for now anyway, so she put me on the case, too."

"What do you mean 'for now'? Are you retiring?"

"I have a feeling that's going to be part of the condition for not facing charges on any of the crap I've pulled."

"But… Oh, man, I don't want to be the cause of the end of your career. I'm so sorry –"

"No. No, my career was over the minute I got taken in Afghanistan last year. Too many rogue operations, and needing a SEAL team to get me out? That was the last straw."

"I'm not sure I want to hear that story," Tim said, smiling sadly. "I can't stand the thought of you being hurt."

Steve stared at him, incredulous. "You do realize that you were just held for three weeks against your will and that you've been tortured for the last six days, right?"

Tim blushed. "Well, yeah, but…" He shook his head. "It's worse to think of someone I care about having it happen to them, than having it happen to me."

"Damn, Tim," Steve whispered, completely caught off guard by Tim's sense of duty and his strength. He kissed him softly. He knew Tim had a big heart, but that... "Go back to sleep, you need it."

Tim nodded and let sleep pull him under.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~
Chapter 4

Another day and a half of tests at Bethesda, with dozens of people visiting him, including the SecNav herself as well as Director Vance, everyone who worked at the Agency (or at least that's how it felt), his sister, several gaming buddies, and even one of his professors from MIT, a retired Naval Intelligence officer from whom he'd learned a lot of cryptography and who now lived in Arlington, and Tim was dying to get home to some peace and quiet. McGarrett was in and out, staying nights in the foldout chair in Tim's room, being as unobtrusive as possible. Sarah had given him a flat look when he was introduced as Tim's "friend", arching an eyebrow in a way that told them both that she was not fooled. She and Tim shared a look, to which she shrugged and he smiled and that was that.

By the time McGee was out of the hospital, McGarrett had met personally with the Secretary of the Navy. She administered the proverbial slap on the wrist for his fast and loose methods in Hawaii, but privately thanked him for saving an important resource in Timothy McGee. He was surprised that he was allowed to remain a Reservist, but had it made clear to him that that would only be allowed if he cleaned up his act in Hawaii. He planned to start his mustering out paperwork as soon as he got home, not wanting to end up court martialed for his investigative methods with Five-0. Steve would rather have spent all his time with Tim, even just sitting next to him while he slept, or hanging out while people visited, but he knew that he was getting off easily.

McGarrett was the one to take Tim home from the hospital. Having called Hawaii, he had let his team know that he was okay, but had not told them when he would be coming back. He knew that he couldn't face leaving Tim again for a while. Part of him screamed at the thought of leaving Tim at all.

When they got inside, Steve encouraged Tim to sit down and he started looking through the kitchen. He cleared out all the spoiled food from the refrigerator and ran it down to the dumpster, then returned and started a list of supplies they needed.

"So, milk, bread, eggs, beer, apples, dinosaur O's cereal, coffee filters…" Steve read.

"Lube," Tim said, trying not to laugh. McGarrett frowned and gave him a hard look.

"You're still recovering," he protested.

"For as long as you're staying here, I expect some service," Tim said primly.

A laugh bubbled out of Steve and he looked surprised by the sound coming from his own mouth. "I get to service you?"

"Oh, I am all about reciprocation, Steve, but there will be servicing. So add lube to the list."

"Yes, sir!"

"Don't call me sir," Tim responded automatically. Steve cocked his head at the knee-jerk reaction, and Tim shrugged ruefully. "I have been working with Gibbs for too long."

Steve smiled. "Yeah, well, you got options. I know they care about you here, but… You got options."
Tim cleared his throat. He wasn't ready to even start to consider what that comment meant. "You want me to come with to get those supplies?"

"No, I'm good. You going to be okay while I run out?"

"Yeah, I think I can manage."

They successfully avoided further awkward exchanges for the rest of the afternoon. Ordering pizza for dinner, they agreed on ham and pineapple, and both thought fondly of the meal of leftovers they'd had at Steve's house. Steve cajoled and encouraged him to eat until he was stuffed.

"You got too skinny in the time they had you," Steve protested.

"Well, I had a few extra pounds to lose. Especially compared to you. Look at you, you're still built like a god. And were you really in a tuxedo when you came to get me? I swear, I think you're James Bond in disguise."

"Maybe the Daniel Craig one," McGarrett replied.

"You're much more handsome than Daniel Craig."

"Huh, thank you," Steve chuckled. He found himself actually blushing and hid it behind a long drink of beer. They talked and bantered, finding an easy rhythm and keeping the topics light.

"You must love this book," Steve said. He had noticed a whole stack of the latest Gemcity novel. Tim shook his head.

"It's okay. It hasn't done as well as the others," he replied.

Steve frowned. "Huh?"

"That's me."

Steve's mind recognized the anagram with the revelation. "Damn. You said you were a writer, but this jacket says you're a best-selling author."

Tim just smiled. He kept his writing as private as he could.

Steve was surprised that he felt nervous when they went to bed that night. He hadn't expected Tim to be so openly interested in them resuming their sexual relationship, especially after he'd groped him on the plane, and he still had concerns about Tim's physical well-being. He had further concerns about his mental state and was glad he would be there for when the nightmares started.

They climbed into bed, and Tim turned out the light then they rolled to face one another.

"I don't think we should mess around tonight," Steve told him.

Tim nodded. He moved closer, though. "I'd just really like you to hold me."

Steve's eyes stung at that and he blinked quickly as he pulled Tim close, careful to be gentle enough not to cause him any pain. Tim raised his head for a kiss, which Steve was happy to give. But their physical closeness fired the intense sexual attraction they had, and Tim pushed harder on Steve's lips, spreading them so he could slide his tongue into the other man's mouth. Steve allowed the kiss to go on for a while but stopped Tim's hand as it slid across his chest toward his waist.

"We got time for that," he whispered. "Tonight, I'm just gonna hold you all night."
"That'll do," Tim said softly. He gave Steve another kiss, this one simple and sweet, then rested his head on his shoulder. He swallowed hard and decided it was time. "You don't have to say anything, Steve. I just need to tell you something, because it was the biggest regret I had when I thought I was going to die in that place." He took a deep breath and said the words that had been hammering in his mind every time he looked at Steve. "I love you."

Steve's breath whooshed out. "Jesus, Tim…" He murmured.

"It's okay. I don't expect you to say anything. I just needed to, and I'm sorry if it makes you uncomfortable, but I'm not going to risk never having taken the chance to let you know."

The heartbeat under his ear had doubled its pace, and he could feel Steve's whole body shaking. He propped himself up on his elbow, ignoring the ache in his side as he did.

"Steve, I mean it. It's okay that you're not going to say anything. I won't keep saying it and make it weird. I just needed to tell you one time. Please, don't be upset with me."

"Upset with…?" Steve began. "I'm not upset, Tim, I'm… I'm not sure what I am, but I'm not upset with you. I promise, babe. I just…"

"Please, can we stop talking about it? Maybe I shouldn't have… But look, we're here, and I am so pleased you stayed with me. I want to sleep in your arms and know that I'm safe. Can we just do that?"

Steve nodded, unable to formulate any more words when he couldn't even identify to himself what he was feeling. Tim settled back down and tried to calm his whirling thoughts. He might have just ruined everything. Even their friendship. It was possible this was the last night he had with Steve, and though he wanted to make the most of it, Steve was right that he wasn't up for sex yet. So he lay there, and tried to breathe in the scent of the man he loved, to memorize that as well as the feeling of being in his arms. The warmth, the softness of his chest hair, the rushing sounds of his breath... Too soon, Tim's need for sleep dragged him under.

Steve laid awake for much longer. Tim's words rang in his head over and over again. Each time he heard them in his mind, an overwhelming swell of emotion filled him. Catherine was the only lover he'd ever said those words to when it wasn't a teenage crush, and he didn't know what to think since somehow, all those years with her paled in comparison to the few weeks he'd spent with Tim. They'd been easy, just hooking up when they were near each other, and even when she'd left the Navy and joined Five-0, their relationship had stayed casual. Had he loved her? Did he love Tim? If he did, how in hell could he leave and return to Five-0 and not see him every day and every night? Dammit, he never thought about this stuff! He tried to still his mind but those words… Imagining for just a moment what it would be like to say them back, to say everything that he'd felt since he arrived in Washington. 'I love you. I wasn't able to take a single full breath after you left. I want to come home to you every day for the rest of my life, to wake up next to you and to hold you all night. I want to make you safe and I want to enjoy how safe you make me feel. I trust you, Tim. Be mine, forever, because I'm already yours.'

God, how sappy! How ridiculous! And how true. He sighed and stroked the soft skin of Tim's back, mindful of the bruises. The welts had lost their ridges, but fury still battled with nausea when he saw how discolored his lover's pale skin remained. They had gotten word from Kort that the CIA had dismantled the rest of the group he'd had Tim hunting, and that the major players were all either incarcerated or dead, but until he saw proof, he still felt the driving need to find everyone who had lain a finger on Tim and hurt them. But more than anything, he needed to keep Tim safe. Listening to the other man's soft breathing soothed him and he finally fell asleep.
As he had on the plane, Tim slept soundly for hours, his damaged body claiming the rest it required to heal. When he woke in the darkness, though, panic surged inside him and he flailed violently.

"Whoa! Tim, it's me! It's Steve! You're safe!" Steve said, not even fully awake when he started reassuring Tim. He'd expected that the nightmares would come but he'd hoped Tim would have a night or two of peace first, even if it was just from exhaustion. He didn't try to restrain him, he just lightly rested his hands on Tim's heaving body.

"Dark! It's so dark!" Tim cried. Steve immediately reached for the lamp and flicked it on. With the soft light chasing away the terrifying memories, Tim's frantic gasping settled after a moment and he felt himself flush with shame. He couldn't even look at Steve.

Frowning at Tim's expression Steve touched his face and tried to get him to meet his eyes. "Tim… Babe, it's okay. You're gonna have nightmares, that's normal. That's why I'm staying, because I wanna be here for you."

"It wasn't a nightmare," Tim mumbled. "It's like I'm five years old, I'm afraid of the fucking dark." He flopped back against the pillow, still refusing to look at Steve. He hated having a man as tough as McGarrett witness his weakness.

Steve laid back down and pulled Tim back into his arms. He kissed the top of his head and stroked his fingers across his neck. "Danny's claustrophobic. My dad had a problem with needles. I have never thought less of them for it. I... I still have nightmares, more than five years later, about an op in Korea. I can't enjoy kinky bondage because of my history. There's shit that happens that you get over and shit that stays with you forever. It means you're alive, that you survived. There's no shame in that and you're not going to get any judgment from me about it."

Tim shifted so he could look at him. His years of working with Gibbs had given him plenty of experience deciphering enigmatic, hyper-masculine expressions, and no matter how he searched, he couldn't find anything but honest sadness, concern, and understanding. He nodded slowly and a twinkle sprang into being in Steve's color-shifting eyes.

"But a problem with the dark could be fun to try to overcome with lots of positive, endorphin-producing experiences. And I am happy to help with as much of that as you can stand," Steve declared. Tim laughed.

"Oh god, that sounds good," he said, sighing. He was so completely in love, and he hoped to make some wonderful memories before Steve left to go back to Hawaii. He refused to contemplate how empty his bed and home would feel after that.

Kissing Tim's forehead, Steve smiled and gently got Tim re-situated to sleep.

"Good," he said. "Now, just relax, babe. It's all good."

So they slept with the light on for the rest of the night. Steve found he liked it because every time he woke, he could watch Tim as he slumbered, his face relaxed and his breathing soothing, sending Steve pleasantly back to his own rest.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Midafternoon light brightened the living room as if the darkness that plagued Tim's memory was a hundred years away, and as he looked at Steve when he came in the door with clean sheets he'd just washed in the basement laundry, they both felt the pull toward each other, that sense of
inevitability and yearning for the perfection of their bodies melding together. Steve set the laundry basket down and Tim rose from his seat on the couch and they met in the bright center of the room, wordlessly. Standing eye to eye, Tim's lack of footwear giving them equal height almost exactly, Steve's gaze questioned Tim's physical readiness for sex, and Tim's mouth quirked and he nodded fractionally. Tim was more than ready to aggravate his injuries in order to express his gratitude and love for Steve in a way that left no doubt in either of them of the truth of the bond they shared. He needed to prove to himself that saying 'I love you' the night before hadn't ruined everything. He had been relieved that he hadn't sensed any awkwardness after they got up that morning, but he needed a more tangible reassurance.

The stress lines around Steve's eyes were already smoothing, his body relaxing in anticipation of the experience. He'd thought a lot about Tim's injuries and had decided to try a position he'd never done before to minimize any possible hurt to him. He smiled crookedly and kissed Tim, recognizing that there was no urgency to finishing at all. They stood for long minutes sensuously exploring each other's responses. They rubbed their hard-ons together through Steve's jeans and Tim's sweatpants, and Steve gladly slid his hands under Tim's loose t-shirt, lightly caressing his skin. He slipped one hand between them and skidded it over Tim's nipple, enjoying the gasp Tim sounded against his mouth.

"Mmm, let's get this into the bedroom," Steve murmured. Tim nodded docilely and followed as the other man drew him in that direction by a gently held hand. At the foot of the bed, Tim started to take his shirt off and Steve stopped him. "Let me?"

Tim smiled and let himself be undressed. Steve skimmed his hands all over him as his skin was revealed, the touch light enough not to cause pain but firm enough to titillate. The diffuse light through the curtains let Steve see the rainbow of the fading bruises all over his lover's pale skin, and he had to pause to get his anger under control, looking away and clenching his fists until Tim finally touched his cheek tenderly to regain his attention.

"I survived," Tim said simply, reminding Steve of his comforting words in the dark of the previous night. Steve's stormy eyes locked with his and he felt himself laid open under the penetrating stare. The concern and worry and anger and relief all swirled together in the hazel blue depths, but finally the haunted look faded and Tim could see Steve return to the moment. The cocky, sometimes gruff SEAL had vanished and his fear of losing yet another loved one had risen up and crashed against his carefully built walls. Feeling humbled to be witness to Steve's vulnerability, Tim tilted his head and leaned in to kiss him lovingly. "I'm safe," he whispered, moving over to Steve's ear and breathing lightly into it. Steve shuddered and they moved in tandem onto the bed.

Resuming his mapping of Tim's body, adding tongue and lips, Steve reveled in the warmth of him and lost himself in the sensuous pleasure. Tim closed his eyes and let himself be worshipped by the man he loved. He was taken to another realm of sensation and delight with every touch and nip and lick and he barely registered the sound when Steve got into the nightstand for the lube and a condom. His eyes opened when Steve rolled the latex onto him, and then widened when he watched Steve reach back and pull a butt plug out of himself. Somehow, knowing that the powerfully masculine man had planned to take Tim's cock up his ass so far in advance as to buy the toy and put it in so he'd be ready was so monumentally fucking hot. Tim gasped and stared at Steve hungrily.

Smiling at the reaction he got, Steve slicked Tim's erection and moved over him.

Straddling Tim's hips, Steve looked down at him and realized the best thing about this position was being able to look at Tim through it all. The heightened coloring of his face had spread down his neck onto his chest, and his nipples were dark pink from all Steve's attention. But by far Steve's
favorite thing was Tim's expression. Even in the glow of the afternoon light, Tim's pupils were blown so wide that he couldn't see but a thin ring of blue green around them, and the total trust and adoration in them made Steve's hands shake. His lips looked even fuller than normal from kissing and were parted as he breathed hard. He was gorgeous. He paused and stroked Tim's cheek tenderly, then reached back and arranged himself and Tim before slowly lowering onto him.

Steve had taken complete control of them both, and Tim had let him. Now, feeling Steve's body opening for him, the tight heat enveloping him, a long low whine worked its way out of his throat. He choked on a sob as Steve settled on him, fully engulfing his length and stilling to acclimate.

"Oh god, Steve..." He whimpered. His hands scrambled at the muscular thighs, and Steve took them in his own, interlocking their fingers and holding him firmly. Smiling softly, Steve rose slightly then dropped back down, squeezing the perfect hardness inside him. "Aaahh!" Tim's voice rose, and Steve's smile turned mischievous. Groaning, knowing he was about to be subjected to Steve's edging kink, Tim tried to relax and ride the sensations like swells in the ocean.

"Yeah, that's it. Now you get it," Steve crooned, seeing how Tim gave in to his intent. God, when Tim gave himself over, he did it completely, and it made Steve want to bow down to him in gratitude. This was gonna be one hell of a ride. He started moving, rocking his hips so he was sliding his ass back and forth on Tim's cock. It felt amazing, and he watched Tim's face as his head lolled with the motion. When his eyes closed and his forehead wrinkled, Steve clenched and sped up for several strokes, then stopped moving. Tim bit his lip and shuddered, rolling through the tingling as he gasped. The sensations slowly subsided, and his breath came easier. He opened his eyes and met Steve's gaze. The man looked unbelievably happy, and Tim had to smile. As unpleasant as edging could be, knowing it gave Steve so much joy made it worthwhile. That, and the earth shattering orgasms it gave him.

Steve started moving again, arching and angling so Tim's cock rubbed his prostate. Every thrust sent delicious spikes of ecstasy through him.

"Tim... Oh, babe... This is so perfect. You're so perfect..." He moaned, his body shaking in pleasure. "Never been like this... Only you, Tim. Only you..." He sped up, feeling the aching in his gut as he kept nudging that spot over and over again. He watched Tim's face, too, alert for the tells that he was getting close. When he saw them, it took everything he had not to continue to both their completions. He froze, panting and gasping, vividly understanding Tim's description of edging as 'diabolical' for the first time. When the urge finally eased, he rose up and off, and Tim cried out in frantic denial.

"Shh, just getting more lube. I'm not gonna stop, I swear," Steve explained quickly. Tim nodded and relaxed. After he did what he needed to do so that they could hopefully edge once more before they finished, they gave twin groans as Steve resumed his position and slid back into place. "God, Tim... Feels so right..." He leaned down and kissed him, then slid his hands across Tim's chest, rubbing his nipples while he started a slow rhythm again. Tim shuddered and Steve felt his cock twitch inside him. He experimented with more nipple play, loving how much Tim responded; verbally, with gloriously twisted facial expressions, and with his member swelling and moving. He took his time on this one, riding right to the cusp and then stopping, moaning brokenly himself right along with Tim when he froze in place. Knowing this was the last time helped him keep control, as well as relishing Tim's agonized pleading.

"Steve! No! Please, god! Please!" Tim's voice was thick and loud and his hands had a grip on Steve's hips that he knew would leave marks. "I can't! Oh...please, love..."

The word shattered Steve. All his resolve, and all his restraint vanished in one syllable and his hips
rocked and he squeezed Tim tight and he moved so Tim's hardness was grinding into that place inside and he threw back his head at the way it felt... He was being pulled apart, rended into pieces, and all he knew was Tim-Tim-Tim!

Pushed almost beyond any rational thought, Tim's mind still registered when Steve lost control. Wanting to push him over, to tear an orgasm out of the man, he grabbed Steve's cock and stroked him even as his own climax waited a hairsbreadth from triggering. Steve roared at the added stimulus and his body heaved as he came, shooting his first few spurts so far Tim lost track of them. Tim's own body finally released and he yelled at the clutching, spasming grip Steve's ass had on him. It seemed to go on and on and on and he was lost in time; there was only Steve, only painfully intense pleasure, only the helplessly overwhelming love...

The light had changed. They laid together without speaking for a long time, and Tim finally stirred within the warm embrace.

"I can't believe you did that," he offered quietly.

"What, the plug?"

Tim nodded, his gut tightening at the memory. "That was the hottest thing I have ever seen."

Steve snorted. "Gotta get you out more. It was just a practical solution."

Tim looked at him. "Uh-huh. You didn't enjoy it at all."

Steve smiled crookedly. "Never said that. Y'know, I never really got into bottoming until you. It ain't half bad."

Tim couldn't contain himself. He started laughing hard. It only took a few chuckles until the pain forced him to silence, but his grin remained wide.

"What?" Steve spread his arms in what might have been a very convincing confused look if Tim hadn't known better.

"Ain't half bad? Really? You screamed my name. You did! More than once!"

"That...was not a scream. That was a, uh, a manly bellow."

Tim giggled and then gasped.

"Sorry, babe," Steve said, running his fingers in featherlight touches across his back. His defensive bravado vanished. "I admit it. Sex with you is awesome, no matter which way we do it. I just wanted to be ready and that position seemed the least likely to cause you pain. I still wanna nail you to the mattress again but I don't wanna hurt you."

Tim smiled. "Thank you for your consideration," he said, then his mind wandered back to his curiosity. "When did you get that plug, though?"

Steve chuckled at his fascination. "Yesterday when I went out for supplies. I got a couple different kinds of lube and a few other things, too."

Eyes widening, Tim leaned back to look at him. "Um...a cock ring?" Steve's grin was answer enough. "Oh, shit..."

"I've never edged someone with penetration like we just did, though, where I had to edge myself as
well. That sorta...sucks. I kinda get it now, the way you cringe when you know I'm gonna do that. Do you want to have a safe word?"

"Seems to me I used a word that worked just fine," Tim said hesitantly. Steve froze and Tim instantly regretted saying anything.

"Yeah, I guess you did," Steve said softly. "Tim, I -"

"Don't. You don't have to... I'm sorry I..."

"Shh. Look, I don't have a problem with you saying it. I'm...humbled, actually, that you know yourself well enough to know what you're feeling. I'm... I'm just not so..."

"Trigger happy?" Tim suggested, distaining himself with his lip curling.

"Damnit, Tim, no! Don't do that. I care about you. I'm crazy about you, man, I just don't know myself like you know yourself. I don't have that..." He sighed. "Look, babe, I have only ever said it to one lover in my adult life, and we were together off and on for something like twelve years, and I said it over a goddamn sat phone while she was in hostile territory on the other side of the planet, about to do something that may have gotten her killed. You're the only person I think about before I fall asleep, you're who I wanna wake up with in the morning. So, look, I'm not gonna put up with you being down on yourself. When you wanna say it, say it. I love hearing it. I just don't want you to feel hurt when I don't say it back."

Tim had heard him rant at Danny when he was in Hawaii, but he had never been on the receiving end of one of Steve's verbal explosions. It amazed him that Steve was unaware that he was using a whole bunch of words to say the same thing Tim had. Warmth spread through his chest and he smiled at the agitated frown Steve wore.

"You came for me, and you were with me in my mind and heart the whole time I was gone. I know I'm not the first person you risked your life and career to rescue, but I know why you did it for me. You don't have to say the words; you live them."

Steve's eyes widened and he stared, speechless, at Tim, who kissed him and then rolled away, taking care of the condom and rising.

"How about we order Chinese for dinner?" Tim asked, ready to drop the heavy conversation and get back to enjoying being together.

"Sure, uh, sounds good. Someplace with no MSG, though."

Tim pulled his sweatpants back on over his boxers and snagged his t-shirt off of the floor. He paused at the doorway. "No problem. I'll let you clean up. I'm pretty sure you painted my wall," he snickered. He chuckled softly at the way Steve's eyes widened again and he twisted to search for the splatter Tim was referring to. His ears reddened when he saw that he had indeed shot for distance and hit not only the wall, but the pillow right beside where Tim's face had rested. He shrugged mentally at that. He had planned to change the sheets anyway.

When he had cleaned up, Steve got dressed and they ordered dinner. Afterward, they tried to watch a movie on Tim's big tv in the bedroom, but Tim dozed off and it couldn't maintain Steve's interest, so he shut it off, which woke Tim.

"Hmm? Oh, hey, why'd you stop it?" He asked, his voice slurred.

"You fell asleep. S'okay. You need to take the rest so you can heal," Steve said, using the remote to
power everything off.

"It's only 1930..."

Steve kissed his temple. "So? Go back to sleep. I'll be here."

"You don't have to stay in here. You could go for a run or something..." Tim's voice was cut off by a yawn.

"I don't want to leave you alone," Steve confessed. "Maybe I'll work out in the living room."

"Mmm. Sounds good," Tim replied, already drifting off again. With a final kiss to the top of Tim's head, Steve crawled out of bed, left the lamp on, and went to the other room. He stripped down to his jeans and stretched a bit before he started doing push-ups, then sit-ups, then star jumps while being careful to land lightly to not disturb the neighbors below. He ran through the kata he knew that he could do in the tiny space and then kept going with different kinds of push-ups, rapid crunches, and all manner of calisthenics.

Tim's subconscious must have recognized what Steve would look like out in the living room. He woke with a raging hard on, and listened to the soft sounds of exertion coming through the door for a few minutes before he couldn't stand it anymore and he went to see. He felt starstruck as he leaned in the doorway watching Steve's muscles bunch and smooth with beads of sweat tracking across them. When he started doing circular push-ups, the movement was so sexual that Tim groaned, and Steve paused to look at him. With a cheeky grin, he continued his set, exaggerating the movement while keeping his eyes locked on Tim's. He lost the smirk when Tim pushed his boxers down and he started stroking his cock. He lost all track of what he was doing and froze, arms extended, body balanced between his palms and his toes.

"Tim..." Steve groaned. His lover looked incredible, slowly working his hand up and down his length.

"Take your jeans off. Then keep going for me," Tim ordered quietly. Steve pushed to his feet and unfastened his pants, dropping them and kicking them off his feet to one side, his eyes never leaving Tim's. Both their expressions were serious as they stood and stared at each other. Tim nodded toward the floor, and Steve narrowed his eyes, then dropped and continued his push-ups. He kept glancing at Tim, whose arousal rose and rose. Cheeks red, moist lips open, panting as if he was the one working out, Tim leaned against the doorframe as he stroked faster, building momentum. Steve rolled over and started rapid bicycle crunches, his ass pointed right at Tim, legs spread so Tim could see how hard he was through his briefs, his eyes smoldering. When he could see Tim was getting close, he stopped and rolled to his feet. Kissing him hard, Steve pushed Tim back into the bedroom and onto the bed.

"Sixty-nine?" Steve asked, breathless. Tim moaned and Steve took that for affirmative. He stripped his underwear off and climbed on top of Tim, wasting no time and swallowing as much of the hard curved cock as he could. Tim breathed deeply of the musk of Steve's sweaty groin, shuddering in pleasure from the blow job and the scent. He raised his head so he could mouth Steve's balls and screwed his eyes shut with the salty taste combining with his sense of smell into a total experience of Steve... He nearly lost himself in the moment, but Steve's hips twitched and he snapped back to what he knew Steve wanted, needed. He pulled the thick erection into his mouth, hollowing his cheeks so it slid in with the suction while he caressed it with his tongue.

"Mmmph!" Steve shouted around his mouthful. They both worked earnestly, tonguing and sucking, their hips stuttering and small whines and garbled curses filling the air. Tim came first, grunting with Steve's cock hitting the back of his throat. As he rode it out, he undulated his tongue,
swallowing, his orgasm the distraction he needed to deep throat for the first time. Steve's body tensed and he gave two brief thrusts before the incredible sensation overwhelmed him completely and he shot pulse after pulse down Tim's throat with his body locked up in a rictus of ecstasy. He froze there for a few more seconds, until Tim tapped his hip, unable to breathe. Steve slowly pushed his body up and then flopped to the side. Tim gulped in air, smiling and feeling very pleased with himself. He'd tried to get over his gag reflex, but hadn't been able to until now. He loved that it was with Steve that he'd achieved his goal.

Propping up on his elbow, Steve tilted his head at the utter self-satisfaction on Tim's face.

"I've never been able to do that before," Tim explained. "Always wanted to."

Steve laughed and turned so they were facing the same way. He kissed Tim and smiled along with him. "Well, I certainly enjoyed it. Thanks, babe."

Tim sighed happily and let his eyes wander over his lover's face. Steve looked relaxed, sated, and as content as Tim had ever seen him. The openness with which he was watching Tim in return made Tim's breath catch. He couldn't help but think that he was really good for Steve. It was such a shame he lived so far away.

Steve saw Tim's expression turn wistful and he knew exactly what was going through his mind. How, how could they figure a way to be together? Steve found he wanted it more than he could remember wanting anything.

After that, nearly every time Steve worked out inside the apartment, they ended up having sex. It seemed like Tim's subconscious had an extra sense that knew, even if he was asleep or in the shower, that Steve was getting sweaty and even more gorgeous than usual. He'd end up watching, sometimes touching himself, sometimes not, until neither of them could stand it anymore. Tim found his home seeing more action than it ever had as they christened nearly every surface in the place.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim's psychological evaluation began three days after they returned from Turkey. He was pleased that he got to work with Dr Cranston rather than someone he didn't know, and he was able to be honest with her about what he was experiencing in terms of reaction to being kidnapped and tortured. He opened up about his relationship with Steve since it was directly affecting his recovery; in a positive way, but the doctor cautioned against having another person be too key in his recovery.

"He helps me see things differently. He's been through it, and he... He makes me see what's possible."

"Like what?"

"That it's possible to go on, to live and help people and love... I may not ever be exactly the same again, but I survived."

"Tim, you've been through something that no one should have to go through. But you seem more open and comfortable with yourself than I've ever seen you. How do you explain that?"

He smiled. "It won't make you happy to hear me say it's Steve, will it?"

"Is that the truth?"
"In part."

Rachel raised her eyebrows and waited.

"I've...found myself. It's only been in the last six months or so, but I just finally feel like somehow, I'm okay just as I am."

"Your father passed away last year."

"Yes. And I regret that I didn't get to be honest with him before he died. But I guess I'm also kind of...relieved. That sounds awful, but he's always been so critical, so disappointed in me, that knowing he's not going to make me feel like I'm nine again and I dropped the pop fly in my baseball game is freeing. I'm bisexual. I never told him that, and I kept it quiet. He's gone, though, and spending time with Steve has shown me how good a male relationship is for me. How good Steve is for me."

"Commander McGarrett lives in Hawaii, right?"

Tim's animated, happy expression drooped. "Yeah. Yeah, he does."

"And you just got out of a long distance relationship."

"I know. I've been trying not to think about it."

"Just because you don't think about it doesn't make it go away."

"Yeah. I...we...have a lot to discuss."

"I'd like to see you a couple more times, Tim. I think your reaction to what happened is being overshadowed by your relationship, and I want to make sure that you really are facing and dealing with your situation before I release you to return to work."

Tim sighed. "I thought you said I'm healthier than ever?"

"You're very smart, Tim. I won't be pushed into letting you back to work too soon. And I have assurances from Director Vance that even Gibbs will not reinstate you until I turn in my evaluation. No end run around this time."

So he kept the journal that she assigned him, and tried to be more aware of his own reactions, independent from Steve. He also tried to find a good moment to bring up Steve leaving and what that would mean for their relationship, but it never felt right. In his journal, he was honest that he feared the discussion would prematurely end their time together. Dr. Cranston finally insisted that Steve accompany him to one of his appointments. Steve agreed, warily.

They settled in, with Steve sitting uncomfortably, his eyes darting to Tim then back to Dr. Cranston. Introductions, pleasantries, and a general discussion about the purpose of the visit barely broke the ice, then Rachel dove in.

"Tim, have you discussed anything with Steve yet?" She asked.

"Um, I never found the right time," Tim confessed. Steve tensed further.

"How about now?" Dr. Cranston nodded toward Steve and looked at Tim expectantly.

Nerves made Tim's voice higher in pitch, but he obediently turned to Steve and met his wary gaze. "I... I want, um..." He trailed off, never having truly started.
"Have you told him about Delilah?"

Tim shook his head, then sighed in resignation. "She's my ex-girlfriend. We met in Washington and got together, but she had an opportunity with her job and moved to Dubai. We tried to keep things going for almost a year, but it didn't work out."

"So?" Steve said. "What does that have to do with me?" Defensively, he knew he sounded belligerent but couldn't help it.

Tim glanced between the doctor and Steve, then stammered as he tried to explain. "The, uh, the long distance – trying, uh, that wasn't the only… We…I-"

"I still don't know what that has to do with me. Why am I here exactly?"

"Well, I just, what do you want from… Us?"

Steve stared. His eyes flicked to Dr. Cranston, and then back to Tim. There was an expectancy in the air that felt like a wet blanket suffocating him. "Is this couples therapy or something?" He spoke aggressively, and Tim flinched.

"Steve, Tim asked you a question. A perfectly reasonable one. Don't you think he deserves an answer?" Rachel said evenly.

"I saved your life. What more do you want from me?" Steve snapped. Tim stared in horror as all the walls that Steve had dropped over the week and a half that he'd been staying with him slammed back into place. He was stunned speechless and no matter how Rachel tried to get them talking again, they both remained mute. When their session ended, Tim couldn't even hear what she said as she released them. All he could do was note that Steve wouldn't even look at him and worry that he'd just lost everything.

The car ride back to the apartment was made in continued stony silence. Tim sadly began to plan what he needed to say to Steve to let him know that it was okay that Steve didn't want a commitment. He just hoped that he'd have a chance to kiss him one last time before he left.

Steve had shut down totally. Being railroaded and browbeaten was unacceptable, and he refused to even think about the possible reasons why Tim had taken him into that situation. They went up into Tim's home, and Steve went straight to the bedroom to change. He needed to work out, and a long run would help burn off some of the sizzling anger in his gut.

Tim stared after him and waited in the living room for Steve to return with his gear packed for travel. He had sentences prepared, realizing that he might only have the moments it took for the other man to walk to the door. A calm resignation settled over him. He'd burned his bridge with Gibbs, and now he was losing Steve. A long, lonely life seemed to stretch before him, and he distantly wondered if he would be able to face it or if he would crack.

When Steve emerged in sweats and a t-shirt, it was so unexpected that Tim could barely register it.

"What are you doing?" Tim blurted.

"Going for a run," Steve said. He moved toward the door.

"Wait!"

"I've just gotta - "
Tim rushed over to him, moving to block him from the door. "You're not leaving?"

Steve's frown deepened into a scowl. "You want me to?"

"No! No, I just thought…"

"I probably should, but...you still need me."

"Don't stay out of obligation," Tim snapped.

"Goddamnit Tim, I wouldn't do that. You just gotta… Let me go for a run. We'll talk when I get back," Steve said, shaking his head. Tim stepped aside, his eyes large and sorrowful.

By the time Steve came back, hours later, Tim had run the entire emotional spectrum of negative emotions. He felt completely drained, and he barely looked up as the door opened.

Steve showered and came back out to stand before where Tim sat on the sofa in the living room. He felt contrite, knowing that he had overreacted to the therapy session. He wanted to make it right with him but didn't know how to start. So he waited and felt worse and worse as he noticed Tim's red rimmed eyes and shaking hands. He dropped to his knees in front of him.

"Baby, I'm sorry. I overreacted. You wanna talk, let's talk. Just us."

Tim felt his hopes rise a little. Maybe he could salvage a little more time with Steve. He just had to play it a little cooler, not be quite so needy. If he could just get them through this, he could build some more memories to see him through after Steve left.

"No, I shouldn't have dragged you there. You want some dinner? We could order in. I bet you like Indian food," Tim said, his voice gaining strength from the near whisper it started as. Steve frowned, unsure about the 180 Tim appeared to have done.

"I love Indian… But, Tim, if you want to talk…"

Tim stood and tugged Steve to his feet as well. He plastered on a smile and gave Steve a quick peck on the lips before he moved around him and grabbed his phone. He hit speed dial for his favorite Indian restaurant and ordered several different entrées off the menu. When he set his phone back down, he turned to Steve with a slightly more genuine smile. 'Fake it until you make it', he thought to himself.

Steve dropped it. If Tim wasn't going to pursue it, he wasn't going to poke the bear. They had a delicious dinner and watched a movie in the bedroom. Steve held Tim close as they watched and neither of them followed it very well, but when the credits rolled, and Tim turned over and raised his face toward Steve, they both felt a desperate need as they started kissing. Very quickly they were naked and groping one another.

"I want you to fuck me," Tim growled into Steve's ear. Due to Tim's injuries, they had been very careful about how they'd had sex, with Tim exclusively topping. But now, he needed that to be different. He needed Steve to take over, to have him and possess him.

"What?" Steve said. "I thought you didn't fuck."

"Semantics," Tim said dismissively. "You gonna do it or not?"

Steve was disturbed by the change in Tim, but not enough to stop. They continued making out, until Tim was gasping and begging Steve to get on with it. In no mood to play with his kink, Steve
prepared Tim and then pushed his legs up and moved into him. He stared down at his lover's face and blinked when he saw Tim's eyes fill with tears. This felt completely different from the ecstatic weeping Tim had done in the past, and Steve was suddenly concerned. He froze.

"You okay?" Steve asked.

Tim felt like his heart was slowly being torn to pieces. He tried to just let himself get into the moment and enjoy his talented partner, but he couldn't stop thinking that Steve would soon be gone. He nodded, not wanting to ruin one of their last chances to be together. Steve hesitated, and Tim pulled him down and kissed him breathless while he rhythmically began clenching around the cock inside him. Steve groaned into his mouth and his hips stuttered back into motion in response to the fantastic feeling Tim was creating.

"Oh, fuck, Tim," Steve gasped. "Shit. You-sure you're okay?"

Tim nodded frantically and met his thrusts, trying to draw him in more, wanting every millimeter he could get. "Yes. Yes, Steve, give it to me! God, yes!"

There coupling was shadowed by all the things they hadn't said to each other, and when Tim screamed in his completion, it was followed by wracking sobs. Steve spilled inside him, then gathered him close and rocked him, wanting to fix whatever it was that he'd broken, but having no clue how. Tim fell into an emotionally exhausted sleep and Steve cleaned up, then held him, feeling helpless and hating it.

The next morning, Tim woke before Steve and went out to start the coffee. He idly picked up his phone and saw he had a voicemail from Dr. Cranston. She advised him that the only thing he could do with Steve completely shut down was to be as clear as he could with the other man about what he was thinking and feeling. If Steve responded, they could have a dialogue, and she was happy to have them both return, but if he didn't, Tim still needed to know that he had done everything he could. He shook his head. She didn't get it. If he spilled his guts about all he was feeling, Steve would leave all the sooner. He needed to dial it back, to be casual and let Steve calm down. He'd have to convince him that he was okay with them seeing other people, even if they were going to continue whenever they saw each other. Hopefully, he hadn't ruined the entire situation already with how he'd cried after coming the night before. He felt pathetic, but knew that he had to be strong or all was lost anyway.

With the planned mask firmly in place, they had a quiet breakfast together, then Tim told Steve he was going to take a long shower. He suggested to Steve might want to take the time to work out if he wanted to.

"I'll even let you finish," Tim joked weakly.

Steve was watching him closely, but rolled with the lighter tone. "It's not like I don't finish working out, it's just that I'm working different muscles, then."

Tim chuckled and headed for the bathroom. As soon as he closed the door behind him, he leaned against it and felt himself shake. He'd never wanted anyone the way he wanted Steve, and he desperately hoped that he was doing the right thing.

Everything exploded at lunch. They'd gone out to a cafe that had a wide variety of cuisines. Tim had brought up the topic of them seeing other people once they separated, and Steve lost it.

"I said I was fucking sorry! What the hell else do you want from me?" Steve demanded. Tim's jaw dropped.
"I – I, I know I scared you, um, with the whole relationship thing when we were at the doctors, so I figured…"

"So I screw up one time and you're done? That's really harsh, Tim!" Steve threw his napkin on the table and stood. Ignoring the fact that they were in a very public place, Tim rose, too, his voice matching Steve's volume. The whole section of the restaurant they were in grew quiet as people stopped and stared.

"I thought this was what you wanted! You don't want to be tied down, you want to keep your options open. I'm just giving you permission to do what you want. Not that you need my permission, but..."

"I don't want options, goddamnit! I want you, Tim!"

"Well I want you, too! Just you."

Steve stepped around the table and planted a searing kiss on Tim's lips, holding him tight in his arms and ignoring any possible discomfort he was causing him. Tim returned the kiss passionately, and they didn't break apart until applause began. Tim's eyes grew huge and his face turned bright pink, but Steve just smirked, tossed a few bills on the table, and led Tim out, practically strutting. He wanted him back at home, now.

Once inside the apartment, they didn't speak any more words. They communicated with touch and long looks, with kisses and sighs. Tim found his heart so full of love and relief he could barely breathe. He lost himself in the feel of Steve's arms and lips, in the heat of their bodies pressing closer and closer. As he gazed into his lover's eyes, part of him noted that they looked a deeper blue than he'd ever seen them, but mostly he just saw Steve in all his passion and power, all his openness and vulnerability. God he loved this man.

Steve gave himself over to experiencing every moment they shared. His awareness contracted to just the two of them and he felt himself riding the waves of emotion and sensation as they came, just flowing, blending somehow with Tim, endlessly. Oh god, would sex with Tim ever be ordinary? Or would it always have this depth and power?

Tim let tears of pleasure and love and relief just run from his eyes. Steve slid down and enveloped him in his hot mouth, tonguing and sucking, and Tim just floated in the ecstasy.

When Steve felt the thick muscle in his mouth swell, he rose up and plunged his hastily wrapped and lubed cock into Tim. Balls deep, roaring primally. They cried out together, then Steve adjusted and tried hard to nail Tim's prostate with firm thrusts. He was so close to coming, but he wanted Tim to have something new, wanted to give him everything he could, to express physically what he struggled to say.

Tim's body convulsed and he screamed with his first prostate-only orgasm. Instead of feeling it just in his cock, it was deep in his gut as well and it went on and on and on...

The scream sent Steve into hyperdrive, humping fast until his own climax sent him reeling and dizzy to collapse onto Tim, both of them shuddering and whimpering in the aftermath. Minutes passed before they calmed enough to speak.

"Steve, hon, I have to say, I have never cried so fucking much during sex in my life!" Tim confessed, laughing shakily and sniffing.

"I kinda noticed. I don't mind, I just... What's up with that?" Steve replied, moving away and
tossing the condom before he turned back with tissues and wiped the other man's eyes then his chest before he pulled Tim close.

"It's just so...intense, y'know?" Tim bit his lip and then quickly released it when Steve frowned. For whatever reason, it seemed Steve didn't like it when he did that. "I mean, really intense, like I'm gonna burst. Is...is it like that for you?"

"God, yes. It's not like any sex I've ever had."

Tim's face flushed. "But you've...had sex with guys, right? I mean-"

"Yes. Mostly, with friends... Um, three guys, Freddie and Billy and Sam, on my SEAL team," he shrugged. "And back at Annapolis when I figured out I was into it. You're the first serious one, though."

Tim's mouth quirked into a smile. "Serious?"

"Serious enough to shout it in a restaurant," Steve said, smirking.

"I can't believe we did that. It's like some chick flick."

"Who cares? It's all legal here. We could even get married in DC."

They both froze when they realized what Steve had just said.

"I'm not..." Tim began.

"Me either," Steve said, and they moved on from their discussion of the intensity of their relationship; physical and emotional.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim went back to Dr. Cranston's by himself, and easily convinced her that he was ready to return to work. When she tried to ask him more about Steve, he became firm about the session sticking to his mental readiness for field duty rather than his personal life. The difference in him was marked from when he had lied his way through his evaluation after Delilah had been injured, so she let him keep his love life out of it. She signed off on his mental health, and he went to a final appointment at Bethesda and gained approval of his physical fitness to return to work, at least for desk duty, as well. He would start back on Monday, and in another two weeks, he should be cleared for field duty. Gibbs insisted that Ducky would do an exam as well before Tim was considered field ready, but Tim knew he was just being overly cautious.

The governor called and asked when Steve was coming back, making it clear that if the answer wasn't very soon, he wouldn't have a job to return to. With Tim ready to go back to work, they both acknowledged that it was time for Steve to go home.

Their last weekend together was emotional and bittersweet. They made love so much that both of them were sore enough to walk with a hitch, but neither minded. They agreed to find time to talk on the phone as often as they could, and made plans to meet in Los Angeles, halfway between them, for a long weekend in a few weeks. Time ticked away relentlessly, and before either of them was ready, they were in the car driving to the plane that would spirit Steve away.

As they approached the door to the taxiway, Tim pulled Steve into the alcove of an office doorway so that they could have a moment of privacy before they were out in the open on the tarmac. He'd teased Steve about actually choosing a military transport over a commercial one, even offering to
buy him a first class seat for the long flight, but Steve liked the noise and sense of purpose hopping a ride on a plane that was already going where he was.

"You know, I never actually said thank you," Tim said hoarsely. "Above and beyond friendship, man. You saved my life, and my sanity. Thank you."

Words deserted Steve again. He stared into Tim's eyes like he was drinking his soul. He couldn't believe he was actually choosing to get on a plane and leave. Their planned weekend in Los Angeles was a glimmer of hope, but 37 days felt like an eternity.

Tim took in all the stress lines that marred Steve's face, and he shook his head. He put his arms around him and pulled him close.

"It's okay. We're okay. Now, you better call me as soon as you get in," Tim whispered into his neck. Steve nodded and fought not to squeeze Tim breathless, knowing how much his ribs still bothered him. Instead, he buried his face in Tim's neck in return. He took long breaths, trying to absorb every moment he had left in its entirety. "I love you, Steve. I'll see you soon."

Steve closed his eyes and took a heavy breath, then he straightened and looked into Tim's beautiful eyes. "Aloha nui loa." He gave a short nod, and kissed Tim softly, loving how he arched against Steve's chest.

They walked together out to Steve's plane, and Tim joked that he finally saw an advantage to the military flight; he could stay by the hanger and watch it take off.

Sharing a long final look, Steve slung his pack and strode up into the plane. Tim waited until all he could see was the tiny speck in the sky vanishing into the cloud cover before he started his long, lonely walk back to his car.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~
Chapter 5

The next two weeks were an adjustment for Tim. He consistently went to sleep with the lights out, and only had to turn the lamp on every few nights when he awoke and the panic overwhelmed him. His loneliness, missing Steve, was in part assuaged by a pair of Steve's t-shirts that he had left, one under each pillow. The smell of Steve on them slowly faded, but Tim felt better just knowing that he had experienced it enough for it to be a familiar comfort to him.

They texted often, and found the occasional time when they could make their schedules match up so they could Skype. Both of them carved out times so they could talk on the phone at least every other day, but they agreed that missing one another simply sucked.

0135 EST, 1935HST

T-You free? I'm home alone missing u

S-Call u in 20 min

T-I'll be waiting

It was actually only 16 minutes later when Tim's phone rang. He knew he needed to get some sleep after their 40 hour shift tracking a murderer, but he had been honest in his text that he was very much missing Steve. So he was stretched out in bed dozing when he hit the button on his phone when it vibrated as it rang.

"Hi," Tim answered.

"Hey," Steve said, smiling. He had rushed home from having dinner at Kamekona's shrimp truck with the team and he'd dialed the moment he hit the door. "I'm glad you texted."

"Long day, and I couldn't stop thinking about you." The body that they had been investigating the death of was a Navy SEAL, a fit mid 30s man with dark hair, and it had shaken him to see it. Gibbs had seen his discomfort and gone almost totally mute, but he hadn't kept Tim at the crime scene any longer than absolutely necessary, sending him to check for tracks and having Bishop do the photographing.

"Yeah? What were you thinking?" Steve hadn't picked up on the somber tone from Tim. He kicked off his shoes and stripped his open button-down off, heading up the stairs. He dropped the shirt in his laundry basket and fell back on his bed.

Steve's flip response made Tim smile. He didn't need to drag Steve down with a tale of torture and a grizzly end. He decided to let Steve bring his mood up, instead. "When I'm on a case, I start to think about how you'd handle it. My team's noticed," he said.

"Yeah? You gonna start carrying hand grenades?" Steve laughed. Tim joined him, feeling better hearing Steve's levity.

"Probably not, but it does cross my mind."

"You know, I'd love to see you in full tac gear," Steve admitted.
"Hang on," Tim said, grinning. He called up a selfie he had taken in Afghanistan in helmet and desert camouflage flak vest and sent it to Steve. "As you wish," he informed him.

Steve's phone dinged and he looked at it, smiling at the goofy selfie. "Really? A grin like that doesn't usually belong in that gear."

"I don't know about that, I bet you had plenty of good times in tactical gear."

Steve's mind went to the three other men that had made up his second SEAL team and all the sex that they had had together. There had been plenty of times where they indeed had barely done more than unfasten their flies. He laughed, remembering a time that Sam, the most well endowed of them, had ended up in a firefight with his dick hanging out. "You got me on that. But a selfie? Man..."

"That was my first trip to Afghanistan, and actually... Abby requested the picture. She wanted evidence that I would be wearing my helmet all the time to stay safe."

"So you and her, huh?"

"A long time ago, before I even joined Gibbs' team."

"She freaked out when you went missing. I figured it out, then."

"She's my best friend. And she's the one that deciphered I had been with a guy in Hawaii. She accidentally outed me, but everyone except Tony already knew." Tim shook his head. "I thought being bi was my secret, but even Bishop knew."

"Gibbs always knew, huh?"

Tim shifted uncomfortably. "From the very beginning there was...something, with Gibbs, yeah." He blew air out noisily. "Trying to keep secrets from investigators sucks," he muttered.

"Having a crush on a father figure is pretty common, Tim."

"Tell me that's personal experience talking?" Tim asked, pleading.

"Joe White. And yeah, I'm pretty sure he knew."

"I always tried to just put it on a back burner, you know? But there were moments, when I really needed him, and he'd look at me in a certain way... He was always there for me, no matter what. Is. He is always there for me."

"I get it. Of everyone alive, when I need something, I always think of Joe first. Even after... Shit. Can we not talk about this?"

Tim nodded, then remembered he was on the phone. "Yeah, this is not a great direction to go when I was kind of hoping for phone sex."

Steve laughed at that. "Y'know, I hadn't even realized it, but I came straight up to my bedroom and I'm laying in bed now. I guess we're still in tune."

"So, what are you wearing?" Tim asked, attempting to sound seductive but ruining it with a laugh. Cheesy or not, Steve decided to roll with it. "A t-shirt and jeans," he answered, grinning. He shifted up the bed. "How about you?"
Tim felt as excited as a little kid that Steve jumped right in to play along. "Boxers and a t-shirt. And I'd really like it if you'd match me."

"You got it," Steve said. He quickly unfastened his jeans and shoved them down. "But I'm in briefs."

"That's okay, I like that look on you."

"I remember. I don't think I got a complete workout the whole time I was with you."

"You did when you went out for a run," Tim replied smartly. Steve chuckled.

"How are you feeling?" Steve asked.

"The ribs are getting better, and most of the bruises are gone. There are a few that Ducky said are probably permanent, though."

"I wish I was there to take advantage of you being more physically hearty now,"

"Yeah? What would you do?"

Steve tried to imagine it. He closed his eyes and tuned out the sound of the ocean, recalling the feeling of Tim's apartment. He could see Tim clearly in his mind's eye, his long legs stretched out, his boxers failing to hide his arousal. He smiled.

"I think I'd have you fuck me first," Steve said, unthinking of his word choice.

"I have no interest in fucking you," Tim replied. "If you mean that you'd want me to top, I'm all over that."

"Yeah, yeah. I misspoke."

"How would you want me to do it?"

"Athletically."

Tim laughed. "I don't even know what that means."

"Hard and fast, babe," Steve breathed. He shifted, rearranging himself as his cock stiffened.

"Don't touch yourself until I say, alright?" Tim said quietly. He recalled vividly the moment he'd ordered Steve to strip down to his underwear and continue his workout, and the erotic rush he'd gotten from the powerful man's wordless obedience had seen him through several lonely nights.

"Mmm. Okay," Steve had never been interested in relinquishing control to anyone else, but Tim could tell him to do anything and he felt helpless not to obey.

Tim shuddered at the soft acquiescence. "So, would you want me to just bend you over and shove into you? Pound you until you couldn't breathe?" He shimmied out of his own underwear and closed his eyes, concentrating on the sound of Steve's breath hitching.

"Oh god. Yeah, start out like that. But I want to see your face when you come," Steve said in a low voice. Tim's body twitched at that, and he grabbed his cock and started stroking. The switch to present tense ratcheted up the tension, and he went with it.

"Anything you want, Steve. Now, put the phone on speaker, take your clothes off, and turn over.
Get on all fours," Tim said. He put his phone on speaker as well and stripped his shirt off before he laid back. The rustling and faint creaking of Steve's bed indicated he was doing as he was told and Tim felt his throat tighten. When the line grew quiet, Tim visualized Steve with his perfect body, positioned exactly as he'd said, ready, waiting for him. "Oh... Steve, you're so sexy like that. Hmm. Okay, close your eyes... Now, I'm climbing onto the bed behind you, and I'm not even going to prep you... I'm all lubed up, and I'm just going to grab your hips in both hands and just shove into you... Ready?"

Steve's body was thrumming with sensation. He could practically feel the bed dip behind him; the heat from Tim's body. "Yes. Fuck, yes. Do it. Do it, babe. I'm ready for you."

"Now! Oh god! Steve!" Tim's hand tightened on his erection, simulating the hot sheath of Steve's body. The cry Steve gave sounded just like when he had impaled himself on Tim so many times while they'd been together, and Tim felt his eyes prickle with reaction.

Steve's gut clenched, his imagination supplying him with the sense memory of being filled by Tim's hard cock. He moaned and rocked back to meet the fantastical thrusts. "Tim! Ah, babe... So good," he gasped.

"Ohmygod, Steve... Just like that... Oh... Shit. Oh, Steve..." Tim panted, listening to Steve's heavy breathing. "Brace yourself on one arm and jack yourself off. I wanna feel you come before I turn you over and fill you up."

Steve obeyed immediately and groaned, close to finishing already. Tim's voice was the best aphrodisiac he had ever had. "Ugh, oh god, uh... Oh, Tim, yeah..."

Tim had to slow his strokes. Hearing Steve, seeing him in his mind, nearly made him lose control and come. "C'mon, baby. Give it to me, Steve. You can do it. Come for me."

"Aaahh!" Steve's orgasm shook his whole body and he grunted Tim's name with each surge. "Tim...Tim...Tim..."

"Turn over, pull your knees up. It's my turn." Tim sped back up, right on the cusp. As soon as he heard Steve settle he gripped harder and moved faster. "Yeah... Steve, god! Milk my cock! Yes! Yes! Steve!" Tim shouted as he climaxed, hearing Steve's broken moan in response and he choked on a sob with each of his aftershocks.

It took Tim several minutes to get his breath back. Steve waited, switching his phone off speaker and enjoying the sound of Tim coming down right in his ear.

"Wow," Tim finally said, and smiled at Steve's chuckle. He, too switched back to normal use on his phone. "That was fantastic."

"You give good phone, babe," Steve said. Tim laughed out loud.

"You, too."

Tim waited, unsure what to say. Steve's mind drifted, recalling the feel of Tim in his arms and just aching at the lack.

The apartment suddenly felt enormous, echoing with emptiness. Tim sighed. "Thanks for dropping everything for me."

"I'm glad I did. You sound wrecked," Steve observed.
"Just worked two days straight," he said, the last word a bit slurred by a yawn.

"S'okay man, I can let you get to sleep now," Steve said sincerely.

Tim didn't say that he wished Steve was there, knowing they were both thinking it. "Alright. Look, stay safe, okay?"

"I'll do my best, but you gotta watch out for you, too."

"Yeah, will do. Steve... I love you."

It was on the tip of Steve's tongue to say it back, but he had made such a big deal out of it, that he suddenly wanted the first time to be special. "I know. Sleep well." His voice was soft in his reply, though.

Tim smiled. "Good night."

They hung up, and Tim did a quick cleanup with tissues, then rolled over to go to sleep. His last thought was wondering if Steve knew the Star Wars reference he'd made.

Steve laid still for a few more minutes, considering the thought he'd had. He was ready to say it, to tell Tim he loved him, and he was actually trying to figure out a romantic way to do it. He shook his head. He could barely believe himself. Catherine had disparaged his perception of romance on several occasions, and with how important this felt, he didn't want to mess it up. He had better ask for advice.

After showering off, he considered for a few minutes from whom he felt he could tolerate the inevitable teasing response he was sure to get. There was no way in hell he'd give Danny such ammunition against him. Bad enough to get all the gay sex references from him after he'd found out Steve had slept with Tim. It would be too embarrassing to ask either Kono or Grover. Chin... But god, the look he would give him! He shook his head and went downstairs, heading for the kitchen and a beer. A family picture caught his attention. Mary. Even if she did tease him, it would be far less than anyone else he could think of. He only even talked to her every few weeks. After he got his beer and took a few long swallows, he grabbed his phone and dialed.

It took a few minutes to calm her down and convince her that nothing was wrong. It made him realize that she really was the only one of them that initiated contact. He'd have to do something about that. After she had calmed down, they exchanged uncomfortable pleasantries.

"What's going on?" Mary asked bluntly.

"Well, I... I actually need to ask your advice."

Mary was silent.

"Is that okay?" Steve asked, starting to feel defensive.

"Yeah, yeah it's okay, I just didn't expect it."

Steve shifted uncomfortably and downed the rest of his beer.

"Where's the most romantic place you can imagine to have someone tell you they love you for the first time?" He asked quickly.

"Have you really never told Catherine that you love her?"
"Um, well, she and I, we're... We're not really together, anymore. Haven't been for a while."

"What? How long is a while?"

"A few months."

"Define 'few'."

"Eight or nine."

"Steve! Why didn't you tell me?" Mary demanded. "And you're already telling someone else you love her? You know it's probably just a rebound, right?"

"It's not a rebound! And it's not a she. His name is Tim and it's something really special."

"Oh my God, really? I thought you just messed around with guys, I never expected you to fall in love with one. And it's 'special'? It must be, if you're ready to tell him you love him. How long have you been together? Do I know him? When do I get to meet him?"

"He lives on the mainland. He was out here for a case about five months ago, and that's when we started."

"That's so fast! How do you know it's not a rebound?"

"Mary, it's not a rebound. We've been through a lot together already. I'm in love with him. Now will you answer my question?"

"Yeah, yeah, okay. I guess... Okay, at the very top of a Ferris wheel where it's just the two of us, sitting amongst the stars with the whole world spread out below us. Oh my God I would so cry!"

Steve could see it. He knew there were amusement rides on the Santa Monica pier and he was pretty sure they had a Ferris wheel. He would hold Tim's hand and say it softly and Tim would say it back and kiss him and it would be perfect.

"Thanks Mary. That's really helpful."

"You have to tell me how it goes!" She insisted. "When are you going to do it?"

"We are meeting in LA in a couple of weeks."

"Call me after you get back. Promise, Steve!"

"Okay, okay. I promise."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

So, fifteen days later, Tim found himself being dragged out to the far end of the Pier at Pacific Park on their first evening together in Los Angeles. They had met at the airport, and Tim had groped Steve as he drove them to their hotel. They'd had a quick sixty-nine, neither willing to wait to satisfy the other after being apart for weeks, then a long postcoital time, wrapped securely in each other's arms. A hot shower, a wonderful dinner, then it was finally dark enough for Steve's plan and they headed to Santa Monica.

"Steve, really, I would rather just go back to the hotel," Tim protested.

"This is the one thing I want to do while we're here, and you can choose everything else from here
on. But we gotta do this, okay?"

Tim considered that. "I call the shots from here on out? All the shots?"

Steve paused and looked at him, frowning. "But… You know I like that…"

"I promise to make sure that we both have a good time," Tim reassured him. He knew how much Steve loved edging, and he wasn't about to deny him his kink. But the chance to call all the shots for the weekend was too good to pass up. "Okay."

He immediately regretted it when they moved into the line for the Ferris wheel. "Steve," Tim whined.

"One thing. The rest of the weekend is yours."

Tim swallowed hard and started his breathing techniques. Whatever it was Steve wanted, he wanted to give it to him. He tightened the waist strap, to Steve's amusement, drawing them close against each other. Steve happily put an arm behind him across the back of the cart. Vertigo assailed Tim as they started to move, and he closed his eyes, concentrating to try not to panic.

Steve enjoyed the view as they rose; on one side the lights from the amusement rides a colorful, riotous counterpoint to the glittering stars above, and to the other the moon hanging just above the horizon, the Pacific making a slowly rolling demarcation between sea and sky. He felt the same adrenaline excitement that he'd always had right before deployment, and he grinned. He couldn't wait to get to the top and make his declaration.

Tim's hands both clenched the bar in front of them, his knuckles white, his whole body tense. His slow breathing exercises had failed him, and he was almost panting through his nose, his lips pressed tightly together to keep him from saying anything. This was so much worse than the cliffs in Hawaii. The rocking of their cart made him want to throw up, and he started counting upwards in prime numbers to try to distract himself.

They were almost there. The ride paused when they were two spaces from the top, then again at one space, then it was their turn.

"Tim, I brought you here to tell you something important," Steve said. He felt ready to explode with his anticipation. "I love you, so much, and I'm not afraid to say it anymore," Steve said, his voice clear and loud. He looked at Tim, and his smile fell away at the expression on his lover's face. His jaw was tight, his lips a hard, thin line, and he was squinting, his eyes closed tight. "Uh, Tim?"

It took time for Steve's words to register in the fog of Tim's anxiety. When it did, his eyes popped open and widened incredulously. Steve had dragged him up here to say he loved him? It was absurd; utterly insane. And yet... it wasn't. It was incredibly romantic, if not for Tim's fear of heights. All the trouble Steve had gone to to set this up... And here he was staring at him like he'd set his hair on fire. Tim started laughing. Steve's face tightened into his 'aneurysm face', and Tim laughed harder.

Steve was getting pissed. Tim had looked all freaked out, and now he was laughing like a maniac. This wasn't how it was supposed to be!

"What the hell, Tim?! I just –"

"No, no!" Tim choked, trying to get his mirth under control. "Oh god, honey, I love you! This is so sweet... But I am terrified of heights! 'A' for effort, but a heroic fail. God, I love you, Steve. Now,
get me the hell off this ride!"

It was Steve's turn to be rendered speechless. And then to laugh like he had just dodged a bullet. He pulled Tim close and kissed him, drawing back and grinning like a madman before doing it again. By the time Steve let Tim breathe, they had passed the ground level again and swung up in the faster, nonstop part of their ride. Tim groaned, and Steve protectively held him, letting Tim bury his face in Steve's neck until they finally got to the ground and the attendant locked their cart down and raised the bar.

They got off the ride, Tim's legs only a little shaky, but Steve having no problem keeping his arm around Tim's waist to steady him. He felt like he had just won every prize from every booth there. By unspoken agreement, they went straight back to their rental car.

"So, love, where to?" Steve asked as he slid into the driver seat. He found he couldn't stop smiling.

Tim's stomach had settled, and it was just beginning to hit him what Steve had said and done. "Kiss me," he ordered. Steve readily complied, and the kiss quickly grew heated. Making out in the front seat of their rental car in a parking lot wasn't quite as uncomfortable as the front seat of Tim's Prius, but it had the potential for too much public exposure. After a few minutes, with hands starting to roam under each other's clothes, they drew apart breathlessly.

"We better get back to the hotel," Tim said.

"Your call, boss," Steve replied, smiling. Tim laughed. He doubted the control freak in Steve would let him completely relax and follow Tim's lead through the whole weekend, but he appreciated the effort. He briefly imagined casually mentioning to Danny that he had no problem getting Steve to give up control and he snickered at the thought of Williams' response. One of his biggest complaints about Steve was how much of a control freak he was.

In their room, they laughed as they undressed each other. Tim ordered Steve to tell him he loved him at least half a dozen more times and just beamed so brightly each time that Steve couldn't even bring himself to mock him. He just said it over and over, and it made Tim smile even bigger with every repetition. They rolled around on the bed making out, and the smiles and laughter eventually turned more serious.

"What do you want, babe? Anything." Steve whispered in Tim's ear, then bit his lobe. Tim groaned.

"You've told me, now I want you to show me. I want to feel you inside me, and I want you to make me believe every word you said. Then I want the words to vanish and to just be yours."

"Oh, yeah. I think I can do that."

Steve began to lovingly caress Tim's body, running his hands from his feet, up his calves and thighs to stroke across his stomach to skim over his nipples, and then cupped his face as he leaned over him. He didn't say anything, he just looked into Tim's eyes, and the gentle sweetness he expressed, the softness that only Tim ever got to see from the hard-ass SEAL, brought a lump to Tim's throat. He swallowed hard and tried to give that open, loving look right back to him. If Steve's smile was any indication, he succeeded.

As they touched and kissed, Steve found himself feeling completely overwhelmed. Admitting he loved Tim; saying the words, had given him permission to experience everything that meant to him. He found himself distractedly considering long term problems like Tim living so far away, of them both being in high risk jobs where they each would have to live with the possibility of losing
"Hey!" Tim slapped Steve's ass hard enough to make a sharp sound. "What's going on? You're so not in the moment..."

Steve sat back on his heels. "You're right. I'm...I'm in the future, with you, wondering how we can possibly make this work. I mean--"

"Uh-uh. Not the time, babe. You said I call the shots, and I say it's time for wild, hot, monkey sex," Tim declared. His light words had the desired effect and Steve smiled. Tim reached out to touch his face. "Steve, we have all the time in the world to worry about how to make a relationship work, but right now, we only have this weekend together. I want you to make love to me. I want to feel you, loving me, while you love me, y'know? Please?"

Steve's smile softened and he moved forward and settled on top of Tim. "I love you."

Beginning again, maintaining his focus on Tim's responses, on sending his lover into raptures, gave Steve the outlet he needed. Tim's milky skin was so sensitive, Steve enjoyed dragging his teeth and stubble across it just to see how it reddened.

"You think you'd ever let me spank you? I bet your ass would go neon," he asked, not quite joking. Tim laughed.

"Seriously? Jeez, if you want to. I really wanna play some power games at some point. I get so fucking hot ordering you around. And not tying you down, just having you choose to stay where I tell you..." Tim shivered, and Steve barked a laugh as he watched as his lover's cock throbbed and bounced at what Tim was imagining.

"That's your call, boss-man."

Tim's smile faded. "Can you... Would you not call me boss, please? It reminds me of Gibbs, and that's not really where I want my thoughts, you know?"

Steve appreciated the sadness he saw in Tim when he talked about Gibbs, and the jealous twinge it always gave him made him want to keep the older man as far from Tim's mind as possible, so he nodded. "No problem. So... Turn over. I'm gonna warm your ass with a little sexy spanking, babe. I wanna see your beautiful skin turn all pink, then I'm gonna cool it off before I give you what you asked for. How about it?"

Laughing in agreement, Tim turned over and let Steve do what he wanted. He found himself starting to hump the bed after half a dozen strikes, and at a full dozen, he was panting with desire. The only enjoyment he'd ever gotten from such activity before was knowing his partner liked it, but whatever was different with Steve's strong hand raining stinging slaps on his butt gave him sudden insight into the pain/pleasure duality.

When Tim's entire ass was bright pink, Steve switched to tongue-bathing it and blowing across it. Tim cried out ecstatically at the contrasting sensation and lay twitching as Steve continued for a few minutes. He finally craned his neck over his shoulder to speak. "That's enough! I need you, now! Please, Steve, god! Please!"

Steve loved making him beg. He quickly rolled a condom on and slicked himself, then worked two fingers into Tim's tightness.

"Screw that! Just do it! I need you, love!"
Shaking in response to Tim's words, Steve withdrew his fingers and pulled on Tim's hips to have him raise up onto his hands and knees. He aligned himself but hesitated. "Babe, you sure?"

"Steve, please..." Tim gasped. Steve slowly pushed in, moaning at the heat and the greedy clutching of his lover's body. He hung forward, braced on his hands just below Tim's, his body flush against the other man's. Everything, all the emotion he'd let fill his life since Tim walked into it, rose like a wave and crashed down on him. Tears spilled down his cheeks and he put his face down on Tim's smooth skin and wept.

Amidst the powerful hormonal drive for sex, understanding filled Tim. He wished he was in a better position to comfort and support Steve, but he recognized that it was possible that the only reason Steve could let go like this was being in a dominant position without his breakdown being visible to anyone, even Tim. He closed his eyes and moved his hand to hold one of Steve's, and just murmured "I love you," over and over again.

When the intensity receded, Steve gently started thrusting and Tim's voice broke into a low moan. With how he was rolling his hips, he was rubbing right against Tim's prostate with every motion, and it felt like a volcanic climax was building. His cries grew louder, and Steve realized he was positioned perfectly. He smiled and rocked harder, relishing the way Tim's voice and body shook.

"Oh, god, yes, Tim! Oh, I love you, baby... Oohhh, so good... Yes, Tim, oh, yes!" Steve felt his own orgasm building and increased his driving deep into his lover. Tim was sobbing and wailing and Steve slammed into him again and again until he felt him clench and ripple and heard him nearly scream as he came. The combination sent Steve into his own rapturous completion, and he sagged over Tim's strong back as his existence narrowed to his cock, inside the man he loved, giving everything he had.

They dropped prone together and lay utterly spent, sweat, saliva, come, and tears making a perfect mess of their bodies.

Tim finally stirred, the comforting weight and heat of Steve eventually making his ribs ache. Steve immediately rolled off of him, checking solicitously if he was okay. Tim grinned as he turned on his side.

"Oh, I'm great, I love having you on me like that, but my ribs..."

Steve gently ran his hands over Tim's side. The only visible marks left were spots with dark pinky purple spider-like bruises where capillaries had been crushed and would never recover. Permanent bruises, similar to some Steve had on various parts of his body from traumatic injuries. He knew from experience that they didn't really hurt, but he kissed them anyway, needing Tim to know they weren't unattractive to him. Tim's soft smile and stroke of Steve's cheek told him they were on the same page, and they stayed like that silently looking at each other for a few minutes.

Tim finally patted Steve's face. "C'mon, my love, let's shower and get some shut eye."

"It only feels like 2000 to me," Steve complained.

"Well I've been up over 24 hours, so I'm going to sleep so we can do whatever we're gonna do tomorrow. There's a gym in the hotel. Or you could go run or something."

"Oh, hey, yeah. I know I said you could call the shots for the rest of the weekend, but I have plans for us, well, for you, tomorrow at 1600."

"You know that I know you pretty well already, don't you? I already figured that there was no way
you'd be able to live up to giving me total control all weekend. Just save it for a surprise, though. And after we're back here tomorrow night, that's when I cash in my note to be in complete control, okay?"

Steve laughed. "Yeah, I guess you do know me. I promise you're going to love it. And I'm going to love you ordering me around tomorrow night, so we'll both get what we want." He rose and cleaned himself off, then tossed a warm washcloth onto Tim's chest as he lay dozing. His eyes snapped open and he grunted.

"Thanks," Tim said, wiping off and then climbing under the covers. Steve pulled workout clothes on and took the washcloth from Tim when he kissed him.

"I love you. I'll be back in a bit. Got my phone on me," Steve said. Tim smiled sleepily and murmured an affirmative.

Chuckling the washcloth into the bathroom, Steve headed down to the gym. Almost regretfully, he completed a long workout on the machines. But as nice as it would have been to continue their habit of sex interrupting him, he felt pretty drained on that count. They hadn't spoken about his breakdown, and he wasn't sure he even wanted to. He so rarely cried, and never in a positive catharsis like he had. It was awkward, and he didn't want Tim to think less of him for having done it. He mentally head slapped himself at that. He'd just tuck that memory away and only discuss it if Tim brought it up.

Though he wasn't especially tired, he wanted to be near Tim, so Steve showered and slid into bed and pulled his lover close. Tim snuggled into Steve's side without waking and Steve just enjoyed the intimacy until he finally drifted off.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Unlike the first surprise Steve had sprung on Tim, the second was a huge hit. When Tim spotted the sign for Jetpack America, his eyes widened.

"How did you know?" He demanded, trying to think if he'd ever mentioned his fascination with rocket-belts in front of his lover. Steve grinned.

"I called Abby."

So Tim spent an hour learning about the water-powered Jetpack he then got to use for his own first flight. He came away from the experience with red-cheeked excitement and exuberantly ran to Steve and lifted him, hugging him tightly.

"Thank you! Ohmygod, what a rush! Did you know -" Tim began rattling off numbers about thrust to weight ratios and other technical information that Steve just let sail on by. He guided the wildly chattering Tim back to the car and let him go on and on as he drove north through the terrible LA traffic. Tim's sentences slowed after over an hour, but he'd then sit quietly for a minute, thinking, and have a burst of excited sharing, only to repeat the scenario over and over. He never stopped smiling, however, and Steve just let him run himself out of words. When they arrived at the restaurant in Malibu that Steve had picked out for its casual yet romantic atmosphere, Tim finally returned to the present and stared around, seeming almost surprised they'd moved from the pier, although over ninety minutes had passed.

Seated out on the patio with the ocean just beyond the edge and a pretty pink and gold sunset beginning, Tim was entranced. Steve ordered a lovely bottle of wine, and Tim found himself
beginning to get uncomfortable.

"What have you done with my rough-and-tumble, three-minute Navy shower superman?" He asked. Steve laughed, his ears tinting red.

"Abby again. She knew you'd love the Jetpack thing, but she reminded me that you deserve some wining and dining, too. I figured that if I wussed out on telling you I love you on the Ferris wheel, this was my backup."

Tim put his hand on top of Steve's and squeezed. "It's incredible, babe, really. And romance is fun, but remember that I'm in love with you. I want to share what matters to you, what you enjoy, too."

Something in Steve released at that statement. He'd been trying so hard to make everything perfect for Tim, he hadn't really considered if he was being himself or putting on a front he thought Tim might like more.

Tim saw it happen, and his smile softened into a tender look. "You want a beer? Have a beer. You want a bloody hunk of steak? Go for it. Tease me about what a geek I am on the Jetpack thing. Just be you, Steve."

Loving Tim even more, Steve did all those things, and they laughed and talked through their meal until the sun had set and the restaurant turned on its blue lights on the patio. They decided not to prolong their evening there and instead hurried back to their hotel. In the elevator, Tim took Steve's hand, and they walked to their door like any couple.

With the door secured behind them, Tim faced Steve, who wore a half-smile and waited expectantly.

"Take your clothes off," Tim said. His voice had that quiet authority he'd displayed when they first met, and Steve felt goosebumps rise on his arms. He obeyed quickly, watching Tim the whole time. That smoldering, attentive look Steve watched him with went straight to his groin, and his eyes narrowed.

Steve stripped. Tim then ordered him to remove his clothing as well, and stood still while he did it. He clicked his tongue when Steve's hands lingered inappropriately, and Steve smiled impertinently and finished his assigned job.

"Into the bedroom."

Tim followed, enjoying the view as Steve walked in front of him. The man's body was glorious. Closing the door behind them, Tim leaned against it.

"Get over here," he said. Steve stepped closer, and Tim put his hand on his shoulder and gave gentle pressure down. Steve's eyebrows rose. He opened his mouth to question, but Tim shook his head. "No. You don't get to talk." He reached up and traced Steve's lips with his forefinger. "No, the only word I want you saying is my name. Now, get down on your knees."

Tim could see the effect his orders had on Steve as his pupils widened and his face flushed. The man didn't blush easily, so Tim knew he had him. Of course, his own cock was bouncing in anticipation, and his breath was coming short, but he was pleased to know they were both enjoying it. Steve dropped to his knees.

"You can edge me as many times as you want, but there will be consequences."

Steve's eyes narrowed and he looked thoughtful before he nodded once.
"So, do it. Mouth only. Suck my cock." Twin shivers ran through both men at Tim's words, but Steve did as he was bidden. Steve demonstrated that his verbal agility had lent his tongue experience that he was able to apply to oral sex. He teased and sucked until Tim was panting and sagging against the door. After the third time he brought Tim to a breath from coming, Tim was done. He pushed Steve back and pointed to the bed.

"Consequences. Lay down, put your hands above your head, spread your legs, and don't move."

Steve's cocky smirk as he settled against the pillows and flexed his arms and chest under Tim's gaze remained in place until Tim crawled up his body and whispered in his ear. "Keep still. Only say my name. I'm going to edge you twice for each time you did it to me."

Steve's grin faltered, and Tim's turned positively predatory. He kissed Steve hard, plunging his tongue into his mouth with confident ownership, then bit his way down Steve's chest and started sucking him off. God, Tim was a fast learner. He knew exactly how to get Steve just to the tipping point, then he'd sit back and stare at him. The first two times, Steve's voice stayed low and growly as he moaned Tim's name. For the third round, Tim lubed a finger and slowly worked it into him while he practiced deep throating. The groaning of Tim's name grew louder, and when he felt Steve tighten up, his abs bunching under his tan skin, Tim sat back, keeping his finger inside him, and the tone of Steve's voice changed. He seemed to make Tim's name into a question, then a curse as Tim curled his finger, then pulled out. Steve was beginning to sweat, and Tim was only at the halfway point. He got off the bed and went to get a drink of water before he came back. He had two glasses in his hand, and he let Steve have a sip of the ice water before he moved back to his place between Steve's legs. Fishing an ice cube out, Tim popped it into his mouth, then went back to work on his lover.

"Tim!" It was the first shout he'd gotten, and he smiled around the thick heat in his mouth. He rolled the ice up and down the shaft of Steve's cock with his tongue, and when it melted down to just a small nugget, he dropped it into his hand and pushed it into Steve. Steve's whole body was shaking at the mix of sensations, and when Tim took a mouthful of warm water and sucked just the head, he knew he'd almost missed the chance to stop Steve from coming. He stopped everything for several minutes, then finally reached for the lube and condom, along with a cock ring he had mail ordered just for this. He put the condom on and slicked himself up, then carefully applied the ring.

"Tim? Tim?" The sound had become needy, almost a whine, and Tim took pity and kissed him.

"God, you're so sexy like this. You're not even tied down, but you're completely under my spell; in my power. You have two more to go, my love. Think you'll make it?"

Steve's face hardened into determination. He gave a short nod and spoke Tim's name in a grim affirmative. Tim laughed. Steve's eyes narrowed, but a reluctant smile tugged at his lips. He nodded more firmly.

"Tim."

Settling back in position, Tim lined up and slid smoothly into Steve.

"Oh...god..." Steve groaned.

"Hey!" Tim's response was immediate and sharp.

"Tim!" Steve corrected. He nodded, panting at how good it felt to have Tim thick and hard inside him. "Tim..."
So Tim started moving, slowly, enjoying a leisurely time of it, occasionally stroking Steve's straining erection, but only edging him once like that. The last time was when Tim got serious, huffing and panting in exertion, beginning to feel wild from the musk of Steve's sweat and pheromones pouring off of him as the gorgeous man's head tossed and his hips jerked to meet Tim's thrusts. He pushed Steve's legs up and changed his angle so he was hitting his prostate in firm jabs.

"Tim! Tim! Tim!" Steve was mindlessly calling out to him, so far gone he couldn't even find any other words to say. When Steve's face screwed up tight, just as it would if he was coming, Tim paused and Steve let out a primal, wordless howl of rage and denial. Shuddering, Tim waited a minute, then two, before he finally released the cock ring and started rolling his hips, knowing neither of them would last long. Steve's face was a rictus of ecstatic agony, and his body was clenching on Tim like a fist as he continued to hit his target.

"Look at me!" Tim ordered. Steve pried his eyes open and looked up at Tim. "I love you, Steve. I love you so much... Steve!" Tim threw his head back, graying out as he shouted his completion. He heard his name being choked out as spasms wracked Steve as well, then they both collapsed into oblivion.

When they talked about it in the morning, Steve admitted Tim's mastery over his own kink. He refused to give it up, but understood that it could and would be turned back on him if he overdid it. That they had both had a staggeringly good time was beside the point. Steve argued that it was exactly the point, and they laughingly agreed to disagree.

When it was time for them to part, they went together to the airport and sat on the concourse between their gates, holding hands until one of them had to board. They wordlessly agreed to keep their goodbye upbeat, and with a slap on Tim's ass, Steve turned to his gate.

Over his shoulder he called out, "Aloha au ia 'oe!", which Tim knew meant I love you in Hawaiian. He grinned and waved a final time and headed for his own plane.

EST 0515, HST 2315

"I'm having a thought, and I want it to be okay if you say no," Tim said as he laid in bed. Steve had woken him with a call to say goodnight less than a week after they'd had their weekend in LA. For Tim is was only a half an hour until his alarm would sound, so he planned to just stay up.

"What's that?"

"Well, if we're really exclusively dating no one else... What if we both get tested and then we stop using condoms? I've never been in a relationship where I didn't use them, but with you... I'd like to. What do you think?"

"I think there's a 24-hour clinic I can hit right now-"

Tim laughed. "I don't think it's that time sensitive, but I'll take that as an affirmative." He grinned up at his ceiling, his whole body tingling with the thought of feeling Steve, with nothing between them.

"It may be a little more time sensitive than you think. My paperwork is all in order, and the Navy wants to do my ceremony in Coronado, where I did my SEAL training, on the 17th. I was hoping you might be able to come."

"I'll do my best. I would hate to miss it."
"You'll get to meet Mary, and I think Joe will be there."

"I would love to meet them both," Tim said. He paused. "I'm not sure what my reaction to Joe will be, though."

"I get that. But it's not like it is with you and Gibbs. He's… As far as I know he's totally straight. The feelings were all one sided, and I haven't thought about him that way in a long time."

"Well you know if I can be there, I will. And I will see about getting tested tomorrow so that maybe, by the 17th… Damn, I can't wait."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim hurried straight to the ceremony from the airport, barely making it before it began. He ended up at the back, where the only empty seats were left, but he saw Steve's expression ease when he spotted him. He looked incredible in his dress blues, and Tim struggled through the whole thing to concentrate on what was being said when all he could think about was getting the newly civilian Steve alone. When the ceremony was over, Steve came immediately to him and hugged him.

"Thought you weren't going to make it," Steve admitted.

"Well, I can't have you staying too sure of yourself," Tim said, smiling. Steve laughed and drew him to a young woman holding a toddler.

"Mary, this is Tim McGee. Tim, my sister Mary and her daughter Joan."

Joan chose that moment to spit out her pacifier and fling her stuffed bear right at Tim's face. He snagged the bear before it connected, and Steve's lightning reflexes caught the pacifier before it hit the deck.

Seeing Tim holding her toy, Joan lunged toward him and Mary cried out at the sudden movement, losing her grip on the squirming child. Tim caught the wriggling body and easily settled her against his chest, returning the bear to her grasping fingers.

"Wow! Good reactions, guys. It's nice to meet you, Tim." Mary said. She watched closely at the way her brother looked at this tall, pale man. She had never seen such joy on her stoic older sibling's face. She grinned.

"It's great to meet you, too, Mary," Tim said. "And it's nice to meet you, too, Jo!" He said to the little girl in his arms. Her face lit up and she squealed.

"Jo! Jo!" She cried.

"It's Joan, or Joni," Mary corrected.

"I don't know, Mare, I think she likes Jo," Steve said. Mary's face scrunch ed up, but the happy cries of her daughter repeating the shortened name made her smile.

"I guess we'll see."

Tim tried to pass Joan back to her mom, but the little one clung to him tenaciously. He shrugged and smiled, bouncing her and talking softly to her, and Steve watched, dazzled.

"Well, I like the name," a smooth masculine voice said from behind Tim. They all turned.

"Joe!" Steve exclaimed. Joan started shrieking the syllable again and again, until Tim plucked the
pacifier from Steve's hand as his lover went to embrace the man who had spoken. Tim focused on getting the child to accept the pacifier, or "binky" as Mary labeled it, trying not to feel jealous at the enthusiastic reaction Steve had to the older man. When Steve stepped back and put his arm around Tim's waist to introduce him, Tim felt better.

"And this is Tim, the man I told you about," Steve said.

The older man stood straight and nodded to Tim. His smile seemed warm and genuine, and Tim relaxed further.

"Tim, I am very pleased to meet you. It's amazing to see Steve committed...and happy about it," Joe said. Tim blushed and glanced at Steve, whose smile just widened.

"Yeah, it is pretty crazy, isn't it?" Danny Williams said, approaching from where he had been talking with one of Steve's former COs. The short man nodded to Tim, who returned the gesture. With his hands full of baby Jo, he didn't try to shake. Glancing around, Tim realized that Five-0 had probably needed to keep the rest of the team at home. He regretted that Steve didn't have the others with him to celebrate, but he was glad his closest friend had been given leave to accompany him.

The extended family moved their reunion to a restaurant in San Diego, and they spent hours talking and laughing and getting to know the newest member of their group. Joan had happily attached herself to Tim, who found he enjoyed playing with her and trying to get her to eat. He didn't see how everyone noticed how good he was with the baby, or how it stunned Steve to see it.

Halfway through their meal, they were joined by a massively muscular, dark skinned man whom Steve introduced as a member of his old SEAL team. Tim immediately recognized his fellow NCIS Agent Sam Hannah, and it clicked into place that he was one of Steve's former lovers. When Steve gave everyone's names, Sam and Tim's eyes met, and the acknowledging inclination of Sam's head set Tim at ease. Tim knew that Sam was happily married with a beautiful family and he relaxed.

When Joan began dozing against Tim's shoulder, Mary tried to take her back to free him, but he shook his head, enjoying the warm bundle and easily working with one hand to finally eat his own lunch.

"You're spoiling her," Steve told him softly, leaning close to speak in his ear. Tim smiled.

"That's the prerogative of an uncle, isn't it?" Tim replied cheekily.

Danny watched the interaction from across the table, and wondered if Steve had any idea of the ramifications. Tim actually liked kids, and he might want a family at some point. His boss and partner looked so happy that he set any concerns aside. He hoped that they would get Tim moved to Hawaii sooner rather than later. There were always kids needing adoptive parents, and it was becoming more common for same-sex couples to be approved. Imagining Steve with kids of his own was almost funny, and Danny definitely wanted to see how it would change his friend.

When the celebration of Steve's exit from Navy life wrapped up, everyone dispersed, with the deeply sleeping Joan finally returned to her mother's arms. Danny and Sam were bonding over embarrassing stories about Steve, and when the Detective saw Sam's car, they started a friendly argument of Camaro versus Challenger.

Tim and Steve left them to it and exchanged heated looks as they silently agreed it was time to get to a hotel room. They barely got in the door before they were tearing each other's clothes off.
"You are so fucking hot in your uniform," Tim murmured, even as he divested his lover of the crisp material.

"I'll wear it for you anytime," Steve offered.

"Right now, I want you naked," Tim insisted.

"Oh hell, yeah," Steve agreed, and soon they both were, and they entwined on the bed, kissing and rubbing against each other.

"Oh god, I can't believe we're gonna go bareback," Tim murmured. Steve's whole body shuddered. "Which way?"

"Both, man. Let me ring you and have you first, then you can do me," Steve growled. Tim groaned, but nodded.

Steve was careful not to pinch Tim's skin or catch any of his hair in the cock ring as he put it on. Then, with an evil smile, he sucked him hard for a minute until Tim was thrashing with the pleasure he knew wouldn't culminate for some time. When he released Tim with a wet pop, he looked up the white expanse of his lover's chest to see Tim's eyes locked on his.

"No fingers. I want to feel every instant of you sliding into me," Tim ordered, his voice thick and rough. Steve nodded, unable to speak. He lubed his erection and lined up, Tim pulling his legs up and out so Steve had perfect access.

"I love you," Steve choked out, and then he pushed into Tim and his eyes rolled back in his head at the feeling of Tim's hot canal welcoming him with nothing between them but the slick lubricant.

"Look at me," Tim ordered, and Steve's eyes snapped open as he obeyed instantly. Tim's lush lips were parted, but he bit down on his lower one at the raw emotion he saw in Steve's gaze.

"Don't!" Steve cried, his mouth twitching, and Tim immediately released his teeth from his lip. "God, please, don't hold back. I'm giving you everything, Tim. I need everything from you, too."

And Tim finally understood why Steve hated to see him bite his lip that way; he saw it as a withholding, a barrier between them.

"I love you, Steve. You have all of me, everything I have, everything I am, it's yours, my love. Yours..." Tim gasped. His hips jerked, his body unconsciously trying to reinforce his words. Steve cried out and started moving, the sensation with no condom so much more intimate that he wasn't sure if he could last more than another few moments. He buried himself in Tim over and over, and Tim clutched at his arms in agonized ecstasy, needing to come, but unable to. "Please, Steve! Oh, my love, please... God! Come for me, I need you! Need... Need..."

Steve answered the sweet begging, his vision whiting out as he felt himself pumping his seed deep into Tim. And Tim nearly screamed at the hot, throbbing flood inside him, the new sensation so much more intimate than he had expected. Sobs shook him, his emotions swamping him so all he could do was cling to Steve's body, limp on top of him.

Stirring, Steve soothed him with gentle kisses and words of adoration and reassurance. As soon as he had calmed, Tim became acutely aware of his own desire to return the experience to Steve, and he rolled them on the huge bed, pulling apart from Steve and moving so he knelt between Steve's thighs. He stared breathlessly down at Steve, who gave him a broad smile of encouragement, then Tim removed the cock ring and lubed himself up. Steve readily spread his legs and roared as Tim filled him.
Tim froze, trying not to come with that very first stroke. Feeling nothing separating them was orders of magnitude more powerful than it had been with a condom. "Oh, Steve," Tim breathed, staring down at him in shock and amazement. Steve laughed joyfully at Tim's reaction, and Tim cried out at the contractions that produced. His hips stuttered and he humped madly for a few seconds and then felt his orgasm rush through him.

Steve, too, was transported by the feeling of Tim emptying himself into his body. He imagined he could feel every drop as Tim's semen splashed into him, and he moaned and wrapped arms and legs around Tim, never wanting to let him go.

When Tim's softening member slipped out of him, Steve finally relaxed his grip and they rolled so they laid side by side.

"That would be embarrassing if you hadn't come nearly as quick as I did," Tim murmured. Steve laughed.

"Well, shit, that was the most incredible thing I've ever felt; of course I came too fast!"

Tim chuckled and kissed him tenderly. "We have plenty of time to work on our stamina," he said.

"A lifetime," Steve said, then paused, realizing what he'd just said. He watched Tim's reaction closely, but Tim just grinned and nodded his agreement. His heart was soaring from Steve's casual pronouncement, and he snuggled close to the man and relaxed.

They spent the next eighteen hours dozing, waking, making love, and dozing again until Tim had to leave or risk missing his flight. They said goodbye at the gate just before the airline closed the door, kissing like teenagers, utterly oblivious to any reaction around them. Tim slept the entire flight back to Washington, and returned to work the next day in the most jubilant mood any of his team had ever seen him. Even the stiff avoidance from Gibbs couldn't tarnish Tim's happiness. He was already trying to find another weekend to spend with Steve.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~
Chapter 6

Chapter Six
1224 HST, 1824 EST

S-Need to talk to you. Call when you can.

T-5 min

Steve paced his living room to pass the time until his phone rang. He hit it immediately.

"Hey Tim," Steve said, relieved. "Thanks for getting back to me so quick."

"Yeah, of course. What's up?" Tim asked. As soon as he had gotten the text, he had offered to go get coffee for the team as they would probably be working late into the night.

"Mary was in a car accident."

"Ohmygod! Are she and Jo okay?"

"Jo is fine. Mary... She's got a dislocated shoulder, broken ribs, collapsed lung... She'll recover, but-"

"Oh, honey! I'm so sorry. Are you okay?" Tim crossed over into the park and sat down on a bench. He'd get the coffee after his phone call.

"Yeah, babe, yeah. I just... I'm gonna hafta watch Jo, and Mary's gonna need so much help she's gonna come stay with me, but..."

Tim's eyes widened. He tried to imagine superSEAL Steve taking care of toddler Joan as well as the injured Mary. It wasn't a pretty picture. "That's a lot to take on."

"Yeah, I know. It's, it's kind of... Intimidating."

"You don't have to say yes," Tim said quietly.

"They're my family, Tim! What the hell?" Steve stomach dropped to his feet. He wanted support, understanding, not criticism. "I don't even know why I called."

"Wait! Wait, Steve. Babe, I'm not saying you should abandon your family. I'd never do that. Just... What about looking at care facilities? Or a live in nurse's assistant or something?"

"That's not what Mary wants."

"Joan will be there too. She's a handful all on her own, Steve."

Steve stopped cold. He hadn't really thought that part through. He glanced around the house, suddenly seeing all of the threats to a little person. "Shit. Yeah, I got some work to do around here."

"Is there anything I can do? I can set up grocery deliveries with all the baby stuff, or something..."

Steve found himself blinking quickly and clearing his throat. "No, babe. I just... I just needed to
talk to you."

Tim's breath caught at the emotion in Steve's voice. "Oh, honey, I love you. Please, let me know if there's anything I can do."

"I love you, too. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"Of course. Call me anytime."

Two days later, Steve called with further complications.

"Aunt Deb is coming to help."

"Aunt Deb who's terminally ill? Who just lost her husband?"

"Yeah. She wants to be here for Mary when she gets out of the hospital."

"Maybe that's good. I know I wouldn't want to have to help my little sister shower and stuff. You're still trying to work, so having Deb help..."

"She's getting weaker, physically. I'm... Shit, I don't know if I can take care of all three of them."

"You're not alone, babe."

Steve groaned. "I sure as hell feel alone."

"But you're not. Ask your team for help. I mean it. At the very least, ask Lou if his daughter might babysit for a couple of hours on weekends. And you know Chin is discreet and level headed, so if you need anything, I think you should see if he's okay being your go-to," Tim suggested. "And when everything is driving you crazy, either call me, or go ahead and rant to Danny. He's your best friend and he's used to it." Steve reluctantly agreed and they disconnected.

Tim worried, not reassured at all when Steve let him know Mary was home and Deb had arrived to "help". The older woman seemed unwilling to admit her limitations, and Steve was already sounding frazzled. Tim ached, wanting to help, and his temper grew short at work from his frustration.

It was several days later when Steve called again. The case the NCIS team had been working on was wrapping up, and Tim's attention had returned to his concern for how his lover was coping with a house full of females.

He got his answer when Steve's voice sounded nearly panicked. Knowing that SEALs generally had the panic trained out of them, and knowing his lover as he did, Tim realized then that Steve needed him, but would never ask.

Tim let Steve vent his list of problems, from Joan not liking the baby food he'd bought to Deb having pain but refusing to take meds that knocked her out, as well as all kinds of complaints Mary was voicing about how Steve was running things. Tim addressed the ones he could give suggestions on, then tried to remind Steve that he wasn't alone.

"I know it's not your favorite thing, but you're gonna have to talk openly with Mary and Deb, and ask your team for help. That's just how it has to be, hon."

Steve groaned about that, but his breathing evened out as he calmed, and they only stayed on the phone for a few more minutes. Tim hung up and sat, staring at the wall for a while. Then he got up
and started packing.

The next morning, he went in early to work, bringing a cup of coffee for Gibbs just in case he didn't have one when he arrived. He did, of course, but Gibbs grunted in thanks when he saw the fresh cup on his desk as he rounded the partition.

"Boss, can I talk to you for a minute?" McGee asked after he saw Gibbs take several sips.

"What's up?"

"I need to take some time off," he said quickly.

Gibbs froze, and Tim swallowed hard, seeing a flash of pain across his boss' face. In was gone in an instant, the bland, interested look replacing it so fast Tim would have wondered if it had ever been there if he hadn't been watching for it. He took a breath to settle the twist his stomach gave, knowing he was hurting Gibbs.

"Okay."

McGee hesitated. "That's it?"

Anger flashed in Gibbs' eyes. "What do you want from me?" He snapped.

"N-nothing, Boss, I just expected..."

"How long?"

"Three weeks, maybe four. It's Steve's sister, she was in a car accident, and she and her baby are staying with him, along with his terminally ill aunt, and-"

"Fine. Do the paperwork. You leaving today?"

"There's a red eye tonight."

Gibbs nodded curtly, and Tim settled back in his chair. That was it. He glanced at his watch and mumbled about going to HR, then hustled out of the squad room.

In the elevator, he hit the emergency stop and let his nerves overwhelm him. He closed his eyes and leaned against the wall. Hurting Gibbs was the last thing he wanted to do. He was such a good man, and he'd already suffered so much loss in his life. It wasn't fair that he was alone, but there wasn't anything Tim could do to make that not be how it was. For months since he'd returned from his medical leave after his abduction, he'd tried by turns to be friendly and when that had been met with a cold cynicism, to just vanish into the background. But Gibbs saw everything, of course, including him. And acknowledging the feelings they had both denied so long had left them both exposed like a raw nerve. Maybe going away for a few weeks would be the best thing he could do. Without his constant presence, maybe Gibbs could regain his equilibrium so that when he came back they'd be able to find a comfortable way to coexist. If not... Tim scrubbed his hand over his face, not wanting to continue thinking down that avenue. He straightened his shoulders and hit the switch, continuing down to the ground floor and heading to Human Resources to get the paperwork for his leave of absence.

After filing all the forms, Tim went to the lab to tell Abby in person. He needed to be certain either Bishop or Tony was in the squad room before he returned, and Abby would never forgive him if he left without a goodbye anyway.
She was just getting settled when he came in and she turned in surprise at his arrival.

"Hey, McGee, what are you doing down here so early?" She asked. He silently offered her the Caf!Pow he had retrieved for her. She flashed a quick smile and drank deeply. He waited until she had taken several gulps before he answered.

"I've got to go to Hawaii again. Steve needs me. I'll be gone a few weeks, so I wanted to make sure that you would keep an eye on the team for me while I'm gone."

"Oh my god! Is Steve okay?"

"He's feeling really overwhelmed. He's got three females temporarily living in his house; his sister was in a car accident and she's staying with him. She's got a baby girl, and their aunt, who's got terminal cancer is there trying to help. He's working and dealing with all of that. He needs me."

"Aww, Timmy!" She hugged him. "Of course you need to go. And I'll make sure the team is safe while you're gone. When are you leaving?"

"Tonight."

"You better come say bye before you leave the Yard."

"I will. Thanks Abs."

When he ascended back to the squad room, he gave a silent sigh of relief when he saw both Tony and Ellie were at their desks. He quickly told them what was happening, and then spent a quiet rest of the morning making sure every scrap of paperwork was totally complete. Unless they caught a case, he intended to spend part of the afternoon making sure Ellie would be able to manage the computer aspects of their cases, so he invited Tony and Ducky to lunch.

The three men went to a café and, once they had settled in, Tim told Ducky he was leaving. He waited until they had ordered before he brought up his real reason for the lunch date.

"I'm a little concerned about Gibbs. I'm hoping you guys will keep an eye on him while I'm gone."

Tony looked sharply at him, and his eyes darted between Ducky and Tim. The knowing look that Ducky was giving as he nodded told Tony what he needed to know. It was the first time that Tim had broached the topic of Gibbs' personal life since he'd gotten back, and Tony latched on to it. He hadn't dared ask for details about what Gibbs had meant when he said he and Tim cared about each other, but he understood enough from the tension that had strung like an overtaxed guitar string between them since Tim came back to work. He just wanted them both to be happy.

"If you're really concerned about Gibbs, why not stay and see what happens between you two? Why go to Hawaii?"

"I'm in love with Steve, Tony. He needs me, and I'm going to be there for him. Gibbs...he just seems to need time to adjust to that."

Dr. Mallard cleared his throat. "Timothy, I believe that Anthony is asking you to consider Jethro's feelings."

"I've already discussed this with Gibbs. We've agreed that there can't be anything personal between us, and he knows how important Steve is to me. He's just... He's so sad, so alone, and it breaks my heart to see it. I worry that seeing me every day just makes it harder for him. Maybe this time with me gone will let him find his footing again. I just want to know you guys will be there for him."
"But you're coming back, right? This isn't... This isn't goodbye..." Tony asked, his voice sounding nearly panicked.

"It's not...goodbye. At least, I don't think so. Gibbs...Gibbs predicted that it was only a matter of time, but I love you guys; I love my team and my life here.... I do miss Steve. If it turns out that he's the person I'm going to spend the rest of my life with, well, I just don't know how that can work long term with him there and me here."

"Timothy, Anthony and I will do what we can for Jethro, but there will come a time when you are going to have to decide where your heart truly lies, and no one can make that decision for you."

Tim's breath hitched, and he blinked rapidly to try to dry his eyes. He nodded, and cleared his throat, and was relieved when their food arrived. The looks that Tony was giving him were hard to witness. Tony didn't like change, and the possibility of losing Tim to the lure of love and the tropical beauty of Hawaii cut him deep. Ducky excused himself when they were done eating, understanding that the younger men needed to talk.

Tim cleared his throat. "Tony, I..."

"You and Gibbs. Was that always-"

"Yes. From the very first day."

"How did I miss it?"

"You wanted a family, Tony. A dad and a little brother. That's all you could see. And we never...we never did anything about it."

"But you would have? If..."

"Doesn't matter anymore. I care about him, but I love Steve and this is something that could be good for both of them. And me." Tim clung to the hope that a break from seeing each other every day would get he and Gibbs onto better footing.

"Yeah! Getting laid helps every man."

"Not what I meant, Tony. I mean... It's hard to be around Gibbs. I tried being friendly, but he just got bitter. I tried to fade into the background, but he's still aware of me. Rubbing salt in his wounds. It sucks. This team is all I ever wanted."

"Until McGarrett."

"Until I fell head over heels in love. Yes."

"You're not coming back, are you?"

"I'm planning on coming back, Tony. My life is here."

"But your heart isn't."

"No. Not anymore."

"You're gonna have to choose eventually, Probie."

"I know."
At the end of the day, McGee gathered his things. He hugged Bishop, then Tony. Turning to Gibbs, he extended his hand to shake, but found himself enveloped in strong arms instead. He choked and tears filled his eyes as he felt Gibbs tremble.

"Take care of yourself," the older man said gruffly, releasing him abruptly and returning to his desk.

"You, too, Gibbs," he replied softly. He couldn't help but look back at the lone figure lit only by his desk lamp as he waited for the elevator. He bit his lip hard to keep from saying anything else. Words wouldn't help.

He stopped in Autopsy and made his farewells to Jimmy and Ducky before going to see Abby as he'd promised. He'd gotten his equilibrium back a little when he finally walked into the wall of sound within the door to the lab. He found Abby talking to her electro spectrograph and waited for her to finish her lecture before he caught her attention.

She flew into his arms and hugged him as only she could. His doubts and fears rose up and he held on tight until they slowly subsided.

"You better keep slathering on that sunscreen, Timmy. I don't want you coming back looking like a lobster."

"I promise," he smiled sadly. There really wasn't anything more he could say. "Aloha, Abs."

"Give Steve a hug for me."

"I will."

Abby watched him leave and crossed her fingers that he would be back soon.

Tim struggled to sleep on the flight, eventually getting a few hours before they landed. He picked up his rental car and drove straight to Steve's house. Only when he pulled up did he begin to feel nervous. He was surprising his lover, who had not asked for his help, and whose house was already quite full. Well, he shrugged to himself, he could always get a hotel and still be helpful during the days.

When Steve answered the door, the smile that immediately flashed across his face laid Tim's nerves to rest.

"Tim!" Steve threw his arms around Tim, already relaxing at the comfort of the man's presence. "What are you doing here?"

"Look, I'm here to help you," Tim said, pulling a serious face, deliberately quoting himself from their very first meeting, then smiling. Steve laughed and hugged him again.

"Oh, babe, it is so good to see you. Come in, come meet my Aunt Deb," Steve said. Tim followed him inside and toward the back of the house, where she was chopping something in the kitchen. "Deb? I want you to meet someone very special to me. This is Timothy McGee, the man I love."

The introduction floored Tim. They had never discussed how they should refer to each other, so he had expected to be presented as Steve's friend. To have him tell her in those blunt words what they
meant to each other was shocking. He stared at Steve until the old woman laughed.

"Steve, don't tell me that's the first time you've told him that," she admonished. Tim's politeness overcame his stunned reaction and he turned to her and smiled.

"No, he said it first when I was having a panic attack on top of a Ferris wheel," Tim said. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Ms. McGarrett."

"Not always the suavest one, my Stevie," she replied. "Give me a hug." She put action to words and Tim felt welcomed into the McGarrett family.

"Mary and Jo aren't up yet and I've got to go to work soon," Steve said.

"Don't let me slow you down, I'm here to make things better, not worse. Just one question, babe: Do you want me to get a hotel or stay here? Let me know later on, okay?" Tim said.

"Here, for sure, man!"

"Think about it. We can try it with me here and switch if we need to. I don't want to add any stress."

When Jo and Mary woke, they were happy to see Tim, and he found he'd acquired a sidekick as the toddler followed him around.

Mary was cranky and obviously in pain but refused to take more than acetaminophen until Tim finally sat down to talk with her while Jo and Deb were both having a nap after lunch.

"I understand why you haven't wanted to take this stuff, but I'm here now. You need rest to heal, and I promise to take care of both Deb and Jo today. If I struggle at all, we'll renegotiate tomorrow, okay?" Tim presented her a glass of water and two of her prescription pills for pain.

"You'll call Steve if you get into trouble with them?" She demanded.

"I swear."

So she grudgingly agreed, and by the time he'd finished cleaning up the kitchen, she was sound asleep. Tim spent the rest of the quiet time double checking the baby proofing that Steve had done. After Deb got up, he'd take Jo and get more convenient cabinet latches. Zip ties were effective, but cutting them and putting new ones on each time would get old. Ditto with the duct tape on the toilets, not to mention the sticky residue. And heavy furniture did help block doors and outlets, but made moving around inconvenient.

Deb agreed to stay in case Mary needed anything, and Tim made a long list, prioritizing it and organizing it in an efficient travel loop so that the essentials would be purchased first, but if Jo behaved, he'd be able to get everything done in one trip. The strategy impressed Deb, and she saluted as he left in Mary's car, the only vehicle they had with a baby seat. That was another thing he planned to rectify.

Tim was glad his techniques to distract the toddler were still novel to her as he hurried through the stores. Two more car seats, one for his rental and one for Steve's truck, four portable baby gates, and bumpers, cabinet, drawer, and toilet latches, sliding outlets, an inflatable bathtub, knob covers, anti-skid mats... Tim knew he was exactly the customer the baby safety industry drooled over; with too little experience to be discerning and too much concern to refuse any gadget, he probably left the store with a third too many more items than he needed, but he was perfectly happy with that assessment.
They made it halfway through the grocery list before Jo started to fuss, so Tim cut that trip short and made it back to the house without a meltdown, figuring he'd either return the next day or have the rest delivered. Deb happily watched over the baby while Tim spent two hours installing all the safety gear throughout the main floor of the house. By the time Steve came home that evening, the family shared a meal of stir-fry Tim and Deb had prepared, and they spent a little while relaxing together before Mary took her pills and went to sleep, Deb went to sit outside and enjoy the sunset, and the couple gave their niece a bath before getting her to bed. Back in the kitchen cleaning up together, Steve struggled to express his gratitude.

"All this... Tim, babe... I can't even..."

Tim leaned over to him and kissed him lightly. "You're welcome, love."

Steve grabbed a beer and Tim the baby monitor, and they went out to join Deb, who sat comfortably in one of the two chairs in the sand. Tim sat between Steve's feet and hooked an arm over his tan thigh while Steve rested his hand on Tim's neck, rubbing idly.

"Tim, I have never seen Steve like this," Deb said, watching them together.

"What? Sitting on the beach?"

She rolled her eyes. "Relaxed and happy."

Tim craned his neck and looked at Steve's face. He did look relaxed and happy, and Tim knew that it was due to him and it made him feel proud and really pleased.

"It is good to see, isn't it?" Tim said, still looking at Steve. The other man smiled crookedly and leaned down for a brief kiss.

They sat quietly for a while until the ever-active Steve grew restless.

"You could go for a swim," Tim murmured. Steve grunted, and Deb's smile flashed in the twilight at the exchange.

"I think I'll go in and read before I go to bed. Goodnight, boys," she said.

They returned the sentiment.

"You gonna come with me?" Steve asked.

"I doubt I could keep up with you, but I'll get in the water for a while."

They went inside and changed into their swim trunks and headed back out, leaving towels on the chairs. Tim followed Steve's lead getting out past the low breakers, then he slowed and treaded water. Steve began stroking powerfully a hundred yards or so one direction, then coming back. Three rounds of that seemed to bleed off his excess energy and he returned to where Tim floated, watching the stars come out.

Grasping Tim's hand where it bobbed on the swells, Steve tugged him and he dropped his legs down and raised his head, turning his smiling face to Steve.

"I've never been night swimming before like this," Tim said. "It feels like the whole ocean is our private pool."

"It is pretty private. More so than the house right now. We could do practically anything," Steve
said. He pulled Tim closer and kissed him. "Or we could if we had the right supplies. We'll have to get some silicone lube sometime."

Tim hoped the darkness hid his blush. "Actually..."

"Oh man, really? You want me to go grab it?"

"No, I have it here. I used the key pocket of my trunks. It's just a small tube, but..."

Steve laughed. "Do you know how much I love your boyscout-ness?"

Tim drew Steve tighter against him and slid his hands back to cup his ass. He spread him while grinding his erection against Steve's belly. "Enough to let me play with the buoyancy that's almost like zero gravity?"

"Sci-fi geek fantasy? Space sex?" Steve asked, snickering. Tim shrugged, obviously a little embarrassed. Steve kissed him hard, plundering his mouth until Tim was breathless. "Anything you want, babe."

Tim shuddered and returned to kissing him.

They bobbed gently together, both kicking their legs lightly to remain afloat. As their kissing and their wandering hands brought them to higher arousal, each found his trunks beginning to be restrictive. Steve stripped his off first and held them in his hand as he continued to try to keep close to Tim. With only one arm, it became increasingly difficult to stay together enough to keep kissing, and Tim grumbled.

"Quit teasing," he said. "Come here, damnit."

"Tryin'," Steve grunted. "Hey, get outta your shorts and then I'll have a handle to grab onto."

Tim laughed. "I've heard of being led around by your dick before, but that actually sounds painful."

"So how we gonna do this, huh, genius?"

"Look, just put your arm through a leg hole and double it over so your trunks are secure."

Steve rolled his eyes but followed Tim's command. Tim pulled his own swim suit off, but retrieved the lubricant before he did the same thing. He didn't want either of them to have to streak back to the house. The tide was out, and the beach quite wide and pretty well lit. Holding the tube, Tim drew closer to Steve again.

"Can I take you? It might be hard to do a lot of prep..." Tim asked.

"Yeah, babe. I said anything. Just lube up and you can take me any way you like."

Tim's gut clenched at the response. As much as he enjoyed having Steve penetrate and possess him, he loved topping the powerful former SEAL more. He slicked himself and reached behind Steve and slid two fingers into him, then kissed him once more before he turned him around so he faced Steve's back. They sank deeper into the water as they reduced the strokes to stay afloat, but once Tim slid into Steve, they were able to work together to keep their faces exposed. Tim wrapped his arms around Steve and used the embrace to pull the man further onto his cock, then relaxed as they drifted apart only to tighten his arms again to push deep. Steve moaned, and they had to both split their attention to keep kicking their legs. When either of them lost focus and
stopped moving, they dropped into the sea and kicked again to surface. The pace was maddeningly slow, and Steve found himself giving a low cry of Tim's name every time he felt him plunge into him. It was almost an intolerable level of teasing. His voice became pleading.

Pausing, holding tight against Steve's back, Tim relished the sound of Steve panting and the way his muscles moved around Tim's cock as the other man kicked.

"You know how you like to have me relax and just ride the waves when you edge me? Feel the ocean, the swells as they rock us. Feel me, and let go, baby. Trust me. Trust that I will take care of you," Tim said softly. He felt Steve's shudder at the words, but also felt him do as he was told. Tension released and his head dropped back.

They found a rhythm, rocking with the surge of the ocean, and when Tim felt secure with their movements, he slid his left hand down and started stroking Steve's steely erection in time.

"Oh, fuck! Tim! God, baby... Ngh!"

Steve's vocalizations melted Tim. He felt hot, yet cool as the water moved around and between them, and he was certain he had never felt more passionately in love with anyone as he did right then.

"Oh Steve, mmm, yes... Oh god, yes! Steve," Tim moaned, his lips right against Steve's ear.

It felt like Tim was inside his entire body, controlling him and speaking directly into his mind, and Steve felt a disturbing loss of self. He started shaking, the sensation of being completely possessed overwhelming him and frightening him more that anything else could.

"Shh, I've got you, Steve, I'm here..." Tim tried to soothe him out of it, but instead found his lover tensing further, coiling like he was about to fight.

Dropping his soft bedroom voice, and stilling his gentle thrusting and stroking, Tim spoke. "Steve," he said clearly, shifting to get so he could see Steve's face. "Hey. Look at me," he ordered. Steve's head turned and their eyes met. "You wanna stop? Or just speed it up?"

Steve nodded at the second part. "C'mon, Tim. Make me come," he said, as if daring Tim. It was sexy as hell, but part of Tim wondered if Steve would ever truly let himself relax and totally be with him in a profound moment of intimacy.

"You got it," Tim agreed. He smiled and shifted his hold. He started ramming into Steve, water squirting between their bodies, splashing him in the face until he found a way to keep his chest tighter against Steve's shoulderblades. He lowered his head and bit Steve hard on the neck, low enough that his shirts should cover. Steve bucked and cried out. Tim started roughly stroking him again as he rapidly thrust into him, and Steve's writhing body and inarticulate groans sent him straight toward his own completion, even as Steve's cries grew sharper and his body tightened and then spasmed as he came. The twitching inside Steve sent Tim soaring over the edge as well, and they submerged as both of them ceased treading water, quivering in their orgasms.

They slid apart and surfaced again, Steve turning so they could kiss and embrace.

"You okay?" Tim asked. He didn't want to ruin the moment, but he couldn't contain his concern and wistfulness at Steve's unwillingness to let go totally.

"Yeah, sure! I'm getting saturated, though. You ready to go in?"

"Steve..."
"I love you, man. C'mon, let's go inside."

They donned their trunks and swam back to the beach and headed inside. They showered together, quickly rinsing the salt off, then sat companionably while Steve had another beer and Tim drank a glass of wine. They talked in low voices with care for their housemates, but really just enjoyed their quiet time together before they went to bed.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim adored Deb. They laughed and talked and worked great together taking care of their charges. Tim was up front with her about it when he perceived she was pushing herself too hard, and while her responses were acerbic, they grew less so when she noticed how he really only said something when she was truly going beyond what she should.

Mary reminded Tim of Sarah but with less sarcastic wit. She appreciated how wonderful he was with Jo and it helped her relax and take the time she needed to heal. Tim had fallen completely in love with the little girl. He took her to story time at the library, helped her build (and destroy) sand castles, got a backpack he could carry her in and took her on long hikes, and just spent all the time he could with her. Steve joined them on a few outings, which was great when they were active and not so great when they were passive. Tim ended up evicting his lover from the group reading of Where the Wild Things Are when the man twitched and wriggled in his seat worse than the crankiest child there. Jo giggled and giggled when it happened, never having seen an adult given a time-out before.

That night, Steve had grown tired of being needled by the two year old and was grumbling like a teenager as he and Tim got ready for bed. Tim let it go for a while, then finally decided he needed to put his foot down and the way he could do that that would completely distract Steve was sexually. He excused himself and went to get some supplies. When he returned to the bedroom, Steve was in bed, in his boxers, and opened his mouth to continue ranting as Tim came back in and set a glass of ice water on his nightstand. Steve stopped short at the expression on Tim's face. It was serious, to the point of being stern, and Steve's eyebrows rose.

"Come here," Tim said, his voice low and commanding. Steve was on his feet before he thought about it. Tim snapped his fingers and pointed at the floor before him. "Kneel."

This time Steve paused. Tim waited, not repeating the command. Steve had discovered how creative Tim was with sex games and eventually decided to play along. He knelt.

"With the ladies in the house, we have to be quiet, and you, my dear Neanderthal, roar like a lion when you come. I'm going to gag you. You know I won't tie you up, but you will do as I say."

Steve licked his lips and looked at the piece of cloth in Tim's hand. A handkerchief, maybe. It was so fucking hot when Tim got all dominating. Steve nodded.

"Strip me."

Steve unzipped Tim's shorts and slid them down, drawing his briefs down atop them, then carefully slipping the clothes off each foot as Tim shifted and raised them in turn. Then he rested back on his heels and waited.

And waited.

Tim finally rubbed his hand through Steve's hair. "Good. You can be patient. Now, I want you to suck my cock. I will control the pace." Steve nodded and leaned toward him, parting his lips and
wrapping them around Tim's erection, sucking lightly and drawing it to full hardness. He felt fabric at the back of his neck and realized how Tim would control the blow job.

Tim tightened his grip on the handkerchief and pulled with both hands, forcing Steve to take him deep. He sighed at the sensation as Steve swiped his tongue side to side, then slowly released the tension and let Steve pull back. He sucked the head and teased Tim, who made him draw him deep again, going further, until he hit the back of Steve's throat and he gagged slightly. The way his throat gripped him harder as he struggled with the reflex felt incredible, and Tim repeated it several times until he was gasping.

"Oh fuck, Steve," he whispered. "I wanna just fuck your mouth until I come. Such an amazing cocksucker... Mmm, yeah. I'm gonna use your mouth, babe. Can you take it?"

Steve nodded furiously, his tongue swirling and probing, saliva leaking around the thick meat between his lips. God, he loved it when Tim took over like this! He'd do anything when Tim used that tone of voice.

So Tim tugged the cloth and started thrusting in time with the motion, relishing the wet heat and Steve's devilishly pleasurable tongue. He grunted softly, struggling not to make any sounds himself. He stared down at Steve's face, enraptured by the total relaxation he saw there. Steve needed orders. He could command, no problem, he'd trained for it and there was no question that he was a charismatic and consummately capable leader, but part of him just wanted the comfort of taking orders and following them to the best of his abilities. And what abilities. As Steve let himself submit, his gag reflex lessened, then vanished altogether as he angled his body so Tim was sliding into his throat as easily as he did his mouth.

Tim rammed madly into that willing orifice and came with a strangled grunt, holding position and shooting straight into Steve, his legs trembling with the power of his climax.

When Tim relented, he withdrew from Steve's mouth and dropped to his own knees, wrapping his lover in his arms, oblivious to the copious amount of saliva on Steve's chin and chest. Steve nuzzled into Tim's neck, pleased with himself and content to be held. When Tim caught his breath, he rose and drew Steve up with him.

"I guess that's one way to keep you quiet," Tim murmured. "But now it's time for the gag." He kissed Steve for a long moment, then tied the handkerchief securely in place. Then he moved his lips to Steve's ear and made his voice into a growl. "Now lay down. I'm gonna ride your cock. I want to feel you shoot your hot come up inside me, baby." Steve's whole body twitched at the blunt description. Tim still seemed pure and innocent after everything and when he talked dirty it felt positively sinful. Steve hurried to comply. Tim smirked at the shine of precome leaking from the head of Steve's cock, trailing down halfway to his balls. He loved getting Steve this riled up.

Grabbing the lube, Tim knelt between Steve's eagerly spread thighs. He got the slick substance on his hand and took a tight hold of Steve's erection, pumping him slowly, making Steve arch on the bed. Tim added an extra dollop to the head, then climbed on top of his fit lover and positioned himself. He used the extra lube to tease his entrance, watching Steve's breath come short at the feeling and anticipation, then he sank down, filling himself, his back bowing, throwing his head back with a gasp. He paused to wait out the intensely pleasurable ache, his eyes shut tight, face pointed toward the ceiling.

Steve stared up at Tim, raptly taking in the smooth lines of his pale skin, wanting to sit up and bury his face in the elegant neck that strung so delectably exposed, biting and sucking and marking it. He wanted to leave purple hickeys all over Tim, wanted everyone who saw them to know he was taken. God, he was beautiful!
Tim adjusted to the sudden stretch and opened his eyes. He looked down at Steve's stormy eyes and grinned wickedly. Interlacing their fingers, he pressed Steve's strong hands back into the pillow on either side of his head and began a slow rocking of his hips, wanting to fuck Steve into madness. He edged him twice, beginning to really understand the pleasure in controlling his lover so completely. His own cock had grown hard again, and he drilled himself right against his prostate until his thighs started to burn.

Steve writhed, trying to increase the pace, to be allowed to come. He gripped the cloth between his teeth so hard he expected he might be sawing through the fabric, but he was glad it kept him from begging.

Releasing Steve's right hand, Tim stilled until he had Steve's attention. "You're gonna jack me off so we come together, understand?" He said, his command voice sounding breathless. Steve shuddered and nodded, and Tim started a faster pace, pushing them both toward completion as Steve used his experience in edging Tim to see when he was close, and focusing to hold himself back until then. The bloom of red spread down from Tim's face onto his neck and then nearly to his nipples as he raised and lowered himself desperately. Steve let go, feeling every quiver of Tim's tight ass on his cock, stroking quickly on Tim's hard-on, and they both ascended to their shuddering spasms of orgasm together.

The hot pulses of Steve coming inside him wrung a low cry from Tim against his best effort as he felt his own explosive climax throbbing into Steve's strong hand.

The greedy clenching of Tim's canal as he came milked Steve until he could barely stay conscious. He gasped and panted around the handkerchief in his mouth as his body twitched in responsive aftershocks at the ripples inside Tim.

Tim finally slid off Steve and collapsed beside him, vaguely remembering to untie the gag. Steve used the soaked cloth to clean them up, then got a sheet pulled over them and hit the light. They were both asleep in seconds.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

The time passed all too quickly. Mary improved and Deb finally decided to return home. The sendoff for the woman was emotional, everyone knowing it could be their last goodbye, but Deb kept the mood as light as possible.

A few days later, Tim and Steve helped Mary move back to her apartment. They rearranged it to get it as accessible as it could be for her still weak and painful shoulder. Tim planned to stay a few more days, continuing to help take care of Jo and planning to get a bunch of meals cooked and stored in Mary's freezer so she wouldn't have to worry about dinners for another couple of weeks. He put some duplicates in Steve's freezer as well, with notes of love sandwiched between them. His heart ached painfully when he let himself dwell on the parting that fast approached. He wore the same two t-shirts for several days, intending to do as Steve had done and leave them in the bed to comfort the other man.

Steve's case load was lighter during those final days and he was grateful. He spent as much time as he could with Tim, and they made love every night, and a few times during the day. They had dinner with various members of the team, and Tim's bond with Chin grew into an easy, trusting friendship. Danny's sarcastic wit reminded him too much of the early sniping from Tony when he'd joined Gibbs' team to let him really relax with the man, but he could tell how deep the bond between Steve and him was and he was glad he'd be leaving his lover with such staunch support.

Packing his things was difficult. Tim had enjoyed the month of living with Steve a great deal. He
heard the front door open and sighed, knowing this was his chance to say goodbye to Jo and Mary.

"Un' Tim! Un' Tim!" Jo squealed, her chubby legs carrying her with too much momentum to stop on her own as she ran into the bedroom. Tim scooped her up to save his shins from the collision.

"Hi sweetie, are you-"

"No!" She shrieked. Her eyes were locked on his suitcase, open and partially full, on the bed. She had traveled enough already to understand what it meant. "No go! No go!"

"Oh, Jo Jo, I'm-"

"No go! Un' Tim! No! No!"

"I don't think she wants you to leave, babe," Steve said from the doorway.

"Ya think?" Tim raised his eyebrow and his mouth twisted at Steve's less than helpful observation. But there was a deep, wounded look in Steve's eyes that stopped Tim's sharp response. The little girl's protests devolved into tears, and she buried her face in his chest, crying. "Steve..."

They stared at each other, and the brightness of Steve's eyes finally spilled over and a tear tracked down his cheek. Tim, less emotionally repressed, felt his own eyes overflowing at the sight. As heartbreaking as it was to have Jo crying hard at the thought of Tim leaving, Steve feeling so bad that he was showing such emotion was even worse. Tim tilted his head, and his other eyebrow rose. He was trying to question without having to say the words. Did Steve really want him to stay? Where they at that point? And was Tim ready to commit to turning his entire life upside down for this?

Understanding seemed to bloom on Steve's face. Tim saw the moment when the other man realized that Tim would actually consider uprooting himself and coming to live in Hawaii. Hope, and awe, washed through Steve's body and his jaw dropped open as more tears joined the first. His chest heaved like he'd just run several miles, and the yearning expression he displayed pricked Tim's uncertainty like a bubble.

"You really want me to?" Tim asked. "You're sure?"

Steve swiftly moved to stand in front of Tim and wrapped him and baby Jo in his strong embrace.

"More than anything, Tim. I love you, and I want you to stay," he said softly into Tim's ear. Tim put his head down on Steve's shoulder and watched in his mind's eye as a life he had never dreamed of unfolded before him. Sun and sea, and a powerful, active man whom he loved with painful intensity; the child in his arms growing and learning as years passed in a rosy haze; Tim's heart reached for it with all his will.

"Yes. I'll do it. I'll stay. I love you, Steve. I'll stay."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Calling Gibbs to tell him the news was the most difficult hurdle Tim faced in this huge life change. He made the call when it was likely the older man would be at home where he'd have privacy to process the information. Tim's hands shook as he held his phone, preparing to hit the speed-dial for his boss, the man he might have...

Clearing his throat, Tim gathered his courage and jabbed the screen. When the gruff voice sounded as Gibbs answered, he cleared his throat again, then spoke.
"I think... No. I'm certain. I'm staying here. I'm not coming back to Washington. I'm sorry, it's just-
"

"I know."

"-what?"

"I knew you weren't coming back, Tim."

"Gibbs?"

"There's a position in the Pearl office. It's a new kind of team; Cybercrimes in active field duty, like
you did here. Your own team. I think you should take it. Vance wants you to take it. Paperwork is
all done. Just gotta date it."

"Jethro..." His voice broke as it dropped to a pained whisper. He didn't even realize he'd used
Gibbs' first name.

"Tim. It's time for you to live your life, with Steve. I know you said your goodbyes. We'll send
your stuff."

"But-" he choked.

"You were right," Gibbs interrupted. "It's too hard, with you here. Seeing you, knowing that any
hope is... You need to do this. You were calling to tell me you're doing it, so just... Just say okay.
Say okay, then... Go and make yourself a great life."

Tim felt his chest tighten painfully. He couldn't leave it at that. "You were wrong that night. I do
love you. Since the moment you told me I belonged to you. If any of a million things had been
different..."

"Tim. It's time to let it go."

"I know."

"I'll tell Leon you'll take the transfer."

"Yeah."

There was a long pause. It felt like the night Tim had come to talk to Gibbs about why Steve was
being investigated, all those months ago, when neither one had wanted to end the moment, even
though they both knew it had already passed them by.

"I love you, too, Tim."

Gibbs hung up the phone.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Making all the calls to his friends and family on the mainland was emotionally exhausting. He
knew that Tony would be devastated if he didn't hear it straight from Tim, so he called him first.

"Hey, man. I've got big news," Tim began, trying to keep the conversation upbeat.

"What's that?" Tony asked, suspicion already coloring his voice.
"I'm staying in Hawaii, transferring to the Pearl office and starting an experimental type of team. My own team!"

"Look at you, McJefferson! Movin' on up," Tony quipped. "I'm impressed!"

Tony's voice held his patently false positive lilt and Tim grimaced. "I am really going to miss you guys, but-"

"No, no, no! You get an opportunity like this and you better grab it while you can. Plus, you get to be near your boyfriend. Big points for that."

"Tony..."

"It'll be great. I'll have some place to stay if I vacation there. I'm happy for you, Probie. Truly."

His voice changed on the last word, and Tim knew his friend really was happy for him.

"Thank you, Tony. We'll talk soon, okay?"

"Sure thing, McGee."

Tim's mother was pleased about his promotion, but noncommittal as always about him being in a relationship with another man. The staunchly Catholic woman couldn't bring herself to overtly disapprove, but she was never encouraging of a life she thought endangered his soul. Since he came out to her after his father's death, their relationship had become strained and particularly polite. Penny wasn't reachable by phone, so he sent her an email, knowing she would get it whenever she had access. He was certain she would be happy for him. Abby cried, but other than her fear for his health and getting skin cancer with all the sun, she knew he was doing what was best for him and supported it. He was able to tell Ducky and Jimmy at the same time over the video phone in Autopsy. Both men expressed their congratulations. The call to Bishop was almost an afterthought, since they hadn't ever bonded to the point of ohana the way he had with the rest of his team. Tim wondered what Ziva would have thought of this situation. He wanted to think she would be happy for him. Tim's biggest concern was still Gibbs. He wanted to call and check on him, but knew that wouldn't be good for either of them in the process of moving on.

Steve and Tim met the Five–0 team at dinner that night. They shared Tim's news and the excitement and camaraderie bolstered Tim's flagging spirits. It was challenging to uproot himself in the middle of his life. He wouldn't be starting his new job for two more weeks, so it was nice to have people who were happy he was staying; a support structure for this huge life change.

"Here's to the only person I've ever seen who can get Steve to listen," Danny toasted. With laughter, everyone drank.

Arranging for a moving company to go and pack all of his things for shipment to his new home was a relatively easy matter, but there were certain belongings he didn't want them touching. He hoped that his call to his sister would let him exploit the option Steve had come up with about that. Sarah's response to Tim's move was the most enthusiastic he'd gotten from anyone back on the mainland.

"You're going to pay for me to take a weeklong trip to Hawaii?" Sarah asked. "Hell, yeah. I'll bring your stuff. I just can't believe you're leaving Gibbs' team."

"Tony is Gibbs' Senior Field Agent. He's not going anywhere, so there's just no room for advancement there. I'm getting my own team, a team tailored exactly to my strengths. It's a dream
assignment, and in paradise, where the man I love wants me to move in with him. How could I make any other decision?"

"When you put it that way…"

"Thanks, Sarah. I can't wait for you to meet Mary and little Jo."

The next call Tim made was to Tony, and Tim felt guilty knowing that the other man was still feeling hurt and abandoned. He hoped this might help.

"I need to ask a favor," Tim said after uncomfortable pleasantries were exchanged.

Tony frowned. "Yeah? What's that?"

"You know I wouldn't ask you but I don't have anyone else I trust," he said. "My sister is going to be bringing my fragile stuff, but I don't want her seeing… Everything, you know."

"Porn retrieval."

"Yeah. There's not much, but…"

"I got your back, brother."

Tim grinned. "You're the best, Tony."

"I really can't believe you're getting your own team before I do."

"Tony, if you wanted a team, you would have had it years ago. You want MCRT, and that's what you're going to get when Gibbs retires. Going from SFA to leading the top team in the Agency seems pretty good to me."

"Yeah, you're right. Nothing but the best for a DiNozzo."

"How's… How's Gibbs?"

"Tim… He's Gibbs. Three B's. That's all I can really say."

"Basement, bourbon… Is he building another boat?"

"He's always building something."

"Yeah." Tim swallowed hard. "Just… Just watch out for him, would you?"

"Tim, if you're this worried, maybe you shouldn't be staying there."

"He gave me his blessing. He wants me to take this chance."

"If you love something, set it free…?"

"Come on, Tony," he said, trying not to choke on emotion.

"I'm gonna miss you, pal."

"Me too."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~
When Sarah had left, having enjoyed her time with Steve and Tim, the little bit of his personal belongings that she had brought fit easily into the house. They set up a desk in the living room for his typewriter, and his record player and record collection tucked in next to it. Tim knew that the boxes and boxes of books that would be coming would be a little bit more difficult to deal with, but he was happy to start settling in with what he had.

Other than his allergies, Tim found adjusting to life in the tropical paradise to be an easy change. Getting to know his new office at Pearl was a bit more challenging, but everyone seemed nice and capable. The head of cyber crimes was a little standoffish, but Tim had expected that since he was potentially going to be stepping on the man's toes. He offered a number of his decryption programs as well as a couple of sniffers to try to ease the tension, and as soon as the man looked at his coding, he lost all of the attitude he'd had. They talked as only hackers and computer geeks could.

Steve caught a big case soon after Tim started his new job, and they didn't see each other for several days. Focusing on work made his days tolerable, but his nights alone in the house were unsettling. It occurred to him that having the Five-0 team as his friends and support structure wasn't going to work out quite as well as he'd hoped since they would be busy when Steve was. He'd have to try to make some friends independent from Steve, but found himself totally out of practice for such an endeavor after more than twelve years spent utterly job-focused. Well, he'd established friendships through his work in those dozen years, so he'd likely do the same in his new position. It just felt lonely to wait for that to happen.

As Tim settled into his new office and began evaluating Agents for inclusion on his new team, he spoke several times with Director Vance. The enthusiasm with which the head of the Agency encouraged Tim to follow his own instincts with personnel choices as well as equipment requisitions gave him even more confidence, and he soon had a short list and started interviewing in person and on Skype.

Coming back each night to Steve's house slowly began to feel more like coming home. When his massive collection of books arrived, he left them stored in their boxes, figuring he'd get to them as he could. Steve let him convert their bedroom's walk-in closet into a tiny electronics and computer workroom. Tim was struck again by how much easier it was to combine his life with another man's than he thought it would have been with a woman. They fit all their hang up clothes in the hall closet upstairs without a problem.

Once Steve wrapped his case, they had several days when they got to spend more time together, and Tim's concerns about outside friends faded. They hiked, and Tim doubtfully tried sea kayaking in the hopes that his seasickness wouldn't keep that from being an activity they could do. Unfortunately, the ocean swells set him off and they had to concede defeat. Steve seemed understanding, but Tim felt guilty nonetheless.

Steve felt great coming home to his lover. He'd worried a little since he was so private and had his own strict way of doing things, but unlike Danny or Jerry, Tim fit in without a hitch. He was neat, took Navy showers, except when they showered together and ended up running the water heater to cold, didn't need the constant noise of a television, and wasn't pushy about meals. The clicking of the typewriter and whirring of the shredder were going to take some getting used to, but their time together at home was so limited that Tim didn't write often when Steve was around.

Tim finally settled on his team. His SFA was a local named Kailani who'd worked for Stan Burly in Europe for several years before applying to return to the island to be close to her family. She found working for two people who had been trained by Gibbs to be a smooth transition, and Tim was glad she already knew many of the Rules. An eidetic memory made her a quick study learning on the fly computer work arounds, and she was already an experienced field investigator. The other
two team members were computer specialists eager for a chance to gain field Agent status. Marcus was a probie straight out of FLETC with a doctorate in Computer Science as a Cyber Security specialist, and Andy came from a Top Secret facility in Colorado where he'd worked for the Air Force. His degree was as a Paralegal, and all his computer skills came from practical experience.

Tim took them to a team dinner as they began getting to know each other, and when they got their first callout, he felt a nostalgic pang as he strode into their office, calling out, "Grab your gear!"

His new team's gear was a lot bulkier than his old one, with gadgets and tablets as well as whole laptops. He watched as they struggled to bring everything they thought they might need, and as he drove to the library where their trail began, he initiated a discussion about what gear would be essential and how much of what they each carried was redundant with one another's. They all immediately went into problem solving and Marcus started a database of what each of them had brought and why, efficiently entering the information so they'd be able to pare down what they brought next time. After Tim had begun the conversation about the duplication of hardware, Tim found he didn't have to say anything else. By the time they arrived at their destination, the trio had cut their equipment load down to a third of what it had been, without sniping at each other or ego. He felt very proud of having chosen three people who integrated so seamlessly into a working unit.

Tim came home from his new team's first official takedown together. Steve congratulated him and grilled up steaks to celebrate. Halfway through their meal, with Tim mid-story about his SFA's use of a tourist and his rented pink surfboard as a distraction, the doorbell rang. Steve waved Tim back into his seat to keep eating and went to answer. His eyes widened at who stood on their doorstep.

"Uh, hi, Catherine," Steve said. His previous romantic partner smiled and Steve's mind went into overdrive.

Tim heard Steve's words and rose, too curious to see Steve's former lover to stop himself. A possessive feeling contributed and he approached and stood close at Steve's shoulder.

"Hi," Tim said brightly, then looked at Steve expectantly for an introduction.

"Oh, hey Cath, this is Tim. He's...we're...uh, he's my..." Steve said awkwardly.

Tim leaned around and reached forward, offering his hand. She took it with a puzzled expression.

"Lt. Rollins, it's nice to meet you. I've heard so many great stories about you, I hope I'll have a chance to hear some of them first hand." He turned to Steve. "Why don't I make myself scarce, let you guys catch up?"

Steve's eyes widened further. "No, man, you don't have to do that."

"I have lots of paperwork to do from that takedown this afternoon. I'll just work on it upstairs. Good night."

Making his exit quietly with a smirk once his back was turned, Tim did as he said and went upstairs, dinner forgotten. He felt a little guilty at leaving Steve on the spot, but the non-introduction had stung and he felt justified having subtly gotten revenge. He thought he'd been a perfect gentleman, while making it completely impossible for Steve to avoid telling Catherine the truth.

When Steve finally came upstairs, having hurried through the uncomfortable explanation and questions, he had an apology on his lips but was pleasantly surprised he didn't need it when Tim attacked him as soon as he stepped into the bedroom. This was a better outcome than he'd imagined it could be as Tim efficiently stripped him down and bent him over with a minimum of prep.
Always conscientious, Tim had liberally applied lube to himself before he roughly shoved into Steve, who cried out ecstatically at the abrupt penetration. Once Steve relaxed and looked over his shoulder with a grin, Tim smiled back and then started pounding him, grabbing Steve's hip with one hand, and his shoulder with the other, driving deep with each stroke.

"I bet she never made you feel like this, did she?" Tim hissed. Steve moaned. God it felt good to have Tim claiming him like he was. Hard and fast and so masculine, such a contrast to memories of anyone else, even other men. That Tim cared enough to be jealous, to feel possessive, made Steve feel so secure in his love that it brought a swell of emotion.

"Love you, Tim! God, I love you so much!"

Tim moved his hand from Steve's hip to his cock and stroked him as he humped fiercely, his mind crying out mine, mine, mine!

"Aaahhh!" Tim shouted as he came, feeling Steve's orgasm rippling all along his shaft even as the rod in his fist erupted. The two froze together, holding their breath as they rode out the tremendous climax.

Later as they laid in bed together, Steve confessed how hot he found Tim's jealousy.

"Yeah. I could tell from that cheeky fucking grin you gave me," Tim replied, only to see the same smile again on Steve's handsome face. "God, I love you, Steve. You're an ass, sometimes, but I do love you."

"Well I didn't know what to say! We've never talked about what to call each other."

"I call you my partner."

"We're both law enforcement, though. I just figured people would think-"

"People who know you professionally know that Danny is your partner."

Steve thought about it. "I want a better word than that. It's too...pragmatic."

Tim smiled. "There's always lover, but that's pretty on the nose."

"You are my lover, Tim. And my partner. But you're...more."

"With people you feel comfortable with you could say it like you did to Deb."

"The man I love?"

"I liked that. I liked it a lot."

"Oh baby. I liked saying it."

"Well, then?"

"I did tell Cath I love you, Tim. I told her you're the most important person in my life."

Tim kissed him softly. "Thank you."

"Y'know, if it'll get me fucked like that again, I might just have to flirt with her or something."

Steve said, grinning again.
"I'll nail you like that anytime you want. Just ask. If you try to manipulate me into it, you might not like the result."

"Oh really?"

Tim raised his eyebrows and gave Steve a flat stare. Steve's eyes widened at what he saw and he nodded slowly. "Fair enough. No flirting with Catherine. Ask if I want it hard and fast. I think we're establishing a real communication, babe."

Tim rolled his eyes. "Smart ass."

Steve pursed his lips and nodded. Tim sighed and turned over to go to sleep. Steve spooned him and tenderly kissed the back of his neck.

"Goodnight, my love."

"'Night, Steve."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

A/N Okay, folks, you have a choice to make here. If you are totally happy with Steve and Tim together forever, then this is your opportunity to imagine these gorgeous boys together living in paradise, growing older, helping Mary raise Jo, maybe even eventually adopting... Happily ever after.

But I have other ideas that wouldn't leave my head and heart, so I found myself at a fork in the road. I peer down this path and see all that I mentioned above, but the other path demanded to be written and so there's more coming soon.

Thanks for everyone who has read, followed, favorited, and reviewed.

And special thank you to Toni M H and my super-awesome Beta reader FlyingPiglet. You've both been such amazing support in this very rough time in my life.
Chapter Seven

Less than a year since Tim had come to Hawaii to assist on the terrorist case, their relationship seemed to be ending before it really began. The adjustment to living together, being in the day to day presence of one another, as well as Tim's loneliness at being half a world away from his friends and family, started out rough and only grew worse. And while Steve was satisfied with the type of roommate Tim made, his constant attention when they were at home together, and Tim's awareness of Steve's thoughts and motivations made Steve begin to feel like he was under heavy surveillance. They both worked long hours, so they weren't spending as much time together as either of them might have wanted. They texted each other throughout the days at first, and had rip roaring sex regularly, but in the little bit of downtime they had, as the weeks became months, they began to discover just how vast the differences between them were.

Tim was more than willing to go for runs together, and they both loved hiking, although Steve's pace was always faster than Tim preferred. But when Steve wanted to spar, Tim told him he didn't think that was a good idea for them, and many of the water sports that Steve enjoyed were out due to Tim's seasickness. Steve went rock climbing one weekend, and Tim felt very left out. When the latest Marvel movie was released, Tim was excited to see it opening day, but Steve had little interest. Giving Tim the quiet space he needed to allow him to write was foreign to Steve as well, and Steve continued to find that the sound of the typewriter and shredder set him on edge for some reason.

After closing a child pornography case, Tim came home once again to an empty house. He checked his phone and saw a text he'd missed while he was in Interrogation with their suspect. Steve expected to be gone for at least a day and might be out of cell coverage. With all the late nights his team had been pulling on this gut-wrenching case, Tim thought he'd probably seen Steve for all of ten hours in the last week, and the majority of that had merely been sleeping in the same bed.

He tried to clear his mind enough to write, but ended up instead out on the beach with a bottle of wine. He enjoyed the ocean, and had missed the chance to relax and let its power soothe him for the years he'd been in Washington. But tonight the vastness before him only showed him how insignificant he was. He wanted to call a friend and distract himself, but the only person other than Steve that he felt close enough to call just to talk was Chin, who was of course on the case with Steve. As wonderfully as his team gelled, they were all too different from each other to have developed a friendship yet. Marcus buried himself in online games, reminding Tim too much of his lonely years with only a headset and computer for company, and Kailani spent all her free time with her family. Andy was in love with the island and explored new trails, restaurants, and beaches constantly. He was the only one of the team with whom Tim might have felt like he could pursue a friendship, but there was something in his expression, something hidden, or guarded, so when Tim considered asking he decided the advance was not a good idea.

By the time he finished the wine, Tim was surprised at how late it had gotten. He squinted at the clock on his phone and laboriously did the math for the time difference to Washington. It was early morning there, but he knew most of his old team would be awake already. He contemplated who to call. Abby and Tony would try to talk him into coming back. Gibbs... He was out for obvious reasons. Ducky or Jimmy? Ducky would give grave and sage advice, but after the disturbing case he'd just closed, Jimmy's innocent rambling seemed more appealing.
"Hello?" The call had the open air sound that told Tim he'd likely caught Jimmy in the car.

"Hey, Jimmy. It's Tim."

"Tim! It's so great to hear from you! How have you been? Wait, what time is it there?"

"Late. Or maybe early, y'know."

"Are you okay? You sound...off."

"M'okay. Closed a nasty case. Drank a bottle o' wine. Sittin' on the beach."

"Oh-kay. Where's Steve?"

"Case. Diff'rent case. We work a lot, Jimmy. How-how's Breena? How's Vic?"

"Um. Victoria is fine. Teething, but fine. Breena's good. Are you, uh, drunk, Tim?"

"Nah. Maybe a little. Tipsy. Tipsssee. That's kinda fun to say. Tipsssee..."

"Tim... Are you alright? I mean, really? This seems pretty out of character for you to get drunk, er, tipsy, alone. I'm a little worried."

Tim sighed. "Just kinda lonely, I guess. Tell me 'bout the team?"

"Oh. Okay. Dr Mallard is good. He's taken Agent Gibbs out a couple of times. Tony is... He actually seems pretty happy. I think Zoë is good for him. Um, Agent Bishop seems, uh, the same as always. Abby's listening to this crazy international music with these drums and...not quite yodeling...sort of-screaming? It's, well, it's very Abby, but no one wants to hang out in the lab, you know?"

"Mmm. How do you make friends, Jimmy?"

"Friends?"

"Yeah. Was never real good at it. Moved around from base to base, made some friends through work once I was with NCIS. Had some college buddies, you know. But... Out here... 'M just kinda..."

"Tim, I met Breena just doing the things I love. Do what you like, and you'll meet other people who do that stuff, too. Does that make sense?"

"I guess. Thanks, Jimmy, you're a good buddy. Steve's sister has a little girl, Jo, and I really love spending time with her. Going to take baby Jo to the park tomorrow... I think that's good."

"Um, okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Thanks, Jimmy. You're great, man... Brah! They say brah, here, y'know? Like brassiere but not. It's more like bro. Heh. I'm getting the hang of it, kinda. Thanks, brah!"

"Sure, Tim. Call me anytime, alright?"

"Buh-bye."

"Bye."
Tim went inside and fell into bed.

The next morning he was awoken by the doorbell. He yanked on a pair of sweats, not noticing that they were Steve's, and stumbled down the stairs rubbing his eyes.

Catherine Rawlins stood there when he opened the door, and the two stared at each other for an awkward moment.

"Hi, Lieutenant," Tim said. He blinked sleepily. Glancing around, he realized it was much later than he would normally have slept. He remembered staying up quite late and decided it was okay to have slept in.

"I'm actually not in the Navy, anymore," Catherine said uncomfortably.

"Yeah, I guess I knew that," Tim said. "Look, Steve's out on a case. I finished up a case last night, so… Why don't you come in and I'll get some coffee."

"I…"

"I need coffee, please come in."

Tim left the door open as he went to the kitchen and started the pot. He heard the door close and sensed when Catherine approached slowly. Pouring himself a cup, and gesturing for her to get some if she wanted it, Tim settled back leaning against the counter. After a few sips, he felt more awake, and became aware of the headache from his wine consumption. He vaguely recalled talking to Jimmy, and he hoped he hadn't been too incoherent.

"I guess Steve told you about us," Tim began.

"Yeah. It's fine. I'm just… I don't have a job, and…"

"And you and Steve have been friends for a long time, and worked together. They have five people on their team now, so I don't know if they would be able to hire you back."

"I don't know if I would want to return to Five-0, anyway."

"With all of your history, have you thought about applying to NCIS?"

Catherine stared at him. "Isn't that where you work?"

"Yeah, but I have a team and it's not like I'm offering you a job, just a suggestion. Naval intelligence, independent contractor, and Five-0... As long as the time you've been gone wouldn't preclude you from passing security, I think the Agency would be a good fit for you. If you ended up at Pearl, it wouldn't be a problem with me, if that's what you're worried about."

"Really?" Catherine had to reassess her initial, somewhat negative, impression of him. His manipulation of Steve, leaving him holding the bag the night she had arrived unexpectedly, and Steve's stumbling explanation of his relationship had given her a bad impression. But this man before her was honestly trying to help. She doubted she would have been able to deal with the situation as well as he was. "I'll think about it."

After Catherine left, Tim showered and got dressed, then texted Mary, asking if it was okay if he took Jo out of daycare for a few hours. Her response, "Duh!", made him smile, and after he grabbed some breakfast, he headed for the day care center. He had often ended up babysitting Jo, who he adored, as a hobby. Mary was always grateful for the respite and the free childcare and had
happily gotten him signed up as an authorized person to pick up and drop off at the daycare she used while she worked.

Taking the toddler to a local playground, he set her loose and stood aside while she ran around on the equipment with other small pre-school aged children.

"Careful, Jo Jo!" He called as she tipped precariously toward a short drop off at the side the ramp she had run up halfway. She looked at him and the grin she gave reminded him of Steve's devil may care one, and he laughed.

"She listens really well," a woman said, approaching him to stand beside him, her eyes tracking a dark-haired little boy who looked a bit older than Jo.

"Yeah, we have an understanding," Tim said.

"If you're the one she listens to, does that mean your wife is the one she steamrolls?"

Tim looked over and realized the woman, who was younger than he was and quite pretty, was flirting with him, fishing for his relationship status.

"I'm more of an uncle. My partner's sister is her mom. He and I are both cops, so we both handle her pretty well, I think."

"Oh." Disappointment laced the single syllable. "Well, have fun," she said, and went to gather her son.

While playing with Jo and spending time with her was one of Tim's favorite pastimes, the short conversation made him realize that it was unlikely to be the best place to look for a friendship. He sighed and considered the other things he used to do for fun. Laser tag. That held little interest after all the real firefights he'd engaged in. Writing, of course. He'd had a writer's group he had belonged to years before. After the incident with his crazy, murderous fan, he had determined to keep his work even more private and quit. Maybe after this latest Deep Six book, he could join a group with something unrelated. He'd had a few ideas about interactive digital kids books, and he could try them out on Jo, too. Getting in with a gaming group would be nice, but his schedule meant that he'd be the crappy guy who canceled half the time. He shook his head. He'd just have to soldier on.

When Steve returned home that evening, he was still pumped from his takedown. He greeted Tim enthusiastically, throwing his arms around him and lifting him off the floor.

"Oh, baby, I missed you. Damn, I'm horny. You wanna go to bed early?"

"Now there's a romantic proposition," Tim replied dryly. Steve drew back and gave him one of his smoldering gazes, and Tim's breath caught. "Steve," he choked, suddenly overcome with helpless ardor. "Yes. God, yes. Take me upstairs and make love to me until I forget everything except your name."

They stumbled to the stairs, lips locked, tearing each other's clothes off as they went. At the top of the staircase, Steve yanked Tim's shirt off and pinned him to the wall, ravaging his neck and grinding his hips into Tim's. Any stray thought of the lonely homesickness Tim had been feeling was drowned in his desire for Steve. "Oh fuck! Yes! Steve, ohmygod..." Tim groaned. He grabbed a double handful of Steve's ass and rutted even harder against him.

Steve enveloped Tim in a crushing embrace and flipped them around, nearly throwing both of them onto the bed. He deftly unfastened Tim's pants and stripped him, then buried his face in the light brown curls of his pubic hair, moving down and sucking his balls almost painfully.
"Steve!" Tim cried. He was seeing tiny explosions of light in his vision and didn't have any idea how Steve had gotten the lube when suddenly, his legs were shoved up and out and his lover's hard cock slammed into him. "Steve!" He screamed.

All Steve had done was unfasten his shorts and pull his cock out of his briefs before he lubed up and sank into Tim. He waited only a few panting breaths before he started ramming into the tight heat. Tim howled, and part of Steve's mind tried unsuccessfully to caution him that he was being too rough, but it felt too good to stop or even slow down, and the way Tim's short fingernails were gouging into his shoulders gave him just enough pain to feel like he was retaliating somehow. God! Tim's ass quivered and clutched at him, and his lover's beautiful face was turning that amazing shade of tomato red, scrunched up with his mouth open as he growled Steve's name with each impalement.

The loneliness was swept away in the inferno of passion and need as Steve took him. Everything but the immediate moment ceased to exist and Tim met each powerful thrust as he writhed, getting the best angle. When Steve's cock was stimulating his prostate with every hard jab, he felt one of those deep orgasms building and he clung to the hot, hard body riding his even more fiercely.

Oh fuck! Tim's body was tightening further, gripping Steve's cock like a viciously powerful fist, and he could feel himself approaching that final ascension into explosive bliss. He humped his body as fast as he could, and when Tim came with a primal roar, he shouted, too, and the climax went on and on, the moment drawing out into eternity, perfection, pain and pleasure and life and death and Tim-Tim-Tim!

Lying atop Tim's body, both their breaths heaving for long minutes before they returned to normal, Steve found himself feeling completely vulnerable, guilt hitting him like a medicine ball thrown too hard, and he finally shuddered as he pulled out and flopped down on the bed next to Tim, who turned and snuggled against him immediately. Steve awkwardly embraced him, but bit his lip in tension, the tightness of his muscles setting off alarm bells in Tim's mind.

Tim shifted away and looked up at Steve, who wouldn't meet his eyes.

"Babe, you okay?" Tim asked.


"Bullshit. What's going on?"

Steve struggled to find words. "I... I dunno. Just feel kinda...raw."

Tim frowned. "Did you not use enough lube? I'm sorry, I couldn't tell, I was distracted-"

"Nah, man. Not like that. Just...raw."

Tim understood, as he studied Steve's face and noted how his lover wouldn't meet his eyes. "Oh. It's okay, Steve. I love you. That was intense, but... You didn't hurt me or anything," he tried to reassure.

Steve couldn't bear to tell him that in the heat of the moment, he hadn't cared. Somehow, for the first time with Tim, sex had felt like a battle he'd needed to win, and it was disturbing to feel combative with his most intimate companion. He'd been feeling so high when he came home, and Tim's dry, derogatory remark when he'd responded to Steve's advances had spurred him into fucking, which he now understood was different from how they normally had sex. He'd never understood Tim's insistence on the semantic difference until this moment, and he found himself
regretting what he'd done as if he'd sullied their entire relationship with the nearly brutal coupling. He glanced at Tim's worried, loving eyes and hated himself even more when he couldn't maintain eye contact.

"Steve, it's okay, really. I'm fine, and that was so hot..."

"Yeah. Yeah, okay," Steve agreed, burying his concerns and regret. "I'll...I'll just go get a washcloth." He rose and went to the bathroom, never seeing the hurt he caused Tim with the brush-off.

When they went to sleep that night, Tim felt alone in their bed as he never had before.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

The Five-0 and Tim's cyber team had a case that overlapped, and the two men settled in and worked together like they were twins. All the awkwardness they'd been experiencing in their private life since Steve's realization that he'd crossed a line he didn't know how to come back from disappeared while they worked together. Each man seemed to know what the other was thinking and what he would do in any given situation, and the takedown was rapid and smooth, with no casualties. Tim's boss complimented him and his team on working so well with Five-0, and asked if Tim would be willing to be the liaison for the team and NCIS. Tim explained that he and Steve were living together as a couple, but that as they had demonstrated, they could work together very well, so he accepted.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Steve spotted Catherine at his favorite surfing spot, and paddled over closer to her between sets.

"Hi," she said, smiling.

"Hey, how's it going? Tim said you might apply at NCIS?"

"Yeah, I did. I leave for FLETC next week. You know, Tim seems like a really good guy."

"He is." Tension and a pinched look gave away that there was something else going on.

"I don't want to interfere, but... Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah. It's just... It's so intense with him. He sees straight into me, knows me better than anyone ever has, and that he still loves me is...amazing. But it's like being torn open and laid out on a microscope slide or something. It's really..."

"Intense. I get that." She considered, then spoke up. "You must really love him to stick around with it like that."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Look, I always knew that if I ever pushed you, you'd split. I was okay with that. I knew I could count on you, on your loyalty and strength and intelligence; that you'd be there for me if I ever needed you. But getting to know you was all inferred. That you let Tim in, let down that impenetrable wall you keep... You must love him a lot."

"I do. I really do, it's just... Everything with you and me was easy, you know? Comfortable. I guess I just kinda miss that, crazy as it sounds."
She looked out at the swells coming in. She'd always had to struggle to keep their relationship at that level, and while it pleased her in a dark way to hear Steve admit he missed that, missed her, she also loved him and wanted him to be happy. Tim was insightful, and since he was able to see into Steve, she suddenly understood that it wasn't because Steve had let him in any more than he had let her. So Steve was feeling threatened and vulnerable and as much as she, too, wanted their easy relationship back, she couldn't push the buttons she knew would nudge him toward a breakup. This could be good for him if he let it be. If he didn't, it was doomed anyway.

"Look, everything I can think of to say is self-serving, so...I'm just going to wish you luck and catch this wave. See ya!"

Steve watched as she rode the wave in, then left the water and the beach. He frowned, feeling even more conflicted since he'd actually verbalized the problem he had with his relationship. He did miss the easy camaraderie he'd had with her, but he'd never felt compelled to take it further. With Tim, it was like there was no middle ground. He was suffocating, but he couldn't bear the thought of giving the other man up.

Sighing, he caught the next wave, then went to the office to check for any possible cases.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Part of the point of having a field unit of cyber specialists was that they could track cyber criminals on the web to their locations and be the unit that also took them down personally. They traveled together, following leads, all over the Pacific rim. Tim found himself stepping back and directing more and more as the team hit their stride. Andy adapted to any situation in a flash, taking the most bizarre circumstances in stride, and Marcus wrote programs as they needed them with the barest suggestions from Tim. Kailani was tough and smart, and the three worked together like they'd been doing it for years.

Weeks more passed, and Tim struggled to reach across the gap that had somehow developed between him and Steve. Steve seemed to avoid the attempts Tim made to regain their intimacy, only able to connect deeply with Tim when they had sex, but shying away from it in everyday life.

Steve hated that he was hurting Tim and finally went to Chin for advice.

"Steve, it's like I told you before I met Tim; real relationships aren't perfect. You just have to figure out what you can live with and what you can't," Chin said, putting his hand on Steve's shoulder. "And Tim's gonna have to figure out the same thing."

"What do you mean? I haven't heard him complain!"

"Have you met the man?" Chin asked incredulously. He couldn't think of a single time he'd ever heard Tim complain about anything.

So Steve went to ask Tim. "Are you unhappy? With me? I know I've been getting frustrated with stuff, but you haven't said a word..."

"Honestly, Steve, yeah. I love you like crazy, but I'm starting to feel like you don't even like me."

"What?! What's that supposed to mean?"

"Look, we're really different. We knew that going in. But it seems like lately... Those differences are annoying you more and more. And I don't know what to do about it."

"Aw, babe, no! I want to spend time with you, but you just don't want to do...anything, man."
Tim raised his eyebrows. He wondered if Steve could even hear what he was saying. He swallowed and tried to adjust his wording to be less confrontational. "I enjoy having some quiet time at home. I love to just sit and watch a movie together sometimes, and I need alone time to write, too. You... I feel pressured to be constantly go-go-go when you express disappointment that I want to stay in sometimes," he said carefully. The blood that suddenly suffused Steve's face, and the pinched aneurysm face he made had Tim recalculating. He'd gone the wrong direction. He cleared his throat and stood up, stepping into Steve's personal space and going from healy-feely to steel-spined in a breath. "This! You need this: in your face, clash of personalities. You need adrenaline and risk, all the time, because you're uncomfortable with yourself. That's why Danny is your best friend, even though this shit makes him miserable. But you don't even see that. You're too busy jumping off cliffs and clotheslinining bad guys. You're all passion and fury, and that's great for your job, Steve, but that's not how a loving relationship works. Damnit, I see who you're running from! I see and love that kid who was sent away to the mainland, who wanted his father's approval more than anything, who didn't get to mourn his mother, and who doesn't trust the world because all it's handed him is betrayal and heartbreak. You used to like that I see through you. Now it just pisses you off. What the hell are we going to do about that?!

Steve's face had gone from red to sickly pale under his tan. He felt more naked than he ever did during sex as Tim spread his soul out with his words. He was right. Tim seeing into the box inside him where he kept his hurt and fear was partially what had drawn him to the man, but now he just felt raw and exposed. And the only reaction he'd ever learned for dealing with this kind of emotional pain was to lash out and make other people feel so much worse that they ran away instead of continuing to prod. He didn't want to keep doing that to Tim, but he had no clue how to stop. His breathing was a harsh rasp, and he did the only thing he felt he could do, other than attack Tim with the intent of driving him away. He attacked Tim with the intent to fuck him senseless. Smashing his lips onto Tim's, Steve used his strength and skills to take the other man down right there in the living room. Kissing and biting, clawing their clothes off, they had the angriest sex they'd ever had. He pushed into Tim with nothing but saliva and precum to lubricate, and together, they shouted and screamed and writhed. Tim retaliated, rolling them over with a quick counterbalance and pinning Steve beneath him. He rode the hard cock inside him, tears streaming down his face, wanting to stop but not wanting this intimate connection to end. He was terrified he'd made a horrible mistake moving to the island and giving up his known and comfortable life in Washington. He wanted desperately for this relationship to work, for Steve to mellow, just a little, for him to let his walls down enough so Tim could freely love him with his whole heart, but it was only in times like this that Steve could open up; only in extremity, at the far end of sanity could his lover let himself be exposed and accepted. Tim suddenly stopped moving and grabbed Steve's face, staring into his eyes.

"I love you, goddamnit! Just let me love you!"

A sob choked Steve and he bucked under Tim and felt the white heat of his orgasm answer the demand. "YES!" He roared, and Tim wailed at the hot, pulsing flood inside him, triggering his own release. He fell onto Steve's sweaty chest and Steve wrapped his arms around him, panting and sated and certain that everything was okay again.

And for a while, it was.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Everyone close to them seemed aware of their struggles, but only Lou Grover was willing to try to do something about it.
"What are you doing with that boy?" Grover asked Steve after he'd heard Steve's half of a phone conversation that had sounded spiteful and petty.

"What do you mean?" McGarrett sounded honestly confused and Lou shook his head.

"Do you ever relax and let him take care of you? Do you ever take care of him?"

Steve smirked. "Oh, yeah, Lou, we take care of each other a lot."

The older man frowned and dropped the subject for the moment. Steve McGarrett was one hell of a cop; tenacious and ruthless, but he was spiraling into the same pattern Lou had seen so many good cops disappear into, a pattern that led to either burnout on the job, or flaming ruin in his personal life. There was no balance in how McGarrett lived, and Grover knew the man couldn't even see that.

Arranging for Steve and Tim to spend time with the Grover family was difficult with case loads of both Five-0 and Tim's NCIS team, but Lou persevered. Having one of his co-workers and his significant other over for dinner wasn't unusual for the family, but that they were two men was new to the Grover kids. They rolled with it, Samantha even gaining respect for her father's open-mindedness, and the evening was a success. Lou relaxed after seeing the affectionate teasing between Steve and Tim during their meal, and decided he must have just witnessed a bad fight. Until it happened again.

"I don't think that's too much to ask, Tim!" Grover heard Steve's raised voice as the team leader paced his office. Lou paused and watched as he threw himself into his desk chair. "Fine. Do whatever you want." He slammed his cell phone down on his desk and rubbed his face.

"Fightin', huh? That sucks," Grover said, standing in the doorway.

"Nah. No, it's fine. He's just...he uses a typewriter, for god's sake! He's a computer genius, but he writes on a typewriter?! The thing is noisy as hell. And then he shreds the page if he doesn't like it. Just random! Tapping away, then shredding. For hours." Steve rubbed his face again briskly. He stood up, moving restlessly. "I just fucking want him to get off his ass and do something with me! All he ever wants to do is hike or go to the range if we go out... Or stupid stuff, like kids movies. Shit."

"You want some advice? Every once in a while, do what he wants. If it's a romantic dinner or frickin' karaoke, just do it. You might even have fun. Relationships are a give and take, partner."

Steve's face fell. Lou didn't think he'd ever seen him look so vulnerable. "He...said he just wants me to be myself, that he loves me just like I am. So why can't he deal with it? This is who I am, man!"

"So did you tell him the same thing, that you loved him just like he was? Because this is who he is, Steve, and you're not dealing with that. Neither one of you has to change for the other one, you know, you just have to accept the differences."

Steve's mouth set in a stubborn line and Lou shook his head. "You want to keep him in your life?"

"Yes! Of course I do!"

"Then you gotta slow down every once in a while and let it be about him."

"You saying I'm being selfish?"
"Your word, McGarrett, not mine," he said, shaking his head as he walked away.

So Steve tried.

Taking Lou Grover's advice, he set up a date and took Tim out to a late summer blockbuster movie. They shared popcorn and held hands, and the wariness with which Tim had started the evening lessened as the hours passed. That night at home, Tim let Steve edge him until he was begging to come, and they both screamed out their climaxes and collapsed into a sated sleep.

But two weeks later, when the high school football season began, Steve told Tim they were going to the first home game and Tim declined. He was at a critical plot twist in his current novel and wanted to take the time Steve would be gone to write. They fought, Steve complaining that once again Tim wouldn't do anything with Steve that stretched outside his narrow interests, and Tim exploding because he was trying to find time to write when the typewriter wouldn't bother Steve. This time, Steve left the house in anger, and Tim found himself completely unable to write from his reaction to the fight. He miserably began to resign himself to the fact that their relationship was falling apart.

When Steve didn't come home for hours, Tim worried and texted him. Another hour later, he texted again. Then he called and left a voicemail. By the time Steve came home after midnight, Tim had sent eight texts and left four messages, and he sat on the couch feeling desolate and worrying that something had happened to Steve.

When Tim woke with a crick in his neck from sleeping sitting slumped over on the sofa, he discovered Steve had returned and gone to bed without him. His hurt went unaddressed when he got a call out just as Steve came down for coffee. It ended up another joint case, and they set their personal problems aside again and worked together smoothly to take down a budding drug cartel. By the time the case was closed, Tim felt it would be petty to rehash the fight, so he let it go.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

In one of the phone conferences Tim had with Director Vance, Leon heard the dull sound in Tim's voice and asked him about it.

"Thanks, Director, but I'm okay. Hawaii is just a long way from home."

"This sounds like more than that, Tim. I'm not going to push you, son, but I think you should talk to someone. I know that you and Gibbs haven't got that kind of relationship, but maybe Dr Mallard? I'm here for you, too, if you can look past the chair to see a man who cares about you."

Tim swallowed hard. "Thank you, Director-"

"Leon."

"Leon. I'll... I'll try Ducky, and if that doesn't work out, I may take you up on the offer."

"Fair enough."

So Tim set up a time to call Ducky, feeling uncomfortably like he was going to confession. Steve was upstairs, having come home from a case in the dark hour before dawn, and Tim had left him sleeping, so he paced the back deck of the house, unaware that Steve had woken and was lying in bed inadvertently eavesdropping.

"My dear boy, I am pleased you feel you can come to me. Please know that I will hold this conversation in strictest confidence."
"Thanks, Ducky," Tim said. He sighed. "I'm just... Being here, so far away from home, it...it seems to be getting harder rather than easier."

Ducky listened, encouraging Tim to tell him all about his attempts to find friends, and the growing rift between himself and Steve became a topic he was talking around and not addressing. So the doctor called him out on it, and Tim's voice grew thick with emotion.

"Have you ever loved someone so overwhelmingly but found that you barely like each other? It's horrible. I'm so lonely, and I need him so much, but we're just going through the motions when we're together. It's tense and careful, except when it's passionate, but even then it's starting to feel...desperate. That's the only way we can connect. I thought... I hoped we'd find a way to stabilize. If I had friends here, maybe I wouldn't need him so damn much. If we could just have our separate lives and only come home to each other and be content with that, maybe... But it's not stabilizing. It's..." Tears streaked his face and he choked. "I'm just desolate, Ducky! I'm dying here, so alone, and the only time I can breathe is with Steve but it's like living on the edge of a razor and... God, I miss my shitty apartment and the smog and cold and working 80 hour weeks. I miss Tony and Abby... I miss you and Jimmy... I miss-" a sob garbled Gibbs' name and he stopped even trying to talk.

"Oh, Timothy. Have you told Steven of your unhappiness? Have you expressed your loneliness to him?"

"I can't! Steve already thinks I'm pathetic, how can I tell him this? It'll just confirm it!"

"Timothy, you cannot truly believe he thinks so little of you. Why would he be in a relationship with you if he did?"

"I don't know, Duck! I don't know what he thinks and feels anymore! I used to look through his armor and I could see every insecurity and all the gentle kindness that he hides from everyone else, but now he's shut me out. He must think I'm not worthy of his trust anymore and if he thinks that, I must not be worthy of his love, either! I don't know how to get him back, Ducky! The more I try to pull him close, the further away he feels!"

"Oh my boy. Do you feel that you were misled? Did you only think you knew him and now his true colors are revealing themselves?"

"No! I know who he was, the man I fell in love with is the real Steve. He's just piling on all these defenses now, and I don't know why!"

"If you are the only one who has ever breached those defenses, do you wonder that he's uncomfortable? Someone so guarded must have ample reason, in his own mind, to fear intimacy. Perhaps this is merely backlash? When an animal feels threatened, it will lash out."

"I'm no threat to Steve! I love him! I want him to be happy, and comfortable with himself. I want to share my life with him, but he's just pushing me away!"

Steve's eyes were huge as he listened to Tim's heartfelt cries. His own feelings of unworthiness rose. How could he deserve a man like Tim? Fiercely loyal and passionately loving; all Tim asked for in return was to be loved back, and Steve's damaged heart and mind wouldn't let him do it. Oh, he loved Tim. He loved him to the core of his being, but his years of self-protection hadn't allowed him to develop any way to show it. Part of him longed to run down the stairs and throw himself at Tim's feet and confess every dark fear and filthy secret he had, trusting that the enormous heart of his lover would accept and soothe and heal him, but a lifetime of betrayal after betrayal, even from his own mother, held him in shackles too strong for his love to break. There had to be another way.
Steve suggested that they start running together in the mornings when Tim was home and neither had an urgent case. The extra time together without the pressure of talking a lot was nice. Tim tried not to send an overabundance of texts while he was traveling when Steve didn't respond, telling himself over and over that he probably had a case. When he returned from an emotionally draining takedown of a 16 year old MIT student on her summer break in the Cook Islands who had hacked into the systems on the ship her father was on, trying to get a message to the man, inadvertently revealing its position and putting a critical operation at risk, Tim felt fragile and in need of Steve's strength. He'd had to talk the girl down from suicide, and the confrontation had brought up his unresolved pain from never being able to connect with his own dad. What he received instead was Steve's sharp, critical sarcasm as Steve sneered at the stupid civilian who couldn't understand how important military operations were. Steve was in a foul mood because he had gotten word that Aunt Deb had taken a downturn and he felt helpless and angry. They argued, each refusing to tell the other what was really bothering him, and ending up with Tim sleeping miserably on the couch while Steve tossed and turned and barely rested at all in their bed.

The next morning, Tim found out from Mary the news about Deb and so, after a day wrapping up paperwork, he enacted a plan and went home to talk to Steve about it.

"I want to invite my grandmother, Penny, to visit. I really want you to meet her," Tim told Steve. He'd figured that if Steve could begin to feel like Tim's family was his, too, then the impending loss of Aunt Deb might not feel quite so much like he was being orphaned. Steve warily agreed, and Tim arranged for Penny to come to Hawaii, but for her to stay at a hotel rather than with them. The visit was wonderful for Tim, who had missed his favorite parental figure more than he'd realized. The couple was able to take a few days off to spend showing her around, and by the time she left, Tim felt rested and content. He bought steaks for Steve to grill, and planned a romantic evening for them. Everything went as he'd planned, and they sat on the beach holding hands and watching the sunset after a pleasant dinner and some relaxing alcohol.

"Damn, baby, Penny is something else," Steve commented. Tim smiled fondly, looking out at a yacht sailing by with its brilliant colored spinnaker full. "Hard to believe that a woman like that raised a squared-away sailor like Admiral McGee."

Tim's jaw dropped. He'd known that Penny's free speaking about her far left views might have put Steve off a little, but he never anticipated that his partner would praise Tim's father over her. He slowly turned his head with the faintest hope that Steve had been making a really bad joke, but the way his lip was twisted in scorn was like a battering ram to his stomach. He watched the handsome man as he sipped his beer and suddenly felt for the very first time like he didn't know him at all.

"You must really be surprised then that a squared-away sailor like Admiral McGee managed to raise a son who's so worthless that he couldn't join the Navy like a real man," Tim sniped, the spiteful words tumbling from his mouth before he could stop them. Steve's head snapped around and his eyes widened at the expression on Tim's face. Tim's lips were a thin line, his face white with hard red splotches on his cheeks, and there was so much hurt in his eyes that Steve dropped his beer and reached for him.

"Tim, no! I never said that. Baby, I –"

"You didn't have to," Tim spat, jerking away from Steve's hands. "I've heard the words my whole life from a guy who was a lot more gung-ho Navy than you'll ever be. Trust me, I recognize the attitude. Seasickness is for weak-minded cowards, right? Tim could get on a ship — or a jet ski, or a kayak, or a sailboard — if he'd just grow a pair, right?" He jumped to his feet, unable to stay and risk saying something worse than he already had. He hated how he'd lost his temper, but some part
of him saw Steve's criticism of Penny as an unforgivable insult to everything he had ever learned from the strong, yet unerringly kind, woman.

"Tim!" Steve shouted as he retreated. "You put those words in my mouth! I never fucking said that!" He stared as his lover continued back into the house. "Goddamnit! Tim!"

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There was no case with the power to interrupt the tension between them after that. They barely spoke to each other for the next few days, even though Steve was trying desperately to think of how to make things better. He tried to initiate sex, craving and needing to feel the connection to Tim again, but a cold fear rose in him as he was rebuffed again and again, and he began to understand that Tim was done trying. It was devastating, and Steve fell into a dark, brooding funk that even Jerry and Danny couldn't pull him out of. He became nearly brutal in his takedowns, and Chin and Grover exchanged resigned looks, seeming to be the only two other people who understood Steve enough to know what was happening.

Tim pushed his team, not realizing that he was becoming more and more like the taciturn Gibbs with each barked order. He drank coffee constantly, and his bearing was tense and formal. He saw the concerned looks he was receiving from his team, most notably Andy, but he refused to respond. At home, he threw himself into ruthlessly sorting his boxes of books, donating hundreds of volumes but not feeling at home enough to find places to put the ones he kept, instead consolidating and reboxing. He wrote climactic fight scenes and steamy sex between Lisa and Tommy, his previously repressed Deep Six characters, uncaring of Steve's irritation at the noise of the typewriter.

The couple no longer ran together in the mornings, and it was not uncommon to have days pass with only a word or two exchanged between them. Tim felt like he was moving through a fog of aching regret, and he finally broke when Mary asked them over for Jo's birthday, realizing only then that he hadn't seen the little girl in weeks.

Sitting alone on the deck, Tim waited for Steve to come home. When he did, an incongruously glorious sunset filling the sky, Tim called him outside and they sat silently for several minutes.

"This is it, isn't it? I think we're finished," Tim finally said.

Steve choked. "Babe, I just don't see how…"

"I guess we kind of burned out like a shooting star. Not either of our faults that we couldn't sustain that crazy intensity."

"I thought that if I loved you enough it would make up for all you left behind, but... I'm not enough."

"Steve, it's not that. We just... We were a blaze of glory, and there just isn't anything that can keep us at that level. I can't take it down to completely casual, and I can't live in the heart of the sun."

"I still love you, Tim," Steve whispered. Tim's smile was despairing.

"I'll love you for the rest of my life, Steve."

And there didn't seem to be anything more they could say.

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Tim moved into an extended stay hotel. Chin helped, spared deliberately from the case the rest of the team was working. Many of Tim’s possessions were still in boxes, and those went directly into a climate controlled storage space. His desk went, although his typewriter and shredder came with him along with his record player and records. He doubted he’d feel like writing much anytime soon, but they were very close to the heart of who he was and he refused to have them stored too far away.

Chin didn’t pry about why Tim was moving out. He’d seen Steve’s mood decline in the last few months and had regretted what he expected was coming. But Steve McGarrett was a proud and stubborn man, and as much as Chin knew he loved Tim, the men were so far polar opposites on so many levels that there really had only been a breath of hope for their relationship succeeding. When Tim stood at the front door, ready to leave, Chin stepped back as he let the younger man process his emotions. When Tim’s shoulders slumped and shook lightly, Chin reached for him and put his hand on Tim’s back in support. After a moment, Tim wiped his face and nodded to Chin, and they left the McGarrett home, Tim’s carriage straight and tall, his face pale and haunted.

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Only a week later, Steve showed up, drenched from the rain that had begun the day after Tim moved out. It had felt to Steve like the world was mourning his inability to save his relationship with Tim: like the end of the world was at hand. The call he’d gotten telling him Aunt Deb had passed cemented his utter despair and all he’d been able to think of was Tim: his strong arms and kind heart, his beautiful body and his loving comfort. So he knocked on the door and Tim was too good of a man to turn him away, even after everything.

Steve wept as he choked on the words explaining his sorrow, and Tim quickly pulled him close, ignoring the way his own clothes saturated from contact almost immediately. Allowing himself to collapse into the generous and oh-so-familiar embrace, Steve felt Tim catch him and cry with him for the amazing woman he’d had the pleasure of knowing such a brief time. Seeing Steve completely lose it shook Tim, and he struggled with his reaction. He’d never been bitter after a break up, but this one had really been devastating for him, so there was a part of him, the part that had repeatedly been slapped in the face with Steve’s reflexive defenses, that told him to toss Steve out on his ear. But Tim’s whole heart just wanted to care for and comfort the man he still loved and probably always would.

Once Steve’s tears slowed, the warmth of their shared body heat penetrated him and he needed Tim in a different way. Tim became aware of the change in the energy between them, and his heart clenched like a fist surrounded it. He calculated it, weighing the pleasure and comfort and connection against the regret and loneliness, then chucked the logic and turned his head and kissed Steve, whose lips were moving to seek his at exactly the same moment. Their tears combined to make the kiss salty, but they clung together desperately through it for long minutes before Tim started pulling on Steve's clothes. They’d long before learned the quickest way to get naked, and the wet cloth barely slowed them. They fell onto the bed, nearly feral in their passion. They clawed at each other, crying out wordlessly. Tongues and teeth clashed and tasted, hands gripped and stroked, and it was only minutes before Tim wailed and sprayed his pent up come into Steve’s hand, then leaned down to suck the familiar erection between his lips, shuddering in pleasure when Steve shouted and filled his mouth. They lay panting and shaking, holding each other.

Looking into Steve’s pain-filled eyes, Tim didn't want to add to his hurt, but he couldn't believe that he’d just done what they’d just done, with someone he’d broken up with so recently. He took a breath to speak, but Steve covered his mouth with his own and kissed him sensuously. Tim lost himself in it for a timeless interval, but finally withdrew.
"Tim, please," Steve whispered. "Please, I'm falling. I'm sliding into I don't even know what, so just... Please."

"Baby... Oh, god, Steve. I'll catch you. Just tonight. I'm here. I'm here," Tim surrendered brokenly. He didn't want to break his own heart further, but he couldn't bear to refuse the plea for help. He pulled Steve close and held him. When they drew apart to begin kissing again, Tim cringed at the sticky mess, and they went together to the bathroom and cleaned up.

Standing in front of the sink, Tim looked at the two of them together in the mirror. Tanned, heavily muscled versus white and wiry; so different. He turned away and stepped up to Steve, trying to segment his mind and heart to make this okay. He tucked away the part of himself that wept and railed at the emotional repercussions of making love to his ex and focused on giving himself over to the physical experience.

Steve saw the change, the resignation and surrender and he was torn by it. He wanted, needed Tim, but he wanted him unreservedly, as he'd always had him while they were together. He understood, too late, the agony of being with his lover when his lover wasn't fully present.

So finally, Steve laid his pained heart bare before Tim, and took him to the bedroom to give him everything.

It was almost like being together for the first time all over again. Steve patiently explored Tim's body, giving and giving. Tim floated in ecstasy, every stroke, every touch exactly what he preferred. Steve worked his tongue hard against Tim's throat until Tim was dizzy from it. He moved on to Tim's nipples and Tim nearly came from how long he spent nibbling and sucking. When Steve's slick fingers breached him, Tim shook so hard he felt like his bones were rattling. It was all so perfect, so ultimately arousing, that when Steve slid into him, Tim cried with regret that this was it; the last time. His body was one exposed nerve, every inch of him shooting rapture straight to his brain.

Steve felt his own tears dripping from his chin as he remained above Tim, thrusting relentlessly exactly the way that drove Tim mad. He began confessing his love over and over, but he knew even so that it was too late; too late.

When Tim came, it was with the power of a rocket, and he screamed his pain and climax together. Steve roared in the same agony as he filled Tim for the last time. He never wanted the moment to end.

But time is a constant, individual perception to the contrary merely an illusion, and eventually, they slept, and woke, and cleaned up separately, then met by the door. Steve knew it was hopeless but he tried anyway.

"Maybe we could-

"No. This was comfort, Steve. This was farewell. I can't be with you. We just don't work the way we are."

Steve closed his eyes for a long moment, and when he opened them, Tim saw he'd drawn the shutters on his heart and hoped that that meant he had found acceptance.

Leaving the hotel, Steve kept his chin up even though he knew he was leaving the hopes he'd had for reuniting with Tim in ashes in his wake. He'd lived without him before, and he would do it again.
Starting now.

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While he couldn't believe the comfort sex they'd had had been a mistake, Tim still regretted it. He couldn't believe that he actually felt worse than he had when they'd broken up. Raw, and desolate, he stumbled through the work week and drank himself into a stupor at night. On Friday night, he couldn't face staying in, and ached to capture a piece of his old life, so he found a dance club of the kind he would have accompanied Abby to and had a cab drop him there.

The music was like a wall of gelatin atop a subwoofer, thick and pounding, and Tim tried to let it sweep all of his sense of self, with all the pain and remorse and self-loathing away. He ordered and drank two shots of bourbon, then headed out to the dance floor. He ignored everyone else, focused solely on trying to recapture some of the feeling he'd always been filled with when Abby dragged him to a numbingly loud concert or club. He'd lost himself in the noise, becoming a part of the crowd, any rage or pain he felt being carried away by the larger organism. Radioactive by Imagine Dragons started its heavy beat, and he felt the sheer apocalyptic idea rush through him. He jumped in one place in double time with the reverberating bass, eyes closed, feeling himself changed in agonized metamorphosis. Everything had transformed, down to his bones, and some part of who he was was disintegrating, toxic, explosive... Vaporizing.

As the song bled into the next, he stopped moving and stood with his head bowed, eyes closed, panting, dripping with sweat. This was it. His farewell to the man he'd become in trying to force his own square peg into the round hole of life in paradise with a god. He was human again, and he was strong.

As he raised his head, he opened his eyes and turned on his heel. He'd gotten what he needed, and he was ready to face life without Steve McGarrett.

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Tim received an email indicating he should plan on a call from Director Vance at 0830 the next morning. It wasn't unusual. This new team of Tim's was Vance's brainchild and the man had kept tabs on its progress. This sounded more official than the other phone meetings had, though, and Tim worried a little. But when they spoke, the news seemed to be an answer to the difficult and lonesome situation he was in. Vance wanted him to make sure the team could function without him, then begin reviewing personnel to create more teams like it. While Tim was relieved he'd likely be able to leave Hawaii, he wasn't sure he wanted to live totally nomadically, traveling the world setting up teams. He wanted a home base, and home for him meant Washington. But returning to DC seemed like admitting defeat. He was torn and didn't feel as if he could talk to anyone about it.

The next two cases, Tim took a complete back seat, encouraging Kailani to lead. She agreed, and stepped up in a big way. He confidently informed Vance that they were ready to go independent.

Telling the team was anticlimactic. Kailani and Marcus were happy, but Andy seemed upset. When the new leader and youngest man left Tim's office, he stayed, shifting uncomfortably in his chair.

"What is it, Andy?"

"You... Earlier on, it seemed like you wanted to get, uh, friendly with me," he said. Tim inclined his head. "I know you and the Five-0 leader broke up, but you were my boss, and..."

Tim's mind suddenly flashed to Steve reassuring him that it was normal to have a crush on a
mentor, and his eyes widened.

"Look, I wanted... I wanted something more from you than we could have done with you as my team leader, but now I'm seeing someone and I just... I'm a little pissed you never let on that you'd be giving Kai the lead, that maybe we could, um, well, you know."

"I didn't know that's what the Director was hoping for. I thought he wanted me to choose an experienced SFA because I had never led a team before, not that I would be leaving you. I never intended to make you uncomfortable with my interest. I really was just looking for a friend, and I had no idea that you..."

The younger man nodded and the tightness in his frame eased. "Okay. Maybe we still can be friends."

"Maybe."

But when they went out for a hike, it became apparent to both Tim and Andy's boyfriend Ryan that Andy was still attracted to his former boss, and when Andy suggested they go out for a drink afterward, Tim declined. It saddened Tim to have to choose to put distance between himself and Andy. The younger man reminded him of Steve, though a more open, less arrogant version. But Ryan was obviously smitten with him, and Tim wanted to give them every opportunity to make their relationship work. He would never want to be the reason for a break up, so he passed the next time Andy invited him out.

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It was almost two months after the break up with Steve before Tim could tell anyone from Washington about what had happened. He continued to work, sifting through personnel files compiling lists of possible cyber field team members, writing programs and floating as a support Agent for the entire office. He still occasionally babysat Jo, but it was painful and awkward when he ran into Steve, and Mary's prying and trying to get the men to try again quickly became too much to bear. So the biggest joy he had left was lost to him, and he ended up drinking more and staying at his apartment watching tv or trying to write.

One weekend, a few days after the third time Andy had invited Tim to join him and Ryan on an outing, Tim finally confessed to Abby. He had to tell someone, and she had been his best friend for a long time.

"Abby, please don't tell anyone. It's bad enough that I came all this way and made so many comments about how great Steve is and now it's over and I don't want to end up being the butt of Tony's jokes about it. My team here has graduated to working without me. This kind of cybercrime field team is going really well, and Vance is going to have me start more like it at other offices around the world. I'd rather wait and have the distance be the excuse I give for why it didn't work out with Steve than admit we're just too different."

"But why don't you just come home?" Abby pleaded. "We miss you, and it's just not the same without you on the team."

"I wouldn't be coming back to MCRT anyway. Vance has made it clear that he likes what I'm doing and wants me to do more of it. And running back to Washington with my tail between my legs is not going to work. I couldn't face that."

"I'll promise not to say anything if you'll think about asking Vance if you can come home."
Tim sighed. "I'll think about it."

And he did. He thought about it a lot. He wanted to come back to the headquarters building and its orange walls and his friends there, to his familiar surroundings and happy memories. He really could be based out of anywhere if he was going to be traveling and starting new teams. But returning to DC felt like he was admitting defeat, and he was just too proud to do it.

He opened another bottle of wine and stared at a sitcom on tv.

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Abby's boots boomed as she clomped down the basement stairs. The sound was loud enough that Gibbs suspected she was deliberately stepping even heavier than she would normally have done, but he didn't really mind. Her theatrics were a comforting familiarity.

"Hey, Abs," he greeted, then frowned when she didn't respond. She walked over to his workbench and grabbed his phone. He tilted his head and watched as she tsked at the old model, dialed, then held it to her ear for a moment. When the call connected, she extended her hand, offering him the phone. His frown deepened when McGee's voice repeated his greeting.

"...Gibbs? Did you just butt dial me?" The tiny, tinny voice asked. Abby stomped her foot and shook the phone at Gibbs. He sighed and took it from her, then stared as she darted away, barely making a sound as she ran up the stairs and out of the house.

"Hey, Tim," he said resignedly.

"Oh. Hi. I thought... When you didn't say anything, I thought you pocket dialed me. That can happen pretty easy with the older-um, with your model of phone."

Hearing Tim's voice felt so familiar, and the tightening and aching in his chest was just like he remembered it, too. "How ya doing, Tim?"

Tim pursed his lips and sighed. "Abby put you up to this, didn't she?"

"Bet she promised not to say anything, because she didn't."

"Of course she took it literall'y."

"Means she's worried about you," Gibbs said. He head the slight slur to Tim's words and knew he was drinking. Not a good sign.

"Yeah, I talked to her earlier." Tim huffed. Maybe confessing to Gibbs would make him feel better. Letting the other man know that Tim had yet another failed relationship might give him comfort and maybe a sense of solidarity. Gibbs wasn't the only one who couldn't make committed, long term situations work. "Steve and I are done."

Gibbs squashed the hope that rose in his heart. "That sucks."

"Yeah. We just... We're too different, and he wasn't able to accept that fact." Another heavy sigh. "I guess I couldn't either," he added softly.

"So you told Abby, but you didn't want to tell me?"

"Gibbs..." Maybe he shouldn't have told Gibbs. Why had he? He couldn't quite remember his logic. He rubbed his face and poured himself more wine. Wait. Why was the bottle empty?
"Why are you still there? You could transfer back to Washington."

"I... I have a job here. I'm going to be traveling to other offices, but..."

"Your family is here, Tim. Unless... Are you hoping Steve will get his head out of his ass? Come back to you?"

"I left him, Gibbs. It wasn't an ultimatum, or a manipulation. It's over." His voice was strong and sure in that truth. Anger and resentment burned some of his confusion away. It still hurt so damned much that he'd lost Steve. Would he ever find someone who could accept him and love him?

Gibbs waited, knowing Tim had more to say and giving him the time to find how to say it.

Tim stood up from his sofa and started pacing, not seeing the pale walls with their seascape paintings and the generic island decor.

"It's humiliating. I uprooted everything, tore the team apart, to come be with Steve and I couldn't make it work. I can't come back like a whipped dog. I couldn't live with the embarrassment of everyone there knowing that I can't keep a man any more than I could keep a woman, that I pathetically followed Steve halfway around the world for nothing."

"So you're punishing yourself for falling in love," Gibbs observed.

"I failed! I failed epically! I failed Steve and all my friends and my family!"

"Do... Do you think you failed me, Tim?" Gibbs' voice had dropped to a whisper. Tim stopped, his knees locking. There was a sound in the voice in his ear that cracked the walls of his self-defeating resolve. He'd already found someone who loved and accepted him. And he'd pissed it away for over a decade.

"You most of all," he answered with total honesty, not even thinking. "We've loved each other all these years and I threw that away," he said, the truth that had haunted him since that night at Gibbs' house spilling out. "I hurt you, and I never wanted to hurt you, Gibbs, ever! Oh god," Tim broke into a sob and covered his mouth to stifle the rest of them. He was crying, and to Gibbs! This had to be a nightmare. He was the most pathetic excuse for a man who ever lived. And now Gibbs knew it. "I'm sorry..." He choked out. "I'm so sorry." Tears blinded him and he just let them fall as he sank to the floor. He pulled his knees to his chest and rocked himself, apologizing over and over, stuck in his realization that he'd had a chance with Gibbs and had always been too afraid to take it. Would there ever be a time when his personal life wasn't a total failure?

Gibbs struggled to speak past the tightness in his throat. "Tim, oh, Tim... No, sweetheart, no. I love you. I'll always love you. You, Tim. You have never disappointed me. You never will. Oh, Tim..."

The words finally penetrated the desperately suffocating blanket of Tim's despair. "You... Gibbs, you...you still... You love me? I thought you'd hate me. I... Oh, god, Jethro!" There was a hope rising in him, Phoenix-like. What if every bridge hadn't burned? Was there really a chance that everything he'd ever wanted was right here? A snippet of a song twittered in his head, '...you were with me all the while.'

"Tim..." Gibbs sighed. "I could never hate you." Listening to the man he loved break down made Gibbs ache to be with him and hold him. "It's okay. I still love you, Tim. Never gonna stop. Shh, now, it's okay." He struggled to soothe the man with words alone. Him, the functional mute! It was ludicrous, but it was all he could do. He closed his eyes and sat down on the stairs.

Tim calmed. He couldn't believe how tender Gibbs' voice sounded; how loving. It fed a deep part
of him, and he soaked it up. If there was the slightest chance that he hadn't mangled the possibility of a real relationship with Gibbs, he had to take it. Maybe they'd never settled into a steady friendship because they both needed more than that from each other. "Jethro," he said, his voice quavering. He cleared his throat. His mind held only one thought, to try to see if there was any chance to salvage what he'd walked away from. "Jethro, I love you. I'm done waiting and putting other parts of my life ahead of what I really want. What I have wanted all along. I want you. I want to share my life with you. I want you in every possible way. Please... Will you have me? I'm half a world away and I'm a miserable excuse for a man, but I love you and I hope, oh do I hope, that you'll look past my shortcomings and say that even though I hurt you, you'll have me." He waited breathlessly. He felt like his entire life hinged on this moment.

"Tim..." Gibbs said softly. "Yes. It's time for you to come home."

Tim's tears turned sweet and he smiled through them. A door had just opened on a new life and he was ready to run through it.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah, it is."

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A/N This was the hardest chapter to write. I knew where it would end up, and I could not leave Gibbs all alone, but it still tore me up to do this to Steve and Tim. I hope that you're still with me and you can keep going. One more chapter, then a hell of an epilogue. I sometimes love and hate my muse.

Big thank you to FlyingPiglet again. Not only did you let me rip off your dream, you held my hand through this painful chapter and reminded me that I could have stopped with chapter 6. My inner over-achiever rebelled and so here's 7, on time! More co-writer than just Beta reader again; you're awesome!

Thanks all. Please don't crucify me.
Chapter 8

Tim called Leon Vance the next day from work.

"I want to be based out of Headquarters. I'm ready and willing to travel, but the next team I set up, I would like to do from there, and between traveling, I want to come home to Washington," he said decisively.

"Okay. I'm actually relieved to hear it, Tim. I think being in Hawaii has been a difficult thing for you personally, and I'm glad you're coming home to where your friends are."

"They're more than friends. We're a family. Ohana is the Hawaiian word, and from my understanding of the language, it's exactly the definition that fits how Gibbs' team feels to me."

Tim waited while Vance considered that.

"Well, I will look forward to seeing you back here. I'll approve your transfer as soon as you file it."

"Thank you, Director."

"I really think you can call me Leon in private, Tim."

Tim smiled. "Thank you, Leon."

"You're welcome."

And they hung up.

After that, Tim felt he had some loose ends to tie up and then he'd be ready to move on.

When the mobile Cybercrimes team returned from their case the next day, Tim asked Andy for a word in private before they headed home.

When the other man sat down across from him, the hope Tim saw in his eyes made him feel weary and see Andy as very young. He tailored what he had planned to say accordingly.

"I wanted to let you know that I am moving back to Washington."

"What?! I thought that..."

Tim held up his hand. "On the professional side, it makes sense, with the success of this experimental team that the next team of its kind would be based from Headquarters. I'm going there to set that up. I wanted to share with you the personal reason that I came to Hawaii and the reason I'm leaving," he said. Andy frowned but waited, so Tim continued. "I came here chasing a Hollywood happy ending. I had fallen head over heels for the most gorgeous, adventurous man, and we thought we could make it work. Obviously, we couldn't, as you already know. But I never told you what I left behind to be with Steve. I'd been dancing around an attraction between me and my Team Leader out there for over a decade. Through the years, the infatuation became something much deeper as we learned to trust and respect each other. Looking back now, I have no idea why I never took the chance with him. He's the most patient, stalwart person you could imagine, and I walked away from that for passion and a ripped body."

"I am the..."
luckiest person in the world that the man I abandoned, whose heart I broke, is willing to have me now."

"What?! I've been sitting thinking of the best way to dump Ryan so I could have my shot with you and you've had some other guy strung along this whole time? Jesus, what kind of asshole Casanova are you?"

Tim sighed at the immature reaction. "I never led you on. I never led anyone on. What I am trying to tell you, Andy, is not to throw away something good that's right in front of your face for some misguided romantic notion. Ryan is in love with you. He's sweet and kind and enjoys the same things you do. He's cute, and smart... God, try to see that there might just be exactly what you're looking for right there."

"What I'm looking for is right in front of me now. Tim, you will never know what you could have had with me," Andy said. Then he stood and walked away.

Tim looked down and found his hands were shaking. He hated drama and conflict like that, but he hadn't been able to just watch while Andy messed up. Closing his eyes, he tried to let it go and got up to head back to his apartment. As he walked to his car, he noted that he never thought of the place as home. Home was Washington. Home was hopefully going to be with Gibbs and all his friends around him again, and soon.

His step became lighter with that thought.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim answered the decisive knock on the door of his hotel apartment. The figure waiting there with the duffel bag over his shoulder was familiar, but the warm, soft expression on his face was new. Stepping back and holding the door, Tim wordlessly invited Gibbs inside, finding that he didn't think he could speak even if he wanted to. The older man set his duffel bag down and turned to Tim. They embraced, and Tim waited for a surge of overwhelming emotion that didn't come. Instead, a warmth like a campfire suffused his chest and he simply felt like he had already come home. He sighed and relaxed into the strong arms, his own holding the older man firmly.

For these last months while Tim had been in Hawaii, so much of Gibbs' life had felt jagged and painfully raw. He'd heard Ducky refer to him as behaving like a bear with a sore paw. Having the younger man in his arms, all the rough edges smoothed, and his tension just drained away.

"Thanks for coming," Tim finally said quietly. Gibbs grunted affirmative, and they slowly leaned back from one another, keeping ahold of each other's forearms. "I put my books and stuff into storage when I left Steve's place, but I've still got everything here to pack," he explained, trying to justify but needing to confess his real feelings as well. "And... I couldn't wait to see you."

"We should talk, Tim," Gibbs replied. Tim let go his grip on him and swallowed, then nodded toward the couch. They sat down side-by-side but with space between them.

"I thought we already said all the hard stuff," Tim said, trying for levity but his voice betraying him with a tremor. "I want to be with you. I want us to finally give this a shot because I think we're both ready."

Gibbs hardened his resolve. Vance had shoved a spanner into the works and Gibbs had insisted on being the one who made the offer to Tim, just so he'd be sure.

"We never replaced you on the team. I talked to Vance and you can come back to MCRT."
Tim frowned. "I thought Vance wanted me to help establish more cybercrime field teams?"

"That's what he wants, but he'll let you come back if you choose to."

Tim took only a moment's pause. That's what Vance's hesitation after his ohana comment had been about. There really wasn't any choice to make. There was no going back, only forward. And Tim wouldn't have it any other way. "Gibbs… I loved being a part of your team, but I love you more."

Gibbs sat stiffly. He had to make sure Tim understood and wasn't swayed by his perception of what Gibbs wanted from him.

"This is an important decision, Tim. I've never wanted to get in your way."

"Oh, Jethro," Tim reached out and set his hand on top of where Gibbs' rested on his knee. He understood what the man was doing: self-sacrificing, as always. But this time, Tim had a say in how Gibbs' life could be, in the man having a chance to get what he actually wanted, and he vowed right then to consider Jethro's feelings in every decision from here on out. "I'm choosing you. I may be traveling and spending time abroad at other offices getting these new teams going, but I think we can handle that, don't you?"

Gibbs turned his hand over and interlaced his fingers with Tim's, his voice a little gravelly as he recognized what Tim was offering. "If I know you're coming back to me," he shrugged, "I can wait."

Tim smiled. "That's settled, then. I get to do a job that was practically created just for me, that plays up my strength, and gives me more responsibility and more pay, and I get to be with the man I've been in love with for years and years. Sounds like I'm hitting the jackpot."

"Not sure I'm a jackpot, Tim." Gibbs said with a self-deprecating twist of his lips. Tim shook his head.

"I know you, Gibbs. I've spent more hours of my life with you and Tony than I have with anyone else. You know me, and I know you, and as long as you say yes, we're going to try to make this work." Tim ducked his head to catch Gibbs' eye. "Somehow, I don't think you came all this way to say no."

Gibbs' lips moved into his wry smile. He squeezed Tim's hand. "I think you got me, there."

"I hope I've got you here, there, and everywhere." Tim pulled their joint hands up to his chest, over his heart. "Because I take you with me, wherever I go. I love you, Jethro."

The sappy sentiment was too sincere to make fun of. Gibbs looked into Tim's bright eyes and leaned close. Their first kiss was simple: gentle, and although it was arousing, it was more of that comfortable sort of warmth, rather than the scorching white heat that Tim had felt with Steve.

"How are you feeling? You want coffee or bed-sleep?" Tim stumbled over his offer, not wanting it to sound like he was trying to throw Gibbs into sex.

"You had dinner yet?"

"No. Hey! You took a military flight, didn't you? You're hungry. You wanna go out? Or I've got some eggs... Um, leftover shrimp, too."

Gibbs smiled at Tim's eagerness to please him. He hadn't had someone who wanted to take care of him in his life for a long time. It was going to take some getting used to.
Dinner was quiet; comfortably and companionably so. Tim's one comment was about fresh seafood being the only thing he was going to miss.

Without verbal agreement, they got ready to sleep and stood together at the foot of the bed. Tim's face slowly flushed and he watched Gibbs' calm demeanor carefully. "So...you're okay sleeping, um, together?"

"Sure."

"I'm...I'm kind of assuming you're exclusively a top," Tim said. He'd thought about that a lot in the last few days, awaiting Gibbs' arrival.

"Usually. I'd like that, if we're gonna go that route."

"You mean you don't want to..." Tim stammered nervously, suddenly worried that Gibbs didn't truly want him that way.

"Tim, I want to do whatever feels right. If we go right to sleep, if we make out like teenagers and then fall asleep, that's okay. If we have some kind of sex, that's okay, too. I'm not interested in rushing you in bed."

Tim was relieved. But another concern rose, and he had to confess it. "I should warn you... I still, um, I still sometimes have nightmares. I might turn the light on if..."

"If that keeps up, you're getting real help when we get back," Gibbs said softly. That nearly a year later Tim was still struggling with PTSD badly enough to warn Gibbs wasn't right. He hugged the younger man. "You don't deserve nightmares and lingering fear. We'll find someone to help you through it."

"It's not so bad, anymore, but living alone again kind of... Brought some of the problems back," Tim admitted. Gibbs rubbed his back. "Of course, with you here, I'll probably be okay..."

"Nothing wrong with needing help."

"Jethro, how is it that when you say something like that, I feel like it really is true, not you just trying to get me to fix a weakness?"

Drawing back to look at Tim, Gibbs saw his sadness, leftover from his time with McGarrett. "Because I know you're not weak. That never even crosses my mind." Jethro resented that Steve had ever made Tim feel that way. When he'd chosen not to fight for Tim's affection, it had been with the unspoken understanding that Steve would take care of Tim. While Gibbs hated how hurt Tim had been, he found himself feeling a bit smug knowing that he would be better for Tim than that.

"I don't think he thought it consciously. He's just programmed to improve, improve, improve. It's sad, because it means he can never enjoy a moment for what it is without trying to make it better. I wish I could have helped him more..."

"People gotta want help. And a relationship isn't meant to be a way to fix someone. I tried it. Three times, Tim."

"You don't need fixing, Gibbs. You're exactly who you are." Tim leaned in and kissed him. "And you're the man I love."

Gibbs kissed him back, relaxing into the press of Tim's soft lips. God. All the years he'd dreamt of
this, and he was here, and it was just exactly as he'd imagined. He gently swiped his tongue across
the seam where Tim's plush lower lip met his upper, and they parted effortlessly to allow him
entrance. Gibbs felt Tim sigh and he slowly deepened the kiss, savoring his first taste of this sweet,
strong young man.

After a long while of laying in bed kissing and holding each other, Gibbs could tell Tim was
feeling an urgency to move forward as his hips shifted a little restlessly. Smiling faintly, the older
man repositioned them, settling Tim on his back with Gibbs' left arm still cradling him as he laid
beside him and let his right hand slide down Tim's chest. When he took a firm grip on Tim's
erection, the younger man gave a soft cry of his name before thrusting himself into the hand. Gibbs
started a slow stroking and leaned back to watch his beloved's face. After a minute or so, Tim
realized he was no longer being kissed, and he opened his eyes, shuddering when he saw the intent
look with which Gibbs was watching him. Gibbs was jacking him off. He loved Tim, had
committed to him, and he was staring at Tim's face while his calloused fingers expertly worked his
cock. The heated look Tim gave him made Gibbs flush with pleasure, then the younger man arched
and gasped and the heavy sex in his hand pulsed as Tim's orgasm overwhelmed him. Gibbs closed
his eyes with Tim, and pulled him closer until he had calmed. When their eyes met again, Tim
found a silly grin of delight wouldn't leave his lips. Until Gibbs brought his hand up and started
licking it clean. Then Tim's mouth hung open and he watched raptly until he'd finished. Gibbs'
smile was sly when he finally kissed Tim, letting the man taste himself on Gibbs' tongue. Lazily,
they traded kisses and gentle touches until Tim yawned.

"Time to sleep, my love," Gibbs said softly.

"But...don't you... I could-"

"I'm fine. I enjoyed that, too, Tim."

While it vaguely bothered Tim to not reciprocate, he was already feeling so heavy that he slipped
into sleep without more protest.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

A knock on the door drew Tim's attention where he was packing in the bedroom, but it was Gibbs
who answered. Steve McGarrett stared in shock at the older man standing in Tim's apartment as if
he belonged there.

"Agent Gibbs," Steve said, nodding.

Gibbs couldn't help but smirk, his resentment of Steve's treatment of Tim making him take a cheap
shot. "You didn't think someone as amazing as Tim would be alone for long, did ya?"

"Jethro!" Tim gasped. Gibbs turned and looked at him, then gave a shrug at his scandalized
expression and went back to packing. Tim tried not to smile at the protective snarkiness as he
hurried to the door. "Hi. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, it's fine. I just... Chin told me you were leaving, and I-we-the team wanted to see if you'd
come to dinner for a going away, uh, thing. Tonight. Everyone's going to The Tiki Bar around
1900. Gibbs can come too, of course. And anyone from your NCIS office here," Steve explained,
obviously taken off-guard by the company Tim had.

The thought of actually having a send off was heartwarming. "Yeah, I'd like that, Steve. Thank
you. I'll see if anyone from my office wants to join us."
"Cath will be there," Steve offered, sounding a little defensive. Tim's smile was genuine and his shoulders lost some of their tension.

"You're back together. That's good, Steve. I'm happy for you," he said sincerely. Steve nodded warily, uncomfortable that Tim could still read him so easily. Tim smiled a little sadly. "Steve. I mean it. You know I wouldn't say it otherwise. We'll be there, and everyone can meet Gibbs. It will be really nice, thank you."

And it was. Gibbs was mostly quiet, but he seemed relaxed, and he sat at Tim's side and marveled at the different side of his former subordinate that he was seeing. This Tim had a deep confidence that underlined how far he had come since his early days in Washington. The stammering uncertainty that he had displayed with Gibbs the night before vanished, and Gibbs understood that Tim had changed and grown, and that he would have to make sure he didn't give him any excuses to regress. Being vulnerable with his lover and expressing his fears and worries was one thing, but Gibbs didn't want Tim to return to the shy, nearly meek man he'd been when they had first met. This easy confidence, his sharp-witted banter with the Five-0 team and his other friends, was attractive and Gibbs looked forward to getting to know Tim all over again.

Tim noticed that Steve was downing a beer and re-ordering every time the waitress came by, and that he was watching Gibbs and himself closely. He caught his ex's eye and gave him a raised eyebrow look. Steve huffed and got up, going out to the edge of the restaurant's lights, and stood looking at the ocean. Tim waited, hoping Cath would go after him, but the clenched-jaw, pinched look on her face made him nod and he followed, squeezing Gibbs' shoulder gently as he went by. The older man understood Tim's need to check in with Steve, and smoothly redirected the conversation that lagged with the pair's exodus.

Tim stood a foot or so away from Steve, but he kept his voice low so the words remained private. "There was this dog I used to see at the dog park. He was old, and he couldn't run and play with the younger dogs. He couldn't stand to have them play with the sticks and toys and stuff, though. He'd gather them up and guard them. It was like he was saying 'if I can't have fun, neither can you'," Tim said quietly, both sets of eyes looking out at the waves rolling in under the low hanging moon. "You say you're more of a cat person, but you're acting like that dog, like I shouldn't be allowed to be happy with Gibbs because I wasn't able to be happy with you. You're hurting Cath, and you're hurting yourself, and neither of you deserve it."

Steve wanted to snap at him, wanted to sneer and make a biting comment that would make Tim and his too-perceptive observations run away. But that wasn't really who he was anymore. His time with Tim, being seen and known and loved, had changed him, and the newer, more reflective part of himself wondered if he'd made the biggest mistake of his life in letting Tim go. He nearly growled in frustration. Self-awareness sucked.

"I want to just go back to who I was, but I can't."

"There's no going backwards, Steve. Just forward. You can be open and loving and still be strong. I hope you learn to see that."

Tim went back to the table and took Gibbs' hand as he sat down. He looked at Chin, wanting to ask him to be there for Steve, and found his friend already watching him. They nodded to each other and returned to the conversation.

It came up as the group talked that Mary had left the island, taking little Jo to the house she had inherited from Aunt Deb. Tim understood even more Steve's depression and hoped fervently that Catherine would step up and be more supportive of him. Other than conceding defeat in their relationship, losing the close bond he had formed with the toddler had been Tim's most painful loss.
during the time he'd been in Hawaii, and although Steve had never been that close with Jo, he knew he must miss his sister. Tim had to continually let go and allow that Steve would make his own choices and lead his own life. That life was separate from Tim's. Whenever that truth felt painful, though, all Tim had to do was look at Gibbs and certainty that he'd made the right decision settled him.

The evening ended gradually. Lou and his wife left first, and Tim shook Grover's hand. Kono and Adam were next, with a hug between Kono and Tim, along with promises to keep in touch. As Tim's Cybercrimes team saw the evening breaking up, they retreated as a unit, and Tim thanked them sincerely for coming, knowing he'd continue to be in touch with them through their jobs. Only Andy lingered an extra few moments, but Tim stood close by Gibbs, and the man sighed before he left the restaurant. Tim had hoped the talk they'd had would help the other man make better choices for his personal life in the future. Gibbs cocked an eyebrow at their interaction and Tim just smiled enigmatically. The piercing blue eyes narrowed, but his trust in Tim was total, so he let it lie. Kamekona and Jerry left next, wishing Tim aloha. The moments drew out with only Steve, Catherine, Danny, and Chin still seated at the long table with Tim and Gibbs. Cath whispered something to Steve, and the couple rose, Danny standing immediately with them.

"Take care of yourself, McGee," Danny said, hugging him with the brief, stinging back slap of the butch male.

"Yep. You too. And keep this partner of yours out of trouble. Say goodbye to Grace for me, too."

Catherine and Tim shared an awkward and polite hug, during which Steve's eyes went to Gibbs' and they shared a long look. Recalling the moment in the hospital hallway after Tim's rescue, Steve understood the complex emotions, especially the sadness, that he'd seen in the older man's eyes that day. He clenched his jaw and tried to be as gallant as Gibbs had been then, nodding once. Gibbs' gaze remained steady, and Steve took that as a demonstration of how his affection would be for Tim: steadfast and resolute. Steve nodded again and looked away.

Tim turned to Steve. They stared at each other with sadness. Tim cleared his throat and extended a hand to shake. Steve took it, then pulled him into a one-armed hug.

"Be happy," Tim whispered, taking a final breath of Steve's familiar scent. They drew apart, their hands still clasped.

"You, too," Steve said in a strained voice. Tim's answering smile was bright as he thought of the life he hoped he'd have with Gibbs. He nodded, and waited for a stab of pain that didn't come as the trio walked away.

When they were gone, Chin rose. He said a long sentence in Hawaiian and Tim laughed.

"Promise me you'll email that to me so I can translate it and appreciate it properly," he said. Chin smiled and agreed. "You've become a true friend, Chin. Please tell me we'll stay in touch."

"You won't get rid of me just by moving to the mainland. We became friends through the net and we'll stay friends that way."

"Good," Tim replied. His mind went to asking Chin to watch out for Steve, but the look they shared made Tim nod silently instead. Five-0 was ohana; they'd take care of each other no matter what.

"I am so pleased that Tim has you, Gibbs. Have a good trip back," Chin said, addressing the older man and shaking his hand. Then he hugged Tim and nodded again before he walked away.
Back at Tim's now nearly bare apartment hotel rooms, all his attention came directly into focus on Gibbs. Their flight was the next day, and Tim wanted to take this last night in Hawaii to show Gibbs how much he adored him.

Taking the older man's hand, Tim drew him into the bedroom.

"I want to show you how I feel, Jethro," Tim said softly. Gibbs tilted his head.

"You got nothing to prove, Tim," Gibbs reassured.

"Not trying to prove anything. I just want to make you feel good."

Gibbs pulled the younger man to him. "I haven't felt this good in years, sweetheart. Just being with you means everything."

Tim smiled and shook his head. "You're making me want you more, Jethro." He leaned in and gently kissed him. "Please? We'll take it slow, but since you arrived, you've taken care of me and I really want to take care of you."

"We've got plenty of time for that back home," Gibbs protested.

"We've got plenty of time for it right now. C'mon, you wanna give me a complex? You're gonna make me think you don't want me," Tim said, meaning for it to sound teasing but having it end up plaintive. Gibbs' expression grew serious.

"Never think that. I love you and I want you, for the rest of my life, Tim."

Tim's eyes shone at that. "I will never tire of hearing you tell me you love me. Promise you'll say it often?"

"Yes. I promise." Gibbs put his hands on either side of Tim's face. "I love you, Tim."

"So let me show you that I love you back just as much. Please?"

The huge, pleading puppy dog eyes were too much for even Gibbs to withstand. "Okay."

Tim kissed him, smiling into it, smoothly tracing across Gibbs' lips with his tongue and dipping into his mouth when granted entry. Long minutes passed, just kissing, no rush to go any further. Tim felt transported, content in a way he'd never experienced before. Everything simply felt right. He rested his cheek on Gibbs' shoulder and let himself enjoy the feeling of being in his arms.

"We can just go to sleep if you want," Gibbs said quietly. Tim shook his head.

"I'll sleep better knowing that you came in my mouth," Tim replied, smirking, and chuckled at the way Gibbs' eyes widened. Then he kissed him hard and started undressing both of them. Gibbs helped and soon, they were naked and lying entangled on the bed, their hips rocking together, both their bodies shaking from the friction.

"Oh, Jethro..." Tim gasped. They had their cocks sandwiched between them and Gibbs was grinding just right. "Shit, I'm-I'm gonna... Ah!" Tim came and then started laughing even as he shivered through his climax. "Well, that wasn't what I planned!"

Gibbs grinned, and it was such a beautiful smile that Tim stared, wanting to memorize it. "Gibbs... Jethro... I love you. I'm so glad we're together. Really, just... So glad."

Gibbs stroked his hand down the side of Tim's face and nodded. "Me, too, love. Me too."
Tim basked in the tender moment, then twisted his body and snagged a few tissues. He wiped them off, then began sensually kissing Gibbs again. With his own desire sated, he was able to focus completely on his partner's pleasure, and he took his time exploring what reactions he got to kissing, sucking, and nibbling on the other man's neck. The different sounds Gibbs made, his breath hissing between his teeth, or shuddering in a gasp followed by a low groan, or a deep sigh, all told Tim what he enjoyed. Cataloging each response, Tim moved down, enjoying the pure masculinity of the wiry chest hair as he worked Gibbs' nipples and caressed his strong chest. Worrying the hard nubs between his lips, Tim discovered that his lover was amazingly sensitive to that stimulus. His hips bucked against Tim and he cursed long and low between clenched teeth.

For Gibbs, having this beautiful younger man lavish him with the attention he'd craved from him for so long was the best thing that he'd experienced in years. He watched as Tim moved from his chest down between his legs and he moaned at the sight. As much as he'd tried not to be, Gibbs had been haunted by fantasies of exactly this. When Tim dragged his pouty lip down the length of Gibbs' cock, he choked and his body trembled.

"Tim!" Gibbs called, his voice splintering. He bucked again and Tim started in earnest, letting the hip thrusts dictate the speed, and giving his very best, as he always did for Gibbs. Working tongue and lips, mouth and throat, he lost himself in the other man's pleasure. When Gibbs shouted again, and Tim's mouth was filled with harshly bitter come, he swallowed quickly, then kept the softening cock between his lips, not moving to overstimulate, but staying that way until Gibbs slid his hand through his hair and drew him up into his strong arms to kiss him. "Better than I dreamed," Gibbs murmured. Tim smiled in delight, and tugged the sheet over them. He snuggled close and they both fell asleep quickly, Tim with a deep satisfaction at having pleased his lover.

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Tim and Gibbs oversaw Tim's storage items loaded for shipping and carefully finished packing his more delicate possessions that they were taking back with them on the plane. Tim insisted they fly commercial, although with all the military flights he had done with his team, he had actually been teased by Kailani that he fell asleep almost instantly on the noisy flights, even in the uncomfortable jump seats. While he rarely flaunted the wealth his novels had garnered, Tim had chosen for them to fly first class and he'd paid the ridiculous amount of money for his six heavy boxes to come with them for the direct flight.

As the plane took off, Tim realized with a start that he hadn't had a single moment of regret or even a twinge of melancholy that no one had come to see them off. He'd been too contentedly wrapped up in details and being with Gibbs in a true partnership to even notice or take a final breath or look at Hawaii. But that was okay. He felt like he truly was going home, so he let the island disappear behind them without another glance. Only when his mind turned to Steve did he sigh, but he deliberately laid his feelings to rest and focused on the handsome, blue-eyed silver fox next to him, his heart filling with such sweetness that all other concerns vanished.
They both slept on the plane, but the long journey still had taken its toll. "I'll start looking for an apartment tomorrow," Tim told Gibbs as they drove toward the older man's house. "I appreciate you letting me stay the night."

"You can stay longer than a night, Tim. You can stay."

"I don't... I'm trying not to rush things."

"Twelve years not a long enough wait for ya?"

"You...really want me to live with you?"

"I want everything you're willing to give me, Tim. I've waited long enough."

At the house, Tim discovered that Gibbs, in true Gibbs fashion, had put his actions before his words. In the days between when they had talked on the phone and Gibbs had come to Hawaii, the older man had prepared his home for Tim's arrival with the obvious intent being that he would move in. The master bedroom had been cleaned and aired, with fresh sheets on the big bed and more than half the closet cleared and ready for Tim's clothes. One of the extra bedrooms had been emptied and cleaned and awaited Tim's belongings to make in into his office; either a writing or electronics workspace, or both. The living room was rearranged so that if Tim wanted a desk on the main floor, he would have it. There were three different air purifiers in various rooms, Gibbs' concern for Tim's allergy to sawdust apparent.

All the changes cemented Tim's understanding and belief that Gibbs truly wanted him to feel welcome and at home in the house, and oddly, he did feel it, from the moment they stepped through the door. Even though he had never spent much time in the house, everything from the placement of objects in the kitchen to the scent of it was familiar and comforting. Simply being in the house felt like he was being surrounded by in all things Gibbs. It was a homecoming the likes of which he'd not ever dared hope for.

They left the boxes of Tim's possessions and their luggage to be unpacked the next day, deciding without discussion that they needed to get upstairs together as quickly as possible.

"I have been dreaming of this moment since we talked on the phone," Tim said quietly as they climbed into bed together. "And it feels just like I expected."

Gibbs raised his eyebrows in question. He settled on his back with an arm out in invitation for Tim to lay close beside him, which he readily did.

"Comfortable. And just...right. Thank you for..."

Gibbs silenced him with a heated kiss. Tim took the hint. Kissing Gibbs just felt...good. Tim's body responded, but it didn't feel like his entire existence hinged on being able to join with the other man. He could thoughtfully explore Gibbs' body with his hands, and when he did, everything he found was familiar and satisfied him with that same feeling of home he'd had the first moment he'd embraced his former boss.

Gibbs found himself more eager than he'd anticipated being. All the years of wanting Tim had caught up to him, and it was time to have what he'd waited so long for. It was a way to show the younger man how precious he was, how treasured, and he relished the opportunity. He cupped his face with one palm and looked deep into those beautiful aquamarine eyes.

"I love you, Tim. Love you so much..."
The blush and smile he received were breathtaking. They melted into each other with kisses that extended forever. There was no discussion about condoms and safe sex; Tim trusted Gibbs implicitly, and Gibbs trusted Tim.

When they reached the point of penetration, Gibbs carefully lined up his slick erection and met Tim's gaze. The younger man's sweet smile was all the permission Gibbs needed, and he pushed gently inside. The grip and the heat were fantastic, and Gibbs had never felt more welcome.

Feeling Gibbs pressing the length of his cock inside him made Tim want to float away with the sensation. Gibbs. Jethro. His lover. His love.

Not only had it been months since he'd had sex, Gibbs was hung like a beer can, and the ache of being filled so completely made Tim's back arch at the burning pleasure.

"Oh, Jethro, yessss..." Tim hissed. It hurt, as he started moving, but what sweet, perfect pain! And then he acclimated and felt a deep satisfaction at having Jethro on top of and inside him. They moved together, meeting and withdrawing to meet again, and the lack of urgency was wonderful. Tim thought they could go all night like this, and he loved the idea.

When Gibbs shifted and hooked Tim's leg up to his shoulder, the sensations intensified as he was stimulating Tim's prostate more directly. Tim started to shake, and was suddenly overwhelmed with a fear he'd learned from all the times he and Steve had been in what had seemed a perfect, intimate moment yet Steve had shied away.

"Jethro?" Tim gasped, and the expression on his face stilled Gibbs' slow thrusting. He tilted his head in question. "Are you with me? Really? I-I need..."

Gibbs released Tim's thigh and carefully lowered himself so he lay fully atop Tim's body and kissed him tenderly. "Right here. Nowhere else I'd rather be."

Tim's breathing slowed. Gibbs would never lie to him. And the truth of his statement was written all over the older man's face and shone from deep in his eyes. "I love you, Jethro."

Gibbs nodded slowly and kissed him again. "I love you, too." When he started moving again, Tim smiled even as his body arched and shifted to meet each thrust. Raising Tim's leg back up, Gibbs kept eye contact, sharing every instant of pleasure and bonding, and gripped Tim's cock when he felt himself getting closer, panting as he picked up the pace.

"Ooohh... Yes, Jethro! My love! My love!" Tim called as his orgasm swept through him. Gibbs grunted his name in return as he locked, spurting, in the tight, rippling flesh; all the years and all the fantasies paled in comparison to the pure ecstatic joy he felt at finally -finally- joining with Tim.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

On his first day back at work, in the MCRT squad room on his way to his meeting with the Director, Tim hugged Tony as the SFA welcomed him back, telling him the happy news when asked about his living arrangements.

"You're moving in with Gibbs?" DiNozzo asked, his face a mask of confusion. "Already?"

"We've waited twelve years, Tony. We've agreed that's long enough."

"I don't know, it still seems a little fast to me," Tony said.
"You've been trying to get me to go for it with Gibbs since I got back from my abduction. What's the problem now?"

"I just wanted you to stay in Washington. I wanted to keep the team together."

"I can't be with Jethro if I'm on the team, Tony. And I'm not wasting another minute of my life without him."

"So... You're not coming back to MCRT, huh? I thought..."

Gibbs paused, unseen, by the stairs with a fresh cup of coffee in hand, curious to hear what Tim's response would be. He was still on alert for any regrets from Tim.

"I know. You were hoping things would just go back to the way they were, but I don't want them to. I've wasted so many years, Tony. I don't regret it...not really. I loved being part of the team, with you. We're ohana, Tony. Family. My not being on the team won't change that. Just... Promise me you'll watch out for him, okay?"

"Always have, always will."

"Thanks, Tony."

Taking a steadying breath, Gibbs decided in that moment that he'd have to be more aware of his own safety. Tim was strong, and eventually, he'd probably have to learn to live without Gibbs, but he didn't want that day to come any sooner because of his own brashness. He'd let Tony watch his back, knowing he was coming home to an amazing man who loved him with his whole, enormous heart.

At the meeting with the Director, Tim discovered how he had ended up in the position he had achieved.

"I had been wanting to try this new kind of cyber team, and so when Gibbs told me you were going to stay in Hawaii, I took the opportunity. I'm overjoyed at how well you did with it. Do you think you can repeat your success?"

"Given the choice of any Agent, yes."

"I'll give you as much leeway as I can."

"Dorneget would have been perfect," Tim said sadly.

"Yes, he... Yes."

"Andy McGillicutty came from us from some secret Air Force project in Colorado, right? He adapts to any crazy situation faster than anyone I have ever seen. I wonder if we could poach anyone else?"

"I can't hear that kind of talk, McGee," Leon said, suppressing a smile. Tim grinned.

"Alright, then. Bishop would be fantastic, too, but Gibbs would kill me."

Vance took a pause. "It's not any of my business, but..."

Tim smiled. "Ask me whatever you want, Leon. We've agreed not to hide."

"You're together, then."
"Yes."

"But you weren't before you left for Hawaii?"

"No. We never broke protocol. But now that we're not directly working together, there's nothing in the regs to stop us."

Leon spread his hands. "Not criticizing, just asking. He seems...less tense than I have ever seen him. He's energized, and he's smiling more. It's good to see, Tim."

"Thank you, Leon. I think we're really good for each other," Tim replied with a faint flush of pleasure. It was true. He was as good for Gibbs as Gibbs was for him, but having someone with Vance's profiling experience and penetrating observational skills see it was a wonderful reinforcement.

Tim already had a short list of people he wanted for the mobile cyber team. He sat down with Vance and was pleased that the Director only pulled two files as unavailable. He gave Tim the green light to interview and offer positions to any of the remaining candidates.

The first position Tim wanted to fill was SFA, which would of course become a promotion to Team Lead after a trial period with Tim as lead. His top choice was Cassie Yates, and the only potential hurdle he felt he faced with her was that she had more tenure than he did with the Agency, and she might chafe at taking orders from a man she had five years' experience on. Scuttlebut had apparently paved the way on that issue, since all of the technically minded SFA's seemed relatively sure that anyone chosen for that position on the new team would end up as lead, just as Kailani had. Cassie jumped at the chance, and began working with Tim to sort the other potential team members.

Unexpectedly, Tony had a candidate and he came to Tim with a thin file. It was Josh Cooper, a young man he had kept in touch with for years since he'd been witness to his father's death on an NCIS case. With Tony's encouragement, the young man had gone to Princeton and then law school before joining Naval Intelligence two years before. He was a rising star in the intelligence community, but dealing with his own father's murder at such a young age had left Josh with a burning desire to be in the trenches, not left sitting behind a desk. Being a field agent would let him find justice for families like his own. Tim admired the young man's drive and dedication, but he couldn't help his initial resistance. Still, it wasn't the kid's fault that his case was the one that had brought Hollis Mann into Gibbs' life. Tim would just have to make sure that the instinctive jealousy and animosity that flared whenever he thought about that woman and her romantic entanglement with Gibbs didn't bleed over into his relationship with Josh.

The other candidate they chose made Tim cringe internally to imagine working with her again. Susan Grady, the former polygraph specialist, had become a solid Field Agent, and Tim knew her computer and probability calculating skills would make her a good Mobile Cybercrimes (as Vance had officially named them) team member. He'd have to focus on keeping their interactions strictly professional, given that she had stalked him, pursued him, then abruptly changed her mind and refused him when he'd finally capitulated and asked her out. His interview with her seemed to show how far she had come since then, and her record as a Field Agent was impeccable.

Gibbs' team was called to Iraq on a case just as Tim's new team went into action together. There was immediate tension as the foursome set up in their joint office, but neither Tim nor Cassie could identify the trigger. They agreed to wait and see how the team worked their first case, but Tim worried and wished he could talk to Gibbs or Tony about the situation.

Tim hadn't anticipated the incredibly incendiary clash of personalities that arose between Susan
and Josh. At the height of the case, they argued so vehemently over the best technique to use to triangulate a critical phone call, that the delay resulted in Tim stepping in and doing the trace himself, then getting the location to Cassie, who, with local LEO backup, brought in their suspect.

Tim was overwhelmed by his own inability to keep his Agents on track in the heat of an investigation, and the incident created such acrimony between Josh and Susan that he realized he would have to replace one of them. He went home and opened a bottle of wine. He considered trying to call Gibbs, but with the time difference and the the potentially stealthy nature of that team's work in a combat zone, he didn't feel like he should.

Draining his third glass, he began pacing. What if his success in Hawaii had been happenstance? A fluke? If he was so blind that he couldn't see that the conflict on his team would endanger the case, he didn't deserve to lead.

Tim opened another bottle, uncaring that he hadn't eaten all day and he was wobbling as he strode through the living room. As a criminal investigator, his obliviousness was inexcusable! He was worse than the greenest probationary Agent. He shouldn't even be trusted with a badge and gun!

He sank into his desk chair and loaded a piece of paper into his typewriter. When his resignation was finished, he yanked the page out and signed it, his emotions boiling inside him.

In an uncharacteristic fit of anger and a very characteristic fit of self-loathing, Tim smashed the empty bottle into the fireplace and grabbed his car keys.

Ending up drunk at Vance's door in the middle of the night ready to resign, Tim had hit bottom professionally. He was forced to admit that he had come to use alcohol as an unhealthy coping mechanism and crutch when Gibbs wasn't around.

Insistently showing Tim into his guest room to sleep it off, the next morning, Leon saw his kids out of the house to soccer and band camp and determined to get to the bottom of the issue.

Two cups of coffee and a couple of pain relievers got Tim verbal after he stumbled out of bed, vaguely confused as to how he had ended up at the Director's home. The letter of resignation sitting on the dining room table with Tim's signature scribbled at the bottom brought it all back. Relief settled his stomach when he saw it had been torn in two.

"Director-"

"Leon."

"Yeah. Okay. Leon, I need to apologize. I put together a team with a terminal flaw. Either Susan or Josh or both will have to go. And since I made the decision to put them together, this is a really bad-"

"Tim, did you close the case?"

"Yes, but-"

"I understand that you feel you made a grievous error, but... No harm, no foul. We'll put a notation in each of their files, which can be removed upon completion of a class on interpersonal conflict in the workplace, and you figure out which one will stay and which will be offered a position on one of the next new teams you set up. That is, if you still believe they can do the job."

"They're both capable..."
"Good. Problem solved."

"I... Okay."

Vance let the younger man contemplate that through a piece of toast and a glass of orange juice, then tackled the second problem.

"Since when have you had a substance abuse problem, Tim?"

"What?! I don't!"

"You were drunk when you showed up last night. You're hungover now."

"But I don't really do that..."

"You also drove yourself here."

Tim paled. That he did not recall. "Uh..." And his mind immediately told him that Jethro was going to kill him. "That was... God, that was the dumbest thing I have ever done."

"Uh-huh."

"I swear, Director, that will never happen again."

This time Leon let his title stand. "It had better not."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Tim got his first experience having his lover actually being angry at him with the fight that ensued when Gibbs came home and learned about the struggle Tim had been through while he was gone.

"Risking your life at work is part of the job. Driving drunk is risking your life being stupid! You've never been stupid, Tim! What the hell?!"

Tim's scalp tingled and he felt his breath quicken. "I... I got into the habit of having some wine to help me relax."

"Bull! Try again," Gibbs growled.

"No, really! That's how it started... But it became more of a way to not have to think about being lonely and then a way to not feel how miserable I was in Hawaii."

"You haven't had more than a single glass of wine since we've been home."

"I'm happy with you! I don't need the crutch when I'm happy... But you were gone, and I screwed up so badly with this new team."

"I understand drinking your feelings. I been doing it for years. But I don't get in my fucking car and drive across town when I can barely stand!"

Tim hung his head. "It was stupid. I know."

"So what's this really about?" Gibbs asked. His face was still fixed in disapproval, but he felt under control enough to approach Tim.

"I screwed up. I totally screwed up putting this team together. Susan and Josh loathe each other."
How could I have put them on a team? It's awful! We almost lost a suspect! I'm going to have to put a note in both their files, but Vance refuses to put one in mine! It's my fault, Jethro. I'm not fit to lead. I'm not even fit to be an Agent."

Gibbs refused to let him wallow any more. He head slapped him just as he would have if Tim had still been on his team.

Tim's eyes popped wide in shock. That was something Gibbs didn't do at home. Of course, it was Tim who had blurred the lines, so he really probably deserved another slap, but he was confused and frustrated and part of him wanted big strong Gibbs to make it all better. He struggled with the ghost of himself from a decade before who didn't believe he could manage his finances, let alone lead a team. His lip trembled and he bit it to hide the fact.

"I screwed up."

"Yeah? And?"

"It won't happen again."

"You're not my subordinate, Tim. That's not enough anymore. How the hell am I supposed to live with you going all over the world when you might pull this shit again? What do you think would happen to me if you died like that?"

Tears spilled over and ran down Tim's cheeks. "I keep my word. You know that. And I am telling you right now that it will not happen again."

Gibbs clenched his jaw. He wanted to believe Tim. He needed that reassurance, because his iron gut and steel spine turned to jelly when he thought about Tim ending up wrapped around a tree. Dying, in a car crash, like Shannon. Like Kelly. He knew his limit, and that was it. There was no Mike Franks to tear him to pieces and sew him back together again. He simply wouldn't survive Tim going out that way. He wasn't sure he'd survive Tim dying, period, but like that would be too much.

"Promise me," Gibbs whispered. Tim sobbed and threw his arms around the man he loved, unable to stand the fear and pain in his eyes a moment longer.

"I promise. I promise. Oh, Jethro, I promise," he choked, over and over again. Gibbs hung on tight and soaked it up.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

One of the Cybercrimes guys Tim had worked with years before had been on Cassie and Tim's short list, and they re-interviewed him, with Josh present. Susan had requested the opportunity to work abroad, so she was benched until Tim and Vance were ready for a team at one of the international field offices. Ken Parker was the writer of some of the Agency's best sniffer programs, and when he'd heard about the Mobile team Vance was trying in Hawaii, he'd begun working out and accruing certifications in weapons and hand to hand training. Ken had dreamed of being a Field Agent, and he'd admired Tim and taken his cues from him well when Tim was assigned to Cybercrimes back when Vance had first taken over directorship. Josh and Ken hit it off immediately, and Cassie had worked with Ken before as well on a task force.

They settled in well after that. Tim guided them in how Gibbs' team as well as the original Hawaii team functioned, but encouraged them to find their own best and most efficient way of solving the crimes they had assigned to them. He talked often with Leon, double checking his actions until his
confidence in his leadership abilities began to return.

With their schedules often at odds, Tim and Gibbs didn't get to see each other as often as they desired, but they were both comfortable in each other's affection, and they made do.

Four days had passed without Tim seeing Gibbs as his team traveled down the eastern seaboard tracking their hacker. Back in Washington and heading home at almost 0400, Tim smiled tiredly when he found his lover was at home using an app he'd installed on Gibbs' cell phone so they could track each other's location without using NCIS resources.

Trudging up the stairs, Tim found himself aching to be close to Gibbs. He stripped in the bathroom and paused beside the bed, allowing his eyes to adjust. Gibbs was on his back, his morning wood tenting the covers. Grinning, Tim slid into bed and ducked under, wriggling down so he was face level with Gibbs' little Marine, as Tim had nicknamed it. He ran the flat of his tongue up the underside and a solemn ent groan changed to a garbled gasp of Tim's name as he wrapped his lips around the wide head sucked lightly.

"Ngh! Tim!" The next few moans were more intelligible, and louder, as Tim began in earnest. He fisted his own cock and stroked as he reveled in the hip-thrusting response he was getting from Gibbs. He felt the thick meat in his mouth swell and he shuddered as Gibbs came with a curse. Two more strokes and Tim spurted into his own hand, gasping around his mouthful. He slid off and rolled to the side for a tissue, then snuggled close to Gibbs again.

"Hmm?" Gibbs questioned.

"You have a couple more hours before you have to get up. Go back to sleep," Tim whispered.

"Mm. Love you," Gibbs grunted, and they both drifted off immediately.

Tim did the same thing twice more when their schedules made it possible, getting more efficient by snagging tissues before he began. He slept wonderfully after the climax and Gibbs never complained. In fact, after the second time, they passed each other at work the next day and Gibbs gave Tim such a wicked, secret smile that Tim had detoured into the bathroom until his sudden erectile response had gone down.

Three weeks later, Gibbs arrived home with Tim in bed asleep and decided to return the favor. When he saw how Tim was splayed out face down, hogging the entire bed, Gibbs knew exactly what to do. He slicked himself heavily with lube, then stripped the covers carefully off of his sleeping beauty. Climbing onto the bed between Tim's outspread legs, he parted the pert cheeks and pushed his now aching cock into him.

"Jethro!" Tim's voice was high pitched as he cried out upon waking with such a delicious feeling.

Gibbs lay heavy across his back, pinning him to the mattress, and started humping, his short strokes at an angle that nailed Tim's prostate ruthlessly.

"Ahh! God! Yes! Jethro!" Tim shouted. The friction on his cock against the sheet from Gibbs shifting atop him along with the direct stimulation of the pleasurable bundle of nerves had him approaching orgasm within minutes.

"God, I love you, Tim. Shit! Gonna come, sweetheart. You're so tight..." Gibbs groaned into the back of Tim's neck.

The words set Tim off and he wailed wordlessly, the rhythmic rippling sending Gibbs into a frantic pace and a low shout as he came.
They rolled over and Tim did what he could to clean up with tissues before they settled down in each other's arms.

"I should make you sleep in the wet spot," Tim grumbled.

"You were taking up the whole bed," came the nonchalant reply.

"I'll start putting a towel under me when I go to bed first," Tim said, deciding he didn't want to discourage a repeat experience.

"Mm-hmm. Sleep now."

"Love you."

"Love you, too."

When they had more time, they enjoyed more leisurely love-making, but the stealthy, semi-conscious joinings kept them feeling intimate even when days passed with barely seeing each other.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

As the new team came together, Tim knew it wouldn't be long before he would have to travel to another office to start over again. He worried about how he and Gibbs would handle being apart. He was confident in their love for each other, but a nebulous fear made his belly ache when he contemplated months apart. It wasn't as if Gibbs would be one for long phone conversations. He'd get things set up so they could Skype, but it just seemed disturbing to know the separation was coming.

When the time drew near, and Tim sent the Washington team off on their own with Cassie as Team Lead, he returned to sorting personnel files and working normal civilian hours at the office. At home, he started writing love notes he planned to leave in various places around the house where Gibbs would gradually find them all, but uneasiness still gnawed at him.

There were finally a few quiet days for Gibbs' team before the one week countdown started until Tim went to the field office in Illinois. On Thursday, Gibbs testified in court for a case from the previous year, then came home to a roasted chicken dinner that Tim had prepared, the younger man knowing for certain that once he was gone, Gibbs would resume his steak-based diet and wanting to get some alternative meat into him while he had the chance. One of the love notes was already tucked low in the stack of ribeyes in the freezer, several more in the pile of firewood. But for now, Gibbs was a good Marine and ate what he was served.

"Know you're worried about Great Lakes. Gonna be fine. Helluva lot closer than Singapore, which was Vance's other preference. That'll probably be next, though," Gibbs said, talking across the kitchen table as they ate their meal. Tim still noticed how much more talkative his lover was than he had been when they'd just been coworkers; sometimes it even took him aback.

"I'm not worried about the job, Jethro."

Gibbs' smile was startling. He was so proud of the incredible work Tim had done getting Yates' team running. "So? What? Us...me?"

Tim took a breath and tried to gather his thoughts. "I know how patient you can be. I also know how impatient you can be. I'm concerned about which way you'll go after weeks or months of me being gone."
Gibbs put his knife and fork down and set his fingers on Tim's wrist. "I know you're coming back. I'll wait." Tim's look of uncertainty cut him, and he sighed. "What do you think it means that I've been married four times?"

Startled by the turn of the conversation, Tim stumbled over his answer. "You told me that...well, you said something about fixing you. I figured you meant that what was broken in you, from losing your girls, that you'd gotten married again and again to try to fix that broken piece of you. But I know you're not broken, Jethro. You've just...grown in a different direction than you expected to."

Gibbs had been ready to answer bluntly to whatever Tim said, but his sweet observation of the unplanned road his life had taken was so generous and so...Tim, that he paused to take that in before he responded.

"Sweetheart, it also means that I want a committed, long-term relationship so much that I've jumped in too fast. Repeatedly. Now...with you... This is it for me, Tim. And I'll do anything you want to show you that, to reassure you. I'm yours and you're mine," he said, shrugging. He saw how large Tim's eyes grew at the proclamation, and when he saw the spark in them the moment that the younger man realized what Gibbs was offering, he grinned crookedly.

Tim's hand turned over and gripped his wrist as he stared at Gibbs with boundless adoration. "Jethro, my love...will you marry me?"

"Already told you I would."

Tim laughed until he cried, and Gibbs finally pulled him to his feet and held him until he calmed. Once he did, the spark in his eyes became an blaze of desire, and he practically dragged Gibbs upstairs, pulling at both their clothes and leaving a tail of fabric behind so that when they arrived in their bedroom, they fell onto the bed together already naked.

Tim kissed Gibbs all over his body, feeling settled yet euphoric as butterflies returned over and over again to his stomach when the realization that he was going to marry this gorgeous man returned to his mind. He spread Gibbs' legs and licked up the crease at his thigh from the curve of his ass forward, nibbling lightly on the tendon at his joint before he nuzzled across Gibbs' balls, sucking lightly, then dragging his lips up his shaft.

Gibbs was seeing stars as Tim expertly worked his body. Emotion was welling up along with the toe-curling sensations, and eventually, he had to grab at Tim and pull him up to hold him when his body started shaking. He was getting married again. And for the first time since Shannon, he knew it was right, it was real, and that this was the last time.

"I love you, Jethro. I love you so much," Tim murmured. He understood exactly what was happening with his lover -fiancé- as his body shivered in Tim's arms. "Thank you, sweetheart. Thank you for trusting me, for loving me... Oh god, for marrying me, Jethro. I love you."

Gibbs pulled back to look into Tim's shining eyes. "I love you, Tim. Gonna be proud to be your husband."

Tim's eyes overflowed at that, and he chuckled damply; it was Gibbs' turn to hold him until he calmed down.

"I better get it out of my system now. I don't want to cry at our wedding." His eyes went misty again at the phrase. Our wedding...
"I shed a few at my first one, so I won't judge, sweetheart."

Tim chuckled and stared raptly into Gibbs' eyes. Those gorgeous blues would never change, and they still gave Tim a little thrill even after all the years they'd known each other. But a heat smoldered in them, and Tim's smile faded as he leaned in for a kiss. The perfect feeling of rightness and home settled over him, and he relaxed into the strong embrace, welcoming Gibbs' seeking tongue into his mouth and playing with it teasingly. They broke apart and Gibbs shook his head at the impishness of Tim's grin. He loved the playfulness, and smiled back before nipping his way along Tim's jaw and down his neck. Tim's hips twitched and started slowly humping against Gibbs, who almost groaned.

Running his calloused hands over Tim's smooth, soft skin made the younger man moan aloud, and whimper when Gibbs gently pinched and rolled his nipples. Tim returned the favor, and Gibbs hips ground harder into his at the firm pain/pleasure.

Gibbs finally decided he was done with foreplay and slid his hands around to cup Tim's ass in a double handful, spreading him and rubbing across his twitching pucker.

"Oh god, Jethro! Yes!" Tim gasped. He reached out for the nightstand and snagged the lube as Gibbs massaged his ass and worked a dry fingertip just inside the rim. Tim pushed Gibbs onto his back and used the slick on his rock hard member, stroking him with it sensuously until Gibbs growled.

"Do it already!" Gibbs ordered. Tim grinned and tossed the tube aside, then straddled the older man and carefully impaled himself, his eyes shut, teeth clamped on his bottom lip, a frown furrowing his brow. The pure ecstatic concentration made Gibbs force himself to keep his eyes open a slit so he could watch. When Tim settled, fully engulfing the wide erection, he took a pause and the frown slowly eased. Gibbs slid his hands up from where he rested them on Tim's hips and stroked his palms over Tim's chest. When Tim finally released his lip-biting, Gibbs pinched his nipples, hard, and Tim cried out and started bucking, riding Gibbs.

"Oh, Tim!" Gibbs sighed. The man knew exactly how to move to make him struggle with his control. Tim opened his eyes and smiled down at him lovingly. They reached for each other's hands and interlaced their fingers as Tim continued rocking, shuddering with each stroke.

"I love you..." Tim panted. The smile Gibbs granted him with in return was heartstopping.

"Love you. Always."

Tim cocked his head and released Gibbs' right hand, and he took the cue immediately, wrapping his fingers around Tim's drooling hard-on and stroking him, thumbing across the head and spreading the pre-come around the glans.

"God! Yes!" Tim threw his head back and rode harder, feeling his climax like an avalanche, tension building like a coiling spring.

Gibbs arched to meet each downthrust and finally roared as he came in hot pulses, vision white, his existence narrowing to Tim and the yell he gave as his cock burst forth with matching spasms while his ass clenched and twitched.

The power of his orgasm had Tim's body bowed back, arcing like a live wire until he ran out of breath and froze, trembling, feeling the last low throbs of Gibbs emptying himself within his body.
Tim dropped like a marionette with strings cut, gasping and panting into the sweaty pelt of Gibbs chest hair. The gentle stroking of his back eventually brought him around and he flopped to one side.

They held each other wordlessly for a long time until Tim finally chose to express a desire he had that he hadn't felt comfortable speaking before.

"Marriage is a partnership, a joining of equals, right?" He began.

"Uh-huh."

"Do you think... Maybe on our wedding night... I would really like to..."

"Told you I usually top. Doesn't mean I never bottom. Wedding night seems like a good time to mark the occasion with something special," Gibbs said, answering the question Tim hadn't quite been able to ask.

Tim smiled sweetly. "Thank you, love. I promise I'll make it good for you."

"I trust you, Tim. Completely."

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Deciding a simple trip to a Justice of the Peace was all they needed, they called everyone they wanted to be there the next day to have them clear their schedule for Wednesday morning.

Through a kind hotel concierge, Tim reached Penny in Mauritius, and she promised to throw a party for them when she was back stateside. And while Sarah was happy to drive down from her home in New York City, Tim came away from his phone call with his mother pale and shaking.

"Hey! What's up?" Gibbs asked as he reached to envelope Tim in a strong hug.

"My mom... I had hoped... But she said it's blasphemous to have two men... Damn."

Gibbs just shook his head and held him tighter, knowing that there was nothing he could do to make it better and hating the feeling of helplessness. It only took a minute or so for Tim to straighten and give Gibbs a sad smile and a brief kiss.

"My favorite word in Hawaiian is ohana. It encompasses blood ties as well as the bond that can be even more powerful than that; family by intention rather than just birth. Our ohana will be there Wednesday. That's what matters."

Gibbs put his hand on Tim's cheek and stroked with his thumb, then patted and let him go. "I love you, Tim. Just us'd be fine if that's all we could manage."

"I'm sorry your dad is gone. Did you talk to LJ?"

"Yeah, but I'm not going to drag him down here. He's okay with it, but he's not as mobile as he was even last year."

"I keep waiting for Penny to have to slow down," Tim said, smiling.

"She's like you; she's driven by her big heart. She'll keep going forever," Gibbs replied. The thing they never spoke of hung heavy in the air: their age difference and what it meant for Tim's future.

"More like you, hon. As long as there's more you can do to serve, you'll keep doing it."
Gibbs opened his mouth to say something, but the words weren't there. He'd just have to keep going as long as he possibly could for Tim's sake.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

Both Abby and Tony insisted on going with them to shop for their rings. They found simple titanium bands and entrusted them to Tony for safekeeping. They let Abby have free reign to decorate their bedroom for their wedding night, so she was happy. A glance exchanged between the couple had them agreeing they'd sleep in the guest room if they had to if she went too far overboard.

Totaling the number of guests they'd have at ten; Tony, Abby, Ellie and her husband Jake, Ducky, Tobias Fornell and his daughter Emily, Sarah, Jimmy and Breena, plus little Victoria: Gibbs called a couple of judges he knew and found one who would perform their ceremony who had a large enough office to accommodate them.

That morning, they both dressed smartly in their best suits and smiled and held hands through the brief ceremony. Tim had agreed to traditional vows and only had a moment of poignancy when Gibbs paused and cocked his head as he vowed 'Til death do us part'. He squeezed Gibbs' hand tightly when he repeated the words and got a faint smile in return. Their vows were spoken staring into each other's eyes, and Tim felt like he was seeing straight into his love's soul and being seen in return. They knew each other completely, and their love would endure. Exchanging their rings, they shared a chaste but heartfelt kiss and left the courthouse surrounded by their friends.

Tim had bought out Gibbs' favorite diner for lunch, and they relaxed and enjoyed a pressure-free couple of hours with everyone together as they so rarely got to be. Vance, Cassie, Josh, and Ken joined them, along with a couple more Agents they felt particularly close with. Tony's girlfriend Zoë made it for about an hour, and G Callen called in the middle of the meal to wish them the best. The luncheon and relaxed celebration with friends as well as family was perfectly intimate in Tim's opinion. He knew he'd see Penny in a few months and he felt hopeful that his mother would come around eventually.

Fornell got a call out and left Emily in Breena and Jimmy's care, which began the break up of the casual reception. Handshakes and hugs saw everyone off until Tony and Abby were the only ones left besides Elaine and the diner staff and the newly married Tim and Gibbs.

"It's so sad you're not going to get a honeymoon. You should go to Barbados or Fiji or something," Abby said. Tim just shook his head and smiled. He and Gibbs held hands under the table, and he knew that Abby's drama-craving would never let her understand the peace he felt with his husband.

"I think I've had enough island paradise for the rest of my life. I'll take our bed in our house over tropical beaches anytime."

"Sometime next year you'll have some time in Singapore setting up another team, Probie, if my information is good. Maybe you can get a visit from your hubby there and take a few days to have both," Tony offered.

"More likely Jethro would end up helping on a case, but who knows? We'll figure it out. The most important thing is just that we have each other, no matter where we are," Tim said. Gibbs rubbed his thumb across Tim's knuckles and Tim's smile widened. "But I'm thinking I want to get going on our 24-hour honeymoon, of which we have only another sixteen left."

A final congratulations from Elaine and the group dispersed. Tim had prepaid for everything and left a healthy tip as he and Gibbs headed home. Tim shifted in the passenger seat anxiously as his
husband drove, and Gibbs raised an eyebrow at him.

"A little eager, there, hon?" He teased.

"I love how we are together. Don't ever doubt that. But I really enjoy topping, too, so yes, I can't wait to get you home," Tim admitted. Gibbs chuckled.

"Ya coulda said something sooner."

"No. This is perfect."

Gibbs grunted and refocused on the traffic, but his smile wouldn't fade. Something in him only felt completely settled when he was married. It was nothing but a social custom, but it meant something to him, and knowing that he was bound to Tim now was a comfort beyond imagining. He was even looking forward to having Tim top. Anything his husband wanted that was in his power to give was his. And Tim always asked so little, he'd have to remember to give what wasn't asked for, too. He put his hand on Tim's and squeezed.

Tim's rosy-cheeked smile warmed him. "I love you, Tim." And the smile only grew.

At home, Tim admitted to some nervousness, and Gibbs was quick to reassure him. "You of all people are not going to hurt me," he said. Tim shrugged and ducked his head, some of his old, adorable shyness coming out. It made Gibbs think about all the changes in the younger man that he'd been witness to through the years. The strong, confident Supervisory Agent he was now was such a far cry from the stammering, obsequious man that Gibbs had watched so closely and been so attracted to. Now this beautiful man was his.

They headed up the stairs and found silver-blue rose petals on the steps leading toward their room. They exchanged a look before Gibbs pushed the door open. Tim was actually surprised at how understated Abby had decorated for them. There were electric tea lights all over, the LED ones that could be set to any color. They were all set in blues and greens, and there was soft jazz playing on an iPod with a pair of small speakers. A good bottle of bourbon sat on the dresser near it, and on the bed there were several tubes and bottles, along with two pairs of padded handcuffs with dark blue fabric. Tim picked up the bottles and tubes and laughed.

"Lubes. Flavored, desensitizing, relaxing, warming; hey, this one's called Gun Oil! And, um, glow in the dark? Eww!"

"I think the regular stuff will be fine," Gibbs said.

"Do you have preferences for position or anything?"

"Want to be able to see you, but I'm not flexible like you are," he said.

Tim smiled at that. Gibbs admitting a weakness or failing of any kind was new. It felt wonderful knowing that he was now the only person who got to see the true, unguarded Gibbs.

"I can work with that. C'mere," Tim replied. He wrapped his arms around the other man and kissed him softly. They sighed and held each other, then Gibbs drew away.

"I'm gonna go get all cleaned up," he said, nodding toward the bathroom.

Tim got undressed, hanging his suit up and thinking about Gibbs preparing himself. Being the bottom in their relationship normally, Tim had a daily hygiene routine, but he hadn't discussed it with Gibbs with regard to this special occasion. As the minutes stretched out, Tim realized that
Gibbs had meant all clean, and it gave him an idea. He heard the shower start and then shut off and rearranged the pillows on the bed. When he pulled two to the center, he saw Abby had changed their sheets. He pulled the comforter back in curiosity and laughed aloud. The bathroom door opened and Tim turned and pointed at the sheets.

"Satin sheets. In wood grain!" He laughed again and Gibbs came closer, one towel low on his hips, another briskly drying his chest and hair.

The sheets did indeed have a wood grain pattern, and Gibbs chuckled. He looked around the room. "You check for cameras?"

"Ohmygod, she wouldn't! Would she?"

"I had Bishop come with her just to be sure she didn't try to sneak one in."

Tim threw his arms around Gibbs, laughing. "I'm glad you're so suspicious. I never would have thought about it."

Pressed close against his damp skin, Tim became highly aware of the fresh smell of soap and the feel of Gibbs' chest hair rubbing against him, and their light-hearted conversation dried up. Gibbs sensed the change, too, and turned his head. Their lips met in a hungry kiss. After only a minute or so, Tim tugged the towel from Gibbs' hips and broke away to toss it over the pillows. He swept the gifts from Abby off the bed, putting them aside in his haste to get his husband into bed. He hesitated when his eyes caught on the desensitizing lube.

"This one has an analgesic; do you want-"

Gibbs took it from him and chucked it into the pile with the other novelty lubes. "Uh-uh. Wanna feel every inch of you..." Gibbs growled, and Tim's mouth dropped open.

"God, yes..." He hissed, and Gibbs' lips twitched in wry amusement before he kissed Tim, hard, plundering his mouth and claiming his husband. Tim clutched at him to steady himself and when Gibbs finally released him, he was breathing hard. "I... I want to try something I haven't done before. You up for exploring?"


"On the bed, on top of those pillows," he said, and went to get their regular lube from the nightstand. He set it within reach and then turned back to see Gibbs settling with his legs open, his ass up and waiting. Tim bit his lip and grinned.

Climbing onto the bed, Tim rested his hand on Gibbs' hip. "Are you comfortable enough? This isn't bugging your shoulder or anything?"

"Fine. Just curious what you're gonna do. Thought I was gonna get to look at you," Gibbs said.

"When I make love to you, I'm going to look into your beautiful blue eyes and drink your soul, my love, my husband. But first I'm going to see how sensitive you are... Gonna prep you so I don't hurt you," Tim said. Gibbs' soft smile at his poetic, sappy response went unseen. He nodded to Tim, and Tim rubbed his back lightly before he cupped his cheeks and massaged them firmly for a moment before he spread them and ran his thumb lightly over his tight entrance. Gibbs twitched, then widened his position to give Tim the best access he could, and Tim felt his breath quicken as he leaned down and huffed against the pucker. A second twitch, then Tim moved in and licked gently across it and Gibbs gasped. Enjoying the response, Tim licked again and lapped delicately until Gibbs shifted and Tim could tell he was getting hard. He switched it up and started flicking
his tongue from side to side, then tracing the rim. Gibbs was shivering from sensations he'd never experienced. It was strange, but Tim's ministrations were sending little electric shocks to his cock and he couldn't keep still. When Tim pointed his tongue and bulls-eyed him, Gibbs gave a shout and his body jerked.

Tim grinned, thrilled with the response, and added a gentle fingertip to the mix. Gibbs was too tight for him to actually penetrate with only his tongue, but he kept his rimming up as he pressed the tip of his first finger inside. The moan he got in response made Tim pause to adjust himself so his erection wasn't rubbing on anything. He didn't want to come before he had the chance to get inside his husband. Adding more saliva, Tim was able to work his finger in deeper while he continued to flick his tongue all around the outside. The thought of getting Gibbs loose enough to tongue fuck him made Tim have to pause again. He shook his head ruefully and reminded himself that they had a lifetime to explore each other's bodies. He reached for the lube and moved his mouth down to work Gibbs balls while he got a second finger coated with slick. He carefully teased it in beside the first while lapping at the underside of Gibbs' scrotum.

"Oh, God..." The rasping moan made Tim shudder as he felt Gibbs clench on his digits. The older man was slowly humping the pillows, and Tim twisted his fingers back and forth, working them in to the base. "Tim... Oh, Tim..."

Tim spread his fingers in the heat of his lover's body and moved his mouth back up and worked the tip of his tongue between them. He wanted to get his mouth in there and shove deep inside, but it was too tight. Instead, he went back to licking the rim while he began working his ring finger in beside the other two. His attention caught on the unfamiliar metal of his wedding ring, and his eyes filled at the reminder that this was not just his lover, but his husband that he was pleasuring. He hummed and Gibbs gasped as the three fingers finally slipped deeper into him.

It had been decades since Gibbs had been breached this way. He hadn't told Tim that it was only Shannon, using fingers, then a strap on, that he'd ever bottomed with. None of his other wives had ever known he was bi or expressed interest in ass play, and the few male lovers he'd had been avowed bottoms. The pain and pleasure mixed in his brain into something totally unique and, for him, representational of true love.

"Oh Tim!" He called. His whole body was shaking and he wanted more, wanted Tim's beautiful, long cock in him, wanted total connection and total surrender between them. "Please, love - want you - please!"

Gibbs voice asking, pleading, was shocking, and Tim trembled as he pulled himself away and rose up. He pulled Gibbs upright on his knees, putting his arms around him and burying his face in the crook of the older man's neck, a few tears escaping.

"Yes, my love, my husband, yes," Tim murmured. "Anything, everything, for you."

Gibbs closed his eyes and wrapped his arms over Tim's where they circled his waist. He was aching with need, and he could feel Tim hard against his right butt cheek, but this emotional bonding was more precious than the physical desire. He had known he loved Tim for years, but he'd never expected the depth of his feelings to rival his first marriage, so long held on it's sky-high pedestal. Tim's love, his honoring Gibbs with his partnership and faith, was healing a wound he'd never anticipated relief from. He opened his eyes and could see Shannon in the soft shadows from the electric candles, smiling beatifically at his realization. She loved him enough to want him to be happy, and as her visage faded, peace settled in Gibbs' long broken heart, and he breathed his first full breath since he'd been told of his loss.

Tim didn't know exactly what was going through Gibbs' mind and heart in those moments, but he
sensed something that reassured him that he had somehow become a part of his husband, that their bond had suddenly taken a quantum leap deeper, and it felt warm and inviting and he sank into it with a satisfied sigh.

They moved, turning to kiss and mumble sweet love words neither would ever admit to uttering, then Tim took the pillows and tossed one to the head of the bed and one to the side. He gently lay Gibbs onto the first, and, with a soft kiss, he shifted around into the position he’d chosen. He got one hip under Gibbs’ thigh and laid down nearly perpendicular, gently holding and supporting Gibbs’ leg as he encouraged him to rest it open, knee bent, giving Tim room to lube himself and line up with Gibbs entrance. Their eyes locked on each other, both completely present in the moment as Tim pressed inside. Oh, god...tight and hot... Gibbs, his husband, letting Tim into his body, his muscles gripping him so powerfully that Tim wasn't sure he could move...

Gibbs took a shaky breath and tried to relax. The experience was so intimate that part of him tried to grab on and cling to it from fear of losing it. Tim's flushed cheeks, moist, parted lips, and burning, hooded eyes reminded him that this was physical, too, not just spiritual and transcendental, and he smiled and arched, pressing against the beloved intrusion and taking Tim deeper. Tim cried out ecstatically and started a slow rolling of his hips. They settled into a comfortable position and Gibbs moaned as the angle started hitting his prostate, rubbing it over and over. He was soon panting at the incredible stimulus, and Tim smiled lasciviously at the reaction.

"Yes! Oh, Jethro... I knew I could make you enjoy it..." Tim gasped.

"Oh god yes! Tim! So-so...so good. Love... Oohhh..." His voice devolved into a long groan that thrilled Tim.

Reaching out to run his fingers through Gibbs' chest hair, to rub and pinch his nipples, reveling in the way Gibbs' cock jumped at the stimulation, Tim got into his toppy mindset and kept ratcheting up the pleasure for his husband. He'd never seen Gibbs lose it so completely, and he loved causing it. He was taking Gibbs apart with each touch. He drew Gibbs' left hand up and kissed his wedding ring, then started sucking on his fingers, tonguing the webbing then giving strong suction while he swirled his tongue over the pads. Then he rolled Gibbs' heavy balls in one hand, tracing his finger up between them, giving a little pressure to his perineum...

Everything he could think of to do to give more to Gibbs, Tim did.

Except touch his cock.

Gibbs had crumbled under the tender loving from his husband, following the beautiful farewell he’d felt to his first love. There was nothing in his existence except pleasure. He was ecstasy. He had no idea what sounds he was making or where he was or how long they'd been going. Only Tim was present in his awareness.

The rush of topping a powerful man was something Tim had discovered with Steve, but this was so very different from that. This wasn't a game. It wasn't about trying to reclaim intimacy after it had dried up. This was sharing; joining and giving and receiving and loving until it could no longer be contained.

Tim caressed Gibbs' face and called to him until he finally had the wherewithal to focus his glazed eyes on Tim's.

"I love you so much, Jethro. I will always love you... Mine...my husband..."

Gibbs felt his body clench and spasm into orgasm with the words, the suddenness breathtaking.
“TIM!” He roared hoarsely, and Tim's climax was wrung from him just as unexpectedly at the feeling of Gibbs' ass rippling and pulsing impossibly tighter on him. Tim shouted and they both froze in the moment, complete and unified. Married.

When their bodies calmed, they shifted around and laid entwined, kissing and murmuring their love and appreciation for each other. Eventually, they quieted and just rested together, replete and content.

"Jethro," Tim finally said softly.

"Yeah?"

"Thank you."

"Huh?"

"Thank you for letting me be here with you, for opening yourself to me in every conceivable way. I feel totally safe with you, and that means everything to me."

Gibbs stroked his fingers through Tim's hair. "I never even knew to hope that I could have it be like this with you," he confessed. "I knew we'd be good together, but this... Tim, it's like what I had with Shannon. It's every need met. I love you, sweetheart. Husband. Love you more than I can say."

Tim's smile was only a little teary. He didn't reply, not trusting his voice, but he knew he didn't have to.

Gibbs already knew everything, just as he always did.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

A/N Okay, one last choice for you to make. There's an epilogue, but it's a doozy. FlyingPiglet has wheedled and threatened, persuaded and cajoled to try to get me to not have that epilogue go the way I have written it, but that's how it came to me, so I will give you the option. Love the rosy lifetime of McGibbs? Then this is the end of the story. Yay, McGibbs into the sunset, fade to black. If you want to know how evil my muse is, read on...
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Major character deaths! I'm serious, here. If you love the fluffy ending in the previous chapter, you do not have to read this epilogue. No flames because you didn't heed the warning.

A/N Warning! Major Character death. Off-screen and referred to, but it's there. Hold on to your hearts and remember that this story from start to finish is about Tim. This doesn't take into account Charlie and the revelation at the end of season 5 of H5-0. There's a nod in here to Hazelmom's incredible Esperanza, too. If you haven't ever read it, you really should.

Epilogue

Thirteen years later...

"...here to remember the brave men and women from our Agency who gave their lives three years ago today. The disaster they averted would have made 9/11 pale in comparison, and though the general public may never know how close our nation came to the edge that day, we will never forget," Director Leon Vance spoke with solemn gravity as he looked out at the crowd of Agents, families, and friends. His eyes met those of his friend and the head of the Mobile Cybercrimes division and gave him a particular nod. Timothy McGee nodded back once, acknowledging the gesture. He held his silvering head high, remembering the day he'd lost his husband of ten years. Jethro Gibbs was still ever-present in Tim's life, professionally and personally as he always measured every action against that indomitable yardstick.

Vance wrapped up his speech and revealed the artist's rendering of the memorial that was to be built outside the new headquarters building. An undulating column spreading wide like wings at the top had a triumphant feel and Tim sadly approved. The blueish metal reminded him of the amazing steely color of Jethro's eyes, as well. He applauded politely and waited while Leon approached him. He didn't stay long at such events, and the Director knew that. They shook hands and Vance pulled Tim into a one-armed hug, which made Tim smile. The last three years had deepened their relationship to a strong friendship that Tim valued enormously.

"Very nice, Leon."

"Thanks, Tim. How you holding up?"

Tim just nodded and shrugged simultaneously and Vance understood. The six month sabbatical Tim had taken after Gibbs' heroic death had involved sleeping at various friends' houses more often than the painfully empty home he and Jethro had shared. The man who had returned to NCIS afterward had been a very different person than the upbeat, content one his friends and colleagues had known.

"Hey, Probie."

Tim turned at Tony's voice and embraced his friend.
"Hey Tony," Tim replied. "No Zoë?"

"She caught a case."

Tim nodded, understanding too well what having both partners in a marriage as Field Agents meant for them. As much as he had enjoyed the years of leading new Mobile teams around the world, the happiest memories he had of his own marriage were from when he was permanently based from Headquarters and only traveled when he was needed. Every moment he'd had with Jethro was precious to him now.

Tim's eyes widened as he spotted a man he rarely saw anymore. He patted Tony's shoulder as he walked up to Jake Malloy.

"I'm glad you could make it."

"Wouldn't miss honoring the best friend I ever had. He got me through after Ellie left," the soft spoken man said. Tim nodded mutely. As Ellie Bishop's boss while she'd spent three years on one of his teams based in Rota, Tim had been closer to her than to Jake, while Gibbs had developed quite a tight bond with the ex-husband the Agent had left behind. As with any potentially awkward situations between Tim and Jethro, they'd worked it out simply and with a minimum of discussion. They'd loved and understood and respected each other enough to accept everything that had ever come up.

"You know, if you ever need anything, Tim-"

"I know. But I'm good, thanks, Jake. Say hello to Melanie for me, okay?" Tim referenced Jake's second wife, and they nodded to each other in farewell. Tim's eyes went to the next group of people waiting to talk to him, nearly groaning at the number of individuals that seemed to be milling around for his attention.

This group was all professional acquaintances, including the current SecNav. He exchanged pleasantries, then got another surprise when his glance caught a tall woman in a habit.

"Sister! Oh, honey, thank you for coming," Tim said, pulling her into his arms in a warm embrace. The woman he'd known as Abby had entered a convent after Gibbs' death, and rarely returned to the location of her former professional life, though Tim had kept in touch with her. When he drew back and met her gaze, his eyes filled at the peace he saw in hers. There was sadness, but nothing like the near insanity she'd suffered when she had witnessed her beloved Gibbs' demise over a live feed. "Vow of silence again?" Tim asked. She inclined her head and he kissed her forehead. "I'll let you get back," he said softly, knowing how trying it was for the nun to be out among people, especially here, where so much of her old life had centered.

The next group was quite familiar and made him smile. The Palmer family had swelled to include not only Jimmy, Breena, and their biological daughter Victoria, but three adopted children. Tim was uncle to all of them and the affection went both ways. He hugged and snuggled the little ones, and had an old-fashioned fist bump with the eldest boy, Simon. The beautiful Victoria, a perfect blend of her incredibly loving and sweet parents, kissed Tim's cheek, as did Breena herself. Tim hugged Jimmy and exchanged a serious moment when Jimmy asked how Tim truly was. The sad smile and shrug made Jimmy's throat close and eyes well up in sympathy, and he pulled Tim in for another hug.

"I talked to Ducky last night. I'm glad you all are going down to Florida to see him next month," Tim offered.
"The kids just love Grandpa Ducky and Pensacola," Breena said, smoothly giving her husband a chance to compose himself. "It's incredible that he's still filling in with the field office's ME when he needs him. I heard he helped with a profile for one of your teams, too?"

"Yeah, he's still a huge asset to the Agency," Tim agreed.

They said their goodbyes and Tim turned for the next bit of schmoozing. He disliked that part of his job, but knew that his leadership position in the Agency required it. When the dignitaries and officials finally released him, Tim slid toward the exit, but stopped abruptly at the sight of Steve McGarrett standing in his way, hands in the pockets of his slacks, his now silver-templed dark head tilted back, lips pursed over half-hooded eyes, looking so much like he had all those years ago that Tim fancifully wondered about time travel. But there was a scar on Steve's neck, and he stood with his hip cocked over like one leg wasn't quite right.

Wordlessly, Tim opened his arms and noted the limp as Steve stepped forward into them. There was an electric reaction, the old physical spark between them still apparent. The strength and scent of each man was familiar and nostalgic to the other, and they were both smiling as they drew back. Tim nodded them over to an alcove by the door that would at least feel more private.

"I thought about contacting you...after," Tim said. "But I was a mess for more than six months, and by then I hoped, for your sake, that you were moving on; moving forward. I'm so sorry about Catherine."

Steve glanced around, then lowered his eyes. "We had just filed for divorce. No one knows, because I didn't want anyone to think badly of her, but..."

Tim touched his arm, and Steve's guilt-ridden eyes met his. "That doesn't make the loss any better. I'm sorry it wasn't working out for you. I only ever wanted you to be happy, Steve."

Steve's expression grew so soft and affectionate at that that Tim felt his heart thump. He knew he was the only person privy to the open vulnerability from Steve, and it was still beautiful to Tim. And something in the other man seemed to have grown and matured as well. He mentally shrugged; grief could do that to a person. He knew that all too well.

"What happened to you?" Tim asked gently, gesturing vaguely to his neck and leg. Steve's mouth twisted.

"Helicopter crash. Trying to get to them," Steve replied, his eyes flickering toward the wall with the photos of the NCIS Agents who had fallen in the incident. Tim's eyes automatically followed Steve's glance and caught on the image of his husband. The gorgeous blue eyes, stoic demeanor, and erect bearing were so completely the Jethro Gibbs that he had known as his Team Leader that he straightened under the imagined scrutiny, then smiled softly at his own reaction. He missed his Jethro every single day, and it meant so much to know that Steve had been trying to rescue Gibbs and Catherine and the others before they'd died.

"Thank you. I never knew you were there that day."

The sag in Steve's shoulders betrayed his guilt that he had failed, and Tim put his hand on Steve's arm again, squeezing. "I have no doubt that you did absolutely everything you could."

Steve cleared his throat and gave a sharp nod.

"You know, I had ten months of crazy love with you, and ten years of perfect companionship with Jethro. I wouldn't make a single choice differently, and neither would he."
That had been Tim's comfort in his tragic loss. Gibbs had died averting a tremendous catastrophe, and they had even been able to talk to each other before the end. Every word Jethro said that day was etched in Tim's memory, and he did his best to live by the promises he'd made in return.

"Everyone else doing okay? I kind of lost touch with Chin and Kono," Tim said, trying to shift the moment away from the brittle barrier that he kept his grief behind.

"Yeah, yeah, they're fine. You know Lou retired," Steve supplied. Tim nodded. "They're all still on the island. When Grace decided to go to college at NYU, Danny moved back to New Jersey, then, uh, after," Steve said, referring to the incident, "he got me to move out here with him. I'm closer to Mary, who's in Aunt Deb's house in Buffalo, and being around Danny... It helps. A little."

"Let's get out of here," Tim said, and guided Steve through the doors. They went to a café and caught up in more detail with each other's lives. Steve seemed to need to talk about Catherine, and so Tim let him. He could tell his former lover had never taken the opportunity to confess the problems that had led to filing for divorce to anyone and he nodded and grunted appropriately in response.

Steve found himself talking non-stop. He told Tim about everything, even that day, and saw answering emotions in Tim's eyes as he told of talking to Catherine over a cell phone through his helo headset just before the explosion knocked him out of the sky, of digging himself and his crew out of the rubble and dragging himself and the only other survivor to help since all the rescue efforts had been focused on the main incident. The broken leg and terrible burns had forced Steve to reduce his adrenaline fueled lifestyle down to that of mere mortals, and Tim could see how that had affected him. Steve seemed more thoughtful, and more at peace than he'd ever known him to be. And Steve could see the scars of Tim's loss in the quiet man as well. Those ocean colored eyes had a constant shadow over them, and even the way Tim moved had changed. He was careful and conservative in his gestures and responses, and Steve just kept talking until they'd come back around to why his relationship with Catherine had failed as they stood out in the parking lot next to Steve's vehicle.

"She...she thought she knew me. But, Tim... You're the only one who ever knew me."

Tim looked into Steve's eyes, their ever-shifting color taking him back to so long ago. He recalled the love that was so intense that in hindsight it looked like madness, but he did as he had done the first time he met Steven McGarrett, and he looked into him and saw exactly who he was, knew what he thought and feared and hoped. And he knew Steve had matured. The loss of Catherine, first to the specter of divorce, and then to the incident... Steve was different. The physical damage he'd taken had contributed as well, and Tim cocked his head, wondering if maybe, the time was right. He had promised Gibbs he wouldn't be alone for the rest of his life, but that he wouldn't repeat Jethro's serial marriages, either. Steve might just be the right man for him now. And he knew he could be a partner and lover and husband, too.

"Are you seeing anyone now, Steve?"

"I'm seeing exactly what I want right now. And what I'm finally ready for." Steve stated it boldly, but felt open and honest in the words as well.

Tim nearly rolled his eyes, but cockiness was part of Steve's charm, and he was being blatantly honest. Tim couldn't help but smile, and even felt himself blush lightly. Steve's grin widened, and they both knew that through the winding paths that had led them to this moment, they'd both become more than they were before.

And Tim could practically feel Gibbs smiling crookedly from behind him and giving him a gentle
push. After all, the last thing he'd said to Tim on that most horrific day of Tim's life had been: "My love, please find a way to be happy."

Maybe, just maybe, this was it.

~~~NCIS/H50~~~

_A/N (Hiding behind Toni M H) Don't hate me, okay?_

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