Changes afoot
by EnemyMine

Summary

Nobody notices him, but Jimmy Palmer notices a lot.

One more month and it would be three years since James Palmer had first set foot into the refuge of the illustrious Dr. Mallard. Since then he had learned to call the Doctor Ducky and to learn to live to be forever more known as Jimmy.

As long as he could not shake the habit of transforming into a bumbling idiot every time he came into contact with someone from NCIS’ premier team, he guessed he didn't really deserve anything else.

Well, someone was a bit too far reaching. The ones who were always able to reduce him into Toddler-Jimmy with some form of ADD and the propriety for bad jokes where mostly Abby and Gibbs.

Abby because she was very certain to inform him on his very first day, when he was just a substitute for the injured Gerard – and how does an assistant to the Medical Examiner gets shot on the job and within the morgue to boot - that if he didn’t behave according to her very exacting standards, she would test method number 23 of her repertoire to kill and not leave any evidence on him. Since she would just assume he had volunteered for the experiment.

Gibbs, well he was Gibbs. Or he had been. More than nowadays at least.

Jimmy had lost a lot of the original awe he had felt in the presence of the man. The very man, who with one look could melt steel – or at least made suspects cry and his team scramble. The same man, who rarely, true, but occasionally was known to crack a joke with his subordinates. Who in turn where absolutely loyal to the point of giving their lives for him. Which he knew and tried to avoid at all costs.

Hence the aftermath of the nightmare which opened a position for one Jimmy Palmer.
Sometimes he missed those early days. Not the intensity of the search for the culprit, the enormous tension which only seemed to build every passing day. But the camaraderie, the banter, the near-family they had been.

His first days had happened of all things during a case in which Tony had been abducted. A very memorable case. At first it had appeared to be just another missing persons case, then it became multiple disappearances and soon a murder investigation.
The team had just been Gibbs, Tony and Kate and they all had run circles around the rest of the Navy Yard with the speed they worked. Still Tony and Kate had found time to release tensions with their sibling-type snarking. Even if Gibbs had already engaged his second b, Tony still had dared to openly jest: “Remember the good old times? When Gibbs would confide in us and treat us as peers.”
Shortly afterwards Tony had gone missing and all hell had broken loose. Jimmy would never forget the force that Gibbs had turned into until he had his Second back safe and sound at his desk the next afternoon.

A lot had changed since then. First Tony had managed to finagle Tim McGee's reassignment onto the team, then Kate had been killed not even a year later. Nothing had been the same after that.
The friendly banter was gone, a desk had been painfully empty only to be suddenly occupied by a Mossad operative.
The arrival of Ziva David had brought nothing but strife and questionable methods.
What once had been a playful sibling rivalry which made Kate grow to become the best agent she ever could be and managed to get Tim to utter his first sentences without stuttering towards Gibbs, became something between seduction and one-upmanship. Very unhealthy in the long run.

If anyone ever asked the young man, he would state with conviction that Tony was the superior investigator on the whole team. Including Gibbs.
As such he was responsible to teach the newbies, which for whatever reason included Jimmy himself, but most of the newbies suddenly refused to be taught. Soon Tony had transformed into a version of himself that egged Ziva and Tim on to do their best, if only to make them feel better about themselves at the end of the day for showing him up.

The people always underestimated Jimmy's insight. It was easy to underestimate him. He was just some bumbling kid who had managed to become some kind of pet project for Ducky. They never realized that he exhibited some intelligence. Otherwise he would not been able to attend medical school. And stay in the good graces of the doctor! Ducky didn't suffer fools easily!

But it was a matter of his chosen field to be overlooked and deemed insignificant. People never liked to be reminded of the death, whichever form it takes.
So he was practical able to hide in plain sight since his first day.

Jimmy had seen how Tony came in during the nights or very early or stayed late to fix the reports of his probies, which Gibbs could not be arsed to do beyond a certain point. On top of his required paperwork as Senior Field Agent. He had seen him reading medical and psychological journals hidden behind magazine covers of barely clad young women. Had noticed the web pages of online courses in Criminology and Forensics, Tony disguised as the latest internet craze for mindless jocks, to be hidden by the push of a button.

Never had Tim asked himself the question who had done his job before he had made the team. He even showed himself to be surprised at Tony's ability to actually type on a computer.
Ziva had never acknowledged that before Gibbs had let her run wild, Tony had been the one to get intel in unconventional ways. More legal ways. Tony never tortured anyone. At least Jimmy hoped so!
What the Mossad officer had gained with threats of violence and repercussions, Tony had down to
the subtle science of seduction and subterfuge.

As much as those two had tried to undermine his authority while Gibbs had spent time in Mexico, Tony still had them beat. While Jimmy had become his sounding board, he had been allowed to see a Tony, who was known to maybe a handful people. Someone who cared deeply and too often too much. Who had a natural talent for this job and was stretched way too thin, while the rest lamented the absence of their leader without doing anything about it.

Tony had at least talked with former Director Sheppard about Gibbs' accumulated personal time. Gibbs had been down for the count but not out until months after. His loyal Saint Bernard had kept the door open and unlocked.

But it had cost him. That the director had had him run an unsanctioned undercover op on the side as repayment became only known after Tony had long since landed in sunny España. When shit had truly hit the fan.

While Jimmy still had contact with the former Senior Field Agent, no one was to know. They kept their interaction to personal matters, barely venturing into NCIS territory. Of course there had been no way to hide the recent developments at the Navy Yard from the nosy guy.

Obviously there were various contacts Tony could interrogate, from the janitor up to the Senior Secretary to SecNav, a woman called Mona, who just so happened to be the aunt of one of Tony's frat brothers.

The one time she had called during office hours with intel, Kate had assumed her to be his latest conquest and never realized that it wasn't just happenstance that he could present a new fact to the case when questioned by Gibbs just a couple of minutes later.

Gibbs had been aware at one point in time. The young Assistant Medical Examiner sighed heavily.

The older man had become a point of near constant strain in his friendship with Tony. Because Jimmy didn't want to tell his friend about him and actually Tony didn't want to hear about him, but otherwise he just needed to know because he still felt responsible. Talk about self-flagellation.

The second b was barely restrained nowadays. After the initial days in which he seemingly hadn't cared about Tony's sudden absence, he had rather suddenly realized how much he had relied on his Second and that he actually had no good read on the remainder of his team. Withing months the whole thing just imploded.

Tim followed Ziva's lead of not trusting your Team Leader and didn't ask him for help when his sister turned up on his door with bloody hands. Only to be caught red-handed releasing confidential information in form of a rather awful piece of fiction. Demotion and reassignment after re-training for him. An overhaul for the agency. A small catalyst with enormous ramifications.

Which in turn meant that Gibbs had to toe the line and he didn't like it. How much he disliked it, was evident when he blew off Abby during one of her infamous rants shortly after the situation with Tim's sister had been resolved. It was truly one of these days the hell must have frozen over.

As for Jimmy himself, he liked the new status quo. He didn't feel as much as the personal property of just the one Team Leader anymore. Always on stand-by to do his bidding and bring in results. Fast. The work was more evenly spaced out now, he had more reliable hours and time for his studies since the overhaul. After all there were more people working in the morgue than Ducky and him. Ducky was “only” the Chief Medical Examiner. They took regular scheduled turns now no matter which investigative team was on rotation.

Even if on days like today, when they lost two of their own due to a suicide bomber, he felt duty-bound to stay on longer.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!