Serendipity

by Gottahavemyncis

Summary

A heart-wrenching case leads to upheaval and discoveries for members of Team Gibbs. Tim-centric with team as family using the early season 12 cast; otherwise this does not follow canon. Papa Gibbs. No slash. Already completed. Rated T for language.

Notes

A team-family story, with a stab at attempting to capture a real family feel, with affection, love, conflict, anger, humor, resolution and forgiveness just as there are in real families and just about everyone makes a mistake or two in here. Mentions of past cases/episodes and references to cases from my other stories. Hey, cases are hard to write, why waste them? Ziva has left the team and Eleanor Bishop is now a junior agent. Also if you're not familiar with my version of Tim's background, it's on my fanfiction.net profile under 'Personal Fanon'. And finally, this has not been beta'd.
Prologue

Friday, May 22, 2015

Looking out the window Ty cried in fear. Mum was driving but it was Mama who yelled to them, "Tyler, Brynie, hang on my loves!"

He heard his baby sister screaming as the world turned over and over and over. He called for his Mama and Mum but no one answered.

Chapter 1

Gibbs slammed his phone down, "Grab your gear and your go bags, two dead, including a naval officer, on Route 33. At the questioning looks, he added, "Rockingham County, outside of Harrisonburg."

Bishop notified Ducky as she ran to catch up with her teammates, gear and go bags slung across her shoulders. She noticed her Senior Field Agent had his go bag with him and followed suit. Tim held the elevator doors open as she slid in. She noticed their TAD agent in the corner of the elevator, watching the rest of them.

With DiNozzo out on personal leave, Vance had assigned Agent Chalmers to Gibbs' team. Gibbs had of course growled, there wasn't anything he, McGee and Bishop couldn't handle but Chalmers stayed. Much like Dorneget back in the day, Chalmers was an unassigned agent and was both thrilled and terrified to be assigned to Gibbs' team, thankfully on a temporary basis.

McGee turned to Chalmers, "You're with me in the van; Bishop, you ride with Gibbs. If you need to hit the head, now's the time; lot of traffic and miles to cover, no time to stop on the way."

Gibbs fought to keep the pride, amusement and resignation from his face. McGee was doing a great job as his temporary Senior Field Agent and once DiNozzo returned to the Navy Yard the Team Leader and Tim needed to have a serious talk about his future. Clearly it was time, past time, for the younger man to leave the nest, as Ducky would say, and move up in the agency.

Bishop and Chalmers nodded in acceptance of the assignments and advice. As these were the first deaths they'd handled since Chalmers' attachment to the team, Ellie figured Tim wanted to run through protocols with him, both agency and Gibbs', not always the same thing.

Once in the van, Tim started talking as they drove out through the security gates and in the direction of Route 33 Rockingham County, in the hills of Virginia.

"Ever process a scene with two dead?"

Chalmers shook his head, "Not two bodies at once, no. Two in one case but not at the same time."

"Means the pressure is ramped up, we need to be thorough and quick. Any little thing can be a clue. What have you done at accident and crime scenes? Remember we don't know yet if this is a crime."

The TAD told him and Tim nodded. "Good, that's just about everything. Pay attention if you end up taking witness statements, every tiny little thing, no matter how inconsequential it might seem, needs to be written down and further questioned. For example: once on a review of a cold case, a witness
mentioned in passing that he and a person of interest had the same insurance company and the POI was pissed because a claim had been denied. That bit of trivial information led us to the insurance company and to the POI; from that we busted a murderer and closed a case that had been cold nearly a decade."

Chalmers thought about that for a couple of minutes asking, "Will you be assigning tasks?"

"If we get information en route, yes. On site probably not, Gibbs will handle it. He'll walk the scene, getting a read on it. As I said, get your work done quickly and as thoroughly as possible, if you need help, let me know, do not hesitate! Ellie and I will lend a hand when possible."

"Ok, thanks." Chalmers took a sip of the coffee he'd brought with him. Tim gave him a quick sideways look, "Leave that in the van. No liquids at the scene."

"Yep, was planning on it."

"Good. And if Gibbs has coffee, keep any comments to yourself. You do not ever mess with his coffee, Rule 23."

The crash site was a two hour drive from the Navy Yard and with many schools already out for the summer and Memorial Day on Monday, the early Friday afternoon traffic was at best sluggish until they exited the Beltway and then I-66. The Medical Examiner's van, with Jimmy driving, caught up with the sedan and the MCRT van as they rolled onto I-81 south.

Chalmers received a text from Ellie saying she was waiting for a call back from the state troopers on site for the victims' ids and Tim nodded, good, they needed all the information they could, might as well use the drive time to get started. While they waited, Chalmers asked Tim a question, "I know this isn't my business, but why is Agent DiNozzo out for so long? It's not medical, right?"

Tim smirked as he nodded, "Definitely not medical! And it is team business and since you're on the team right now, that includes you. All three of us, Gibbs, DiNozzo and I have a lot of personal leave accrued and Human Resources and Director Vance decreed we had to take it; I guess the Accounting Dept. hates carrying our paid leave forward every year. They didn't even give us an option to sell it back and there were dire threats made if we tried to work from home or anything like that. DiNozzo pulled together a trip to visit family overseas; when he gets back, Boss and I will flip a coin to see who goes next."

"Wow, I can't imagine having that much personal time off accrued, to be gone for two months."

Smiling, Tim replied, "You work at the agency long enough, it happens. DiNozzo has fifteen years in, Gibbs has twenty something and I've got twelve years. However, because I did the electronic work by myself the first few years on the team, when I did take leave I'd end up working and Gibbs made sure I was compensated for that. Which meant I'd be out of the office for say 10 days but maybe only 5 or 6 of them, sometimes less, would count as actual days off."

"So how long will you be gone?"

"Uh, I think 7 weeks, nearly the same as Tony."

"And do you have a trip planned too?"

He chuckled, "With the exception of a brother in the Marines, my family is in Maryland. There's only a few of us, so no big trip there. Although if I can wait until after Gibbs' return, my sister will be in London for graduate school. I wouldn't mind taking a look around the UK. Don't know about the whole 7 weeks though, that'd cost a fortune!"
"You could stay in the U.S., do a road trip."

"Yeah, thought about that. Not sure how much fun that would be by myself but it could be a way to kill some time."

Chalmers snorted, "Most people would be thrilled to be off work, with pay and benefits, for nearly two months."

Tim laughed, "You're right. But we put in so much time it's hard to keep up with friends, have a life outside work."

"Oh…huh, heard you were in a relationship."

Tim sighed, how had the conversation gotten this personal? He used to be far more closemouthed; he guessed over the years he'd loosened up, learned to trust that personal information would not be used against him.

"No longer true."

"Oh geez, sorry. Man I wasn't thinking, that was crossing a line."

As Tim felt it was partly his fault he shrugged, saying, "Appreciate you keeping it to yourself."

Chalmers nodded, "No problem."

They rode in awkward silence for several minutes until Ellie called. "Two things: one, the troopers say this is definitely a crime scene and two, I have the ids. How do you want to do this?"

Tim had already decided, "You take professional, Chalmers and I will handle personal."

"Okay. The victims are Navy Lieutenants, both female. Suzanna Christine Nichols and Deanna Marianna Mays. Mays is registered at a resort near the crash scene called Massanutten. Sending Chalmers their info."

Chalmers nodded when he received it. "Got it, thanks."

He got busy with his phone, looking up the personal details of their victims' lives. He sighed, "Oh boy."

"What's that?"

"They're a couple, married to each other since 2011, the end of DADT, and they had had a commitment ceremony years before that. But that's not the 'oh boy' part, this is: they've got two little kids under three, a boy Tyler Dean and girl Suzanna Bryn. I'm going to social media to see what else I can find out."

Tim hoped those kids hadn't been with them and that there was a guardian for them. He dreaded cases with orphaned kids; it hit too close to home for him.

"Let Ellie know about the kids, she needs to let the troopers know. Do a quick look for family members but don't spend too much time, Child Protection Services will be called in. Gotta prioritize, handle what happened today."

Chalmers grunted his agreement as he sent a quick text and kept working. "Damn, their kids are with them, there are photos posted yesterday on Facebook from that resort. Letting Bishop know I've confirmed. Ok, I'm looking for family."
For several minutes Tim heard nothing but muttering from his passenger. Finally there was a sigh from Chalmers, "Both women grew up in foster care, from what I've read online it's one of the things that drew them together. They met in high school, got scholarships to community colleges, went on to get their degrees and were accepted into Officer Candidate School. Neither seem to have any relatives. They drove across country from Seattle, arrived 5 days ago only to find base housing wasn't ready for them. They checked into the Navy Lodge and two days later checked into the Massanutten resort. And geez, their whole lives are posted online."

Tim resisted the urge to swear loudly about the lack of relatives, managing to say, "With their experiences, they probably made sure their kids would be taken care of, have a home and guardian."

Chalmers made a face, "I've never dealt with this before. How will we find out?"

Time to move things along. "For now focus on the immediate information we need and we'll let Social Services know about the kids. Start working on the investigation. Think about who, how and why? We don't know enough yet to decide what to investigate so we look at everything. Lock down their rooms at the Navy Lodge and at Massanutten; both rooms needed to be searched. What was their status at the resort? Were they just out for a drive or had they checked out? And if so, where were they headed? Was their housing ready at AB or were they headed back to the Navy Lodge? Track their activities at the resort. And share your findings with Bishop."

Chalmers gulped, feeling he should have known to do all that. "Yeah, ok."

Seemingly reading his mind, Tim made a noise, "I'd rather you ask than flounder around. It's all a learning process."

Feeling better, Chalmers called the resort, identified himself and asked a few questions, ending the call by telling the resort manager to hold the room they'd occupied, not to clean it and definitely not to rent it out, no one was to enter it.

Disconnecting he updated Tim, "They checked out of the resort this morning; room hasn't been cleaned yet; won't be until we release it. The address they gave at registration was 12 Bowline Green SW, #106, Washington DC. I'm looking it up now."

Tim nodded; that was the address for the Navy Lodge and the bit about their base housing not being ready would seem to fit but he'd let Chalmers tell him. After the TAD verified, he told Tim that both officers were confirmed PCS; that is making a permanent change of station.

"Ok, time to talk with Gibbs." Chalmers nodded and contacted the Team Lead's cell, putting it on speaker. Ellie answered, "McGee for Gibbs?"

Tim gave a half smile, "Both of you. We know the lieutenants have two small children who were with them and are now unaccounted for. This is gonna take us awhile. Boss, I'm thinking we should chase another team over to the Navy Lodge, room #106 where the family was staying. From their social media postings, their base housing wasn't ready for them. They checked out of Massanutten this morning, we've already put the room on lockdown; we should get a deputy or one of the troopers over there to watch it."

"Good thinking, McGee. Bishop, call Dispatch. Chalmers, chase a deputy over to the resort."

Both agents muttered "Yes Gibbs" as they made the calls. The Rockingham County sheriff and deputies were already at the crash site with the state troopers and quickly dispatched a deputy who would hold the room until the agents could get there.
By the time the three vehicles arrived at the crash site, it and the surrounding countryside were crawling with Search and Rescue teams looking for the missing children. Another team was searching for the missing kids at the resort and an AMBER Alert was already out.

The four agents got busy with the scene, although Gibbs and McGee had to restrain themselves from doing their own search for the kids. Tim kept an eye on the two less experienced agents, directing them to different angles for photos, pointing out skid marks, paint transfer, etc. The vehicle was a midsize SUV that had been rammed from behind, again on the driver's side and a third time close to the headlight on the front left. From the tire marks on the pavement, it looked like the driver of the victims' SUV had tried to correct and evade, twisting and turning on the road.

Paint transfer proved the hit at the front of the vehicle and the troopers speculated it sent the SUV into at least one roll before landing in a ditch on its side, the rear of the vehicle resting on a large boulder, the front nose down in the ditch.

The back passenger side door sagged open; the children's safety seats in place with the restraints unfastened. The front passenger door had been crushed inward, they speculated the vehicle had landed on the large boulder and then slid down to its current position. With the front of the vehicle, including the engine, crushed halfway into the front seat, the victims were trapped, pinned down.

Judging from the angle and height of the impact areas, the vehicles that rammed them were larger. The rear door was crushed and the contents of the cargo area, mostly personal belongings, had been flung as far as 30 feet.

Gibbs prowled around Ducky, waiting to hear the time of death and with any luck cause of death. The senior medical examiner ignored him until he and Jimmy were through with both bodies. "Time of death about 3 hours ago. Preliminary cause of death is exsanguination; I believe both of them bled out, most likely from internal injuries, in a matter of minutes. But as always…"

"I know Duck, pending the autopsies."

Tim had stopped working on tire tracks to listen to Ducky's findings and noticed how noisy the crash site was. He thought about two little kids, toddlers barely past babyhood, both terrified. Would they realize someone had hurt their mothers deliberately? If the drivers of the ramming vehicles hadn't taken them, where were they? Remembering his brother Rob hiding under the cot at the shelter when he was scared or overwhelmed, Tim wondered if the kids were hiding and if all the noise was scaring them even more.

Catching Gibbs' attention, the older man returned his frown with a questioning eyebrow. Tim looked around, still listening and Gibbs did the same, apparently coming to a similar conclusion. Search and Rescue teams assume the lost person wants to be found but these kids were so little, they might think the S&R folks were bad guys or at least strangers. And with the noise of the investigation and the number of people on site, they'd never be able to hear the kids if they were nearby.

These kids were very young and the terrain here was uneven and hilly; Tim thought the 18 month old wouldn't be able to walk or climb very far. They'd been out there for three hours, they'd be hungry and thirsty. After a quick conference Gibbs agreed with Tim's thoughts and the two of them approached the coordinator of the S&R teams. He wasn't terribly happy with their proposal but agreed it made some sense. He called back the teams and the crime scene workers joined them in taking a quiet break.

With what Tim and Tony called his superhearing, it was only a minute or so before Gibbs heard a baby crying. He held up his hands to the others to stay in place, then motioning to Tim, they grabbed water bottles and walked a few steps up the hill. There the pair stood silent, looking around them
until Gibbs pointed to a thick shrub. When they got closer they saw one tiny purple shoe and a slightly larger red one. It was apparent from the smell that both toddlers needed a diaper change. A bag identified as a diaper bag had been lying intact in the middle of the road, now Tim sent a quick text to Ellie that they would need a towel or blanket, diaper, clean underwear for the boy or a second diaper, plenty of wipes, clean clothes if she could find them and a plastic bag for the dirty diaper(s)/underwear and to continue maintaining the quiet.

Peeling off their NCIS jackets, the two men split up, going around the shrub. A tiny girl was curled up underneath the bush, crying, while a little boy sat at her feet, guarding her.

Rather than stand over the kids, Tim sat on the ground next to the boy. "My name is Tim McGee. Are you Tyler Nicols-Mays?" Beside him, Gibbs' eyes widened as he looked at the children but he didn't say anything.

The boy frowned, "Yes. Are you good guys? Bad guys hurt our car, we crashed an' I couldn't wake my mommies."

"We know, Tyler. Yes, we're good guys, we're policemen." Tim held out his badge and the toddler touched it before nodding, "Dat's like on "Sidewalk Cops". Mum lets me watch it."

Now Gibbs looked confused while Tim did a quick search and saw it was a kids' YouTube show. "That's right, like that. See, my boss has a badge too."

The little boy giggled, "He's da boss?"

"Yes, he is. His name is Gibbs. There are other people by your car, we all want to help you."

Tyler told his sister to crawl out and she did, plopping into Tim's lap. The kids drank enough water to satisfy their rescuers and then Tyler made a face. "We're all dirty."

"That's ok, kiddo, we'll get you cleaned up."

"I want Mama and Mum!"

Tim looked at Gibbs, wondering. "Tyler, can you tell us what you saw, what happened?"

The little boy, trying not to cry, nodded, "I sawed a big red truck. He hit us."

"Did you see the bad guy?"

"Uh huh, his hat. Orange wit' black things on it. I don' like orange anymore."

"Do you remember anything else?"

"Mama said, "Tyler, Brynie hang on loves." With that the tears rolled down his little face, "I want Mama, I want Mum."
Chapter 2

Gibbs hated doing this, but with the long ride back to DC and the kids' horrible experience, they needed to be told something. He couldn't remember ever having to tell a child this young that his or her parent was dead, not without a family member or CPS there.

Tim could only think of one explanation that might help, they were so little, babies really. He gently rubbed the boy's arm. "Tyler, do you know what angels are?"

He nodded, "Dey help God in heaven an' some of dem guard us."

Gibbs sighed, that gave him a lead in and like Tim he couldn't think of any other explanation the kids might understand. "Tyler, Bryn, your Mama and Mum are angels now. God took them to heaven to live."

"Dey're not coming back?"

"No."

Tyler buried his head in the crook of Tim's neck, sobbing. "Mama, Mum!" Bryn didn't understand what was going on but she wanted her mommies too and sobbed along with her brother.

Finally, the kids quieted down. Bryn held her arms out to Gibbs and Tyler climbed into Tim's arms, both were wrapped in the NCIS jackets and held securely for the short walk down the hill. When the four of them appeared, some of the crowd started cheering, scaring the kids even more; the sheriff made a shushing gesture, hands out, palms pushing down and most of them got the idea.

They had a couple of gallon jugs of water in the back of the MCRT van and Ellie led them to the rear doors where she'd laid out a large towel and first aid supplies along with a diaper, a pair of toddler briefs, clean clothes for both children and plenty of wipes. Tyler frowned, whispering to Tim, "I messed my pants."

"That's all right, Tyler. We'll take care of it."

The two men got into the back of the van with the kids, a tight squeeze but they wanted privacy. Ducky brought his medical bag over and gently but thoroughly examined the children, finding that the safety seats and safety features of the car had done their jobs remarkably well. Both had bumps and bruises from the crash and scratches from their escape up the hill but there were no signs of internal injuries, no broken bones, no head trauma. They were a little dehydrated and one of the sheriff's deputies was dispatched to a local grocery store for bottles of a rehydration drink for young children and snacks appropriate to their ages.

While the children were tended to, Bishop and Chalmers helped Jimmy get the bodies of their mothers into the Medical Examiner's van and then the two agents took the sedan to the resort to search the family's hotel room and interview anyone who'd seen or talked with the family.

After Ducky finished his ministrations, Gibbs and McGee completed the kids' clean up. While Tim helped them put on clean clothes, Gibbs stepped away from the van to call Vance. He gave a chin wave to Ducky and Palmer as the ME's van pulled out, heading back to DC.

"Leon, we found the children, they're safe with only a few bruises and scratches."
"That's great news, Gibbs. Any leads?"

"There's paint transfer and the little boy saw the vehicle that rammed them from the side."

"Good, send whatever you have to Ms. Sciuto and Rick Carter; his team did the search at the Navy Lodge and they'll get started on anything you can give them now. We've contracted for a flatbed wrecker to get the vehicle back here. Agent Fuller will ride up and back with the truck so your team can remain on point there. They're leaving shortly. Have Drs. Mallard and Palmer left yet?"

"Just now, Leon, the kids need help."

"Yes, I know. I saw from McGee's text that you haven't found any family. I'll put a call into CPS to see what they want us to do. You two have kept up your certifications, right?"

"Yes, we're both still qualified foster parents."

"You going to be done up there today?"

"Don't know, depends what we find at the resort. Bishop and Chalmers are up there now, going over the hotel room and interviewing witnesses. Once we're done here, we'll take the kids up there and trade off staying with them while we work. If we can interview everyone today, we might follow the wrecker back."

"Ok, I'll let CPS know you'll be back late."

Gibbs sighed. "Good, appreciate it." While he was on the phone, the deputy returned with the rehydration drink, cups and animal crackers. Still sitting on the floor of the van with the kids, helping Bryn with the cup, Tim sent Boss a questioning look as he approached the van but the older man shook his head, he'd fill him in when he actually knew something. "Vance is contacting CPS; he'll let us know."

They conferred while the kids sipped the drink and munched on the cookies. Tim thought of the work ahead, the needs of the kids and nodded. Through with his snack, Ty crawled into his lap, reaching up to touch Tim's face. "You look like me and Brynie."

"I do?"

Tyler nodded solemnly. "Yes, green eyes and pale skin. Mum says me an' Brynie are prolly rish."

Tim smiled, "Do you mean Irish?"

The little boy nodded and said the word slowly, sounding it out. "I-rish."

"That's the word!" Tim patted his arm.

Gibbs grinned, "You might be Irish. I know someone who's Irish, has green eyes and pale skin."

Ty giggled, "Tim!" He paused, "What is Irish?"

They explained and he nodded wisely. Bryn had attached herself to Gibbs and was nodding off in his arms. When Gibbs' phone rang she woke, her eyes wide. "Phone!"

Gibbs handed her to Tim while he once again extricated himself from the van, walking a few steps away. "I'm here Leon, just needed to get a little farther away from the babies."

"Understood. CPS is good with you and McGee caring for Tyler and Bryn. As you get into town,
call D'arcy McKinna and she'll meet you here."

"Anything else?"

"Yeah. Updated SecNav, she's concerned about the children's safety until we figure out who the killers are. The two women were high level cryptologists; Secretary Porter is worried this might have had something to do with their work, although I pointed out they would have been more likely to have been kidnapped than murdered."

"Unless they'd cracked something significant and this was containment or revenge. Could even have a mole in the Brain Trust."

"Yeah, there's that. I've got calls in to the lieutenants' commanding officers. When they call, I'll bring you in."

Gibbs huffed, "McGee's the one for that call. Last time I had to deal with cryptologists he had to translate for me and I still had no clue what they were talking about."

"All right, I'll contact McGee instead."

They discussed a few other details before disconnecting. Gibbs returned to the van with a slight smirk. When Tim's eyebrow asked, Boss said, "COs are gonna call you, women were both cryptologists."

Tim nodded and bit back a smile as a dozing Ty let out a snort.

"Come on, let's get to the hotel. We can rotate taking care of them. Sooner we get that tied up, sooner we get the evidence back to Abby."

Each carrying a child, they walked to the cab of the van and Tim maneuvered himself and Ty in, got situated and then took Bryn as Gibbs handed her in. He nodded as he stretched the seat belt over one adult and two small bodies, "Good, it fits!"

Returning to the back of the van, the Team Lead made sure everything was secure and then quietly shut the door, climbed into the driver's seat, buckled up and headed in the direction of the hotel.

Several busy hours later, the team and the two children were on their way to DC. The wrecker with Agent Fuller had shown up as expected, loaded the car, minus a few items, and was now also on its way back to the Navy Yard where Abby would put the puzzle pieces together. Not just two but four of the dead women's commanding officers had contacted McGee; the COs they'd left in Seattle were as concerned as the new COs at the Pentagon. After revealing what they could of their work, the Seattle officers were able to shed a little more light on the women's lives and thought it likely that each woman had named the other as guardian of the children. That made Tim feel sick to his stomach, it was too close to his own history. There were no godparents, the children had not yet been christened or baptized.

He was also given names and contact information of friends who'd worked with them, among them another former commanding officer, this one located in Maine. Tim raised an eyebrow at that and he pulled up Bishop's file with the victims' professional information. Sure enough, the couple had been posted in Maine, from the timing Ty was probably born there.

By the time Gibbs and McGee arrived at the resort, Bishop and Chalmers had already interviewed several witnesses who'd had some contact with the victims, including management, front desk clerks, housekeeping, bike rental and water park staff. The other two agents, rotating child care, interviewed several more between them. Bishop and Chalmers established a timeline for the family: registration,
the porter who'd helped with their luggage, concierge who helped them sign up for family activities. The team learned of the long bike ride, the hours spent in the water park and the previous evening when the children were with the hotel babysitters while their mothers had time to themselves. The babysitters who'd been on duty last night were called in and closely questioned. Along with comments about the beautiful children and the lovely family, they remarked that the women had not gone off site.

That sent McGee and Bishop downstairs to the lounge where last night's bartender waited for them. He remembered the two women relaxing with drinks in the lounge, dancing together and mentioning to him and their server they were having a 'date night'. The man frowned when he recalled that two other customers had been harassing the women, making off color remarks and calling them derogatory names.

He'd spoken with the two men, advising them to keep their remarks to themselves but when they got even louder, he called Security. The two were not hotel guests and Security quickly escorted them out of the building and watched them drive off the property. They had a description of both men and their vehicles; one was a large red pickup that looked new and one of the Security officers mentioned an orange ball cap. The other man drove a black Hummer with dark tinted windows. The staff involved was able to give physical descriptions of both men.

Now as they headed for home Gibbs and McGee were fairly certain with everything they'd heard, seen and the evidence collected, that this was a crime of opportunity, a hate crime. That meant the death penalty for both scumbags. Catching them shouldn't take long as the security footage from the hotel and the parking area was already in Abby's capable hands. With her on the job they knew it was only a matter of time before they'd have the identities and whereabouts of the murderers.
Chapter 3

The team and kids had a meal in the restaurant café before they left and the little ones slept the entire trip, safely secured in their child safety seats in the back seat of the sedan. A large suitcase with the children's clothes, books and toys had been thrown several feet from the wrecked vehicle but most of the contents survived in decent shape. The suitcase would never roll again, the fabric badly frayed but there were no holes and the zipper was intact. After taking extensive photos, the whole thing came with them for the children's use, along with the diaper bag.

Unfortunately, the double stroller was beyond repair, it looked like it had bounced on rocks or pavement, losing pieces here and there. Luckily, the children's safety seats were undamaged and after taking enough photos to show the placement of them in the victims' SUV, they'd been moved to the agency sedan for the drive home.

Most of the rest of the physical evidence traveled to DC in the van, now occupied by Agents Bishop and Chalmers while Gibbs and McGee were in the sedan with the children, their belongings and the rest of the evidence. They made good time as the bulk of the traffic was headed away from DC for the long weekend, although as Gibbs remarked, "Those folks may end up spending the weekend sitting in their cars on the road." Tim chuckled, amused by Boss making a joke.

D'Arcy McKinna, their usual representative from Child Protective Services, was contacted when they were about 15 minutes out from the Navy Yard and was pulling into the visitors' parking area as the sedan and the MCRT van entered the Yard. Ellie was driving the van and Tim texted her kudos for keeping up with the boss. Gibbs pulled the sedan close to the front door and helped remove the kids from their seats. Ty was awake and crawled out of the seat and the car on his own but Bryn never stirred as she was lifted into Tim's arms. Reaching up, Ty took Tim's hand and quietly walked beside him in through the doors while Gibbs moved the car. The security guards had already spotted the sleeping baby and were quieter than usual, having been briefed that these kids were involved in a case. Ms. McKinna walked in with them, gently removing the diaper bag from Tim's shoulder and carrying it. Ty gave her a curious look but wasn't frightened by yet another stranger.

They went straight to a conference room where they found small beanbag chairs and a portable crib someone had provided for the children. There were a few coloring books and crayons, picture books and two teddy bears sitting in the beanbags and more snacks for the kids. When Tim looked surprised, Ms. McKinna explained, "I gave Director Vance a list of what the children would need. We won't take long tonight; all of you are tired and obviously need sleep."

Tim opened his mouth to say the team would be working on the case and then stopped. He wasn't sure what was going to happen with the children but he really didn't want them to have to deal with more strangers. While he was thinking that through, Gibbs and Vance slipped into the room, quietly greeting the social worker. Tim introduced Ms. McKinna and Vance to Ty who surprised them all by shyly holding out his hand to each of them for a shake. Smiling, Gibbs took Bryn from Tim's arms and settled her in the crib, covering her with a light blanket.

With Ty coloring and getting to know his new friend the teddy bear, the adults spoke softly. When the social worker asked which of the two foster parents would be taking the kids, Gibbs looked at Tim who gave him a discreet nod. The team leader said, "They'll stay at my house but Tim will be in
charge of the children. He's bunking with me until he finds a new place to live."

Both McKinna and Vance were startled although for different reasons. From Ms. McKinna's point of view, it sounded like one of her certified foster parents was homeless. From Vance's point of view, that meant something had gone awry between McGee and his girlfriend Delilah Fielding, with whom he'd been living. He'd heard that McGee had purchased a ring and was ready to propose. Vance had been happy for him, glad to see at least one of the agents on Gibbs' team with a life and support outside of work and the team.

Tim caught both looks of dismay and quickly explained, "This only happened last week; I don't even have all my stuff out yet. My girlfriend and I broke up; I left because she's in a wheelchair and a wheelchair friendly apartment that matched her tastes took us several months to find. It'll be easier for me to find someplace new."

Ms. McKinna nodded, figuring if she had more questions she'd ask later. Vance also nodded, saddened to hear the news and not surprised that whatever happened between the two, McGee was taking the high road by leaving the apartment. Gibbs was torn between wanting to comfort his agent and moving the meeting along so they could get back to work. Then he realized, as Tim had, that one of the two of them would have to stay with the children. He looked around the room, wondering if they could bring in some sort of bed for Ty, almost immediately dismissing the idea.

Within a few minutes, it had been decided the kids would stay at Gibbs' home over the long weekend and probably into the following week while the murders were investigated and questions about the women's estates and guardianship of the children were settled. One of the questions they had was about the kids' fathers and Ms. McKinna verified it was one of the items on her list. Vance offered to have the kids' DNA run to help the process along and she agreed.

In the meantime, Ty had fallen asleep curled up in one of the beanbag chairs and Gibbs covered him with another of the blankets in the room. Ms. McKinna signed the legal agreements to have the kids' DNA tested and the foster parent arrangement for Tim and Gibbs and then she left, promising to be in touch with Tim over the weekend.

With the door propped open so they could hear the children, Vance beckoned Tim into the hallway while Gibbs headed to the bullpen. "Agent McGee, I'm sorry to hear about you and Ms. Fielding. I hope this didn't have anything to do with you being away."

Tim had been in Southern California two weeks previous, working with the OSP team on a project. Now he sighed, "I haven't figured out yet whether it was a good or bad thing that I was away. I caught a standby seat on the redeye Saturday night instead of waiting for my scheduled Sunday flight. I wanted to surprise Delilah and Tony had some time before his flight to Italy, so he and I met for breakfast and then he went with me to run an errand. We said goodbye, I bought flowers and then went home to surprise her. Delilah was home but she wasn't alone, the surprise was on me and eventually I ended up at Gibbs'. Chalmers knows and now you but I haven't told anyone else."

"Oh geez, Tim, what a godawful mess, that came out of the blue!"

Tim nodded, surprised at the use of his first name and definitely done talking about it. Vance took a breath. "The other thing is, McGee, those kids are the spitting image of you, especially the boy."

"Is that why you offered to do the DNA?"

"Yeah. Now I think about it, I'll send it to an outside lab. You've got enough on your shoulders right now without anyone getting too curious."
Tim was quiet for a beat and then decided to jump in. "I know a lab in Bethesda where no one knows anyone here. And they're reliable."

"Have you used them personally?"

Tim blinked in surprise and Vance realized it was none of his business. "Very well, I trust your judgment." His agent nodded as he sent him the contact information.

Gibbs returned a few minutes later, handing Tim his laptop. He set it on the end of the conference table the farthest from the children. To his surprise, Gibbs sat next to him and leaned in, speaking softly.

"You ok? This is all pretty overwhelming, the situation with Delilah and now this. You know I'll foster the kids with you, but one of us has to be on record."

Tim managed a smile, "Yeah, I knew that. I'm okay for now. I'd rather not deal with the other situation, but I guess at some point I'm gonna have to get the rest of my stuff."

"Got a lot of room in the basement, kiddo."

"Thanks, might take you up on that. Timing sucks; Tony's gone and now one of us is gonna have to stay with the kids."

"We'll trade off and either of us can work from home. See if we can find a good daycare."

"Have to look into how to handle little kids' grieving process, Boss. When we lost the Commander and Patrick, I was in the hospital and Sarah was through the worst of it by the time I got out. As for me... not sure I ever took the time. You know what happened."

Gibbs nodded, patting him on the shoulder. "I know, Tim and that's a good point, we need to do that. I'll put a call into Doc Cranston; see what she has to say."

"Thanks. Uh, I put him off but Vance made a comment about the kids looking so much like me. Do you think so too?"

Gibbs inhaled and then nodded, "Yeah, noticed it in both of them as soon as we saw them."

Tim shook his head, deep in thought, jumping when his laptop chimed with an IM from Bishop saying Abby had something. Gibbs took off for the lab while Tim sent Abby a request to put the meeting on video with closed captioning rather than audio so they wouldn't wake the kids. Then he disabled the chime and turned the speaker volume down.

She had an id and address for the owner of the red pickup truck and orange cap. While they waited for the warrant needed to bring him in, search his residence and impound his truck, Tim found a list of known acquaintances, including previous cellmates. They ran DMV records for all six and found one with the right vehicle, a black Hummer. Abby also had facial recognition on the Hummer guy by that time, the same man.

To bring in both suspects at once Gibbs asked Vance for a second team and the director once again assigned Carter's team. In the meantime, Vance had also contacted Ms. McKinna to see if she could arrange for someone to watch the children at the agency while the teams brought in the suspects. She returned to the Yard before the teams left, bringing meals for the kids and wishing them good hunting. Tim was relieved, he hated the idea of his team out there short not just one but two of their experienced agents, with one inexperienced agent who was a relative stranger and another agent with only a year of experience under her belt, serving an arrest warrant on the white supremacist dirtbag
who'd targeted and killed the couple. The women were both Caucasian but the hatred that applied to anyone of color apparently also applied to same sex couples.

Gibbs' team returned several hours later, their suspect in handcuffs, his feet shackled and duct tape covering his mouth. They'd surprised him pulling out of a gas station and had him out of the truck, cuffed, his rights recited, before he could reach for one of his weapons. That hadn't prevented him from trying to take McGee and Chalmers down with his legs, but all the mixed martial art work Tim had done with Ziva and in formal classes paid off and every move the killer made was blocked. His mouth was taped due to his foul if unimaginative language and a tendency to spit. Ultimately, the weapons uncovered in the truck and during the search of his home proved to be unpermitted and many were illegal.

Carter's team followed them into the Yard an hour later. Their suspect, the driver of the black Hummer, chose 'suicide by cop' as this would be his third felony, subject to Virginia's 'Three Strikes' law. That law stated that a third felony conviction was an automatic life sentence. Unfortunately for the dirtbag, Carter and team anticipated his response and shot the gun out of his hand as his finger touched the trigger. He too arrived in cuffs and duct tape although his feet were not shackled, as he had not tried kicking, tripping, blocking or any other of the leg and body movements futilely attempted by his buddy Orange Cap.

Hummer man confessed, hoping for prison privileges, as he already knew he was going down. After that, they had Orange Cap dead to rights as the saying goes. There was no need for a confession from Orange Cap although Gibbs and McGee tag teamed him and got one anyway.

Once the two were safely in the agency holding cells, both teams called it a night or morning, as it was nearly 0300. Paperwork could wait until later in the day. Ellie and Chalmers helped Tim and Gibbs get the kids, toys and the portable crib into the agency sedan. The evidence had been removed from the trunk but everything else was still in the vehicle and for now Vance told them to keep it, they could exchange it for their own vehicles over the weekend. Then he chuckled, realizing neither the Challenger nor McGee's Porsche would be the ideal vehicle for two toddlers and their paraphernalia. While the Porsche would be impossible, he supposed they could make the Challenger work and said as much to his agents who nodded their agreement.

Finally back in the car with the kids, Tim swallowed a yawn, "Oh man it's late. Need to get the kids tucked in and need to crash for a few hours. I'll work on my reports in the morning, uh, later this morning, ok?"

Gibbs had no problems with that, "Sounds like a plan." Abby left at the same time as the others and smiled as her phone buzzed with a text from McGee. He said it was from Gibbs and him; they wanted to say thanks for her quick work and help in breaking the case. Abby replied that she was just glad they got the monsters and that by the way, she'd already let Jimmy know the kids were staying with Gibbs and McGee. She sent the text and then a second one saying she needed to know why Tim was staying with Gibbs but was willing to wait.

Tim stared at the message for a minute, wondering why letting Jimmy know was important enough to mention. As for the second text, only Gibbs and now Vance knew the real story of what happened with Delilah and he really didn't want to talk about it with anyone else. Not yet, he was still trying to process what happened.

Reaching the house they carried the kids in and Gibbs stayed with them while Tim brought the portable crib in, taking it upstairs to the room he'd been sleeping in. Carrying Brynie and followed by an awake if groggy Ty, Gibbs walked up after Tim, verbalizing a decision he'd made earlier. "We'll clear out Kelly's old room and the kids can sleep in there. You can't sleep on the couch; I know what
Ty looked at them, "I c'n sleep wit' Bryn."

"Won't that be crowded?"

The little boy shook his head, looking sad and Tim realized the kids would probably do better together, for a few nights anyway. He made a decision. "All right, I'll sleep in the big bed; you can sleep with me or with your sister."

"Ok."

They got the crib set up again and then changed Bryn into a clean diaper and her favorite jammies. Tim hoped the kids would sleep a few more hours but wasn't sure, they'd already slept during the car rides and at the agency. Gibbs went to look for anything Brynie could drink from, even a travel mug would do for tonight. He came back upstairs with a baby bottle full of milk.

Tim looked at it and then at him, his eyebrow raised in surprise.

"Breena left a note saying Jimmy told her about the kids. She brought us what she thought we'd need for tonight and Ms. McKinna looked up the kids' medical records, no food or dairy allergies."

Tim grinned, "Yay we're saved! That's what Abby meant when she said she'd told Jimmy we have the kids. Food, diapers, milk, bottles?"

"Yeah and I saw grownup food too."

"Good because I'm starving!"

Ty watched them curiously, not understanding what was going on. Gibbs turned to him, "We wanted to make sure you had everything you and Bryn need, Ty, and now we do."

"Oh, dat's good." They'd brought the kids' suitcase upstairs and once the boy was also in his favorite jammies, he and Tim looked at the books while Gibbs went for food, although Tim heard some strange noises in the hallway. Ty pointed to "Winne the Pooh."

"Dat's our favorite. Mama and Mum know da words widou' looking." His little face scrunched up as tears rolled down his face. Tim picked him up and scooted backwards on the bed, rocking him in his arms. Eventually Tyler fell asleep and Tim shifted him to a more comfortable position for both of them.

Once he was sure the little boy was sound asleep, Tim carefully tucked him in with pillows surrounding him to keep from falling off and then moved off the bed, leaving a Pooh Bear next to him.

He paused at the head of the stairs, now blocked by a baby gate that explained the noise he'd heard earlier: Gibbs installing it. Wondering just how thorough Breena had been, he peeked into the hall bathroom where he found the drawers and cabinet had toddler locks on them and the electrical outlets were covered. The doorknobs on the other rooms up here all had some sort of plastic thing over them that Tim vaguely recognized from Sarah's babyhood.

At the bottom of the staircase, he discovered a second baby gate, this one left open. Mentally he
started a list of items he'd need to make whatever new place he found safe for Bryn and Tyler but quickly gave it up, certain to locate a list online. Gibbs was at the table, eating a large sandwich. As Tim sat, he looked at his boss, saying "Outlet covers" before picking up his own sandwich. Gibbs nodded, figuring the younger man was too fried to make more sense than that. Food consumed, Tim went back upstairs while Gibbs settled onto the couch with a deep sigh of contentment. Man he hoped those kids slept later than Kelly had as a toddler!

Tim woke to a whisper in his ear. "Tim, we're hungry!" He smiled as he recognized the voice and when he opened his eyes, he found Ty half snuggled in one of his arms and half laying on his chest. He blinked, deciding he'd better not play scary morning Tim as he did with Sarah and Rob when they were little. Across the room, Brynie babbled something at him and he smiled at her. He was surprised when he saw the time - it was nearly 11 AM!

"Ok, I'm awake. Let's get you two changed and have some breakfast."

He'd grabbed a towel last night and now was glad he'd thought ahead, he didn't want to put the baby down on the floor or directly on the crib sheet to change her diaper. Once she was clean and he'd found a plastic bag for the garbage, he helped Ty change. He decided to wait to change out of his own jammies, he and Boss would have to take turns watching the kids while they showered and changed.

Holding the kids' hands, he walked them out to the top of the staircase. "Know what this is?"

Ty nodded, "Baby gate; not 'sposed ta go up or down widou' help." Bryn nodded, echoing her brother. "Beby ga', no go."

"That's right! Ok, let's see if Gibbs is awake yet."

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Chapter End Notes

Reviewers asked if Gibbs and the rest of the team know Tim's personal history in this story. The answer is yes, Gibbs, Tony, Ducky, Jimmy, Abby and Leon know about the siblings, the abandonment and living on the street. Ellie knows the siblings but there are things she doesn't know. The TAD Agent Chalmers has no idea.

Also, the foster parent certification for Tim came from my story "Finding Home" and Gibbs' certification exists but is new in this story. (It really comes from another story I'm writing not related to this one but I don't know when or even if I'll post that.)
Chapter 4

To Gibbs' amazement, he hadn't woken until he heard Tim talking to the kids on the stairs but by the
time the trio walked carefully down the stairs and reached the kitchen, he had a pan out and was
removing food from the refrigerator. Tim found a little chair without any legs but with arms that slid
onto the table, plus a tray and a lap belt; he guessed it was a portable high chair. He got Bryn into
that and smiled when a box of Cheerios was thrust into his hands. He sprinkled a few on the tray for
Bryn, and then went off to find a box, books, or something for a makeshift booster seat for Ty. In
minutes, the boy was sitting on a pile of books balanced on a wooden box that was in the middle of
one of the chairs. Ty's eyes were big and Tim looked at him, "Hmm, how about you sit on my lap to
eat?"

Ty's arms went up and Tim carefully lifted him up and onto his lap. "There you go. No wobbles
now."

The little boy giggled, the two men smiled and that started their day. By nightfall, Tim was ready to
crawl right into bed when the kids did. He'd managed to do his reports, added and signed off on
Bishop and Chalmers' when they appeared in his e-mail; he suspected Ellie had coached their TAD
in the proper way to write a report for Gibbs. He printed them, sent them to Boss's inbox and gave
the printed copies to Gibbs who calmly announced he wasn't doing his until Sunday, then Vance
could do his on Monday. The scumbags weren't going anywhere, they'd already conferred with their
lawyers and they wouldn't be arraigned until Tuesday when the courts opened after the holiday.

In the early afternoon, Vance called. "Spoke with our Legal folks about the family's effects. They're
already here, in storage at the moving company. Ms. O'Connell believes that if the children stay with
you, you'll be able to sell or use whatever you need of the family's belongings, depends how the
lieutenants set up their estate. Certainly you'll want to go through and keep a few things for the kids."

Tim cleared his throat, "Did she mean as a foster parent or their legal guardian? Yeah, I'm their foster
parent but they're legally wards of the state."

"She said as legal guardian; she also mentioned that the state would likely be willing to let the kids
have what they need even if you're not the legal guardian right away. Unless they've got precious
gems or gold, things worth real money, she didn't think they'd be too concerned."

"Oh…well, we'll have to wait until next week I guess. At least."

"Yeah, just wanted to let you know."

"Thanks Director."

"Know what you need?"

"It's a long list! Toddler bed and booster seat for Ty; I guess Bryn can sleep in the portable crib for
now or is that on loan from someone? Breena Palmer left us a portable baby chair that attaches to a
table. Uh, more baby gates, outlet covers, drawer locks for the kitchen, door locks for the front door
and something for the patio door. Childcare so both Gibbs and I can work and…I'm not even sure
what else. Except Sir," Tim looked around but Gibbs had the kids in the other room, "who's making
arrangements for a service and burial?"

"The Navy will do that, McGee."
"Of course! Sorry, guess I'm a little off kilter today."

Vance huffed, "With everything going on in your life, don't worry about it and you can keep the portable crib for now. It belongs to Agent Stevenson, her daughter doesn't use it anymore and she hadn't gotten around to getting rid of it. Now, I had an idea for your concern about work that would enable you to come in for a few hours every day."

He waited for Gibbs to join the younger agent and quickly outlined his plan. His kids were at an age where they didn't need their nanny Lara Morgan as a nanny anymore, she was now more or less their transportation and event coordinator. She'd suggested she stay with the new little ones part-time until everything was figured out.

"She figures she could come over in the mornings after my kids leave for school, then you can go into work and come home when she needs to leave to start hauling Jared and Kayla here and there. That should get you five or six hours aboard the Yard and you can work from home as needed. When they're ready, the kids can go to the daycare aboard the Yard and if you're working late, she'll pick them up and take them to our house."

Tim took a minute to think it all through while Gibbs waited patiently. He liked Lara's plan, was grateful for it but Tim needed to make the ultimate decision. Finally, Tim looked at him and seeing he had Boss's agreement, nodded at him, saying, "Yes Sir, that's a wonderful idea. Why don't you, Lara and the kids come over tomorrow or Monday to meet Tyler and Bryn?"

Gibbs leaned in, "We'll have a cookout, Leon. Won't ask anyone else; be too confusing for the kids."

"All right, shall we make it Sunday then? Need to get some work done Monday."

After deciding on the time, they disconnected and Tim looked around the house, already littered with the kids' toys, blankies, pacifiers and a few books. Gibbs saw the look and grinned, "Get used to it!"

He offered to stay with the kids while Tim went shopping. Taking careful photos of the two car seats, Tim hoped to buy at least one additional set of bases. Then he stopped and stared at his boss. "I just realized I'll need the baby friendly car while you're at work."

Gibbs tried to look innocent and failed, finally promising to treat Tim's Boxster with plenty of respect and tender loving care. Tim huffed, "You'd better, if the kids end up staying with me I'm going to have to trade it in for something family friendly, so no dings, dents, scrapes or scratches."

Gibbs solemnly promised, knowing he could very well drive his truck instead of the Porsche, and Tim told the kids he was going out shopping for food, a seat for Ty and other things. Bryn looked at him, eyes shining, "Pwesent?" Behind the kids, Gibbs was shaking his head no.

Tim smiled at the little girl, "Not today, Brynie. New toys and presents are for birthdays and Christmas." She pouted, sticking out her lower lip, one that reminded Gibbs very much of his agent's own lower lip and he had to turn his head to keep the grin off his face.

After kissing both kids, Tim left with his mile-long shopping list, taking Gibbs' ancient pickup, glad it had a locking hard shell cover over the truck bed. He had no idea how long he'd have the kids, if he'd get to keep them, how long it would take to settle the estate or anything like that. So yeah, he was going to spend money now for things that might be coming to him at some point but the kids needed them sooner than 'at some point'.

Three and a half hours later, he pulled back into the driveway at Gibbs' house after a successful shopping trip. He'd combined smart shopping at garage sales advertised online, craigslist and big box
stores to find everything. The truck bed was piled high with things for the children. Tyler would be happy with his toddler bed and booster seat and Brynie would be secure and comfortable in her high chair that would convert to a portable and eventually a booster seat. Among other things, Tim bought every kind of babyproofing item he saw, a toddler's potty seat for Tyler (who'd nearly fallen into the commode this morning) and an adapter potty seat to use when they were away from home. He also had a double stroller and many other necessities and niceties for the comfort and safety of the kids. Tim felt his best buy was the two additional child safety seats and bases.

Despite telling Brynie presents were for birthdays and Christmas, he also brought home several books and educational toys including an old-fashioned magnetic drawing board and a little train set. He'd do his best to hold onto those for special occasions although some of the toys would actually help him with the kids. If he didn't retain custody, he'd either return everything or get them to the kids wherever they were.

The kids were napping when Gibbs heard the truck pull into the driveway. Hoping Tim had picked up a baby monitor, he made sure the baby gates and all the doors were closed before going out to see what damage McGee had done to his bank account. He grinned when he saw the pile and grabbed as much as he could carry. Ty's bed was on the bottom, so they carted everything else in first. Before the bed came in, Gibbs made coffee and ordered his agent to take a break. The younger man was exhausted; he really needed a solid night's sleep.

After their coffees, the men brought the mattress and bedframe in, putting it in Kelly's old room. Tim was amazed to see the room had been cleared, there were a few boxes that Gibbs said still needed to be carried down to the basement for sorting; he hadn't done any of that yet. He'd dusted and cleaned in there, even washed the windows, the room was ready for its new occupants. They quickly assembled the frame and put the mattress on it, waiting to make up the bed until the new bed coverings were washed and dried. There were matching window curtains and Tim quickly hung those, glad he'd guessed the window in this room would be the same size as in the guest room.

Back downstairs, they assembled Bryn's high chair and attached Ty's booster seat to one of the kitchen chairs. The sippy cups and other kitchen items were washed and dried, ready for the kids. Last to be wiped clean was the stroller as it was purchased from a family whose children had outgrown it. When they were done, Gibbs gave him a look, "How'd you get all that done so fast?"

Tim grinned at him, holding up his phone. "I got organized before I left. Had the garage sales that had kids' stuff advertised mapped out, got lucky with that considering how late it was, I've always heard baby and kid stuff is usually sold out first thing. The toddler bed and stroller were on craigslist, same people and for a few bucks more they were willing to deliver them to me in the Costco-Wal-Mart parking lot. After I'd finished with the garage sales, I ordered the rest of what I wanted online before I got to the stores and it was all pulled and waiting for me. Once I had everything else, it got loaded into the truck and here I am."

Gibbs snorted, "Of course, good thinking - I should have known!" He pulled storage containers out of the refrigerator. "Here, we had Chinese for lunch."

"And the kids ate it?"

"Yep, I asked Ty what they liked to eat, he said, "Italian and Chinese.""

Tim shook his head, "Hope we can keep takeout to 'treat' status!" He paused, "Something else…I talked with Breena and Jimmy, thanked them for everything. Some of the things I bought were suggestions from them, things Victoria likes. And I told them why I was staying here."

The microwave dinged, his lunch was ready and Tim was quiet as he did his best not to inhale his
food. Afterwards, he laid on the sofa and slept until the kids woke from their naps. Once everyone was up and Bryn changed, they went out to the backyard to play, letting the kids chase them and generally encouraging them to have fun and expend energy.

Sunday morning it was Gibbs' turn to go shopping, this time for their cookout as well as for the rest of the week. Tim loaded the kids into the double stroller and they went for a long walk around the neighborhood. Tyler sometimes walking and helping push the stroller with his sister chattering to them. They discovered a kids' playground where Tim pushed both kids in the little kid swings, held them up on the jungle gym, watched Ty laugh his way down the slide and then took a squealing Bryn down in his lap.

Back home again, the kids were sad, missing their mothers. Gibbs was home, so the four of them had lunch before the little ones settled in for naps. Ms. McKinna called just before the Vances arrived, asking to stop by on Monday. That was fine; the children wouldn't be as overwhelmed that way.

Kayla, Jared, Lara and Leon were a big hit with the kids. Ty was a little shy while Bryn gave them her best toothy grin. The weather was beautiful again so they spent most of the afternoon in the backyard, the older kids playing with the little ones. Gibbs smiled to himself when Ty bumped his elbow and went straight to Tim for comfort. They'd always miss their moms but they were already learning to trust Tim; that was good. By the time the other family left, both little ones were comfortable with Lara and Ty understood that she would take care of them part of the day so Tim and Gibbs could go to work.

He looked puzzled, asking, "Daycare?"

"Not now, Ty. For now, Lara or I will be with you here at the house."

"Are you goin' ta work?"

"Yes I'll go to work and Lara will be here, then I'll come home in the afternoons."

"Ok."

Monday was not quite as busy. Ms. McKinna came to visit and had hugs from both children. She looked at everything, including the kids' room and approved. While Gibbs took the little ones outside to play, she sat down with Tim. "I have some news. I was able to speak with the attorney who set up the estate and I'm sorry to confirm that the women named each other as guardian for the children."

Tim paled and the social worker patted his arm, "Are you all right?"

"Yes, it's just a little too close to home for me. My father didn't provide for my sister or me either. He apparently made our stepmother our guardian but she abandoned us shortly after murdering our dad and brother."

"Oh, Tim, that's terrible, I'm so sorry! Here I was thinking that while it's unfortunate, it makes it a little easier for you to gain custody of the children. The attorney also confirmed there is no family and that because they were Navy, their friends tended to also be service members."

Tim sighed and nodded, "Makes sense when you see how much they used social media. It's the easiest way to keep in touch with everyone."

"Yes and as the children are now officially wards of the state and I represent the state, I posted notice of the lieutenants' deaths on their social media accounts. I hear we're getting some replies and inquiries. Director Vance told me the Navy will handle the funeral and burials."
Tim heard her but he was still thinking about the guardianship or lack of guardianship. "It seems so little but that was a critical step to miss. These two women were so smart and did so much, fought their way into the mainstream and succeeded. They found love with each other, touched many lives, served our country and decided they wanted to risk bringing children into the world to love. Yet, they didn't take the one little step that would have ensured their kids' safety and wellbeing. It's mind boggling to me." He sighed, "I guess I'm kind of thin skinned about it."

"Did you and your sister grow up in foster care?"

Tim shook his head, "No, we avoided it. We were in Baltimore and things in the system were bad at the time. Plus there's 6 years between us, I was sure we'd be separated and it was my job to take care of her, I'm the older brother."

"Oh dear, so…"

"You know the camp near the bus station in Baltimore?"

"The one with the big man who watches over the kids?"

"Yes, that's Nate and we stayed in that camp for 6 years, until I was 18. We were in the 59th Street shelter before I aged out and then went to the camp."

"Oh my heavens, Timothy, that's…no wonder you feel so strongly about this."

"I promise you there will be at least 5 guardians listed in my will. Each of them will know who's on the list and be involved with the kids so there will be no secrets and my children will not have to be raised by strangers. Don't misunderstand me, I know the value of the fostering system but I also know that system is overcrowded and I'm sure it's underfunded."

She patted his arm. "I like your ideas to ensure the children's futures. Director Vance tells me he expects the DNA results in a few days. If there are no living relatives, and we'll have to continue searching as not everyone has their DNA in a system, then you can get things started to get custody. Now, I have contact information for three family law attorneys I've worked with; they're all above aboard."

She sent Tim the info and he looked. "Thank you, that was thoughtful. Uh, the head of our legal department seems to think that CPS and maybe me, I'm a little confused about that, might gain access to the family's belongings."

"Yes. From what I understand, even though the mothers didn't set up the guardianship correctly, they did set up the estate so that the children would inherit everything. We should have access to the storage unit by the end of this week and I'll arrange for the two of us to inventory everything in storage. You can take whatever you need for the children, although I see you have a few things already, and then whatever you don't want, we'll sell."

"All right, that makes sense." He sat in thought. "Two questions: what about the items from their suite at the Navy Lodge? They're in our Evidence Lockup but as they weren't involved in the murders in any way, they can be released as personal property of the deceased. And two, if there are things the kids don't need from the general inventory can I purchase them from the estate?"

"First, the items from the Navy Lodge belong to the estate and therefore the children. Since those are likely to be more of an immediate need, take what you want and get the rest to me at some point. As far as your second question, I don't understand."

"I'm going to need more furniture than I have. I don't mind buying new but if there are things that the
kids are familiar with, that could help them adjust. Or is that creepy?"

She chuckled, "It's not creepy; I think it's a lovely idea. You mean things like a rocker, items the children will remember?"

Tim nodded and she smiled, "That's fine and once again, they belong to the children; in this case I'll delegate you to represent the state."

"Okay, thanks. Next: Gibbs and I have talked about the length of my – our - stay here and we decided that until the kids' situation is decided, the three of us will remain here. I don't want to uproot them again, losing their mothers and living with strangers is hard enough. And I really need his help!"

"All right; just keep in mind that to continue as a foster parent, you need to have your own place. What about child care?"

"I could pay rent to Gibbs for the rooms we're using, would that work? As far as childcare, Director Vance lost his wife a few years ago when his kids were 'tweens'. He hired a nanny, Lara Morgan and she's still with them. The kids are in high school now and she calls herself their 'transportation and event coordinator' and feels she has the time to stay with our little ones. Until the kids are stabilized, feeling secure, she'll be here with them in the mornings and afternoons until she needs to leave to drive Kayla and Jared around. I'll be home before she leaves, the kids can nap and I can continue working if I need to, from here. She'll have bases for their car seats so if Gibbs or I can't make it home, she can take Ty and Bryn to the Vances' home. Once the kids are feeling more secure, I'll enroll them in the daycare aboard the Navy Yard and again if we get stuck, Lara will take them to the Vances' home."

"That's a wonderful plan, I'm happy to hear you've already got it set up! And yes, paying rent to Gibbs would establish that you are providing shelter for the children. Now, I should be going. I'll forward anything from social media I think you need to see and let's plan to visit the moving company early Friday afternoon - if that works for you."

He nodded, "I'm on part time family leave so I can do Friday as long as I'm home by 3:00 when Lara will need to leave. Is your office closer to the moving company or here?"

"Here."

"Why don't we meet here at noon and we can take Gibbs' pickup?"

"Excellent!"

She stepped out back to tell Gibbs and the children goodbye and then Tim walked her out.

Gibbs was glad things were more organized and that by Tuesday Tim caught up with his sleep. The Team Leader thoroughly enjoyed driving the Boxster to the Navy Yard and the remarks from the Marines at the gate made it even more fun. Bishop entered the parking garage right behind him and she met him at the elevator.

"Wow, driving the Porsche! Makes sense though, can't get more than one baby seat into it!"

He tilted his head in agreement and they detoured to the coffee cart, buying one for Chalmers as well. When they got upstairs, they found their TAD already at work, he nodded his thanks when Gibbs handed him a coffee. "Is Agent McGee coming in today?"

Gibbs nodded, "Yes, this week except for Friday he'll be here in the mornings and stay until 1430
and then work from home. Friday he'll work from home."

"Kids all right?"

"Yeah, they're getting used to things. Gonna be tears and they're gonna miss their mothers, but they already trust Tim and me; that helps." He paused to change the topic to work mode, "McGee tells me you two got your reports to him quickly Saturday. Appreciate that, meant Director Vance gave everything to Legal yesterday and they're prepared for the arraignments this morning."

He nodded to them, "Lab, then Ducky." He picked up Abby's CafPow and walked to the back elevator. He was still gone when McGee hurried in. "Morning, thanks for the coffee!"

Ellie chuckled, "That's from Gibbs; he bought this morning."

"He upstairs?"

"Nope, lab or Ducky's."

Tim nodded. His morning had already been busy and he was almost glad to be at work. It felt good to be Special Agent Tim McGee and not Foster Dad Tim for a few hours. He guessed it would take some time to adjust.
Chapter 5

After Gibbs left for work that morning, Tim used Skype to call Tony in Italy. He really missed his friend and needed to tell him about the kids and his split with Delilah, although not in that order. Before he left, DiNozzo made him promise that he'd update him with anything important.

When he answered the call, Tony looked carefully at Tim. "I can't read your expression, McGee, but it doesn't look as happy as I expected."

"It's been a hell of a couple of weeks, Tony. Get comfy because there's a lot to tell you. Hope you're having fun?"

"Yeah, love it here! I can't believe it's taken me this long to get over here, to mi famiglia."

"Hope that's family and not food or something weird!"

"It's family, so talk!"

"Left you that Sunday, stopped for the flowers, got in the door and found Delilah had a guest. In bed with her, not sleeping."

"What the hell!"

Tim was glad he'd waited until Lara took the children for a walk.

"Yeah, one of the tamer things I said. I grabbed a bunch more of my clothes and left, ended up at Gibbs' place, still there."

"Is she out of there yet?"

"I don't want to live there; I had my name legally removed from the lease, now it's hers. I'll get my stuff this weekend. Got a little busy at work after that. Oh and Tony, I haven't told everyone about the split yet. Gibbs of course, our TAD because, well that's another story and not important, but he knows things didn't work out and Vance knows because of what happened with a case."

"Knows all of it?"

"Yeah, once I got started it kind of slipped out."

"Geez, I wasn't even gone a day!"

Tim gave a rueful laugh, "Don't think your flight had even left."

"Wow. Was it someone you'd met?"

"Yeah, in Dubai last summer."

"Oh God, Tim, do you think she's been cheating on you since then, that's…I'm so sorry man. I really thought she was one of the good guys…women…you know what I mean."

"Yeah I do and so did I, but nope, par for the course, I fell in love with a cheat and a liar without even realizing it. Just…I'll tell Ellie and the others this week but I'm not going to tell them what
exactly happened, it's none of their business. So let me tell you about the rest of the week."

"Hang on. When Abby calls me to ask what happened, I will tell her it's none of our business. I promise not to tell her, I know that's important to you. Ok, now the rest of the week, please don't tell me it got worse."

"Thanks and let's just say it was different." He quickly filled his friend in on the case, finding the children and bringing them home.

"Whoa! Are you telling me you're keeping these kids?"

"If there's nobody else and maybe even if there is, yes."

"Tim!"

"Tony, you remember telling Ziva about donating to a sperm bank while you were in college?"

"Ok, that was a bizarre segue and yeah but how did you know?"

"She told me. I didn't say anything to you because, well I figured it wasn't any of my business and I did the same thing although for a different reason. I forgot about it until last week."

"So what was your reason?"

"I'd just turned 21, had a lump in one of my testicles and panicked. The doctors were talking surgery, chemo, radiation and a strong possibility I'd be sterile by the time they were through with me. I got scared. I wanted kids of my own, wanted to raise kids in a safe, loving family not thrown out on the …well, you know. When the doctors said the word sterile, I freaked and did a sperm bank donation. Actually, I had some frozen for my own future children and donated the rest. Then the tumor ended up benign, no chemo, no radiation and no sterilization. Over the years I forgot about my swimmers in storage in Cambridge."

"Okay…"

Tim took a deep breath, "Our two victims are women, married to each other, been together since they were teenagers, even studied and mastered the same topic, cryptology. They were stationed in Portsmouth Maine when their eldest child was conceived and born. I checked, the closest sperm bank is near Boston, in Cambridge. You're the only one I've told. Gibbs and Vance have both said the kids are spitting images of me. Vance even offered to run the DNA tests for CPS."

"Abby's running it? Tim!"

"No, that's when the whole conversation about why I was staying with Gibbs happened and Vance decided I didn't need anyone to be uh, overly concerned about me. Said I had enough on my shoulders. I gave him the name of a reputable lab in Maryland, one where no one knows Abby and she doesn't know them."

"Good thinking! Not that she'd look but she'd probably figure it out at some point."

"And if it's true then I'd like to be the first to know and tell people!"

"Damn straight! So now what?"

"Now we wait for legal stuff to happen and for the DNA results. If I am their biological father, I think I'll still need to go through adoption procedures so there won't be any questions, not sure about
that and I haven't had time to do any research."

"And if you're not their biological parent?"

"Gonna adopt them, Tony."

"Wow. That's a huge change, raising two kids."

"Yes, although I've already raised two – Sarah and Rob. I'm just glad Gibbs knows what to do, hoping to get the hang of it from him!"

"Bet he loves having you all there."

"He's so good with them. When everything is settled, I'm gonna ask him to be their grandfather, along with Ducky."

"Cool!"

"Yeah and Tony, I'd like you to be one of their guardians if something happens to me."

"Yikes…guardian! As in Bruce Wayne to Dick Grayson? What do you mean one of them?"

"That's the idea. The kids' mothers made each other guardian, they're both dead and now their kids are SOL. I think my father made our stepmother our guardian but after she murdered him and my brother, she abandoned us, so no one to take care of us. Which in our case is probably a good thing, she might have killed us too."

"I see where you're coming from on that, Probie. So yes, I'll gladly be one of the kids' guardians, as long as I'm not the first one!"

"Ok, we can do that. Maybe the Palmers will be the first ones, then you, Gibbs, Ellie, my brother Rob and Vance. I'm only leaving Ducky out because of his age. I hope he'll live forever but…you know, reality."

"That's 6 guardians!"

"Yeah, gonna set it up that way. Especially since 5 of you are federal employees."

"No Abby?"

"No. She can be eccentric Aunt Abby, but that's it."

"What about Sarah?"

"She'd disown me or dig me up and kill me again!"

Tony chuckled. "Man you've got a lot going on. I feel bad that I'm not there!"

"You're reachable and that's good."

"You're not going to ask me to babysit, are you?"

Tim laughed outright, "No way man, not until the kids are older, much older. Like over 21 older." He paused, "That sounded mean and I meant it as a tease, not a taunt! You're going to be the cool uncle, so when they're a little older and you're comfortable, we'll see."
"I knew it was a tease and 21 sounds just fine!"

DiNozzo was glad to see an amused smile and answered Tim's questions about his trip; they talked for another 15 minutes until they heard Lara and the kids at the front door.

"Gotta go, the kids are home and I need to get to work!"

"Ok, be good, be sane and safe!"

Tim snorted, "Goes both ways!" With both of them laughing, they disconnected, Tony feeling overwhelmed and concerned for his friend with all the life changing news and Tim feeling relieved he'd told his best friend the whole story. Now he just had to get through telling the others.

The rest of the week was thankfully quiet and the team worked on cold cases; aside from a trip to the firing range, they were not in the field. Knowing he needed to tell his team about the other significant and for him, earth shattering, change in his life, Tim asked everyone to gather in Autopsy for a quick meeting. He saw sadness and anger when he told them that he'd split from Delilah.

It was only later that he realized how he'd said it and he felt some satisfaction. Yes, he'd been cheated on and lied to but for once, he'd been the one to end the relationship. As expected Abby was the one who persisted in questioning what happened and Tim finally had to tell her that it was private, no one else's business but his and Delilah's and all Abby needed to know was that it was over. She stopped then, knowing from experience that Ducky and Gibbs would support Tim and tell her to knock it off. When she heard that Tony had been told, she resolved to get the answer from him.

Relieved that was done, Tim asked for help in moving his stuff out of the apartment on Sunday. Everyone volunteered which made him feel good. Next, he enlisted Chalmers, whose first name was Bob, and Ellie to help him with the posts from Nicols' and Mays' social media accounts. As the news of their deaths spread, there were quite a few comments and questions.

The news that they'd been murdered because of who they loved had gone viral and although NCIS didn't reveal the names of the individual agents who'd brought in the murderers, the agency did enjoy a brief moment of glory for the bust.

In the meantime, the Navy chaplain met with Tim and they decided to have a memorial service rather than a funeral. The remains would be cremated per the wishes of both women; however, Tim had no idea what to do with the ashes. He wished the kids were a little older, old enough to understand, then he'd take them and their mothers' ashes out to sea or up in the mountains somewhere. But they weren't and he did not want to keep the ashes in a closet, even if they were the mothers of the children he hoped would be his.

Ducky reminded him of a cemetery they'd been to years ago, one that had sites for cremated remains. If they interred the women's ashes there, they could have memorial stones, something the kids could visit when they were older. However, the Navy surprised them: the chaplain called Tim to tell him the lieutenants' remains would be interred, side by side, at Arlington National Cemetery.

Deeply moved, Tim, Ellie and Bob split social media sites, posting the location, date and time of the memorial service that weekend, to be held at a local church of the same denomination the women had attended, followed by the interment at Arlington. For the sake of the children, although they were really too young to understand much, they hoped the lieutenants' friends would come. The children would attend the interment service and possibly the reception afterward. Lara, Kayla and Jared volunteered to bring them after the memorial service.

On Friday, Ms. McKinna met Tim at Gibbs' house as planned and the two of them went to see what
was in storage at the moving company. They dug out several boxes of kids' clothes, toys and books and a few boxes marked "Photos" which surprised Tim as he'd figured they'd posted them all online. While their furniture was not the style Tim would have normally selected for himself, he was a practical man. He selected several items: a formal dining room table and chairs, kitchen table and chairs for 6, sofa bed, love seat, another toddler bed, full size crib for Bryn, two rockers that looked handmade, three lamps and the entire large box of toddler and crib mattress linens, blankets and pillows. He also chose some of the outdoor furniture. He took note of the number of boxes marked 'Sue' or 'Deeny', the nicknames the lieutenants were called.

The Navy would pay storage for another 60 days, so Tim would need to find time to sort through everything else; he decided to worry about that later. By 1400, an hour before Tim needed to be back at home, Gibbs' pickup was packed full of boxes, the crib, one of the rockers, linens, two of the lamps and some of the patio furniture. The rest they tagged to be delivered to Tim and the kids' new home once they had one.

The service on Saturday went well, the Navy turned out with friends and former co-workers, some of whom came in from Portsmouth and other duty stations as well as the Pentagon. NCIS was well represented with both Gibbs' and Carter's teams there, along with the Palmers, Abby, Ducky and Director Vance. Ms. McKinna was also there and along with Tim, watched the friends of the deceased when the children arrived.

Tim saw that although everyone was pleased to see them and remarked that the kids looked well, no one stepped up as a possible guardian. The children were hugged but only a couple of people picked them up. Tim supposed that could also be because Ty ran and Bryn toddled straight to him and Gibbs when they arrived at Arlington. After the solemn ceremony, one of the women pulled him aside. "Are you going to adopt the children?"

"I hope to, wasn't sure if there was anyone else."

"As far as I know, there's not. I always thought it was strange that Sue and Deeny were the only ones amongst all their friends who had kids, who even wanted kids. They're obviously attached to you already and tell you the truth, they look just like you!"

Tim just nodded, not feeling the need to discuss the matter any further. He knew the earliest Vance would have the DNA results would be Tuesday, the latest Thursday or Friday. His guilty hope was that no relatives would show up on the DNA/family chart who'd want to contest his adoption of Bryn and Tyler. He'd lost his heart to them within seconds of meeting them and he'd never forget Tyler at the ripe old age of 30 months, guarding his baby sister. Whether or not he was their biological father, he already loved them.

By the time the crowd dispersed, he was exhausted and thankful for Gibbs' support as Boss carried a sobbing Tyler to the car and Bryn fussied in Tim's arms. A good night's sleep helped but Sunday brought the final chapter of Tim's other situation, removing his belongings from the apartment he and Delilah had shared. He'd thought to rent a storage unit but Ducky had other ideas. His townhome had a two-slot garage and his precious Morgan took only one of the slots. He insisted that Tim move his belongings into the other slot, stating that Tim was already out a considerable amount of money on the now forsaken apartment and with having to move again, he thought it wiser to use the resources they had at hand. Tim didn't argue much, while he had a solid chunk of savings thanks to Mr. Gemcity, he'd paid the cleaning and security deposits on the apartment and Delilah hadn't yet paid him her half or any of her share of the rent he'd paid.

With two pickups and a small rental van, they gathered outside the apartment Sunday morning, the children once again being watched by Lara and the Vance kids. To Tim's astonishment, Leon had
volunteered to help move. When Tim caught Gibbs and Vance exchanging 'significant' looks, he wondered what the two of them had planned.

The 'removal gang' as Ducky dubbed them, consisted of Rob, Sarah, Ellie, Jimmy and Breena, Ducky as the self-proclaimed supervisor, Abby, Gibbs, Leon, the McGees' friend Barry and Bob Chalmers who volunteered to help. Tim and Barry went early to pack the rest of Tim's clothes and by the time everyone else arrived those were in Barry's car awaiting transport to Gibbs' house. Delilah wasn't home, much to Tim's relief and Barry's unspoken disappointment. He'd been one of Tim's brother Geordie's tent mates growing up; he knew just what Geordie would want to say to the woman who'd broken his brother's heart and intended to deliver the message for the absent Marine.

By the time the rest of the gang arrived, Delilah had returned. When she wanted to keep several items of furniture she and Tim had purchased together, he remained calm, saying, "You never paid for your half." On other items where she protested, he told her that since she hadn't yet repaid him her half of the deposits or rent, he would take what he could use or sell to equal that amount. Furious but knowing she didn't have a valid argument, she made a call and by the time they were almost finished moving the items that were truly Tim's, she handed him cash for what she owed him. He painstakingly counted it in front of her before pocketing it without another word.

The items he'd set aside were left behind although after Tim left an expensive vase she bought in Dubai somehow fell, breaking into many pieces which were stepped on several times, crushing some of the pieces into powder. Nobody mentioned it to Tim, knowing he'd hate the pettiness but it sure felt good!

Tim, Ellie, Bob and Abby took the last load out to Ellie's truck and then Delilah found herself facing Gibbs, Leon, Ducky, Barry, the Palmers, Rob and Sarah. The eight of them quietly, not one of them raising their voices, proceeded to let Delilah know exactly what they thought of her and what she'd done to Tim. She opened her mouth once but the looks she received from Sarah and Breena scared her even more than Gibbs and the Director so she closed it again, hoping this day would be the end of the whole mess. Except she still had to tell her parents.

Later she'd find out Tim had already spoken with her parents. He'd called them before his flight home, making sure he had their blessing for his planned proposal. After the disaster, he'd felt obligated to call them again to tell them what happened and to say goodbye.

Tim was across the street stashing a box in Barry's car when Abby noticed the others hadn't followed them outside. She turned to go back in when to her shock Chalmers put a hand on her arm. "Leave it."

"But…"

Ellie shook her head at her. "Tim doesn't want us involved."

Abby stomped her foot, "He won't tell me what happened."

Ellie sighed, "I only know because of interagency gossip; she cheated on him. He caught her."

Abby gasped in horror, covering her mouth. She made a move to run to Tim to give him an extra strong hug, but Ellie stepped in her way. "No, leave him alone. This is hard enough for him without you crushing the oxygen out of his lungs. He doesn't want your pity or anyone else's, just wants to move on."

"But I need to hug him…"
Chalmers shook his head, "You need...he shouldn't have to deal with your need to comfort yourself. Leave him alone until you find some compassion and can express yourself as an adult."

Across the street, Tim heard Abby and most of what Bob and Ellie said. In the past, he might have rushed to Abby's side and apologized, made sure he was still in her good graces but he'd long given up that behavior; now he just appreciated the support he was given by his team. He wished Abby had been given the advice years ago.

He sighed, exhausted after days of dealing with death, sorting through the lives of the dead women's lives along with the services yesterday, not to mention caring for two grieving toddlers and having to deal with his cheating former girlfriend. He grunted, giving himself a headslap. He was alive and well, those two women who'd fought just as hard as he had to rise above their childhoods were not. They'd been cut down by hatred fueled by alcohol and anger. He'd had enough of anger and he could do something about that right now.

Walking back across the street, he pulled Abby into a gentle hug, murmuring, "They're right, Abs, but don't ever think you're not loved." He smiled at the other two over the top of her head, mouthing his thanks to them. Bob looked confused while Ellie smiled back at her friend and teammate.
Chapter 6

Once everything was tucked away in Ducky's garage, the group, minus Leon, sat down to a hearty meal of roast beef, mashed potatoes and a variety of vegetables. It was perhaps an unusually heavy meal but Ducky knew it was one of Timothy's favorites. After they ate and Tim thanked them all for helping him with a difficult job, the 'removal' gang dispersed. Sarah and Rob followed Tim to Gibbs' home where they found the Vances just leaving after dropping the kids off with Gibbs. Sarah was nervous, she didn't like being around little kids, they were always touching things and Rob was curious to see if the children looked as much like Tim as he'd heard.

Two little bodies ran into Tim's arms as he stepped through the doorway and squatted down to their level; behind him his siblings stopped to watch, reminded of their own childhood with their 'Timpa', the name they'd called Tim back then. Knowing Sarah was uncomfortable, Rob moved forward to be introduced to the new kids; he supposed they were or would be his nephew and niece.

"Tyler, Bryn, this is my brother Rob. He's your Uncle Rob." Ty shook his hand while Bryn held out her arms to be picked up. When Rob did so, she gave him a smoochy kiss. "Unca!"

"Niece!"

She shook her head, "No, 'm Brynie."

"Ok, Brynie!" He put her down and then held his arms out to Ty who looked to Tim before letting Rob lift him up. He got a kiss and a hug, causing him to giggle. "Unca Rob, you tickle!"

They laughed as Rob hadn't shaved that morning. Next up was Sarah and she did much better than she thought she would. Ty had her figured out in a couple of minutes and charmed her into a hug and kiss with Bryn following suit, both happy to have a new Aunt and Uncle. They didn't stay long, it was nearly time for the kids' nightly routine and the adults were exhausted.

Monday dragged by with no new cases, much to the team's silent relief, they were still a bit tired after the busy and stressful weekend. Chalmers braced for any fallout from his remarks to Abby but Tim had spoken with Gibbs and to his amazement found his boss somewhat relieved. The expanded Gibbs' household turned in early Monday night; Tim very aware that the DNA report might be available the next day. However, Tuesday passed as another quiet day. Wednesday Tim had a court date and was gone all day, mostly waiting to testify.

By the time he made it to the office, it was 1700. As he walked in his phone buzzed with a text from Ellie, saying Gibbs had just released them and he should go home. With Tim at court, Gibbs had handled childcare around Lara's schedule. When Tim reached the house he sniffed appreciatively, someone had cooked real food! Noticing a vehicle he thought was Ms. McKinna's, he bounded into the house only to be tackled by two toddlers. Pulling them into his arms, he kissed them both,
blowing raspberry kisses on their arms. They shrieked with laughter and he grinned.

With Ty on his shoulders and Bryn riding one of his legs, he finally made it into the kitchen where he found Gibbs putting the final touches on a stew comprised of left over roast beef from Ducky's Sunday night dinner. The meat had been chunked into bite-sized pieces and simmered with the rest of the gravy, along with new spices, vegetables, sweet potatoes and onions.

He chuckled to find Ms. McKinna setting the table. "Ms. McKinna, your flexibility and willingness to pitch in never cease to amaze me!"

She smiled at him, "Right back at you! But how can I be a good caseworker if I don't get to know my families?" He returned her smile, reaching up to undo his tie.

Gibbs gave him a sideways glance, "How'd it go?"

"Good, all the prep was worth it, don't think there will be any problems."

That got him a pleased nod. He took the babies to wash up for dinner before setting Bryn in her high chair and Ty in his booster seat. Ty grinned, "Look Daddy, no wobblies!"

Tim froze at the words before turning to the little boy with a matching grin, "That's right, kiddo, and you don't have to sit on my lap to eat either." He gave a questioning look to Gibbs who looked just as happy, but only shrugged in response. Deciding Ty must have picked up the term from the Vance kids, he carefully cut the meat, sweet potatoes and other vegetables down into toddler sized pieces before setting both bowls aside to cool a bit.

After they ate and the kids were playing within their line of sight, Tim made coffee, pouring three mugs full of the dark brew, setting cream and sugar on the table. His caseworker smiled, "Thanks. Now, I have news for you. We don't have the DNA results just yet but we do have records of the searches done for relatives when Ms. Nicols and Ms. Mays first entered foster care as children.

"Ms. Nicols' parents died, along with several others, when the roller coaster they were riding at a local fair malfunctioned. Suzanna was only 6 years old; her parents and both sets of grandparents were only children and her paternal grandparents and maternal grandfather predeceased her parents. She lived with her maternal grandmother until the woman was killed by a drunk driver when Suzanna was 14.

"Ms. Mays' story is similar. Her parents met during their own years in foster care; they drowned in a flash flood when she was 8. A neighbor took her in and raised her until she was 12. When the woman became disabled, she was forced to go into a nursing home. Deanna was placed in foster care temporarily but the neighbor died several months later.

"I know this is sad and depressing, but bottom line: there are no other family members for either of them. The caseworkers went back three generations, as sometimes we'll find a distant cousin or a great aunt or uncle who is willing to raise the child. In both cases, they found nothing.

"Two takeaways from this: 1) as far as CPS is concerned, you are clear to file for adoption or paternity or whatever your attorney recommends, or stay with foster care and 2) I hope and pray you break the chain of early death and abandonment that the Nicols', Mays' families and your own family experienced."

Tim nodded his agreement; he'd already done background checks on the three family law attorneys she'd recommended and now he decided to go ahead and make an appointment with one of them.

"Also, I imagine someone from the Navy will contact you, but the children will be entitled to Navy
death benefits for both mothers. Something about active duty and leave for PCS."

She chuckled to herself when both men understood the military terms and Tim frowned, "Is it too soon or too presumptuous to get a trust fund started for the kids?"

"It's a little early but your question is not presumptuous! Your options are to set it up now, without your name on it and then amend it later or wait to get it going until everything is decided. Once again, they're wards of the state and I represent the state so if you decide to start now, I'll work with you so all the legalities are satisfied. Have you ever dealt with any trust work before?"

Tim nodded, "Yes, my siblings and I have a family trust."

"Smart!" She paused, "I will pass along one tip regarding the adoption process. The judge will not be happy with you living here with Gibbs, even paying him rent. While it works for foster care because I know you both, it will not work for adoption. The sooner you can get a place of your own, the better."

Tim nodded, "I understand, I just need to find time to look."

Gibbs finally spoke, "We're off this weekend. If you need to stay with the kids, then maybe some of the rest of us can start looking for you."

Tim was so startled by that he didn't know what to say. He had a list of requirements and he could talk with a realtor about locations, school districts, drive time to the Yard and his preferred style beforehand. He figured Gibbs knew him well enough and probably Ellie, definitely Tony if he was available. He chuckled, "You and Ellie could go look, you can always video chat with DiNozzo to show him a place; he helped us find the apartment. He knows my tastes."

Ms. McKinna commented, "I've been meaning to ask where he is."

Gibbs sighed, "Before all this started, HR came down on DiNozzo, McGee and me about too many unused PTO - paid time off - days. Upshot is DiNozzo is now visiting family in Europe, he won't be back in the States for a couple of weeks and he won't be back at work for another 4 weeks after that. When he returns to work, either I go next or Tim does and I think he's gonna really need the time before I do."

Tim huffed, "And here I was wondering what I was gonna do with all that time off!"

His phone buzzed and he called out to the children, "Brynie, Ty, time to put your toys away. Bath time in 5 minutes."

Bryn whined a little but eventually joined her brother in putting her toys in the large cardboard box currently serving as their 'toy box' and indeed one of their favorite toys on its own. Ms. McKinna said goodnight to the family and took her leave while Tim walked upstairs with the kids.

Tim had just finished talking with a realtor, discussing his housing needs, when they caught a case on Thursday. Ducky thought it was a suicide but they investigated anyway. By the time the ME definitively ruled the death a suicide, the team was ready to close the case. As Tim was packing his laptop for home that afternoon, Vance called him up to the office. Taking a deep breath, he ran up the stairs. The director nodded at him as he entered the private office. "Results are finally here. I haven't looked, got two copies in separate envelopes. Here, this one is yours and Ms. McKinna gets the other one."

He handed Tim a large manila envelope. Tim nodded, his voice having suddenly disappeared. Vance gave him one of his half smiles, "Go on and get out of here and take your boss with you, the others
can go too. We'll call you back in if something comes up."

Tim smiled his thanks and flew back down the stairs. "Boss, results are here. Director said we can go for the day, Dispatch will call if..."

Gibbs looked at his agent and nodded. "All right. Bishop, Chalmers, you heard the man and you know the drill. No alcohol until 1700, stay within an hour's drive, keep your cell phones on and your gear with you."

None of them had to be told twice and as he left, Gibbs executed a small salute of appreciation to the security camera facing the bullpen. Tim reached the house first, greeting a surprised Lara. The kids were napping which suited him just fine. Gibbs arrived as Lara was leaving; he made a fresh pot of coffee and the two men sat at the kitchen table staring at the envelope. Restless, Gibbs finished his coffee and starting picking up toys in the living room while Tim took a deep breath and carefully opened the envelope.

He grinned and said a soft "YAY!" at the first page showing the children's parents, Suzanne Nicols, Deanna Mays and Timothy McGee. He was their dad! He blinked repeatedly as he stared at the results. Boss soon joined him, slapping him lightly on the back, "Congratulations Dad! How's it feel?"

Tim huffed, "Surreal. One minute we're at a crime scene the next minute people are noticing how much the victims' kids look like me, the next minute, BOOM, I'm a father!" He shook his head, "These past weeks have been unreal. I talk with Delilah's parents, tell them what I was about to do so they're all excited, hop an early flight home from LA, pick up the ring she wanted; I'm all prepared to pop the question, plan a wedding, honeymoon and you know, live happily ever after. Instead, I walk in on that mess, no more happily ever after, the ring's going back to the jewelers, I may have given her parents the actual details, she owed me a boatload of money and I've somehow made myself homeless…something I swore would never happen again. I'm not only homeless but dad to not one but two toddlers. Again! Although this time, at least I'm an adult and have resources. Just please God they'll be easier to live with as teenagers than Sarah was."

Gibbs started laughing as Tim watched in amazement. He didn't think he'd ever seen his boss laugh like this. Finally, he wound down and looked at Tim, "Well you know what they say, practice makes perfect!"

That set Tim off and by the time he wound down, he had to wipe his eyes. "Ok, yeah, that was good."

He started to gather up the DNA report but Gibbs stopped him. "There are more pages. Don't you want to look? Could be some of your relatives on there, you could find your family again."

Tim's forehead and eyebrows scrunched together as he spoke in a low but emphatic voice, "My family is Sarah, Rob, Geordie and now the kids plus you guys. I'm not interested in 'finding' anyone who ignored us when we needed them most. Where were they when I was in the hospital for almost two months after the crash? Where were they when she abandoned us? Where were they when we had to pick leftover food out of dumpsters to eat or when we didn't even have that? Where were they when that crazed druggie cut me open? Where were they when I wrote the Navy every damn month asking for help? Nine years we were homeless, Boss, nine fucking years! Even after I got my full ride to Johns Hopkins, there wasn't enough money to house the three of us anywhere safer than the camp so we stayed there. Whoever they are, they can all go to hell."

Gibbs' eyes widened, he hadn't heard this tone of voice from McGee since Sarah's involvement in a case. Even with that, he'd never heard this much anger from his normally mild mannered agent.
However, there was something he hadn't known before and decided to pursue it. "You wrote the Navy every month?"

Tim was rolling his neck and shoulders, trying to find calm. "Yeah. Starting a couple of weeks after we landed at the camp, right before we rescued Rob. I found a friendly librarian who helped me look up what department and address to send questions from Navy dependents. When I told her my family was staying at the shelter, she let me use the library's return address. I couldn't tell her everything but she helped me with my writing, gave me a stamp and addressed the envelope because I was afraid they'd ignore something with a kid's handwriting. She said we should wait a month to give them time to respond. The next month she gave me paper, envelope and a stamp; I wrote again. I wrote every month, when I got older I worded things differently but it was the right address, I checked it out when I was hired at NCIS and there was never any response. That librarian is still there, I've been in to see her, I paid her back for all the stamps, paper and envelopes and to this day, there's never been a response. Nor have the letters been returned as undeliverable."

"We should look into it."

"What?"

"We need to check that out. What if you weren't the only ones? Or what if someone was paid off to ignore anything from you?"

Tim looked at him wide-eyed. "You're right, I'll look into it."

"Nope, Bishop can handle it. You're the victim, remember?"

Tim rolled his eyes and sat down again. Gibbs poured them both more coffee and rubbed Tim's shoulders. "You could have Sarah look. Although she was just as much of a victim as you, bad idea."

Tim huffed. "Boss, you're not going to let this go, are you?"

"Just thinkin' that stepmother of yours was a nasty character; we should investigate anything out of the ordinary."

He sipped his coffee while he watched McGee think about it. He was pressing the point because he knew that having family around would help Tim with the kids and it would be good for the kids too. Yes, he and Ducky were around now. However, Ducky was getting up there in years and with the job as potentially dangerous as it was, he just thought it would be smart for Tim to have people in his life who weren't federal agents. Folks who'd known his parents, family and could possibly even give him some closure to the nightmare that had been his childhood and maybe lessen that bitter anger.

Deciding to give the younger man some space, he took his coffee into the living room.

Putting his mug down, Tim pulled the report to him and turned the 'parents' page to find one dedicated to Tyler and Deanna Mays with no other names. The following page was Bryn and Suzanna Nichol's, again with no other names. The fourth page was the 'paternal parent' page and he had to turn it sideways to see the whole chart. He smiled at his name next to Ty and Bryn. When he scanned the rest of the chart, his mouth dropped open and his eyes grew almost painfully wide. He expected to see Sarah and maybe as Boss suggested, some of the relatives who'd been missing from their lives for the past two decades. But what he saw confused him completely.
Chapter 7

There was no Sarah, no one named McGee or Hubbard, his mother’s maiden name. Instead, there was an impossible name slotted in for his father with a blank space next to it and no name at all for his mother. Beyond that, there were grandparents listed, also impossible and names he didn’t recognize at all linked to the grandparents. He sat there staring, trying to get air into his lungs.

When Gibbs caught the dead silence, he re-entered the kitchen and quickly sat next to Tim who wasn’t visibly breathing. He grabbed his pack and quickly dug out his inhaler, not certain if this was an asthma attack, he’d never seen Tim or anyone else have one. Still not sure, he clapped him on the back between his shoulder blades and Tim took a breath. “Let it out slowly and then take another one.”

They sat like that for several minutes, Gibbs directing Tim’s breathing. Finally satisfied the younger man was breathing normally, he tapped his shoulder, “What happened?”

Tim swallowed hard and took another breath. “I’m the kids’ biological father.”

“We talked about that.”

“Yeah. The rest of the results, I don’t understand.” Tim pushed his ‘paternal parent’ page in front of Gibbs who retreated to the living room for his glasses.

On his return, he sat down next to his younger surrogate son and picked up the page. As Tim had, he first noticed the lack of Sarah or any McGees. When his eyes moved to the right on the family tree, his mouth dropped open at the father’s name. He stared at it, shaking his head. “Tim, that’s… how…”?

Tim was near tears. “Why? Why didn’t you tell me? All this time.”

Gibbs dropped the page and grabbed Tim, “Kiddo, I don’t understand either, I don’t know…”

“How could you not know? I thought you were with Shannon, that you met in 1976, the summer of the bicentennial.”

“I did, Tim but her parents wouldn’t let her see me. She managed to sneak away a couple of times but we never…never went all the way!”

Tim pulled away and looked at him, annoyed with the denial. “Well obviously something got through; I’m sitting here with half my DNA from you.”

Gibbs kept pressing, “What about errors in the results?”

Tim shrugged, “In the years I’ve worked with the DNA database, it’s only been wrong once and that was because Chip Sterling sabotaged the results.”

He stood up, exhausted and heartbroken that he’d never known, never been told he was adopted and that his biological father, who knew him well and whom he’d loved as a father figure for over a decade, was in such denial.
Gibbs grabbed his arm, “Don’t go, I’m sorry I’m being an ass about this. I have a son, one I already love and am proud of. I am proud and happy to be your father, Tim. I just can’t believe that Shannon never told me and I wasn’t with anyone else, Shannon has to be your mother.”

He took a breath, swallowed, exhaled and took another one, trying to calm himself before speaking again, “As I said, she managed to sneak away twice to see me, both times in Harrisburg. She had a friend, Jocelyn who was a couple of years older and in college there; we met at her apartment. Yeah, we fooled around, but we never went all the way; she wanted to wait until we were married. I saw her in January and April of ’77. Then I was deployed and couldn’t get back to see her, I didn’t hear from her for months but I was moving around and my mail took months to catch up with me and I knew she’d have to sneak a letter to me out to the post office. Small town.”

“When did you see her again?”

“It was almost a year, the following March, 1978. She was in college and living in a dormitory. She wrote to say she’d been ill but was better and saved money to come see me. I was back in the country by then, at Quantico. She took the train and I met her halfway. She was too thin and looked ill. Oh geez.”

Tim added what he knew, “I was born 9 weeks prematurely. My delivery date should have been in January of ‘78. That matches the timeframe.” He paused, “Have you kept in touch with her friend? Maybe she knows.”

“I know she married but I don’t remember her married name. Not even sure I remember her maiden name.”

“Was she from Stillwater?”

“No, uh Bloomberg I think.”

“Ok, I could google her. Unless you think it would do any good to ask Joann Fielding.”

If this weren’t so important and he wasn’t so edgy and tired he might have been amused at the look on Gibbs’ face, to tell the truth he felt pretty much the same way.

“I’ll take that as a no.”

“Let’s look at other ways first.”

“Fair enough. What about Shannon’s father? Isn’t he called Mac? I remember seeing a card and flowers with his name at Jack’s funeral.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. You tracked down his address for me so I could send a thank you for the flowers.”

“Ok; I found it once, can do it again.”

“Think I might still have it, let me look.” Gibbs went into the living room and took a book from one of the shelves. Tim had noticed it before, now he realized it pertained to him too, a family bible. Boss brought it back to the kitchen with him and the two men sat. “You wrote the address down on the back of the card he’d sent and after I wrote out the envelope, I shoved it in here. I haven’t looked through this since the girls died.”

Suddenly aware of the importance of what he’d said he looked at Tim who’d closed his eyes, realizing ‘the girls’ were his mother and sister.
He wrapped his arms around his son, “God Tim, I wish you’d known them. Things would have been so different for you. We would have raised you, you would have been loved by two parents and we would have had each other after they died.”

“I wouldn’t have grown up on the streets and you wouldn’t have been alone.” Tim took his hand and held it tightly. “We need to know why and how, both of us.”

Gibbs nodded and opened the bible to just about the middle. Rather than go page by page, he left it open and picking it up, turned the book upside down, gently shaking it. To their amazement, several papers dropped out, including the card with Mac Fielding’s address. Tim picked it up, quickly looking online to find a phone number, numbly thinking that in all the time he’d been with Delilah, he’d never once considered the coincidence of Shannon and Delilah both being named Fielding. He supposed it was a common name but still…

He found a number and jotted it on the card, handing it back to Gibbs who stared at it and then at the time, it was just 1630. Tim looked at the address, “It’s a retirement home. Dinner’s probably early.”

“Yeah, good point, I’ll call him now.”

Tim was too antsy to sit any longer so he put their coffee mugs in the dishwasher while Gibbs dialed; making sure the speaker was on. The phone rang several times before an older but still strong voice answered, “Fielding.”

Tim smiled to himself, wondering if Gibbs had picked that up from his father-in-law, geez his grandfather. He’d never had a grandfather before, not that he remembered.

“Mac, this is Jethro, Jethro Gibbs.”

“Jethro! Good Lord it’s been a long time, how are you?”

“I’m good, thanks, how are you doing?”

“I woke up this morning so I won’t complain. I was sorry to hear about Jack, he was a good man.”

“That he was. Mac, I’m calling because I have a mystery on my hands and I’m hoping you might have some information.”

“Huh, now you’ve got me curious. What’s up?”

“I…Mac, was Shannon pregnant with my baby before we were married?”

There was a deep sigh and a long silence before the elderly man answered, “Yes Jethro, her senior year of high school. When Joann figured out that Shannon was pregnant, she insisted we send her away. I wanted to contact you but my wife…well she talked me out of it, said we should wait until the baby was born. She graduated high school all right, she didn’t look pregnant yet, we didn’t even know until after her graduation. Over the summer, we took Shannon to an unwed mothers’ home affiliated with a maternity clinic, south of Harrisburg. That way she could be under a doctor’s care without any gossip or anything. She was there for several months when she went into early labor. They stopped it once and Joann went to her. She was still there when Shannon’s labor started again and they couldn’t stop it that time. It was a little boy, Jethro and I’m so sorry, but he didn’t make it, he was 9 weeks premature, just too early. Joann called to tell me that the baby died and Shannon wanted me. So I drove down and stayed with them until Shannon was strong enough to travel; then she came home with us.”

“Did you see the baby?” Gibbs and Tim were both crying, sitting next to each other. Gibbs held
Tim’s wrist, rubbing his thumb gently over his pulse point, feeling his son’s life and not the death Mac believed happened. Tim could feel Gibbs trembling and he put his free hand on the back of his father’s neck, both of them needing that additional connection.

“No, they’d buried him by the time I got there. I saw the grave, I remember how small it was and I tried to find a flower to leave for him but it was November, nothing was in bloom. All I could find was a tiny little sprout of an evergreen tree; I dug it up with my pocketknife, scratched out a hole near the grave and planted it. She named the baby Timothy; he was baptized before he died.”

“Do you remember the day he was born?”

“I’ll never forget it, no more than I’d forget Kelly’s, my two grandbabies. November 13, 1977. Jethro, Shannon never told you?”

Gibbs was still crying but he managed to answer, “No, I just found out today.”

“How? Don’t tell me that witch did something?”

“If you mean your former wife, no. I haven’t seen or heard from her in years.”

“Then how, Jethro?”

“It’s a long story. I have an agent on my team who…” Jethro did his best to condense Tim’s life and recent events. When he told him about the DNA chart and his name and Mac’s listed as parent and grandparent of Tim McGee, Mac inhaled a sharp breath. “You mean to tell me baby Timothy didn’t die? He’s alive and grown up? I’m still a grandfather?”

“That’s right and I’m a dad. His birth certificate has his birthdate as Nov. 15th, two days later and his birthplace as Bethesda Maryland but his adoptive father was in the Navy so that makes some sort of sense. Tim never knew he was adopted, he was orphaned at age 9.”

“And you know him, you work with him?”

“More than that, Mac, we’re close; he’s already like a son to me. Right now he’s staying with me and just found out he has two kids, so you have a grandson, a great-grandson and a great-granddaughter.”

“I can’t believe this; it’s wonderful, horrible and just…unreal. Jethro is there any way we could meet?”

Tim gave him a teary smile as he answered, “Yeah, we’d both like that. You’re in Florida…”

“Now yes, but I don’t stay here during the summer, never have. I rent a house on the beach in Fenwick, Delaware late spring through fall, usually early November, sometimes later, depends on the weather in Florida. I have my reservations for Amtrak already, leaving on Monday. Think you could come up there?”

“Yes, let me give you my number and Tim, the babies and I will come up and see you. Maybe while you’re there you could come down here. I’m still in our home in Alexandria.”

“That’s a wonderful idea, Jethro. I’m just sorry your father didn’t know. Is there any chance I could speak with Tim?”

Tim smiled as he took the phone, “Hi, I’m Tim and it’s good to meet you. What did Kelly call you?”
“Tim, I can’t believe I’m talking to you…uh, we were Grandpa Mac and Grandpa Jack.”

“Do you mind if I call you Grandpa Mac too?”

“No, son, not at all. Oh my word, it’s so good to meet you, even if it’s just over the phone for now. Tell me about yourself, Timothy.”

“Uh well, you know how old I am. I’m 6’ 1”, a little taller than Boss, I mean Gibbs, I mean Dad. Huh, I’ve never called him that before! Anyway, I have green-blue eyes, brown hair and pale. I write books in my spare time, have a degree from Johns Hopkins and my masters from MIT. I’ve worked at NCIS for twelve years and I’ve been on Gibbs’ team for eleven years. I have three siblings, none of us is related by blood although until today I thought my little sister was, but we grew up together and adopted each other. Geordie’s the oldest; he’s a Marine, then me, then Sarah who’s also a writer and Rob who’s in medical school.” He couldn’t think of anything else to say but Boss urged him on, “Tell him about the kids.”

“Oh geez, sorry, I’m not used to being a father yet. From a case we had last week, I found out I have two children, Tyler who is 2 ½ and Bryn who’s 18 months old. Their mothers died so I have custody and I’ll raise them.”

“Mothers? Two children so close together?”

“I had a cancer scare when I was in college and thought I’d be sterile. So I donated to a sperm bank and the kids’ mothers uh, selected my swimmers for their kids.”

“Oh my heavens son, you have had an interesting life, haven’t you? And now you know you’re a Gibbs!”

“Yes, I’m a Gibbs, I still can’t believe it!”

They heard a chime in the background and Mac said, “That’s the five minute warning for dinner. I don’t want to miss tonight with such a great story to tell! Timothy, Jethro, I love you both and look forward to seeing you in a couple of weeks!”

Tim hurriedly gave him their phone numbers before they disconnected. Then the two men stood there looking at each other. Tim wrapped his arms around his father, “Ha, I can do this now, don’t have to worry about you thinking I’m totally weird or shoving me away.”

Gibbs laughed and said, “Hope I wouldn’t have shoved you away. I’ll do you one better” as he kissed his son on the cheek. That brought on tears and the two clung together for several minutes.

“Dad…is it ok if I call you that? Or would you prefer Jethro or Leroy?”

He felt a hand at the back of his head but got a loving pat, no slap. “Dad, please.”

Tim smiled at him and then remembered. “Poor Mom, she never knew I was still alive.”

Gibbs nodded, tears starting again. “And Kelly always wanted a brother; God, my poor Shannie.”

“You think it was Joann, don’t you?”

“Yes. Back then I wouldn’t have thought so but now after Captain Norton’s murder, I can see her wanting to clean things up and hope that Shannon might be weak enough to finally fall in line with her plans.”
“She’d give away her own grandson; lie to her daughter, why? And what plans?”

“Maybe because she knew Shannon would never agree to give you up and would have found a way to contact me. If Joann did somehow manage to send you away for adoption, Shannon would have spent the rest of her life looking for you. And she never would have forgiven her mother.” Gibbs sighed before continuing, “Joann never liked me; I wasn’t good enough for her daughter. With her looks and intelligence, she had big plans for her; she’d get her education, meet some society guy at school and have a lavish wedding, bring the Fieldings out of the middle class and into money.

“But I came along instead, a jarhead from a coal mining town she hated, whose father ran a grocery store. She looked down her nose at us; she respected my dad’s hard work but thought I was a punk who’d never amount to anything, not even in the Corps. I remember how surprised she was when I made Gunnery Sergeant and she started to thaw a little bit when Shannie told her I was studying for my Master Gunnery Sergeant’s qualifications. She was relieved Kelly was smart and Shannon told me her mother was starting to scheme again, this time to push Kelly up in society.

“So when you were premature and if Shannon was too sick to know what was going on, it must have seemed like the perfect opportunity. I’ll bet she already had your adoptive parents lined up and let them know you were early. Do you know how long you were in the hospital?”

“Two months. I was discharged in January, right around my original due date. And I went straight to Puerto Rico; my dad, I mean Dan McGee was already there.” He opened his mouth as he realized something. “Oh my God, she must have known!”

“What?”

“Joann, I met her during the Norton case, think I spent a couple of hours with her. I remember Tony teasing me because she was charming to him and outright cold to me. If she arranged my adoption privately, she would have known the McGees’ name and I was already named Timothy. Oh my God, Dad, she knew I was her grandson, the one she gave away. How can anyone be so cold, so uncaring?” Then he shook his head, “Not like we don’t see that all the time. And I forgot she murdered a guy who wasn’t involved in Mom and Kelly’s deaths.”

Even as he said it, he marveled at how easily the term “Mom” came to him. He’d never called anyone Mom; Lily McGee died before he was two and his stepmother was always Natalie or Mother when his father was home.

“Different when it applies to us. I couldn’t believe she was still blaming me for being a Marine, for not being here to protect Shannon and Kelly.”

Tim looked uncomfortable for a moment before blurting out, “Mike Franks told me; I asked if he’d known them and that made him talkative. He told me that they were killed about 15 minutes after Shannon spoke with you about witnessing the murder. There was no way you could have been here to protect them.”

“I could have if I wasn’t a Marine deployed overseas. I asked her not to testify, but she said she had to, what if it had been me? Mike didn’t tell me how close it was to that phone call until shortly before he died.”

“So you could stop blaming yourself.”

Gibbs shrugged, “Maybe. Mike liked you, said you reminded him of a younger me, that’s why he called you ‘Probie’s Probie’. Which I used to find funny, considering how different I thought we were. Over the years, I’ve come to understand how wrong I was. You build, using wire, plastic,
metal and circuit boards instead of wood, but you’re a builder, same as me. You’re handy too; I remember you rewiring Jack’s store for him and putting the solar panels up. You teach yourself things, me too…just not the same things.

“You like structure, need it, same as me, rules and orders, although you’re better at dealing with bullshit than I am. Guess you learned that when you were on the streets. You hate injustice with the same passion that burns in me and I believe was beginning to burn in your sister. You don’t like fancy and neither do I. I think to this day you don’t see things the way most people do.

“You talk more than I do but then you are Jack’s grandson. On the other hand, you’re quiet, it’s always nice to have you around, no constant chatter, that’s Mac and to a degree, my mom. My mom would call you a restful soul; it was one of her highest compliments. In addition, you are endlessly curious, that’s me, Shannon, Mac and my parents and I think that’s what made you a scholar, you want to know and understand everything.

“Your inner strength, that’s from Shannon and my mom. You might have inherited a little from me, but I think it comes mostly from your mother and grandmother. Your innate goodness, ability to see the best, thoughtfulness, ability to love and forgive, that’s from Mac and Shannon and my mom. Love of math and science, no idea where that came from, must be a recessive gene!” He paused while Tim laughed.

Gibbs continued in a softer voice, “Although Mac is an accountant and his father was a pharmacist so I guess that could come from the Fielding side too. The writing is all from your mother. Shannon wrote poetry and short stories. Even got one of her stories published in a magazine, I still have a copy.”

Tim listened, enthralled as his father, his very own father, pinpointed where his various traits and interests came from. He was fascinated on multiple levels: one, that Gibbs, the functional mute, had been talking for more than 10 minutes straight; two, that he’d had this all outlined in his mind, he’d just needed to add the other parts of the equation and three, that this man knew him so well.

For years, Tim thought Gibbs had little use for him and although he loved taking dirtbags off the street, he’d never felt part of the team. As Gibbs said, he wasn’t afraid of being an outsider although he didn’t like it much and hoped things would change. They did; he, Tony and Ziva eventually became friends but with Gibbs, Tim only recognized the change after he was hurt in Somalia and tried to keep it quiet. Then he saw the softer side of his boss directed at him and learned the man cared about him.

He’d underestimated his injuries, despite having been conscious most of the time they were beating him, but still, he felt he could handle things with the help of his siblings. When they discovered Ziva alive, he was horrified at what she must have suffered and didn’t want to distract anyone from her situation, what had happened to her. He’d been in the brutal hands of Saleem’s men for 18 hours; they had Ziva for 4 months. Until they’d deplaned at Anacostia-Bolling, he thought Tony was in the same sort of shape he was, just dealing with it better. That was when he realized that with the truth serum still in his system DiNozzo couldn’t hide anything. In the meantime, the adrenaline that had been keeping Tim going wore off quickly as Rob got him into his car and drove him to the nearest hospital, his little brother furious with Gibbs and the medics who had signed off on his brother traveling anywhere.

While Tim was in emergency surgery to repair the worst of the damage, Dr. Rob called the Director of NCIS and gave him an earful about his brother’s condition, exacerbated by hours without anything more than rudimentary treatment, sitting on a cargo plane. Vance, horrified at what he was hearing, passed the word to Gibbs who was there demanding to know what happened before Tim’s
surgery was even halfway through. Rob witnessed the man’s anger, frustration and fear but only started to realize the man’s regard for his brother when Gibbs got on the phone with the head of the medical unit who’d cleared his team for travel and gave the commander a tongue-lashing he would probably remember for the rest of his life.

Tim woke after his surgery to find his boss by his bedside, his hand on his arm. He wasn’t sure what to think when the normally steely-eyed Marine leaned forward, smoothed the hair on the top of his head, welcomed him back and asked him not to ever hide an injury or illness again. That changed things and Tim never felt like a tool or the proverbial ‘red headed stepchild’ again.

Now he watched fondly as his father wound down and opened his mouth to say something. Both men jumped when a little voice emanated from the baby monitor. It was Brynie singing something to herself. She finished, giggled and called, “Daddy? Gibbs? Wara? I hungwy!”

As they stood, Tim looked at Gibbs, “Got a Grandpa name in mind?”

“How? Uh, maybe Pop or…don’t know son, I’ve never thought about it. I’m Uncle Gibbs to Emily and Unca Jefwo to Victoria, don’t have a grandpa name ready.”

Tim loved being called ‘son’; it had been far too long. “Not Pop, sounds too old. How about Poppy?” They were ascending the stairs as they talked. Gibbs shrugged, “Do I need to decide right now? Maybe the kids will come up with something.”

Tim grinned, he liked that idea a lot, who knows what they’d come up with!

When both kids were awake and cleaned up, Tim sat on the rocker, pulling his babies onto his lap. “Tyler, Bryn, I have something to tell you.”

Smiling as they looked at him, he told them “I’m your father and that means that you, Ty, are my son,” he kissed him, “and you, Brynie, are my daughter.” He kissed her.

Tyler looked at him, his face scrunched in thought, finally asking, “Our daddy?”

“Yes, I’m your daddy!”

Tyler smiled happily and snuggled into his arm while Bryn reached up and patted his face singing, “Daddadaddyy!”

“That’s right Bryn. You know what else? Gibbs is my daddy which means he’s your grandpa.”

Bryn looked puzzled, “Whoda’?”

“Gibbs.”

“Gibpa?”

Tyler giggled while Tim called out, “Oh Gibpa, your grandbabies would like to see you!”
Chapter 8

Friday at work was strange and familiar. When Tim arrived, Boss was not at his desk and Tim settled in to work; that felt normal. After talking about things last night, they decided to keep the news of their blood ties quiet until Tony's return home, then have everyone over and tell them all at once. However, neither felt they should wait to tell Vance, especially after Gibbs pointed out he was unlikely to move Tim off the team until DiNozzo's return. Tim admitted the idea of needing a safer job with regular hours had been rolling around in his head and his father agreed. As much as he didn't want to lose Tim from his team, their lives had changed and the children came first.

Tony had another two weeks overseas and the two men hoped they'd be able to keep their happy secret quiet for another fourteen days, especially after realizing that probably meant delaying telling Sarah and Rob. Tim would write Geordie who probably wouldn't get the letter within those two weeks, but after Sarah's outing of Tim as a published author, he wasn't willing to test her discretion on an even bigger secret.

At this point, they also agreed that Tim would take his leave next; it would now be a combination of family and personal leave, bumping his time out of the office up to 11 weeks.

In the meantime, Tim would let his siblings and friends know about his established paternity of the two children. He intended to ask Ducky to be Granducky to them as he was to Victoria Palmer and then tell family and friends that Ducky and Gibbs would be the kids' grandfathers. With all this in mind, he'd given Ms. McKinna a call from home that morning, quickly explaining what was going on and why. She'd looked at the entire report and congratulated him on the kids and his newly discovered link to his boss. As that relationship had nothing to do with his fostering or custody of the children, she easily agreed to keep the news to herself.

He was deep into a cold case review when someone tapped him on the shoulder. Congratulating himself for not jumping out of his chair, he looked up at Bishop's twinkling soft brown eyes; maybe he hadn't been as subtle as he'd hoped. "Tim, can I talk with you about this cold case?"

"Sure."

She gave him the facts of the case and the initial investigation. It was an embezzlement case, no one had died or been injured and it'd now sat untouched for nearly 20 years. The embezzling had stopped and the investigating team had not found anything usable as evidence. Ellie found a note in file that said when digital information was more readily available, the agency might be able to catch the perpetrator and close the case. They'd had a Person of Interest but didn't have enough evidence to bust him.

Tim nodded, "Go for it! Get your warrants in place and have at it. Can't wait to see what you find. The embezzler will sure be surprised after all this time. How much was stolen?"

She showed him the figure, in the millions, and his eyebrows rose. "Oh the Navy's gonna love you!"

"If there's anything left."

"Good point. Have at it; let me know if you need any help. I'm meeting with the realtor you recommended this afternoon but I'll have my phone on."
Getting back to his own cold case, he did his due diligence following up but got nowhere. He wrote his notes and attached them to the file, pulling another case.

When Gibbs returned, he gave Tim a 'follow me' look and the two men walked upstairs, both with mixed feelings. As they walked into Vance's private office, the man looked up, "This must really be something, you two look like you're about to be hanged!"

That got a laugh out of them and Vance joined them at the conference table. Tim started the discussion, "You, Gibbs and Ducky are right; I am the children's biological father. I'm meeting with a family law attorney to make sure all our bases are covered. In the meantime, we've discovered something else."

Gibbs nodded, "Read the DNA results and it turns out Tim wasn't born a McGee. They adopted him after he was stolen from his mother, we believe by his grandmother. We know his birth parents' side of the story; the only evidence we have for the adoption is Tim's birth certificate which shows him born two days after his actual birth and at Bethesda when he was born in Pennsylvania."

"My God, McGee! How did you two figure all this out so quickly?"

Tim looked at Gibbs who continued. "Well, for starters when Tim read the report, his biological father was close by and never knew he had a son until last night."

Vance frowned at that and then his eyebrow rose and he looked at the two of them. Gibbs put his arm around Tim's shoulder. "Like you to meet my son Timothy."

The director's mouth did an impression of a fish, opening and closing. Tim huffed, "That's probably what we looked like."

Gibbs added, "Only with a lot of tears."

"How, I mean…?"

"A few years before we were married, while I was deployed overseas and Shannon was still living with her parents, she had a baby I never knew about, my baby. She never told me she was pregnant and when her parents found out they shipped her off to a home for unwed mothers. Tim was born 9 weeks early and we believe Joann, yes that Joann, my mother-in-law, Tim's grandmother, took him to Bethesda where Dan and Lily McGee were probably waiting. Shannon was told the baby died. She'd named him Timothy and the staff told her he'd lived long enough to be baptized but not much past that. She died believing that and I guess not wanting to hurt me."

"Unbelievable! How did you get the story? Tell me you didn't contact Ms. Fielding!"

"No, that would have been our last resort. Shannon's father Mac Fielding sent flowers when Jack died and Tim found his address for me so I could thank him. I still had the address so my genius here found Mac's phone number and we called him. He told us what he'd been told happened."

"I hope you told him Tim is very much alive?"

Tim smiled, "Yes, and I spoke with him. He'll be in Delaware for the summer and we'll all go to meet him."

"A happy ending then."

Tim shrugged, "As happy as it can be without my mother and sister." Gibbs tugged him close for an embrace and the director nodded.
"Are you looking into pressing charges?"

Gibbs snorted derisively. "At this point, Leon?" The director looked at him and realized Ms. Fielding probably knew about Gibbs' actions after losing Shannon and Kelly.

Still…he shook his head, looking at the younger agent, "Nine weeks early, she couldn't have transported you on her own."

"You're right. I'm sure we could find a record of a medical transport with an incubator driving from southern Pennsylvania to Maryland sometime between the 13th and 15th of November 1977. Someone created a second birth certificate for me and I wonder if Ms. Fielding forged my mother's name on the adoption papers or just signed her own." He turned to his father, "Was Shannon 18 when I was born?"

"No; she wouldn't have been until January."

"So because I was early, Grandmother Dearest could legally sign me away but she probably would have done it illegally if she'd had to. Nice." There was silence for a minute and then Vance stood.

"I get to be the first to congratulate the two of you, two Gibbs, wow!"

"Gibses."

"Beg pardon?"

"We're the Gibses."

Smiling he shook their hands, slapped them on the back. This was really something but considering their histories he supposed he shouldn't be too surprised that another extraordinary thing had happened. At least this was a good thing.

Gibbs nodded his thanks and continued with the rest of what needed to be said. "Two things. One we realize fathers and sons can't be on the same team. And two, Tim will be taking leave after DiNozzo's return."

"Yes, unfortunately I am going to have to break up the best team in the agency. Although I wouldn't have been too surprised if you'd asked for a transfer anyway, McG…Tim. Huh, that's a change. Are you going to keep McGee or change it to Gibbs?"

"Change it to Gibbs. No one else knows yet. I'll tell everyone the kids are mine but we don't want to announce the other until DiNozzo is back from Europe."

"Ok, I can keep that quiet. Except…Lara."

"Figure she's not around the team, we'll tell her but not your kids. That ok?"

"Yes because I'm likely to slip and say something to her…uh."

Gibbs smirked at his boss, having already figured out that Leon and Lara were far more than employer and employee. Tim just smiled serenely.

"McGee - guess I'll keep calling you that until you break the news - anyway, I'll have options for you here by Monday, then we'll talk again. Are you willing to relocate?"

"Unless there's nothing else here, I'd rather not Sir, especially now."
"That's fine; I have several ideas for you aboard the Yard."

Father and son left the private office, feeling and looking much better than they had going in. When they entered the bullpen, Bishop and Chalmers were doing their best not to look curious. Tim smiled, "That's ok guys; we were talking about the kids, my leave and stuff."

Ellie smiled back at him, "Sorry."

Gibbs snorted, "Rules, Bishop! Besides, curiosity is the trait of a good investigator. Hard to turn off sometimes, ask DiNozzo."

While the others were on their lunch break, Tim called Abby, asking if he could work in the lab. She agreed and he grabbed the lunch he'd brought from home. With his abbreviated work schedule, he wouldn't take a break but he would eat while he worked. He had an ulterior motive though; he wanted to talk with Abby.

When he walked in, the volume of her music was almost as low as it had been after they'd lost Kate. "Hey Abbs, you all right?"

She looked at him, "Yeah, why'd you ask?"

"Music's on low."

"Thought I'd try something different."

"It's nice. Hoping we could talk a little."

Looking nervous, she nodded and he put his lunch down, wrapping his arms around her. "Don't want you to be nervous around me or anyone else. And I have a favor to ask you."

"Ok."

"Will you come over to Gibbs' this weekend to meet the kids? They've met Sarah and Rob, now it's time to meet their awesome Aunt Abby."

"Really? Uh, I can't come on Saturday but I could on Sunday."

"Yes really and that'll be fine! Just remember they've just lost their moms; they're still a little shy with people and after the crash, noises scare them."

"Oh, so I shouldn't run in and hug them or speak loudly?"

"Yeah. Let them come to you for hugs and then your gentlest hugs please. I'll introduce you as Aunt Abby. Be warned you'll probably get smoochy kisses from Brynie and Tyler will start out with a handshake."

"So I shouldn't wear a collar, rings or bracelets then."

"Nothing that can hurt them, please. You know I love your look but it's not an image I want to explain to my 2 ½ year old son or my 18 month old daughter."

She nodded and then her face lit up, "For real, McGee?"

"Yes, they're mine!"

"Wow!" She wrapped her arms around Tim but remembered in time to give him a half strength
Abby hugged. "Congratulations, I'm so happy for you!" She pulled back, "But I still don't know how..." He huffed as he told her the story. When he finished she shook her head, "We don't believe in coincidences so we'll have to say this was just meant to be. I mean, not the murders of their moms but..."

Tim recognized an incipient ramble and put his finger to her lips. "I haven't told anyone else yet. Well Gibbs of course but no one else."

"Ducky?"

"Headed to the Duck pond next."

She smiled at the use of her nickname for the Autopsy suite. "Bishop and that guy?"

"Aw, Abby, I'm so sorry we hurt your feelings on Sunday. I was hurting pretty badly and didn't want to talk about it and they were overprotective. Since then Bishop told me there's a pretty active gossip feed between agencies, so I guess people know the details, although why Delilah would have told anyone I don't know. Anyway, here's what happened. I came back a little early from LA, picked up the ring I planned to give her, bought flowers and champagne, all set to propose and then headed home to surprise her. Unfortunately, the surprise was on me, I found her in bed with someone I'd met in Dubai. And yes, they were having sex. I said words, most of them profane, grabbed more clothes and left, ended up at Gibbs' house. He took one look, sat me down on his couch and poured me a glass of bourbon. I'm legally out of the lease, she can figure out how to pay the rent because I was paying for pretty much everything. The rest I think you saw. She owed me a bunch of money which she managed to get from somewhere."

"In Dubai, oh Timmy, she was cheating all along?"

"I wasn't sure but I asked and the answer I got from their body language was yes. Weird thing is she said she loves me too. Cheating is a total deal breaker for me and she's been lying to me for over a year; I'm done."

Abby nodded and made a face although she didn't believe in commitment to just one person so how could people not have sex with someone else? However, many people did believe in it and promised they were committed to someone so if they slept with someone else then they were cheating. Besides, that bitch hurt Tim; that was not acceptable!

She sighed, "I'm glad you have the kids. Still not good about the murders but..."

Tim nodded, "Thanks. At least I got half my dream. Kids but no wife."

The search he had running finished and he looked at the results. "Not getting anywhere with this case either! All right, thanks for listening. Um, about the details, I'd appreciate it if you could keep them to yourself no matter what you hear."

She made a motion of zipping her lips and he kissed her cheek as he left, turning back when she called him. "You forgot your lunch!"

Then she wouldn't let him leave, "You need to eat, McGee!"

"You want some?" He didn't say anything about it but the name McGee grated on him when she said it. He supposed it was because of everything he'd learned last night.

"Already ate, thanks."
He ate quickly before heading down to the Autopsy suite to see Ducky and Jimmy who greeted the news with a handshake, hugs and a promise to help. Ducky was thrilled that Tim wanted him to be Granducky to his children and both grinned gleefully when he told them about 'Gibpa' Gibbs.
Chapter 9

That afternoon Tim met with Ms. Rohn, the real estate agent who'd done her best to find a house for Ellie and Jake. The agent already knew what Tim was looking for and had several places lined up for viewing. Two were apartments; one was a duplex, two condominiums and three single-family homes.

The apartments were all right but neither had more than a balcony or small patio and Tim wanted more outdoor space for his children. He liked the duplex all right but the school district wasn't that great. The condominiums had the same problems as the apartments, minimal outdoor space. One of the condominiums was also dark with very little natural light and that just seemed too gloomy for his new family. He wasn't crazy about the surrounding neighborhood for that one either.

When Ms. Rohn told him where the houses were, he looked online for the school districts and smiled. Looked like two of the three were in great districts, a solid plus. He chuckled to himself when they turned onto a very familiar street to view the first house. He turned to Ms. Rohn, "How long has this been available?"

"Just got the listing last night."

Tim pointed as they drove by Gibbs' place. "That's my boss's house, where we're staying now."

"Oh my goodness! Then this might be perfect."

The rental was five houses down from Gibbs', the second to last one on the block. Tim liked that, no street to cross to get to Gibpa's house. There was plenty of curb appeal; the house was a blue two story with white trim, lots of windows with an attached two-car garage. Both front sides of the property had gates and Tim could see fences on either side, leading to the back of the property. That was good security and privacy; he liked that a lot. The front yard was low maintenance with a walkway winding through various plantings and a young fir tree. Tim smiled, "Yay, no lawn to mow!"

"There's one in the back."

"Good, the kids can play on it."

The interior of the house looked in good shape. The foyer opened onto a staircase on the right, with a good-sized living room on the far right; on the left was a dining room that led to the kitchen in the back. There were gleaming hardwood floors throughout and the kitchen looked recently updated. At Tim's questioning look, the agent said, "The owners had a surprise promotion and transfer and yes, they did just finish renovating the kitchen and the master bath."

"They don't want to sell?"

"Not at the moment. They said their lives are too chaotic right now; they just want to get a good tenant in here as quickly as possible. Might down the line though."

A guest bedroom was tucked down a short hallway behind the staircase with a full bathroom that opened to the hall and the bedroom. The bedroom was nicely decorated and sized, large enough for a
queen bed, side tables, upright dresser and maybe a chair. The other bedrooms were upstairs. As Tim walked down the hallway to the master bedroom, he noted the high ceilings, same as downstairs. That was certainly a bonus. The master was at the end of the hallway, quite large with a walk-in closet and en suite bathroom, which had been, as Ms. Rohn said, recently updated with dual sinks, a soaker tub and a separate shower. The commode had its own little room and Tim liked that as well as the tub in the master bath; he loved a good hot bath and he knew from the housing search with Delilah that many master bath renovations removed the tub in favor of a larger shower. The shower had a window about his shoulder height, high enough for privacy but still bringing in plenty of natural light and the room had a skylight that lit the whole space.

The other two bedrooms were also larger than Tim expected them to be, with plenty of room for the kids. Both rooms featured large double windows that let in plenty of light. He could see rocking chairs for story and cuddle time now, with desks and larger furniture moving in as they got older. The rooms were nicely painted, one a light purple he knew Bryn would love and the other one a fun mixture of greens, blues and a little yellow he thought Ty would like. A hallway bathroom could be shared by the children. He also liked the upstairs laundry room, complete with washer and dryer; that would be very helpful.

Back downstairs to the eat-in kitchen and an adjoining family room, which Tim thought was a great spot for team gatherings. Taking a quick look into the two-car garage, he found an upright freezer, a workbench and overhead storage. Along with the door into the house, there was a door out to the backyard. Back in the house, they went through the slider to the backyard and confirmed that the yard was fully fenced and family friendly with a gate to the alley that ran behind the backyards of all the houses on E. Laurel. The lawn the realtor mentioned earlier was about 25' long and 15' wide, not too much to mow and plenty large enough to play on; there was also an established garden with five raised beds and two large deciduous trees. One he knew was a maple; Ms. Rohn said it was a red maple and the other one was a hickory, both would provide shade in the summer and brilliant colors in the autumn. The large patio was covered and the ceiling had a large fan built in.

There was plenty of room for an outdoor table big enough to seat everyone as well as a setup for an outdoor kitchen. He could add that at some point, for now he knew there that a grill, patio table and more outdoor furniture were still with the lieutenants' belongings. From a safety standpoint, he was glad there wasn't a pool or hot tub. If they stayed here, he'd think about a pool when the kids were older and knew how to swim. For now they could have a toddler sized wading pool on the lawn. Back inside, they went down to the basement, which was partially finished although he noticed it was plumbed and there was one lone overhead light hanging down. Tim nodded, that was fine; he could use the space for storage. Although maybe they could fix it up so the kids could have a playroom. That would be great for the winter months or in the summer when it was too hot to play outside.

He really liked this place, enough that he didn't see any reason to look any further. The rent was reasonable, all the appliances were staying; with the addition of the lieutenants' furniture, they'd be set and he could replace that as he found items that suited him better. He'd seen photos of Deeny and Sue's last home and hoped they'd approve of this house for their children. When Ms. Rohn handed him a list of items a handyman had recently fixed, Tim knew this was it. If there were anything else, he'd ask his dad to teach him how to fix or do whatever it was. His dad - that was so cool to even think; his son, his daughter, his dad!

Sitting down with the realtor, Tim completed the rental application and paid the deposit. She smiled as he finished. "I have a surprise for you. After you called and said you'd been referred by Ellie, I went ahead and ran a credit and background check on you. So we're all done, I have the authority to tell you the home is yours. You can move in whenever you're ready."
Tim grinned, "Wow, thank you!"

They stepped outside to the realtor's car as she said, "I'd love to meet your kids."

With his head he gestured toward the street, "Your timing is impeccable." She looked up to see a woman in her thirties and a little boy pushing a double stroller across the street, with a little girl in the stroller. She smiled, "They're adorable and look just like you!"

"Thanks!"

Ty ran to him, "Daddy, we went to da park and rode da swings like before."

Bryn held her arms up, "Out p'ease."

Tim introduced Lara and Tyler while he unbuckled Bryn. She beamed at the realtor, reaching over and patting her face. Tim laughed, "As odd as this sounds, we have to get going so I can get my car and be home before Lara has to leave to be with her own family."

Lara smiled at his words and Ty nodded wisely. "She hasta pick up Jared and Kayla."

After buckling Brynie back into the stroller, they said goodbye and went their separate ways. Grabbing the Challenger at the realtor's office, Tim was back home in plenty of time for Lara to meet her schedule.

While the kids had a snack, Tim sent a text to his dad about the house. He got back a bunch of smiley faces and a message that said he'd be home early. He also sent a text to Ellie thanking her for the referral; that Ms. Rohn had been very helpful and he'd rented a house close to Gibbs'. Then making a face, he sent a quick text to everyone else, including Tony, telling them he'd found a house near Gibbs' home.

Then he called the moving company to arrange the delivery of the Nichols-Mays household belongings. He was surprised when they said they'd had a cancelation and could deliver on Saturday if that met his schedule. He had a meeting with the family law attorney early Tuesday morning so that worked perfectly; he'd be able to give the new address as their family residence.

He made a face when he got a text from Ellie asking when he wanted to move his things from Ducky's garage to the new place; he'd totally forgotten about them! He called her, laughing, to say he didn't know, that the other things were being delivered tomorrow and he and Gibbs would probably just carry the kids' furniture down the sidewalk to the new place. While the kids went down for a late nap, he went online to his foster parent account and updated his address to the new one. He followed that with the appropriate form for NCIS, along with a change of 'next of kin', listing the children along with Gibbs and his siblings. He was glad Sarah and Rob had already met the kids.

Then he looked at his schedule for Saturday. He'd ordered a new California King mattress that would be delivered Saturday afternoon, there was no way he wanted to ever again sleep on the one Delilah had defiled. He snorted softly; that sounded very biblical for a near agnostic! The movers wouldn't arrive until noon so if he could find someone to watch the kids, he, Ellie, Gibbs and maybe Rob could retrieve his belongings from Ducky's in the morning, at least the bedframe, TV, furniture and kitchen items. He'd already sold the tainted bed through a Facebook Swap group and it would be picked up on Sunday, he'd already cleared that with Ducky. He could move boxes later.

He sent texts to Ellie and his dad (big smile) asking if they would be willing to do that. They said yes and that Chalmers wanted to help. That was fine; he also asked Rob who agreed. Now he just needed someone to watch the kids. He was still thinking about that when he had a text from Jimmy
saying he, Breena and Ducky could take the kids for the day. That worked fine, he would tell the
children tonight and drive them to the Palmers on the way to Ducky's house in the morning.

When Rob pulled up the next morning, Tim was surprised to see Sarah with him. She smirked, "I
want to see the new place and I might as well be helpful. I'll be overseas soon enough; gonna miss a
whole year with my new nephew and niece."

Tim's eyes widened, with everything going on, he'd totally forgotten about Sarah's impending
departure. Yikes, that meant he needed to tell her about being a Gibbs sooner than planned. Thinking
quickly he smiled, "You'll have to spend lots of time with us before you leave. I'm planning to take
them to the zoo next weekend, want to come along?" She made a happy face; he knew she loved the
zoo!

Sarah and Tim got the kids and all their stuff into the Challenger while Rob rode with Gibbs in the
truck. The two of them would meet the others at Ducky's after the kids were delivered to the
Palmers. Ty and Bryn were excited about going to Uncle Jimmy and Aunty Breena's to play with
Victoria. Ty was also excited about moving to their own house and Tim had a sick moment of worry
when he wondered if his little boy expected his mothers to be there. After he explained that they
would live close to Gibpa, the boy nodded. "Our own house, Daddy? You, me an' Brynie?"

"That's right, son, you, Brynie and me."

"An' Gibpa will come over?"

"Yes, he'll be over lots and so will Lara, Kayla and Jared."

"An' der daddy?"

"Yes and Granducky, Uncle Rob and Ellie and another aunt you'll meet tomorrow!"

"What about Aunt Sarah?"

Aunt Sarah said, "I'm going to a school that's far away so I won't see you all the time like Uncle Rob
and the others will."

Ty's lip trembled, "Aunty Sarah, you gonna be an angel?"

Sarah had heard Tim and Gibbs' 'angel' explanation for the death of the kids' mothers. She gathered
the little boy into her arms.

"No Ty, I'm just going to a school that's a long way away."

"Good, because my mommies are angels and I miss dem."

"I know you do, sweetie. They're looking out for you from heaven."

He cheered up at that. "Dat's good, dey will like our new house too."

Brynie grinned, "New house!"

Both kids cheered, "Yay!"

Although their father had been worried about them being upset when he left them at the Palmers,
they waved cheerfully. Evidently, they were used to playdates, daycare and all the other good things
that take a young child from his or her parents. Dad, not so much but he trusted the Palmers and
wanted the kids to have friends. When they pulled up to Ducky's, they found the bed of Ellie's truck
nearly full and the crew had already started loading Gibbs' truck. Chalmers grinned, "We've got this
down to a science, Tim. Where to next weekend?"

The agent laughed at the collective groan and an amused half smile from the boss. By 11:00 they
were done, both trucks unloaded, the bedframe hauled upstairs to the master suite where Rob and
Gibbs put it back together. Ellie helped Tim put the TV on the wall in the family room while
Chalmers and Sarah unloaded the few boxes of kitchen items. The pizza and sodas arrived in time
for them to eat and relax before the moving van arrived. By that time Tim had thanked them all and
was astounded when they stayed, planning to help unpack after the movers were done.

"Guys, thank you but I really only needed the help with the stuff at Ducky's."

"So you're saying you don't want us to stay?"

"I'm saying please don't feel obligated!"

Ellie looked at him, "Who's going through Sue and Deeny's clothes? Their books, movies, all the
women's personal things?"

"Thought I'd have all the boxes that aren't something we'll need put in the basement and sort them
later."

Sarah nodded, "That's fine but Ellie and I can get started today. Even if it's only a couple of boxes,
that's two less for you to go through."

"Ok, thanks! If you see anything you want, take it. Otherwise everything will probably go to
Goodwill or one of the other thrift stores; I'll see about a pickup once we've been through
everything."

That said, they took additional beverages out to the patio, sitting on the grass or the chairs Tim and
Boss brought over the night before. The moving truck arrived promptly at noon; Tim took the lead
mover through, showing him where the various boxes should go. As he remembered, there were
several boxes and wardrobes marked "Sue" or "Deeny"; those went to the basement for sorting.

It didn't take long to empty the truck and as it pulled away, the furniture delivery truck pulled up with
his new bed. They quickly unloaded, took it upstairs and had the whole thing set up in less than ten
minutes. After they left Tim stood in the house, surrounded by boxes and unfamiliar furniture, just
looking for several minutes before finally getting back to work.

Gibbs and Rob got the bathrooms and linen closet set up; Chalmers, and Sarah worked on the kids'
rooms, hanging curtains and making the beds while Tim worked on the kitchen, thinking about Bob
Chalmers as he did so. He was a good agent, learned quickly and Gibbs wasn't growling at him too
much, always a good sign. Tim figured Ellie and Bob could already handle about 80% of the
electronic work he'd traditionally handled and before he left, he could teach them the rest. Maybe
write up a cheat sheet or two. Neither would be a good hacker but then that wasn't called for as much
these days and you could hardly put a requirement on a job posting to be a competent hacker for the
team's illegal searches. Maybe if you phrased it very subtly.

Tim directed his thoughts back to Chalmers. They'd need their new agent as soon as Tony came
back to work and Tim left on his leave. He knew he wouldn't be returning to the bullpen after that.
Bob would do all right. He'd talk with Ellie about it; get her thoughts, once she knew he was leaving.
Of course, DiNozzo would have a say in his Probie's replacement and Gibbs would have the final
say. Well, Vance would but he'd probably green light Gibbs' recommendation.
He sighed. With everything going on, he hadn't let himself think about leaving his team. His home at NCIS. Gibbs, DiNozzo, McGee, the core of the MCRT for the last 11 years. They'd survived Kate's death and losing Ziva three times, when the team was split up after Director Shepard's death, once to Somalia and then after the three of them quit during Parson's witch-hunt. She'd gone to Israel and never returned. That had taken some adjustments. Ellie had shaken them up with her idiosyncratic ways, but it worked, she worked and the team was operating at full strength. He'd always figured that on some far off future date Gibbs would retire, Tony would take the team and he'd be Tony's Senior Field Agent. He knew DiNozzo thought the same way, they'd talked about it often enough.

Now he'd be leaving. Yes, it was because he had a family, Dad, kids, and he knew he owed it to his kids to come home every night, especially after the horrendous losses they'd already suffered, but he didn't yet feel like it was his choice. He huffed to himself, the kids came first; he needed to stop whining even if it was just to himself! He arranged the various cook pots and pans, cookie sheets, cupcake pans, casserole dishes, Bundt pan, angel food cake pan; he was certain he now had every kind of baking pan in existence!

He thought about where else at the agency he'd like to work. He could work in MTAC he supposed, although he'd have a hard time managing that system and not getting involved in the cases and issues dealt with in there. He'd really rather be in Cybercrimes, at least there he'd still be fighting crime and he had some ideas he'd been dinking around with for years, updating their methodologies. He shrugged; he'd wait to see what Vance offered.

A belated Happy Thanksgiving week to my fellow Americans! As I'm running behind on chapters on AO3, I'll post two or three chapters today.
Chapter 10

While Tim worked in the kitchen, Gibbs disappeared down the street to his house, returning with a cooler full of hamburger meat, buns, onions, tomatoes, lettuce, condiments, a bag of frozen something and two large bags of chips, plus beer, milk, and sodas. "Thought we'd have these tonight, to celebrate the move. Ducky's going to bring the kids home at 1700, so I'll start the grill a little before. Or do you want to grill? Didn't mean to take over!"

Tim grinned at him, "No way, Gibpa, that's your job! Is that grill even usable?"

"Yup, it's clean, ready to go."

"Great, thanks! Uh, I need to go grocery shopping tonight, need food for the week."

His father shook his head, "No you don't. We'll bring over everything you need from ho…my place. You can shop tomorrow or later in the week. Be better to do it without the kids, otherwise, you'll have to fight them over the cookies and crap they'll want."

Tim's eyes glazed over, so many things to learn, to do differently. Yes, he'd raised two kids already but he'd rarely had money to shop and no way to cook. While they were at the shelter, they were fed two meals a day but the years at the camp had been hungry. They scrounged, went to food banks, climbed into dumpsters, scavenged bottles and cans to turn in for cash and ate whatever scraps they could find.

His dad stood patiently, "It'll be all right. I'm right down the street and I'm more than willing to help. Heck, you'll have to chase me out! You'll have plenty of other help too. Leon said Lara thinks the kids will be ready for daycare in another week; that will help. And the Palmers will be available, you can invite Victoria over for a playdate, give them a break occasionally. It'll all work out, takes time and you have everything on your shoulders right now. Proud of you, Timothy, very proud!"

Tim smiled ruefully, fighting the urge to throw himself into his father's arms. Dang, we need to tell these people; hurry up and get home Tony! That made him think of Abby and he patted his pockets, looking for his phone. Gibbs looked at him, "Lose something?"

"Looking for my phone, want to call Abby and see if she wants to come for dinner. She couldn't make it today but maybe she's through."

"She can't; already called her; figured you'd want her with us. She's co-hosting dinner for the other folks who ran whatever she was doing today."

"Health fair. She's coming over tomorrow to meet the kids."

"Yeah, she told me; that is a smart idea, letting the kids meet her by herself."

"Figured it was only fair since the others met them that first day, except for Tony."

Ellie and Sarah emerged from the basement. "Tim, the clothes are in good shape, you could take them to a consignment store to be sold, make some money."

Tim shook his head, "Thanks for the help with the sorting! And no, it'll all go to charity and Sarah, now I'm thinking I'll take them to our thrift store in Baltimore."
Just walking down the stairs, Rob overheard him. "That's a great idea, Tim. Then those who really need clothes will have them."

Gibbs thought about the store, he'd been in there a couple of times. "You guys still paying off the layaways?"

Sarah nodded, "We trade off, Barry, Bill, Jose, Freddie and us. We don't do it every month so people don't expect it. But at least once every quarter."

Ellie looked puzzled and Chalmers was downright confused so the three siblings briefly explained living in the homeless camp. The thrift store they mentioned had a layaway plan with no minimum payments or payment schedule. They'd relied on that store for clothes, shoes, sleeping bags, even money for food a couple of times. Now several former camp residents paid off the layaways every so often and found other ways to help those living in abject poverty. Tim smiled, "After he found out about the shelter and camp, Gibbs went to the shelter and fixed all kinds of things, cabinets, floors, lighting, cots, plumbing…well, Jose and Freddie work on that."

"You lived in a tent?"

"He raised you?"

Rob and Sarah grinned, nodding yes to both questions. Ellie looked at Tim, "You are an amazing man, Timothy McGee…all these layers!"

Sarah nudged Rob; she thought she'd been subtle but the look from Gibbs told her otherwise. Oops! She'd never trusted Delilah, hadn't been sure why but hated not only being vindicated in her distrust but more importantly how the woman hurt her brother. On the other hand, she liked Ellie just fine.

Tim blushed and was never so happy to hear Ducky's voice near the front door. "Come along, children, this is your new home!" He hurried to the front door and scooped up his babies as they ran into his arms. "There you are! Did you have fun with Granducky, Victoria, Aunty and Uncle?"

Ty nodded, "Uh huh, we went to da park an' played tag, we hadda catch Uncle Jimmy. Then Granducky took us to feed ducks and they ate all da bread. Is dis our new house?"

"Yes, maybe you'd like to take Granducky upstairs with Gibpa to see your new rooms. Unca Rob got them all fixed up for you!"

"Wow, ok! C'mon Granducky, Gi'pa."

Tim noticed the disappearance of the 'b' in Gibpa and shrugged, wasn't his name to worry about although it was starting to sound a little like Klingon. He grinned at the others. "You like Gibbs' grandpa name?"

Chalmers chuckled, "Your kids come up with it?"

"Oh yeah, I was aiming for Poppy."

Ellie grinned, "Don't give up hope, my nieces and nephews started out calling my dad something weird but it changed to grandpa as they got older."

Tim smiled back at her, "It's not my name and Boss doesn't seem to mind."

Chalmers huffed, "My cousins named our grandmother "Dolly" before I came along."
"That's not so bad."

"Not when I was Tyler's age. Calling her that when I was 25 was a bit much."

Gibbs was suddenly behind him, "At least she was there still."

"Uh yeah Gibbs, good point."

"Gonna start the grill, McGee."

"Ok, should I come watch?"

"Nah, another time when we're not holding up dinner."

"Fair enough."

Tim took the meat out of the refrigerator to make hamburger patties. Ellie smiled, "Ooh, I know how to do this. Want me to chop the onion?"

"Sure! Wait about five minutes, though; I just put it in the 'fridge."

"Huh?"

Tim explained why onions have a stay in the refrigerator before being sliced.

"You could slice the tomatoes now if you want."

The two of them got busy, the tomatoes sliced, the onion chopped and added and when Gibbs called that he was ready, Bob took the plate of burgers out to him.

Tim ran upstairs, finding Ducky and the kids still exploring both rooms. Ty was clutching a stuffed Thomas the Tank engine while Bryn had a stuffed horse named Neigh.

"Daddy! Look a' our toys!"

"I know kiddo, there are lots of them. Let's go wash up; Gibpa is cooking hamburgers for us."

"Ooh, burgers!"

Between Granducky and Daddy, Ty and Brynie were cleaned up for dinner which Tim thought was really pretty silly as they'd end up messier than ever. Still, hands and faces needed to start out clean. Holding hands, the four of them walked downstairs where they found Unca Rob cooking vegetables, the contents of the frozen mystery bag in Gibbs' cooler.

The kids ran around saying hello to everyone. When the patio table was set, drinks poured and the burgers and buns ready, they all headed outside with paper plates and many napkins.

Everyone ate until they were stuffed and then sat back and relaxed. Tim took the kids out of their chairs and had them run around on the lawn. Much to her own surprise, Sarah found herself sitting on the grass, telling them a story while her brothers smirked at her; she had to resist the urge to stick her tongue out at them. Tim poured coffee for everyone but Ducky who waited patiently for his tea to steep properly. It was a beautiful evening, cooling down nicely and not yet beset with the warm season's pesky insects.

After Tim once again thanked his move crew, promising to give them next weekend off, the group gathered their belongings and left. Gibbs stayed behind after Rob, Sarah and Ducky left, playing
with the kids while Tim tidied the kitchen.

Tim looked at his dad, "Thanks for everything!"

"Hey, for my only son? Anything, anytime!" He chuckled, "I caught myself a few times today, wanting to call you son or give you a hug."

Tim grinned, "Me too! Gonna be a long two weeks."

His dad reached up and ruffled his hair, "Ok, that feels better. Want some help getting the kids to bed?"

"Sure!"

The children were tired so their bath was short followed by a very brief story while sitting on Daddy's lap in a rocking chair. Kisses goodnight and both kids were tucked in, the baby gate secure at the top of the stairs.

Back downstairs, Tim made a new pot of coffee as his dad chuckled. "You know I should have figured out years ago that we're related. No one but you drinks coffee like me!"

Tim laughed, "I'd love to blame you for that, but I started at JH when I had a little money for treats. Got worse at MIT and here I am, just as addicted as you are!"

"Sign of a true Gibbs, your grandfather was just as bad."

Tim sighed, "I wish he'd known. However, I'm grateful I knew him and spent time with him. I think I loved him every bit as much as if I'd known."

"Yeah, he was something else all right and he loved you kids. He always had his eye on you though, said there was something about you that touched his heart." He paused, "You'll like Mac too, despite his unfortunate choice of wife."

Tim huffed, "Without Joann, there would have been no Shannon, no Kelly or Tim. It's not all bad!"

His dad rolled his eyes at him, changing the subject. "So what'd you think of our meeting with Vance?"

"It was fun to watch him figure it out and then see his shock."

"Yeah, that was great. Wish you didn't have to leave the team. I could retire…"

"I'd still have to leave the field, Dad. I can't do that to the kids, not after losing their mothers."

"Yeah, I know. Reminds me, you have guardians in mind?"

Tim told him his plan and his father nodded, "Good, I like having multiples just in case. When are you going to set that up?"

"Monday morning, have an appointment with the law office that set up our family trust. Tuesday morning I see the family lawyer."

Gibbs nodded, "Got to do something about a will for me too."

Tim was shocked, "You don't have one?"
"Shannon and I had one drawn up after Kelly was born. I think Tobias helped me write something one night when we were both drunk. Something like neither Diane nor Stephanie was allowed to have anything else after they cleaned me out. The house should be torn down or something like that. Everything should go to Mike and Tobias. Before you guys."

"Before Tony even?"

"Mm, maybe right after he started because I'd already split from Stephanie. I vaguely remember we were celebrating my getting to keep the house...no furniture except the bed but I had the house." He paused, "Hate that you haven't found your Shannon yet, Tim. I don't want my mistakes to follow you."

Tim sighed, "I don't know what I'm doing wrong but I'm tired of loving the wrong woman."

"There's something in you that's attracted to girls who are interesting and strong, whether they're bad, ambitious, eccentric, weird...something. I am too, I'm just lucky I met your mother who was strong enough to deal with me."

Tim smiled, "I'd say there's hope for me yet, but got different priorities now."

His dad laughed, "Oh yeah and you think your sex drive is just gonna vanish now that you have kids? Got news for you, kiddo, life doesn't work that way. But now when you want to date someone, you're gonna have to make sure they'd be a good mom!"

Tim shook his head sadly, "I'll be a single dad for the rest of my days."

"Nah, we'll find someone for you."

"Uh, Dad? Three ex-wives?"

"Yeah but I know why those marriages didn't work. You're not looking to replace someone...or maybe you are."

"Who would that be?"

"Maybe your mothers, Tim. You were robbed of one and the other one died before you were old enough to remember her."

"Ok, how is that going to help? I'm not going to marry someone to be my mommy."

"Maybe not but you could have conflicting interests. Women who are different, strong and independent and want to be your mom. Seems like they'd kind of cancel each other out or worse, too controlling."

"Not my mom, a mom. At all."

"Huh?"

"I'm the one who has always wanted kids. I can't think of a single woman I've dated who admitted to wanting children. And I...well I don't always say anything anymore but I used to be pretty up front about it."

"Delilah?"

"Mm, she would always say "yes, someday". And she loved me, or at least I thought she did, so I believed her."
"Yeah, no more liars, cheaters, professional hit women, thieves or commitment-phobes."

Tim made a noise, "Can't believe you remember the thief!"

"Uh…"

"Dad?"

The man sighed, "Ok, busted. She got out of prison about eight months ago. NCIS was notified, Vance wanted to know why and I went to see her, tell her what would happen if she got anywhere near you. Don't know what she was like before but she seemed pretty broken to me."

"She was an adrenalin junkie who stole for the thrill of possibly being caught."

"Oh she got caught all right. Her filthy rich father disowned her and she's still in a halfway house."

"Wow."

"So…no more bad girls! Find an interesting woman who isn't a bad seed! They do exist you know. And if a woman expresses interest in you, don't lay down and let her walk all over you."

Tim frowned, "You think that's what I let Delilah do? I was being supportive when she went to Dubai; you think I liked that? She's the one who got blown up and paralyzed. I thought it was good for her to be independent again; thought I was being a supportive boyfriend." He closed his eyes "I'm an idiot. He probably ran when she was hurt and crawled back when she was in Dubai. I just wish she'd had the decency to break up with me rather than stringing me along all this time." He slumped back in his chair and Gibbs rubbed his back.

"Sorry kiddo, I didn't mean to sound like I was blaming you. Wasn't your fault."

Tim nodded, exhausted. "Speaking of women I let walk all over me, Abby will be here around 4 tomorrow. Want to come for dinner?"

"You don't do that anymore and that was just as much my fault, playing favorites."

Tim sat up straight, staring at his father. "What? You knew that? Was…you stopped? When?"

"Stopped letting her play me when Vance told me what happened in Mexico."

"Mexico? You know about Mexico?"

"One of the students Abby dragged out to that place recorded the whole thing on her phone and finally had enough nerve to do something with it after Paloma was dead and Alejandro died in prison."

"When?"

"Two years ago. Had to take time off after he played the recording for me. I was too angry, upset, sad and freaked out by what I saw and heard. If you ever look in your file you'll see a letter of commendation from me, signed by Vance."

"What about Abby?"

"Confronted her, told her how wrong she'd been, how I felt about it and that I was done being her protector, that she'd almost cost the life of one my kids, my agents. She needed to grow up."
"Wow."

"Thought you might have noticed a change."

"I told Vance some of the other things that have happened, told him I never wanted to be on protection duty or anything else with her."

"So that's what generated his reaction to Mexico, it wasn't just Mexico. Gibbs sighed, "And you couldn't come to me because I'd blow up at you, take Abby's side, always."

"Yes, you always have."

"Tim...I don't want anything like that between us again, ever. Please?"

"Then don't eviscerate me for sticking up for myself or my position. At least listen to my side, or whoever's side, before losing your temper."

"You're right, son and I'll do my best to change. This is between you and me...Leon put Abby on probation for several months. Not just over Mexico, the whole thing with Mawher, her treatment of you after the dog attack and incidents with other people, NCIS employees. God Tim, if I'd only known and done the right thing! Anyway, she was almost done with her probation when she slipped up and once again disobeyed you and was totally out of control during that thing with the cracked "Beautiful Mind" scientist; he extended her probation another few months." Gibbs sighed, "And I was the one who told you to go with her then, even though he'd made it clear I was not to assign you to do that, ever. I hoped you'd be able to decipher what the woman was doing, I wasn't thinking about Abby's part in it at all. When Vance found out, he suspended me for a week."

Tim's jaw dropped open and he sat, trying to deal with his emotions, his relief that they were talking this out and the wish that it had happened before they'd found out they were father and son. As always, Gibbs seemed to read his mind. "I'm sorry, Tim, I should have sat down with you months, years ago, worked this out."

"I don't want us to keep doing this, dragging it out. I want us to be father and son, family. More family than we've been and I hope that's what you want too?" Dad nodded and Tim smiled at him, continuing, "I don't want to keep wading through all the crap that's happened in the past, have that hanging over our heads for the rest of our lives. Yes, we need to talk through this, work through it and yeah, I wish it had happened before and we both know it's going to take time. But it is happening now and that's good; once we decide we're done, then we're done, agree?"

His father nodded again and Tim hugged him.

"I've only got a few weeks left on your team and despite the bad stuff that's happened, the years on the team have meant the world to me. Not only have we done good, taking terrorists, murderers, rapists off the streets, saved families, kids, but it's also been a home for me, for each of us, all of us. That's what I want to take with me, to remember when I can't be there to watch your 6 anymore. I want to remember the good things, to focus on them."

He blinked at the moisture in his eyes as his father gathered him in his arms. "The day we were on our way to Rockingham County, I listened to you mentoring Bishop and Chalmers and I was so proud of you I could have burst. I was resigned too because I knew it was time for you to move on, past time. I know whatever you do, wherever you go you're going to do good; be good. That's who you are, driven to do your best. Now I don't have to worry about losing contact, that gradual drifting away that happens. You're mine and I'm yours, your children's, and their children. And Tim, when you leave, I promise I'll be thinking of all the good things too."
He felt his boy nod into his shoulder and he tightened his hold. Eventually, he felt Tim relax and hoped he'd fallen asleep. Poor kid, he'd had so much thrown at him recently and he hadn't helped by bringing up old hurts tonight. He hadn't meant to do it this evening but he did want to bring the bad out in the open, start clearing the air between them.

He held onto him until his arms started to hurt and then he gently woke him up. "Kiddo, come on, wake up. Time to go upstairs and sleep in your new bed."

Tim mumbled something, kissed him and wandered off toward the stairs. Making sure he had his key to the new house, Gibbs locked up and walked down the sidewalk to his own house, trying not to notice how empty it was. It'd been empty for years, with brief respites when his team came by and then Tim arrived one day with a car full of clothes and a broken heart. While decrying the reason, Gibbs was pleased McGee trusted him enough to come to him for help and willingly provided it. A few days later, the children arrived and despite the chaos of living with two toddlers, Gibbs felt more attuned to the world than he had since he'd lost the girls.

When they found out their connection, he felt like God had finally forgiven him, for what he'd never figured out. Now the house was empty again and he reminded himself, as he pushed aside a left-behind toy truck, that he wasn't alone. He had family. He'd had a family for some time now but now it had expanded and included grandchildren. Now, even if everyone left NCIS, he wouldn't worry about losing touch with them. His kid, his son…his kids!
Waking bright and early, Tim was pleasantly surprised to find both his babies still asleep. He quietly dressed, tiptoed down the stairs and got the coffee going before looking to see what he could scrounge for breakfast. Opening the refrigerator, he stared at the carton of eggs, container of orange juice, milk, butter and loaf of bread. Just how big was that cooler Dad brought yesterday?

Frowning he opened a cupboard door, the one where cereal would live once he did the shopping. He shook his head at the box of Cheerios. Seriously, where had this stuff come from? Then he spotted a piece of paper next to the cereal. It was a note from Ducky; Breena had asked him to buy enough food to tide the family over for a day or two. Tim scrunched his face, he remembered the kids walking from the driveway holding Ducky's hands. Then they saw him and jumped into his arms. Sly old fox Granducky must have brought groceries in after that or asked someone to fetch them. He found the toaster and the pan he needed to scramble the eggs; the coffee was perking along. Sippy cups for juice, two small plates, one bigger one for him, cutlery in the drawer to the left of the stove, napkins on the table, yep, he was all set. No…coffee mug; in the dishwasher, they'd used several last night.

He'd finished about half a mug when he heard Bryn squawking on the baby monitor. "Daddy…..wan' up pease!" Smiling, he headed for her room and kissed her good morning. With a clean face, hands and diaper, she was ready for the trip downstairs.

She was already in her high chair, delicately eating some of the Cheerios, when Tyler called out from the baby gate. Running up the stairs, Tim opened the gate and gave him a kiss, "Hi son! Did you have a good sleep?"

"Yes Daddy! I heard birdies dis morning!"

"Ooh great, after we eat and get dressed we can go outside and look for them."

"Fun! C'n we feed dem?"

"They've already eaten this morning, Ty; they wake up a lot earlier than we do."

"Oh."

"Let's get you settled and then I'll make breakfast."

"Eggs?"

"Eggs, toast and juice!"

He chuckled when both kids cheered. He'd add what he needed to make pancakes to his shopping list; maybe those could be their weekend treat.

Happy and relieved the kids liked their eggs scrambled; the three of them ate breakfast talking about what they'd do that day. Tim reminded them they would meet Aunt Abby after their naps.

Tyler asked who she was which his father thought was interesting. Everyone else so far had a designated spot; Ellie was his friend and worked with him, Aunt Sarah was his sister, Unca Rob his brother, Aunt Breena was a friend and Uncle Jimmy was a friend who worked with him. Mr. Bob,
Tim had to be careful not to call him Mr. Bill, worked with him and he had no idea how Tyler had pegged 'Uncle Leon', nor how the director had even become Uncle Leon. He guessed the easiest explanation for Abby was that they worked together.

Ty nodded at the designation. "How come she wasn't here before?"

"She promised to help someone else before she knew we were moving."

"Oh, dat's good, right?"

"That she kept her promise? Yes, Ty, it is."

"I'm all done!"

"Ok, let's get you two cleaned up."

They washed up, put play clothes on and went to find the birdies in the backyard. Tim spotted a couple of nests and held each of the kids up so they could see them. Ty squealed, "Look Daddy, der's baby birds!"

"Yay, baby birds!"

Brynie was pulling on his shirt, "Wanna see bebbies!" She ooh'd when she saw the nest with the baby birds.

While the kids were watching the birds fly from tree to roof to the next tree, Tim wandered around the garden, looking at what was growing. He made a happy noise when he discovered a tomato plant flourishing in one of the raised boxes, shaking his head at the tomato cage he hadn't noticed previously.

The noise caught Ty's interest, "Daddy, did you fin' sum'in'?"

"Yes, a tomato plant, come look!"

Bryn toddled over with her brother and they looked at the plant. "See the yellow flowers?"

"Yes."

"Those are very important; they're going to be tomatoes when they get older."

Tyler laughed, "Baby tomatoes!"

His sister echoed him, "Beby 'ma'oes!"

Tim grinned, "This will be fun; we can watch them turn from flowers to little tiny tomatoes. First they'll be green then they'll turn red."

"And den we c'n eat 'em?"

"When they're ripe."

"Ripe! What's dat?"

Tim chuckled to himself, he'd forgotten about toddlers' never-ending questions.

"Ripe means they're ready to eat. The color will be just right, the size will be just right."
"Oh. Dat's a little flower, dey get big like da tomatoes on owur burgers?"

"I don't know, Tyler, that's a very good question. Some tomatoes grow very big but there some that are meant to be small, like this", he made a shape with this thumb and index finger. "We didn't plant these so it'll be a surprise for us."

Bryn's little face lit up, "I wike supwizes!"

Tim grinned back at her as Tyler asked, "C'n we get more plants?"

Tim smiled, loving the idea. "Yes, we can get more plants and then the three of us will plant them."

"Yay!" The little ones danced around the yard.

Tim took a quick look; one of the raised beds was empty. "How about we get some plants to put in that?"

"Ok! C'n we go now?"

"After we clean up our breakfast dishes."

Back in the house, Tim loaded the dishwasher, amused when his kids brought their plates to him; mentally thanking their mothers for the training.

"All right, let me grab the diaper bag. Ty, why don't you go to the bathroom before we go?"

"Ok, I might have to go." The little boy disappeared into the downstairs bathroom and Tim smiled when he heard the toilet flush and the water run. "I went; Daddy and I washed my hands."

"Good boy! Ok, let's go!"

As he tucked the kids in their seats in the backseat of the Challenger, he made a mental note that he needed his own family-friendly vehicle as soon as possible. He couldn't just keep driving his father's car forever. He'd sent a text to the man while Ty was in the bathroom and wasn't surprised to find him waiting outside the garage.

He grinned when he heard toddler squeals, "Poppy!" He wondered how and when Gi'pa had changed to Poppy.

"Yes, he wants to come with us. Is that all right?"

"Yay!"

Dad climbed in the passenger seat, giving each of them a kiss before he fastened his seat belt and off to the plant store/home center they went. Once there, they decided they could pick two plants each, either flowers, vegetables, or herbs. Brynie spotted a plant with purple flowers; that was her first pick. Then Ty found one with bright red flowers, he liked that a lot. Tim decided on another tomato plant, this one with cherry tomatoes and Poppy decided they should grow peas.

The kids quickly picked their second plants, orange flowers for Bryn and yellow for Ty. For his second plant, Tim chose snapdragons with multiple colors while Poppy selected an already planted hanging basket full of multi-colored petunias, along with a hook and chain to hang them from the fence.

They also bought a bag of compost and then Tim spotted the racks of gardening gloves. He found two tiny pairs for Tyler and Brynie plus adult sized. Poppy declined, he had gloves already. Two
small trowels, two toddler sized watering cans, a trellis for the peas, another tomato cage and they would have been ready to go if the Tiny Tykes gardening boots and sun hats hadn't snagged them on the way to the cashier.

Finally, they were loading their treasures into the trunk of the car. However, Miss Bryn did not want her baby plants riding in the trunk and burst into tears when Daddy said they would be better in there. It took all of Tim's strength not to give in to his little girl but he knew if he started caving in now, he was finished for all time. He persisted and the plants went in the trunk. Bryn fussed and pouted until Daddy told her that if she stopped fussing, they'd have their planting fun when they got home or she could keep fussing and planting would wait until after her nap.

Tim wasn't at all sure she was old enough to understand but she was quiet for several seconds before saying, "I want to pway with my fwowahs, Daddy."

"Ok, sweetie, that's fine, that's what we'll do." He swallowed his sigh of relief, feeling he'd passed his first real Dad test.

Back at the house, they carefully carried the plants from the trunk out to the yard through the front gate. The kids danced around, impatient while the adults carried the compost, gloves, trowels and boots. On the last trip, Tim went through the garage and brought a shovel and adult sized trowel. When the kids saw their boots, hats and gloves, they stopped to put them on and Tim took several photos. Poppy did too but he took one 'before' of the garden and then waited until his family got busy planting.

First they marked where they wanted the flowers to go, then dug holes in the dirt; each child poured some water from the watering cans, then they mixed some of the dirt back in. Tim scooped a little compost in, they mixed that in with the dirt and finally the plants were carefully removed from the nursery pots. Poppy showed them how to 'tease' the roots a little bit before the kids put their flowers into the dirt and just as carefully covered them up.

Tyler was concentrating and Poppy took a perfect photo of his happy face when he scooped the last of the dirt around his plants. Bryn worked with her dad, her tongue between her lips as she put her plants in the ground. Then the three of them sat back triumphantly, faces smudged but happy while another photo was taken.

It took some time for all the new plants to be tended to but when they were done, the peas were wound around their trellis and the new tomato plant sat between the legs of the cage it would soon climb. The pot of petunias hung on the chain fastened to the hook driven into the edge of the roof. Poppy took one last photo, the 'after' of gardening day. They'd take more photos as the plants grew and they'd probably add more plants along the way. Tim wanted some of the smaller patty cake and spaghetti squashes and maybe a pumpkin or two for Halloween.

They were hungry after their hard work. Boots, muddy shoes and gloves were tugged off in the garage and left there to be cleaned later. Hands and faces washed, the family sat down for leftover burgers, hot dogs for the kids, carrots and a few chips.

When Bryn started squirming, Tim plucked her out of her high chair and took her upstairs to change her diaper but noticing it was dry, decided to try something first. He asked Bryn if she had to go potty and when she nodded, he put her on the potty seat, holding onto her and sure enough, she went. Tim smiled at her, "Yay Brynie, that was great, sweetie!"

"I'm a big girl, Daddy!"

Wondering whether Sue and Deeny had already been working with her, Tim tried not to make too
big a deal of it; he didn't want her to feel bad if she didn't always use the toilet. Making sure she washed her hands, he looked through her clothes, finding underwear for her, which answered his question about her mothers having already started potty training her. He slipped those on her and then scooped her into his arms.

They played a bit longer outside before Poppy took the kids upstairs for their naps. Downstairs, Tim looked online for information about potty training and thought he'd also talk with Breena and Lara.

Gibbs stayed with the kids while Tim took the Porsche grocery shopping, resolutely not thinking about how great it felt to drive his own car. Tonight's dinner was his first priority but they needed just about everything so he went to Costco. Even before the kids, he'd rarely had time to pick up this or that and had become a believer in buying in bulk. That worked as long as one remembered one was driving a sports car with no back seat.

He drove into the garage when he got home; his dad helped him unload and get dinner started. They'd tossed around the idea of grilling again or doing something in the oven. Grilling won, this time they'd have grilled chicken and vegetables.

Abby was just pulling into the driveway as Tim walked downstairs with Tyler and Bryn after their naps. They were excited about telling their new aunt about seeing the baby birds this morning, going plant shopping with Daddy and Poppy and then getting to dig in the dirt!

Abby had been a little nervous but relaxed when the kids welcomed her with hugs. "Aunt Abby, um, we're glad ta meet you. Do you like birdies? I heard birdies singing dis morning an' Daddy, Brynie an' me saw dem in der nests!"

Brynie nodded, "Dey's bebbies too."

"Babies?"

"Uh huh, Daddy lifted us up so we could see da nest!"

Abby grinned; this wasn't so bad. "Baby birds are fun! And you know how they're fed?" When the kids shook their heads, Abby opened her mouth to tell them how bird parents regurgitated their food into their young. A throat cleared and she looked up to see Tim shaking his head almost violently.

"Well, the bird parents find worms and things birds like to eat and fly them to the nest to feed their babies. They have to eat a lot so the parent birds have to find lots of food for them."

"Oh, dat's hard work!"

Bryn was pulling her by the hand. "Come see da gawden. We pwanted fwowahs. Daddy an' Poppy took us to da stowe an' we picked wha' we wanted."

Tyler had her other hand, "Daddy bought us gloves an' boots an' hats too. An' we planted tomatoes an' peas."

Abby handed Gibbs her bag and followed the kids, who really did look very much like Tim, outside. Her eyes bugged out at the size of the yard, it was much bigger than she expected. She smirked at the grill, already prepped for cooking. Seeing the furniture, she turned to Tim. "I know you didn't have patio furniture."

"No, it was all Sue and Deeny's." She had to think about that, in her head she had the two women as the victims, the kids' mothers or the lieutenants. Hearing Tim referring to them by their first names was a little confusing. When the kids were busy a few minutes later, Tim explained. "They'll always
be part of our family and it's easier to use their first names than their hyphenated last name. And the kids know who we're talking about then too."

"I understand, McGee."

Tim smiled, "Speaking of names, I prefer Tim."

"But I always call you McGee."

"And now I'm asking you to call me Tim, at least outside of work. Everyone else does, even Tony and Gibbs."

"Oh, ok."

"Thanks Abby."

She chalked that up to another change. She thought that maybe it had all started with him walking in on Delilah; he'd been different ever since.

Relieved that McG…Tim's kids were comfortable with her; she took her boots off and sat on the lawn with them while Gibbs and Tim got dinner ready. It was strange how comfortable Gibbs was, a completely new version of him, relaxed and happy, playing with the kids and talking. Talking! Yeah, he normally talked to her way more than anyone else except maybe Ducky but she couldn't be sure of that because when she was around Gibbs and Ducky she and Ducky did most of the talking but still she bet he talked a lot more when it was just him and Ducky. This was beyond even that. Inwardly she shrugged, she guessed it was being around kids and having them think of him as a grandfather. She barely remembered her grandparents; they were people who'd only visited on holidays so she hadn't been around them much. These kids were all over both Gibbs and Tim. She didn't mind them hugging or taking her hand, but she wouldn't want to carry them around or worse, have them crawling all over her like they were doing with Tim on the lawn.

As a breeze was kicking up, they ate dinner inside. As they sat around the dining room table, Abby looked at it, "This is new."

Tim opened his mouth but Ty beat him to it. "It's ours; Daddy, Mama and Mum's. But der not here with us now because God took dem to heaven to be angels."

Abby looked shocked at that but Gibbs distracted her by asking about her health fair. After dinner, the kids played for a while before Gibbs took them upstairs for their bath. Abby watched Tim clean up the kitchen. "You sure settled into this fast."

He huffed, "You forget I've already raised two kids?"

"I meant the whole house, you know the domestic bit." Her tone was mocking.

He shook his head, "Abby, three weeks ago I was ready to become a husband and planned to have children. Yes, I'm not a husband but I do have kids; being domestic is not a new concept to me."

"Still, you're all dad-like now."

Tim wished she'd leave; he was getting more annoyed. "How is 'already raised two kids' not dad-like?"

"Huh. What you've always wanted."
"Yes it is. I hope you aren't saying you have a problem with me having people to love?"

"No, I didn't mean that. It's just so…different."

"Not really. Guess you just don't know me that well."

She frowned and started to say something but Gibbs was suddenly in the kitchen with them, she hadn't heard him come down the stairs. "Tim, kids are waiting for their story."

"Ok, thanks Boss."

He gave a tight smile to Abby, "Excuse me. Or would you like to come up with me, read a story to Ty and Bryn?"

"Uh, no thanks, I should be going."

"Have a good night."

"Thanks for dinner and everything."

Tim waved a hand behind him as he walked up the stairs.

Gibbs looked at Abby, "Goodnight Abby."

She blinked, "Night Gibbs."

She waited for his usual kiss to her cheek but he walked to the door, holding it open for her. She left, fuming all the way home. What the hell had McGee done to Gibbs? Who did he think he was?
Chapter 12

After story time and tucking in, Tim headed back downstairs to find his father sitting at the table with two fresh cups of coffee. "Thanks. Don't suppose you have your flask on you?"

Dad chuckled, "Not the first thing I think of bringing to dinner with my son and grandchildren." He paused, "Didn't know you knew about it."

"Fornell mentioned it."

"Figures. So what did she say that pissed you off?"

"Annoyed, not quite pissed off. She was mocking my domesticity. Not the worst thing she's ever said or done."

"No, guess not. Tell the truth, I was afraid she was going to argue about the whole angel thing, why I changed the subject."

"Yeah, thank you for that. And thanks for all your help, don't know what I would do without you."

"It's a joy, Timothy, better get used to it."

They smiled at each other. Gibbs finished his coffee, rinsed his cup and put it in the dishwasher. "See you after the estate guy?"

"Yes, have an 8:30 appointment; I hope to be in by 10:00. You want the Porsche?"

"Nah, I'll drive the truck. Don't worry about what time you get in; you should already be on family leave."

"It's working out all right. As long as Lara doesn't mind!"

"Extra paycheck for her."

"Yep and the kids love her. Reminds me, I need to get them enrolled at the daycare aboard the Yard."

"I'll remind you."

"Thanks! I'm used to reminders on my phone but I've been too busy to even set them up."

"Keep telling you, get used to it! Although now that you've moved, getting the legal stuff taken care of, kids into daycare, you'll get into more of a routine. Then DiNozzo will come back to work, you'll change jobs and you're off and running again."

They chuckled at the truth of that. After a goodnight hug for his son, Gibbs walked down the street to his house.

NCIS NCIS NCIS NCIS

Tim and the kids were fed, dressed and ready for their day when Lara arrived Monday morning. With a grin, Tim backed the Porsche out of the garage, enjoying the purr of the powerful engine as
he drove to his attorney's office. There he updated his trust with the kids' and his father's names and set up a separate form listing the children's guardians. Next, they started the process of setting up a separate trust for the children. Right now, there was a nominal amount of funds in there but once the Nichols-Mays' estate was settled, more money would come in and Tim wanted that for their education.

He was surprised when his attorney asked him why he was seeing a family law attorney. "I need to find out how to make sure I'm the children's legal guardian."

"We can do that right now, Tim. You had DNA run, right?"

"Yes."

"Get me a copy and we'll attach it to the form you're about to fill out. I'll file it with the state and you're good to go."

"Seriously, it's a form?"

"Who's listed as the father on their birth certificates?"

Tim had everything together in a briefcase, including the DNA results. He pulled it all out and handed over the birth certificates given him by Ms. McKinna.

"That's interesting. I've never seen the birth certificate of a child conceived with a sperm donor. They have you listed with what I assume is the donor number you were assigned at the sperm bank. We'll file an amendment to change it to your name, along with the paternity claim form and a copy of the DNA test...just that first page please."

Tim handed him the page and the attorney handed him a form. "Here, fill this out while I have copies made of these."

He nodded a little numbly; relieved this part was apparently going to be easy. The attorney popped his head back in the room, "Do you have a copy of the women's marriage license? We should keep one with your file here."

"Uh, I don't think so."

"That's all right, we'll get it. Where and when did they get married?"

"Connecticut in 2010; in Coventry, I believe. That's Tolland County."

"We'll have them fax a copy."

Tim filled out the paternity claim form and then realized he might have to do it over. When the attorney returned he asked, "I'm going to be changing our surname in the next month. I told you about my dad, we're also going to use Gibbs as our surname."

"That's fine, go ahead and sign it now, we'll file an amendment when that's done. We can help you with the name change too."

"Great because I haven't had a chance to research."

"You file a petition to change your name with the courts. Then you get a court date, could be anywhere from 6 to 12 weeks out. Go to court and once they approve your request you're given a court decree changing your name. Then the fun starts, letting everyone you've ever done business
with know about it. We have a form letter we'll put together for you and you can either give us a list of who needs to get it or we'll give you the letters and you can customize and mail them."

Tim chuckled, "Right, so I'll start getting that list together for you."

"It's not just the credit card companies. It's the credit reporting companies, any professional groups you belong to, landlords or mortgage holders, insurance companies, doctors, dentist, car dealer, etc. Knowing you as long as I have, you've probably got records of all of those."

Tim smiled, "Not just records, electronic records so I can pull them into a list."

"Of course, I would expect nothing less!"

He left a few minutes later, happy to have so much taken care of, especially the whole paternity thing. His attorney explained that sperm donors were considered to have waived paternal rights although they weren't prohibited from making a paternal claim. The fact the kids' mothers listed his donor number on the birth certificates gave them enough wiggle room to use the paternity claim form. His attorney was also going to have his birth certificate reissued with Shannon Fielding and Leroy Jethro Gibbs listed as his parents and the real date of his birth, November 13, 1977.

Before he started the car, he contacted the family law attorney and canceled the appointment, apologizing for his ignorance. The woman who'd answered laughed, "It's actually nice to hear that something is less complicated than expected. It's usually the other way around, believe me!"

Tim snorted, "I do believe you; I work for the government!"
He smiled as he drove into work. The kids were officially his, that form would be filed with the state of Virginia this morning and his birth certificate was going to be fixed. When he stopped at the gate, the Marine on duty chuckled, "Agent McGee, I see you've reclaimed the Porsche!"

"Yeah and it feels great!"

The guard waved him through and Tim found a spot in the parking garage, much to his amazement. He walked into the bullpen at 0930, a half-hour earlier than anticipated. Quietly waving hello to his team, he turned to his desk where he was surprised to find a card. It was from Abby saying she was sorry she'd been rude after dinner, that she'd really enjoyed meeting the kids and hoped she'd be invited back. He smiled, waved the card at Boss who'd seen Abby leave it; he nodded his okay for Tim to make a quick trip to the lab.

He found her cleaning her evidence tables and gave her a hug, "Apology accepted and please accept mine for being overly sensitive. Can we chalk it up to both of us being tired after a busy weekend?"

"Yes please!" Another hug and then she pulled back, "So did you get all your legal stuff done? Oops, I forgot you have another appointment tomorrow."

"Actually I got it all done at my attorney's this morning! Claiming paternity turns out to be a lot easier than I thought. They're going to amend the kids' birth certificates too. And I set up a trust for them."

"Good! That's a load off, huh?"

"Yes and I can't stay, Gibbs gave me the 'only stay a minute' nod. Want to do lunch, you eat, I'll work, on Wednesday?"

"Sure!"

With that, he headed back upstairs. He figured Gibbs and the others were dying to ask how things had gone but work was work so he grabbed several cold case files and settled in. Then he remembered Ellie's case and looked up, "Bishop, how's your work going on that case from last week?"

"I just got the last warrant, diving in now."

Tim nodded, "Need any help?"

Her eyes lit up, "Of course!" She sent him a list of searches she needed and he got busy. By early afternoon, they had most of the information needed to bring in a different person of interest than the one named in the file - a navy officer not even on anyone's radar back when the case had first been investigated. They were amazed he hadn't retired but Gibbs shrugged, "Didn't want anyone to take his job and start checking records. Or wonder why he'd retired before he had his time in."

Tim chuckled to himself as they found account after account in the man's name, some offshore, most in the U.S. This person was either supremely confident or stupid, maybe a little of both. When the arrest warrant came through, the four of them headed for the sedan.

The man was so sure of himself he didn't even blink when four NCIS agents entered the office.
When his CO turned and pointed to him, he started to panic but by then it was too late. Bishop and McGee had approached his cubicle from different directions, he thought of running but he'd never make it out of the building, there were too many people in his way. He sighed as his arms were pulled back and his hands cuffed. Dang, he should have retired, faked an inheritance or something! He wondered how many of his accounts they'd found, maybe there would be money left after he got out of prison.

Bishop led him into an interrogation room. "We'll be back to chat." She left him a bottle of water. She nodded happily when Gibbs told her the interrogation was hers. Putting together the file, she sent McGee a look and he nodded, he'd love to sit in.

They didn't have long to sit, the guy had already moved into damage control and confessed, even going so far as listing the various accounts where he'd stashed the money. They seemed to go along with that until Agent Bishop cocked her head as she looked at the list. "Agent McGee, do you have our list?"

"Sure do, here you go." Tim passed her the full list of the accounts and she compared it to the perp's list. "Now, Lieutenant, or should I say ex-Lieutenant, I see there are several accounts you seem to have forgotten."

In 10 minutes flat, they had all the information from him. Within a couple of hours, the SecNav heard of the $15 million (plus a ton of interest) that would eventually be returned to the U.S. Navy. She called Bishop personally to thank her.

While the others were at lunch, Tim met with Director Vance regarding his employment options. He held back a smile when the first two mentioned were MTAC and the Cyber Crimes unit, commonly referred to as the CCU. The third option was Team Leader of the Cold Case team. He took the position descriptions and promised to let Vance know by the end of the week. Although he already knew what he wanted, manager of the CCU, he decided to at least think about the Cold Case team. It would give him leadership experience, he'd be in the field occasionally and he'd still have a field agent designation. His next thought was that he really shouldn't be in the field at all. The CCU position was a promotion with a substantial raise. He'd also gain leadership experience. He could certainly use the extra money for the children and he'd be working in a field that spoke to his strengths and experiences. Driving home that afternoon, he thought of several things he'd like to do to improve things. It would be interesting to report directly to Vance; he was used to working directly for him on special projects so at least there was some familiarity there.

He'd forgotten Lara's schedule was different today; she still had an hour left with the children when he got home. Taking advantage of that, he started researching vehicles. By Tuesday morning, he'd made a list of vehicles he was interested in and then narrowed that list down using safety records, customer reviews, price, ease and frequency of maintenance as well as the availability of parts. Whenever the Porsche went to the shop, it took weeks for parts to arrive. Tony once claimed he could row a boat to Europe, get the parts and row back to DC faster than Tim's mechanic could get them.

That left him with five choices. He didn't want new but a late model would be good. He'd start looking for those that evening. By Thursday, he knew what car he wanted and what dealership had it. It had the best safety record in its year and class. For a few minutes, he'd been hung up in his admiration for the Infiniti QX60, but it was only #10 in safety. His final pick wasn't the most fuel-efficient but safety ranked higher with Tim these days. And it was a good looking car in his opinion: a midnight blue pearl with charcoal interior Acura MDX, all-wheel drive with all the bells and whistles; not his Boxster but then Porsche didn't make a Boxster that would fit two kids' seats and all their gear. An SUV, yes but it wasn't high enough in the safety ratings.
The Acura was last year's model and still cost a pretty penny but the blue book fair trade value on the Porsche was close to $25,000 so that would help and the rest would be paid in cash, courtesy of Mr. Gemcity. He contacted the dealership to verify they still had the car and then arranged for childcare as his father wanted to go with him. Ellie volunteered; Tim trusted her, knew the kids liked her and that she had experience with her brothers' children. Gibbs dismissed the team at 1700 on Thursday; Ellie followed him home and smiled as she pulled up in front of Tim's place. He had the Boxster in the driveway, giving it one last loving wash, with the kids 'help'.

The children spotted Ellie and ran to her, shouting, "Ellie, Ellie" or in Bryn's case, "Ehwie, Ehwie". She laughed; glad she wasn't wearing anything that required dry cleaning! Tim's eyes widened but it was too late to stop the rush of small bodies crashing into her and she wouldn't have stopped them even if she could.

"Kids! Ellie, I'm so sorry, oh geez you're all wet."

"That's okay Tim, it's not that bad and it's warm out, it'll dry."

He shook his head, "I'd offer you dry clothes but I'd be afraid you'd trip on them."

She pretended to huff, "I'm only 6 inches shorter than you!"

He smirked, "Come on, let's at least get you a towel. You can take a shower if you'd like, I'll pop your clothes in the dryer."

His ears inexplicably turned red and Ellie was glad her hair was long enough to cover hers. "No, I'm fine, really. A towel would be good, though."

"We're sorry Ellie." She was impressed when Tyler apologized to her without any prompting from his father; she had to hold back a laugh at the woebegone little faces looking up at her.

"I accept your apology, Ty, Brynie. I know it was an accident." She kissed both of them, happy to see them smile.

Towed off, she followed Tim and the children into the house. He'd already sent her a list of their doctors (Ducky or Jimmy), the number and location of the nearest Emergency Room, contact info for the neighbors (courtesy of Gibbs, as Tim hadn't met them yet) and the phone number of the dealership he was going to. He'd also attached the kids' medical records and a letter giving her permission to seek medical care for the kids. Ellie took the flood of information in good stride; after all Tim had only been a dad this time around for a few days and this was the first time he'd left them with anyone other than Gibbs, the Palmers or the Vances' nanny. From what Sarah told her, when she and Rob were little and they were living on the street, Geordie was the only one Tim trusted to take care of them.

She took the kids into the backyard for some playtime while Tim finished with the Boxster. When Gibbs arrived, he poked his head out to say hello to everyone, giving hugs and kisses to his grandkids. When he heard the deep throaty sound of a German engine idling, he waved goodbye.

Tim was pensive as they drove to the car dealers. Gibbs looked at him, "You can buy another one or heck, track this one down and buy it back when the kids are grown."

That amused his son. "Thinking more about the rite of passage. Love this car but it's a machine, not a person. Well, not quite a person. She's gotten me over some rough roads."

Gibbs chortled, "Guess I can't say much about that, still drive the truck I bought 22 years ago and the car I wanted when I was a teenager!"
Tim was the one to snort, "Must be in the genes!"

"Yeah, pin that one on me, don't mind a bit!"

Parking the Porsche at the dealership, they had immediate attention.

"How can we help you? Are you planning to buy an additional vehicle or trading in the Boxster?"
The salesman smiled, "I'm trying not to drool!"

The men chuckled and Tim replied, "Wish I could keep her but I'm afraid I'm trading her in. Have kids now, no room for baby seats and diaper bags."

"Ah, well your loss our gain! Do you have a specific model of Acura in mind?"

"Yes, I do. You have a 2014 Acura MDX here that I'd like to look at."

"Are you the one who called about it earlier today?"

Tim nodded, "Yes."

The salesperson sighed, "I'm afraid it's no longer available. At least not today."

"What happened?"

"Couple came in, wanted to test drive it. Unfortunately, they had a minor accident. No one was hurt and the car isn't damaged that badly but it will take a few days to repair it, have it detailed and back in perfect condition."

"What was damaged and may we see it?"

"Back bumper, left taillight, and the rear hatch and sure, if you'd like, I'll show you. Also, if you'd like we have another 2014 MDX on site, only differences are no all-wheel drive and the colors."

"But I could test drive it."

"Sure, it would be very much the same ride."

They followed him to the back of the lot where they viewed the damaged MDX. It didn't look that bad, at least the engine hadn't been hit. When Tim asked how long the delay would be, the salesperson said a week.

The other MDX was in the front lot and Tim smiled when he saw it. "It's a beautiful car but there's no way I want a light colored interior. I don't have time to clean it every time my kids have been in it. I don't want another silver car; need something different. But I would like to test drive it to see how I like the model."

In minutes, he and Gibbs were adjusting the seats and mirrors, buckling up. They liked the feel, smooth and quiet. On the surface streets, Tim noticed it handled well over the various bumps and pavement patches of springtime road repairs. It accelerated quickly and easily on the freeway, brakes were good, not grabby or too soft. After a few minutes, Tim pulled off the freeway and stopped while Gibbs climbed into the backseat to see how the kids' ride would be. After approving of that, they stopped again and Gibbs drove while Tim rode in the back. Finally, they swapped again and drove back to the dealers.

"I really like the way this handles and it's pretty comfortable. Has plenty of cargo space. Do you mind if I keep the Challenger for another week until the blue Acura is ready?"
"Nah, that's fine. Means I get to drive the Porsche to work some more!"

Tim laughed, "That's right! Ok, let's see what I need to do."

Their salesman knew Tim didn't want the beige interior MDX and was happy to hear he still wanted the midnight blue model. "All right, why don't we do this? If another model comes in that meets your criteria: 2014 model year, AWD, low miles, dark interior, no silver exterior and the same add-ons, I'll give you a call. Otherwise, we'll contact you when the blue one is all ready to go. Here's a list of repairs, etc. we'll be doing on it."

"Great, thanks!" Tim held the list so his dad could see too.

"Painting the whole car?"

"Yes, the replacement parts will be the same color but they're never quite the same so we repaint the entire vehicle. And we'll detail the whole thing so it's fresh, clean and sparkly for you."

"Sounds good!"

Home again where the kids and Ellie were surprised to see the Porsche. Tim explained as the five of them sat down to dinner. Ellie grinned as she smelled the chicken dish Tim set up in the slow cooker that morning,

"Cool, you cook during the week, I'm impressed."

He laughed, "Never had a slow cooker before, it was Sue and Deeny's. It's kind of fun finding all the things I can make in it."

Ty nodded, "Mum made cake."

"In the slow cooker?"

The little boy nodded.

"Wow, I bet that was yummy!"

"It was, Daddy, yummy chocolate an' berry, I forget what kind."

Ellie made a dreamy face, "My favorite is chocolate and raspberry."

"Dat's it, ras'berry!"

The two exchanged fist bumps while Bryn squealed, "Cake!"

"Let's eat our dinner first, sweet pea."

She nodded, "Dinnah fuwst den cake?"

"Dinner and then we see what we have for dessert."

She clapped her hands, "Yay, supwize!"

They made short work of the chicken, vegetable and dumpling dish. As Tim ate his last bite, eating slowly hoping the kids would follow his example, he looked up to see four curious faces.

Ellie finally spoke, "Dessert?"
"Berries with a yogurt topping."

"Yay!" The kids squealed and clapped their hands, Poppy and Ellie clapping right along with them.
Later that night after the kids were in bed and Ellie and Dad were gone, Tim was just sitting down with a fresh coffee when his laptop dinged, Tony on Skype.

“Hey Tony, how are you? Are you up early or did you stay up all night? Geez, it’s only what, 0400 there?”

“Oh, it’s early. Have to leave here in an hour and realized I hadn’t told you yet.”

“Told me what?”

“Change of plans, I’m leaving for London this morning.”

“Cool! Gonna spend a few days in the UK, huh?”

“That’s the plan. I love Italy and my family but I’m at the point where I either move here or leave and I’m homesick. Found out a buddy from my men’s group is in London for work, a project, he’ll be leaving right after me. So I’m gonna stay with him, he has a flat his company is paying for and I’ll sightsee while he works. And we’ll get out and about over the weekend.”

“Wow, that’s great! London’s always sounded like fun, so much to see and do.”

“Yeah, to me too. Anything you want?”

“Um…pictures at least! What are you planning to see?”

“Westminster Abbey, I know you’ll want a photo of Poet’s Corner.” At Tim’s nod, he continued, “Buckingham Palace, Carnaby Street, Trafalgar Square, 10 Downing Street, you know, the whole tourist thing. Might take a city tour first, and then go back to whatever I want to see again. And of course as many pubs as possible!”

“Good idea. Are you going to have time to see things outside the city?”

“Over the weekend. I really want to see Stonehenge. I know, I know, ground zero for geeks but it’s always fascinated me. Want to visit Bath because it was built by the Romans, which means it’s Italian. Wouldn’t mind a trip to Liverpool to see where the Fab 4 got started. And it’s a longshot but it’d be cool to see a little of Scotland.”

“You could take that express train, stay over.”

“Good idea! Especially because I’m only going to be in the UK over one weekend. I’m flying home from Heathrow the following Saturday.”

Tim verified the date with him before saying, “I’ll pick you up at the airport.”

“You don’t have to…”

“I know you’re a big boy, but that’s a long flight plus customs, you’re not going to feel like messing with Uber or cabs. Besides, I want to see you! And it’ll be your last ride in the Porsche.”

“Oh no! Well, yeah I guess you can’t fit little ones in a two-seater huh?”
“Nope, not even close.”

“Yeah, then it’d be great if you could pick me up. My flight gets in at 15:30 your time, figure some time for Customs.”

“You buy a lot?”

“Um…yeah. Shipped most of it home, which reminds me, would you please let Gibbs know several packages will be arriving? They’re mine. I slipped up and sent him an e-mail.”

After they stopped laughing, Tim nodded, “Sure, I’ll tell him.”

“So, anything new I should know about?”

“Yeah. Met with Vance about job options. I have to leave the field, Tony; the kids are my priority now. Wouldn’t be fair to the team or to them.”

Tony sighed, “I’ve been thinking about that, knew it was inevitable I guess. So what are the options?”

After he heard what they were, Tony grinned, “So…Cybercrimes?”

Tim rolled his eyes, “I guess it makes sense after all these years that you’d know which one I want.”

“Told Vance yet?”

“Tomorrow. I actually meant to tell him earlier but he’s been up on the Hill and well…life is pretty busy these days.”

“I can only imagine, actually I can’t but I’m sure I’ll find out soon.” He paused, “So if I were going to bring presents home, what would the kids like?”

“No toys, please! We’re already drowning in toys. Kids’ books, anything with Winnie the Pooh, ah, that’s the classic one, the original, not the Disney version.”

“Okay…what sizes do they wear?”

“Oh boy. I’ll send you the latest photos so if you do see something you can ask at the store. In general, Brynie wears 18 months but Lara, the Vances’ nanny, told me she’ll be growing out of those quickly. And she’s 19 months old. I know I said 18 months before but I was wrong. So in US sizes she’ll be moving up to 24 months.”

“It sounds complicated!”

“Yeah, I hear it is. Tyler is easier, he’s in a 2T now but Lara says next time he gets clothes they should be 3T. Hang on; I pulled up a UK conversion chart.”

“Thank you!”

Tim told him what the comparable UK sizes were and smiled when Tony asked if they had favorite colors. “Anything in the purple family for Brynie and the brighter the better. Ty loves red, yellow, greens, blues, primary colors. Their eyes are pretty close to the same color as mine, Tyler has a little more blue and Brynie a little gray to go with their green. I trust your color sense but Tony, please don’t feel like you need to bring them presents. I’m already learning it’s a slippery slope. I told Brynie no presents except on special occasions and then went crazy at Costco. I have most of it hidden at Gibbs’ but I’ve been leaving a few things out for them to find. I sure didn’t have this
problem with Sarah and Rob!”

Tony started chuckling when Tim mentioned Costco and was in a deep belly laugh by the time Tim finished. When he finally wound down he said, “Remind me, when is Sarah due in London?”

“Two weeks after you get home. The start date for her program got moved back, no idea why.”

“Shoot! I was hoping I’d still be here.”

“She’s having second thoughts now, doesn’t want to miss any kid fun.”

“Thought she didn’t like kids?”

Tim snorted, “She didn’t think she did either…surprise! The first time she was here, she voluntarily played with them and then told them a story.”

“Maybe she’ll like being an aunt, not a mom.”

“Huh, good point; maybe that will work for you too, uncle versus father.”

They talked for several minutes longer before Tony had to go, promising to send a text when he got to Heathrow.

Tim got up to check on Ty, in the throes of a nightmare about the crash, at 0200 and found Tony’s text sent a little after 0100; he’d arrived safely. Comforting his little son, he rocked him back to sleep, holding on to him until he was sure he was sound asleep. It wasn’t his first nightmare; they had an appointment with a child psychologist the following week.

The next morning Dad stayed with the kids until Lara got there because of Tim’s early appointment with the director. Before going upstairs to meet with Vance, he looked around the bullpen, his last few minutes as a team member. When he returned he’d be a ‘lame duck’, a short timer. He looked at Ellie’s desk, thinking of Kate and Ziva, remembering that Paula Cassidy sat there when she was TAD after Kate’s murder. Michelle Lee also sat there and at his desk. Tony’s desk, briefly his during Boss’s ‘margarita safari’ as DiNozzo called it. Boss’ desk and his own.

Despite his earlier thoughts, he still hadn’t really wrapped his mind around leaving the team. The field, yes, but not the team he’d been on since…forever, his entire professional life minus the year in Norfolk, which was mostly spent here anyway, or on the road to and from. He knew the team’s longevity was unusual at NCIS, but in truth, it was only the three of them, Gibbs, DiNozzo, and McGee, who had worked together for so long. Eleven years for Tim, fourteen for DiNozzo and of course Boss started with Mike Franks back when the agency was still NIS. Still, Ziva was with them a little over 8 years; that was something. He smiled, sketched a small salute to absent friends and resolutely focusing on the future, walked up the stairs.
Chapter 15

Returning to the bullpen after his meeting with Vance, he was surprised to see not only Ellie and Bob but Ducky, Jimmy, and Abby too. Smiling at them, he spoke softly. "It's a done deal. How about we move to Ducky's when Boss gets in, I'll tell you the details, unless we get a call out. Don't want to share with the whole office just yet."

They nodded their understanding and the visitors left, with a pat on the shoulder from Ducky. The three teammates stood looking at each other and then Tim raised an eyebrow, "Right, let's get to work." Grabbing a stack of cold case files, he handed several of them to Ellie and Bob, keeping some for himself.

Ten minutes later, his cell rang with a call from Boss. "Missing Marine dependent at Norfolk, 8-year-old boy. Bring the van. Here's the address, I'll meet you there; Lara just walked in."

"Got it."

Hanging up, he turned to the others, tossing the van keys to Chalmers, "Grab your gear and gas up the van. Got a missing kid at Norfolk. We'll meet you out front."

Tim drove so Chalmers could work with Ellie getting what information was available. The boy, Paul Morris, lived on base with his parents, Staff Sergeant Carl Morris and Ava Morris. The bus picked him up at the regular time this morning to take him to school on base but Paul never arrived in class. His teacher notified the office; they called the parents who called the Base Commander who turned out a search party and called NCIS.

Gibbs was surprised when the van pulled up less than a minute after him. He guessed parenthood was already changing his son into less of a cautious driver, at least in a case like this. He and Chalmers went to interview the parents while McGee and Bishop went to the school to interview the kids who'd ridden on the bus with Paul this morning. The vice principal had already pulled the list and handed it to the agents. "I've got them separated in the library and the cafeteria and pulled everyone I could to watch that they didn't talk to each other."

"Thanks."

Splitting up, they spoke with each child who'd been on the bus, starting with the ones who lived nearest and those who had been identified as Paul's friends. One of the girls made a face. "He was sad this morning but he didn't want to talk. He usually sits with Rocco or me on the bus but today he sat by himself."

One of the older kids, whose family lived two doors down, said, "My parents told us not to talk about it, so please don't tell them I told you, but the Morrices fight a lot. Like screaming. Paul hangs out at our house after school and he's usually fun but yesterday and other times he was really quiet and kind of sad."

"Do you have any idea where he might have gone?"

"There are woods in the back of the base, we've ridden our bikes back there and he likes to walk. He might have gone there."
"Any particular part of the woods?"

The older kid shrugged, he couldn't think of anything.

When they asked the girl, she thought before nodding, "There's a tree that looks like this..." she took paper and drew a tree that looked like a "Y" with additional branches. "We've climbed it before; we called each branch a room of the house. Paul said he was going to borrow a knife and carve his initials so when he moves away it'll still be his tree. Said he'd come back to visit someday."

"Move away?"

Her eyes shifted, "You know, get transferred. We're Marines, we move a lot."

Tim was briefly amused by her reference to being a Marine; he vaguely remembered calling himself Navy when he was a kid. However, there'd been something else, he looked at Ellie who nodded; she'd take this one.

"Shelby, is that what Paul meant - when his dad transferred?"

She shook her head, "I can't, I pinky swore."

"Because Paul wasn't moving because of a transfer? Was he going away with his mother?"

She looked at them, eyes wide. "I didn't tell you that!"

"No, you didn't, we said it by ourselves. Ok, thanks, we understand why you can't say and you've been a really big help."

"Can I go back to class now?"

Tim nodded at the girl, "Yes, Agent Bishop will walk you over to the teacher and tell her you're free to go back to school. And Shelby?"

She looked up, close to tears. "You're a good friend to Paul."

"Thank you." Ellie escorted her over to the woman supervising the potential witnesses while Tim called his boss.

"Gibbs."

"Boss, two kids report Paul liked to walk around in the woods at the back of the base. He might be hiding in a specific tree. I have a drawing from one of the kids. They all say he's been sad. Reports of a lot of fighting between the parents and Paul evidently thought he'd be moving away and not for a transfer."

"Ok, need you two with us, meet at the entrance to these woods." Tim smiled to himself as he quickly disconnected, he'd beat the boss in hanging up, a first ever. Chiding himself for his childish behavior, he still couldn't help a smile as he turned toward Ellie and the door. She called the vice principal to have the rest of the kids released to class while Tim got directions to the woods from one of the Marines posted outside the school. He was chagrined, he'd been posted here for a year and he had no memory of any woods. With a nod from the Marine's CO, the man joined the agents and led them around and through the base. They passed the former offices of NCIS, closed in 2009; when he mentioned it, Ellie frowned, "We had an office here?"

"Yeah, tell you about it later."
They stopped when they came to the woods, a thick copse of deciduous and evergreen trees. The Marine pointed, "The kids usually go in through there. There is a bike path as well as a walking trail."

Gibbs and Chalmers pulled up beside them along with a truck full of Marines. Tim looked at them and back at Boss, walking over. He quietly told his father what they'd learned. Pointing to the Marines, Gibbs spoke softly to his agents, "We'll split into four teams; each of you is leading your own team of Marines. Don't be intimidated by them. When we find the boy, have the Marines leave. McGee, hang onto the one that came with you, we might need someone to relay information. From all accounts, this child is upset and we don't need him having to face his dad's co-workers while he worries about his parents' marriage and what's gonna happen to him." He paused, "Chalmers, Bishop, how are you at tree climbing?"

Both said they were good at it and Gibbs nodded, "Ok, stay in close touch. No more than 10 minutes without a check-in. We don't know how upset the boy is."

Gathering rope, flashlights, water, protein bars, first aid supplies and an emergency blanket each, they stuffed them in their packs and set off. Tim and Ellie's Marine said he thought he knew which tree Shelby meant so he went with Tim while the other teams worked at parallel angles to them.

It was nearly 11:30 by now; the hours had been taken by the drive down and the interviews with the parents and school kids. The bus had dropped the kids off at the school at 7:45; Tim figured it would have taken the boy at least an hour to walk. Unless...he called Boss, "Is his bike at the house?"

"No, they said he loaned it to a friend."

"Know who?"

"Got the number but nobody's home. Mom is off base working, Dad's deployed. I put a call into the Base Commander to get Mom's work number, haven't heard back yet. You thinking he rode over?"

"Awfully long walk for an 8-year-old and you'd think as busy as the base is, someone would have noticed a school age kid wandering around. He might have borrowed a bike from the people two houses down; he stays there after school sometimes. His friend there is Rocco, the older brother Pete was one of the ones who mentioned the woods. The surname is D'Angelo."

They called and had someone drive over to check. Sure enough, Rocco and Pete's mother said her daughter's bike was gone. It was bright green with blue ribbons on it. They passed the information between the teams, something easier to look for than a multi-branched tree!

Chalmers' team found the bike near a fast moving stream but after a few heart-stopping minutes, they found fresh footprints and some bent and broken shrubs leading away from the water. As Tim's team searched their quadrant, they noticed a large scattering of leaves and twigs below one particular tree. When they listened quietly, they could hear a child crying and Tim felt bad for the poor kid. He stepped away and quietly called Gibbs to tell him they'd found Paul, then he swung onto the lowest branch and went up from there. He found the boy on the branch he thought the girl had called the 'kitchen'. He let the boy see him before he got too close; he didn't want to spook him. "Hi Paul, my name's Tim."

"What are you doing here?"

"Your teachers, your mom and dad got worried about you. I work for NCIS, know what that is?"

He nodded, "Dad says to call you if something bad is happening and there are no Marines around."
"That's right. Are you okay up here? I have water and a protein bar."

"I'm kinda hungry and thirsty. Dad says a Marine has to take care of himself so he can take care of his troops."

"Ok if I come up so I can give them to you?"

"Um yeah but don't come all the way out, I think you're too big for this part of the tree."

"Smart thinking. Are you a scout?"

There was a soft reply, "I used to be."

"But?"

"My dad doesn't take me anymore and it's weird going with someone else's dad."

"Yeah, I could see that would be tough. My dad was Navy and I didn't like going to stuff without him either."

"Did he when he was home?"

"Yes, most of the time."

"My dad doesn't anymore. He's never home and all they do is fight with each other when he is. They scream and it hurts my ears."

Since they'd gotten the callout, Tim had been mentally reviewing everything he knew about dealing with troubled children. Given that for eight years, Gibbs' team was composed of adults who had been troubled children, he had a lot of experiences to mine.

"I'm sorry to hear that. I know what you mean about screaming, hurts my ears too. Have you talked to your parents about this?"

"My mom. She told me we're leaving as soon as school is out, going to live with my grandparents."

His lower lip trembled, "But my dad isn't coming with us, we're getting a divorce."

"They are, Paul; you are not. Your father will still be your father, still be your dad. Your mother will still be your mother, still your mom. It'll be different but there won't be any more screaming and your parents will still love you."

Paul had a question and the two of them talked for nearly 30 minutes. The young boy drank the water and ate the protein bar, but he didn't want to leave and Tim wasn't ready to push him. Not until it started to get dark and that was several hours away.

However, when he noticed the boy was squirming he remembered his daughter performing almost the same motions the other day. "You ok there?"

"I have to go to the bathroom."

"Well, there are bathrooms around but none of them are in this tree. Except maybe if there are squirrel bathrooms up here."

He was heartened by a giggle from the boy followed by his softly spoken agreement, "All right, I'll climb down."
"You climb up and down this all the time, right?"

"Yes."

"See, my boss is going to be mad at me if I let you climb down by yourself. How about you let me help you or you help me?"

"You don't need help, you were a scout!"

"Well yeah, but my boss won't think of that!"

"Ok, I'll pretend to help you."

The two of them made their way down the tree, Tim relieved to see it was just the team; the Marines had returned to their regular duties. As they got close to the bottom, he called out, "Make way, have a boy here who needs to see a man about a horse!"

Above him, Paul giggled again. That was good. When Tim's feet touched the ground, he grabbed the youngster and set him down gently, saying over his shoulder, "Agent Bishop…"

"She's gone to the car."

"Thanks, Boss." Paul took care of his bladder and then turned to them, taking the hand wipes Tim handed him. "I'm sorry you had to come looking for me. I just wanted to be alone for a while. Am I in trouble?"

"Not with us, Paul. But you did borrow a bike without permission."

"The bike, oh I forgot!"

"It's already been returned, you can apologize when you get home."

His face fell and he whispered, "I don't want to go home."

"You don't?"

"No, it'll just be the same, all that yelling." He looked up, tears streaming down his face. "I hate it! I don't want to go back!"

While Tim and Bob spoke with the boy, Gibbs stepped away, making a couple of calls. One was to inform the family liaison aboard the base that she had an unhappy minor dependent who did not want to go home, another to the Morris house to let them know their child was safe but didn't want to see them, didn't want to go home. He was blunt, telling them what Paul said and what his team had heard at the school that day. He followed that up by telling them he'd already contacted the Base family liaison who would meet with them while the boy was checked over by the medics. Then he went back to the boy and his team. The kid looked miserable and he couldn't blame him, he'd been the kid in the middle between his own parents during the latter years of his childhood although that had been because of his mother's illness. Mostly.

When they emerged from the woods, the liaison was there. She knew Paul from community events and he greeted her with a small smile; she introduced herself to the team. "I'm Julie Day, thanks for helping us today. Paul, why don't you come with me? The medics need to check you out and then we'll see about getting you some lunch."

He looked at Tim, "I just want to be alone!"
Tim looked at the liaison who nodded 'go ahead'. "You can still be alone, kiddo, but the adults in your life need to know where you are. We get that you don't want to go home, however, no one wants to leave you out here by yourself. And we all want to help."

"By leaving me alone?"

Julie had the gist of the discussion now and jumped in. "You can be alone at my place. Maybe not in a tree, I'm not that great of a climber, but you can have a whole room or the yard to yourself if you like. As long as I know where you are."

"So I don't have to talk a lot?"

Tim bit back a smile, doing his very best not to look at his boss, the functional mute. He thought he'd managed it but apparently not as he felt a glare on the back of his neck.

Finally, Paul consented to go with Julie and the team put everything away and split up into two cars; Chalmers went with Gibbs, heading off to update the Base Commander. As Ellie buckled up, she looked at Tim. "Poor kid."

"Yeah but you know, he helped himself the best he could. He didn't want to tell anyone, nothing like ratting out your parents. He called attention to the problem by giving himself some time off."

"You're right and that was pretty smart. So, is Gibbs' sizing up Chalmers to add him to the team? Is this your last case as a field agent?"

He looked at her with a smile. "Don't know the answer to either of those questions. Gibbs is Gibbs, who knows why he does what he does? And since I'll be around until DiNozzo returns to work, don't know that either."

"But you are leaving the field."

"Have to; my kids have already lost two parents. Can't risk it. My priorities have changed from watching your six to theirs."

"Are you okay with that?"

He thought about it. "Not how I imagined how things would go. Always thought I'd be Tony's senior after Boss retired. Not going to happen now. I'm having the feelings you'd expect someone to have about leaving a team after 11 years. The flip side of that is that I love my children more than my job, they're a joy and I'm not going to regret a single second I spend with them or at my new job. It's not their fault their mothers were murdered and I cannot ask them to risk losing their father too. Which reminds me, did you sign the guardian form?"

She smirked at him, "Of course and thank you for trusting me! I left it in your snack drawer this morning. The one with the containers labeled "Data peripherals, HDD, motherboard, RAM, firegigs." She chuckled as she teased, "Firegigs?"

He looked at her, "That was to keep Tony out of them and firegigs was a word he couldn't have seen before because I made it up. He used to eat all my snacks and never repay me. Too many years without food, have to have a stash."

"Yeah, I got that and I always have my own snacks, no worries!" She quickly added, "And I won't tell Tony. But what was that one word, something very odd?"

He laughed, "Thanks and that's a nonsense word from Star Trek, 'ramistat'. It doesn't mean anything
but on the show, it was used to trick some bad guys."

"Ooh, nicely done!" She sat in thought for a few minutes. "Which Star Trek? I've seen all of the original series, have the DVDs but I don't remember that."

"It's from Next Generation, something the first officer makes up." Tim couldn't believe she knew Star Trek stuff!

"Ooh, Commander Riker. Hmm, have to look for that episode."

He shrugged, "It's called "Rascals" where the Captain is de-aged; I have the DVDs if you want to borrow them."

"Hmm, please. What else do you have? I may have to look through your collection."

"What else do you like? I have the DVDs of all five of the Star Trek series, plus the movies, new and old."

"Any other sci-fi?"

He grinned at her as he started firing off names of TV shows, books, and movies. They were still comparing likes and dislikes when they reached the gate at the Navy Yard. Both looked at each other, it was a three-hour drive, how had they gotten back so quickly? As Tim checked in, Ellie murmured sotto voce, "Maybe we were beamed back."

Tim laughed outright as the guard pushed the button to raise the gate, giving them a funny look.
Chapter 16

The case may have been successfully solved but it couldn’t be closed until the mound of paperwork was completed, even though there was no bad guy to track down, interrogate or arrest. Gibbs would have even more forms to complete because he’d used his personal car. Tim was glad he’d dodged that bullet although he thought he’d buy Dad a beer or two to make up for the extra work.

Before the end of the day, Gibbs and team met Ducky, Palmer, and Abby in Autopsy where Tim told them that when he returned from his leave, he was being promoted to Manager of the CCU. He repeated what he’d said to Ellie earlier and was given handshakes, pats on the back and hugs and kisses from Abby and Ellie. Ellie felt a little naughty sneaking a kiss in but Abby kissed him first, certainly nobody was going to call her out for following the older woman’s example! She missed the thoughtful looks in Ducky and Gibbs’ eyes and the glare from Abby. She did not miss the flash of happy on Tim’s face.

When Tim pulled into his driveway that night he decided to get the mail, as he had no intention of stepping foot outside the house again until morning. Until he’d brought the kids home with him he hadn’t paid much attention to paper mail. He paid all his bills online and most of his subscriptions were for online publications. But with kids, he was apparently far more attractive to various entities and was already receiving forms and letters from schools – even colleges, professional photography studios, nanny services, life insurance companies and advertising for kids’ toy and clothing stores. Now he checked the mail although he still tossed most of it.

He frowned as he pulled out a large manila envelope. One of his eyebrows hit his forehead as he looked at the return address: the house in Cambridge Massachusetts that the McGees had lived in while Tim was at MIT. When their landlady and friend Mrs. Ferguson died four years ago, she left her house to the 3 McGees. They still owned it, renting their former home to college students every year. Unable to get to Cambridge more than once a year to check on the house, they’d hired a property manager when they could afford one and his name was listed above the return address on the envelope.

Tim frowned; he hoped this wasn’t bad news although usually the property manager Larry called with that. Last year they’d had to replace the furnace, found termite damage and ended up with a new HVAC system, ducts and all. Two years before that had been a new roof. He’d been grateful Mrs. Ferguson’s husband the professor had replaced the wiring and plumbing in the house before he’d fallen ill and passed away; they wouldn’t have those to worry about for few years. He pondered as he walked into the house, he’d always wondered what Gibbs could do with that house; maybe it was time to find out. It was too far to drive with two active kids but a train ride might be a fun adventure. He shook his head, leaving that thought for another time.

He thanked Lara for staying and smiled as she told him about taking them with her to pick up Kayla and Jared, the teens squeezing into her car. Taking care of her paycheck including overtime for the extra hours, he walked her out to her car. The kids were already in bed so he was very quiet as he went to tuck them in. He wasn’t surprised to find Tyler awake. His son kissed him, “I missed you, Daddy!”

“I missed you too, Tyler Dean. I heard you got to see Kayla and Jared today.”

“Yes,” Ty yawned and Tim kissed him again, “Come on, slide down and I’ll tuck you in. We can talk in the morning.”
“Ok Daddy, love you.”

“Love you too, my sweet snuggly boy.”

He tucked him in and then went across the hall to his little girl. She was sound asleep, snuffling softly. He kissed her and as he tucked in her blanket she murmured, “Daddy.” Smiling, he kissed her again before tiptoeing out of the room, vowing never to take his children for granted. Never to stop taking them to scouts or games, never to stop being Dad. No matter what life threw at him, he planned to always be there for and with his kids.

Back downstairs, he looked at the coffee maker but instead pulled a cold drink out of the refrigerator, he’d had enough coffee for one day! Settling into the recliner and wondering again how he’d lived without one all these years, he tore the top off the big envelope. There was a note from Larry attached to another envelope. “One of the tenants called me when this was delivered to the house and I thought I’d better forward it to you. All is well here; I’m sure you’re glad to hear that! - Larry G.”

He opened the medium sized manila envelope to find a note attached to a third envelope. He chuckled; this reminded him of those Russian nesting dolls!

The note was from one of the staff at, his eyes widened, Massachusetts Cryobank, the sperm bank he’d donated to all those years ago. It said that a note had been received from two former clients asking that their letter be forwarded to their sperm donor. Underneath the note, finally, was a legal sized envelope. He opened it and gently pulled out two pieces of paper. It was a letter from Sue and Deeny and he leaned toward the light to read it.

“Dear 129348,” he smiled as that was his donor number.

“This is hopefully a waste of time; you’ll never see this letter. We feel silly even writing it and it might get silly, but things happen and even though we don’t have dangerous jobs, we do dangerous work, if that makes sense. We’re Sue and Deeny and we are two-thirds of the parents of two wonderful, smart, good natured and beautiful children. You, our dear sperm donor, are the third parent of our Tyler and Bryn, their father. And if you’re reading this, it means something has gone terribly wrong and we’re both dead. We can’t imagine that happening but decided we should do it anyway. You see, from everything we saw on your profile, we believe you are the only possible guardian for our children.

First, they’re as much yours as ours, although you may not have thought of that way back when you were a college student donating your genetic material!

Secondly, you had a bright future ahead of you when you donated; we wonder what you are now. Scientist? Writer? CEO of a tech company? King of the World? Told you this might get silly.

Thirdly, neither of us has any family (besides each other and the kids) and in our opinions, none of our friends is parent material.

Fourth, your donor number is on each child’s birth certificate. We talked about it for months before I (Deeny) had Tyler and after doing some research decided to put your donor number in the daddy space. The hospital and the county didn’t like it much but tough noogies; it was Ty’s certificate, not theirs! We prevailed. And when Bryn was born in California, nobody said a word.

Anyway, please accept this as part of our last will and testament, that you should be the children’s guardian. We’ve enclosed two copies for you to give to the state or your attorney (whoever needs it to make it legal) and both of us have signed each copy as well as this page. We didn’t tell our attorney because we didn’t want a fuss and we don’t know your name. So we’ve asked that it be sent
to the sperm bank in the event of our deaths with a cover letter to Mass Cryobank to please forward to you. We called and asked them if they would and the staff person we talked to said yes because it would all be handled confidentially. So there you have it.

We hope you will raise our children with all the love and care we intend to provide them. Both of us ended up in foster care but before that had people who took us in and loved us after our parents died: Sue’s grandmother and a dearly loved neighbor of mine. Both were elderly and passed before we were of age. We hope and pray that won’t be the case with you, but please please make your own arrangements for our children!

Again, here’s hoping you never see this!

Our thanks to you for your donation and for helping us raise our babies. (Again, never going to see this, right?)

Sincerely and kind of weirdly because...you know,

Sue and Deeny Nichols-Mays”

The letter was signed and dated by both women, as were the copies Tim found behind the first page.

Shaking his head, still astounded, he looked at the time, surprised that it seemed far later than it was, only 7:30! He found the number of the women’s attorney in Seattle, thank you D’Arcy McKinna, and dialed it, wondering who would answer at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. He was pleasantly surprised when the phone was answered after one ring. After saying the name of the firm, the voice said, “This is Daniel Keilty, how may I help you?”

“Mr. Keilty this is Timothy McGee in Virginia regarding Tyler and Bryn Nichols-Mays.”

“Oh yes, hang on, I have that file right here.” There was a brief pause and then the attorney spoke again, “Sorry, wanted my notes in front of me. Yes, I spoke with the social worker, Ms. McKinna about Deeny and Sue’s children. Horrible thing to happen to them. How are the kids?”

“I agree and the children are wonderful although they miss their mothers. This is going to sound strange but I received a letter from Sue and Deeny today. I don’t remember whether you know this, probably not since it’s been confirmed, but I am the biological father of the kids, literally the sperm donor. Sue and Deeny wrote a letter to me but didn’t know my name so they put it in an envelope with a note to the sperm bank. They said they left it with your office, so someone there sent it to the sperm bank who put my name on it and mailed it to an old address of mine. Luckily, my family still owns the building so the property manager forwarded it to me. They’ve named me as guardian of the children. Legally I’ve already taken care of this, I filed a paternity claim and we’re set. I wanted to let you know because they said, rather their letter said, they hadn’t told you. And I don’t know about you but not making arrangements for their children’s future seemed very out of character for what I’ve learned about them.”

“Mr. Keilty this is Timothy McGee in Virginia regarding Tyler and Bryn Nichols-Mays.”

“My God, this is a first! I’ve never run into something like this, very unusual. Would you send me a copy? I’d like to file it with the state of Washington and keep it in our own files.”

“Sure, I can fax a copy tonight. They sent three copies of the letter and signed each one so I’ll mail you one of those copies and give another to my own attorney.”

“Thank you. I know Ms. McKinna told me something about how you got involved in this from the start, I mean their deaths, but I don’t remember the details.”

“I’m a federal agent with NCIS, based in the Washington DC Navy Yard. My team got the call
when the lieutenants were found dead in their wrecked car and my boss and I found the little ones hiding in some bushes. We investigated the murders and arrested Sue and Deeny’s killers. They’re looking at death penalties, mandatory in a hate crime resulting in a fatality. I’m a certified foster parent, so I took them the first night or two while Social Services looked for any family. When there was nobody for the kids, I told CPS I wanted to remain their foster parent and possibly adopt them. Their DNA was run, standard procedure, and I found out I’m a dad.”

“Amazing. I’m sorry about the women; they were so full of life and had so many plans. But it does seem as if divine providence or something had something else in mind.”

Tim made a noise; he really didn’t want to credit any divine being with killing off two wonderful people just to make him a custodial father.

“He’s our fax number and our mailing address.” Tim wrote both down and disconnected, leaning back in his chair. Shaking his head, he took the letter, faxed it to the attorney’s office, and then sent another fax, with a cover note, this time to his attorney. After thinking about it, he wrote another cover note and faxed it to a third number, this time D’Arcy McKinna. He was amused at how relieved he was that ‘Mama and Mum’ hadn’t neglected to plan for their kids’ futures. Sure, it was unorthodox but it worked. He knew if he’d gotten this letter and didn’t have custody of the kids, he would have found and fought for them.

With a groan, he realized he’d forgotten to visit the daycare and enroll the kids; he’d have to do that on Monday. Lara said he needed to take the kids in to meet everyone first; they’d stay for a couple of hours and start regular attendance the next day. He needed to take both kids clothes shopping soon. How the heck was he going to know what they needed? Maybe he’d go by himself and leave the kids with his dad. Or his dad could go and he’d stay with the kids. He laughed aloud at that and thought that maybe he’d ask Ellie to go with him. He’d talk with Breena first. His last thoughts as he fell asleep were that he wanted to show Dad the letter and he couldn’t wait for Tony to get back so he and Dad could share their news.

Saturday morning, he woke to his son whispering, “Daddy, you awake?”

“I am now, Ty. Good morning!” The little boy beamed, crawled up onto the bed and lay down with his head on Tim’s chest. “Thump, thump. What’s dat?”

“That’s my heart beating kiddo.”

“Yower heart? C’n I hear mine?”

“Not without some help from a doctor. Tell you what, next time we see Granducky or Uncle Jimmy we’ll ask for help listening.”

“Ok.”

He giggled when they heard Brynie chirp over the baby monitor. “Daddy…up pwease!”

Tim grinned; she’d gotten the ‘L’ in there, her version of an ‘L’. Progress!

Up, cleaned and dressed, Tim was cracking eggs into the skillet when there was a perfunctory knock on the front door, followed by the sound of a key turning. His dad, for sure. When the kids saw their grandfather enter, they cheered, “Yay, Poppy’s here. More eggs, Daddy!”

Bryn nodded wisely, “Moah eggs fow Poppy an’ us!”

The men chuckled as Tim obeyed his children and added more eggs. His dad made coffee, pouring
them each a mug when it was ready. Grabbing jam and butter out of the refrigerator, he started making toast. “What’s up for today?”

Tim grinned as he signed, “Today and tomorrow are family days. I thought we could go to Leesburg Animal Park.”

Gibbs gave him an approving pat on the back. “Great idea!”

Still signing he added, “I invited the siblings but they’re both working. Tomorrow there’s a water park that sounds just about right for little ones, at South Germantown Recreational Park, thought we should check it out.”

His father chuckled as his son spelled out ‘water park’.

“Also a great idea. Do they have swimsuits?” He signed that and Tim nodded, signing ‘and floaties.’ He had to spell floaties.

“And does Daddy have those things too?”

Tim nodded and then grinned, signing, “No floaties! You?”

“Yes.”

Ty noticed the last two exchanges and said, “Hey, you talk jus’ like my mommies!”

He smiled when his father and grandfather turned to him and said, “Thank you!”

Tim added, “I will ask the Palmers and Granducky for tomorrow. Ok?” He made a mess out of Granducky and started to spell it but Dad tapped his fingers, “I got it. Sounds like fun!”

The family sat down to eat and then Tim took the kids to wash faces and hands while Poppy did the dishes. He played with the kids for a few minutes while Tim called the Palmers and Ducky, all of whom said yes for their Sunday outing. Breena said they’d have to go after church and that was fine with Tim, he needed to do some housework anyway.

When he came back to Poppy and the kids, he smiled, “Who wants to go to the petting zoo today?”

“With real live animals?”

“Yes, goats, donkeys, pigs, ducks, little horses and lots of other animals.”

“YAY!” Ty cheered and Bryn echoed him. “Daddy, what are little horses? Are dey babies?”

“Some of them might be babies. They’re miniature, which means they’re very small horses, like the size of a big dog. They’re very special.”

“Cool!”

Bryn chortled, “Horsies and doggies, Daddy!”

Tim smiled at the two of them, realizing that was the first ‘r’ he’d heard from Brynie. While he was getting snacks and beverages packed, the kids played by themselves and he handed his father the letter from Deeny and Sue.

“What’s this?”
“Got it yesterday; read it and then I’ll tell you how it got to me.”

For once Gibbs had his reading glasses in his pocket and put them on. The first words on the paper had his jaw dropping and he looked up at his son who smiled at him, motioning to keep going. When he finished reading, he went back and read it again.

“Tim, this is extraordinary and makes me rethink my stance on coincidences.”

“Yeah, I know. Here’s how I got it,” He ran through the path the letter took to get to him and Dad shook his head. “If you didn’t still own that building, would it have gotten to you?”

“I think so. Might have taken a bit longer, but eventually, it would have found me.” He chuckled, “I faxed copies to their attorney, mine, and Ms. McKinna. As upset as I was about them not naming a guardian, I thought she should know.”

“Blows my mind, kiddo, unbelievable.”

Still shaking his head, they gathered up the kids, got them settled in the car and off they went to the park.
Chapter 17

Two very tired and happy children had to be carried from the car into the house later that afternoon. They'd had a wonderful time playing with the baby goats, lambs, rabbits, donkeys, pigs, chickens and best of all, the miniature horses. They'd seen a parrot who talked to them; Poppy even held it after Daddy said Poppy would have made a good pirate. They ate their picnic lunch underneath a shade tree and then went back into the animals' quarters to watch them being fed. They had the most fun touching the animals and listening to the different sounds. Each goat had a different 'voice', some sweet and some loud and not at all pleasing to the ears although the goats were all very gentle with the children. The sheep, on the other hand, all sounded the same. One of the donkeys hee-hawed just for them and they all laughed when the little horses neighed. Daddy and Poppy helped when they fed the horses and goats slices of apple.

After the kids went down for their naps, their father and grandfather retreated downstairs. "That was a great first outing, Tim."

"You ever take Kelly there?"

"Yes and I think that was the same parrot. They live a long time."

"Huh, wonder if he recognized you?"

Saturday was an early night for all of them and Tim managed to write for a few hours before he got too sleepy. Sunday morning, they smelled pancakes when they woke up, Poppy's turn to cook! They were trooping down the stairs, hand in hand when the doorbell rang. Poppy was smiling as Tim said, "Oh, looks like Poppy's got a surprise for us!"

He opened the door to find Rob and Sarah, invited for breakfast. "Hey, my grown up babies!" He greeted them with kisses and hugs, which were repeated by the kids and eventually Poppy. After the six of them stuffed themselves with pancakes, bacon, and eggs, the kids were excused to play while the adults cleaned the kitchen and then relaxed with their coffees.

Tim had decided this was the best opportunity he'd have to tell them about his and Gibbs' discovery. "Glad you guys are here, I've been trying to figure out the best time for us to get together."

He turned to his father who gave him a nod. "Have something to tell you. You know we had the kids' DNA run and proved I'm their biological father. When I got the chart, though, it was shocking, to say the least. Sarah, it appears that none of the four of us siblings share DNA."

"What?"

Rob's eyes widened, "Tim, are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"I'm saying that I'm not a McGee by blood, I was adopted by Lily and Dan, although we don't know if it was legal; haven't found any papers yet."

Sarah looked at him, "That means we're…"

"As much brother and sister as we've always been. By heart, soul and the letter of the law I am legally and emotionally your brother, just as I am Rob and Geordie's and that's never going to change. It only means we don't share DNA."
"But you said you don't know if the adoption was legal and that must have been an awful shock!"

"The original adoption may or may not have been legal but don't forget Geordie adopted the three of us when he turned 18. We are legally siblings. And there is more to the story."

"Ok, but wait a sec; that means no long lost McGee relatives showed up on your chart."

"That's right, no McGee relatives. You can have your DNA run and see who pops up."

She nodded, "I might do that someday. So, what else did you find?"

Tim and Gibbs took turns telling them about their shocking discovery and the research they did that same night. When they paused, Rob looked at them. "You're still speaking, so it must have turned out all right."

"All right now yes, but it is heartbreaking, Robbie."

They told them the story they'd heard from Mac. Tim's siblings were horrified at the kidnapping and saddened that he'd never known either of his mothers or his sister Kelly and that Gibbs had never known he had a son. Then they realized that Tim had been working for his own father for over a decade. All of that took a lot more coffee to get through.

All too soon, they had to leave as Sarah had plans and Rob had a shift at the hospital that afternoon. The trio promised to see each other again before Sarah's departure.

After they left, Tim leaned into his dad, "Thanks for setting that up. I've been putting it off, dreading telling Sarah. But I knew I needed to tell them before we tell the others."

"What you said was good, Tim!"

"Thanks. It wasn't planned, just occurred to me as I was talking."

Eventually, they told the kids what they were doing and who they were doing it with. They were so excited they were jumping around and it took some time before they calmed enough to change into their swimsuits. Poppy already had his swim trunks on under his clothes so he stayed with the kids while Tim changed into his, had help with the sunscreen, grabbed their sun hats, dry clothes and piled it all into a sports bag. Checking in with the Palmers, they found Ducky with them and ready to go.

They met at the park and the adults took turns with the kids, giving the mom and dads time for some fun by themselves and with the children. Breena soon had enough of the water and got some time to herself while the grandfathers escorted the kids and Jimmy and Tim rafted down the lazy river, having a blast. When Jimmy mentioned having done this as a teenager, Tim chuckled, "I've never been before."

"Then you'll have to keep coming back, make up for lost time!"

Before they left the park that afternoon, Tim bought a family pass, he loved this place and so did his kids, they'd come here as often as possible.

He had to wake the kids up from their nap that afternoon, afraid they wouldn't sleep that night. And he added a toddler pool to his list of things to acquire.

Monday morning was back to work. When she arrived, Lara looked at the three of them. "Hmm, you're all still pale, but did you maybe get a little sun this weekend?"
Tim grinned, "I'm sure you'll be hearing about our adventures all day long!"

He laughed when he got to work; Gibbs had mentioned the water park. Bob said he'd used too much sunscreen while Ellie chuckled and asked him to take off his watch. Then she smiled, there was the proof. He'd worn it both days and there was a faint difference in his skin tone.

They caught a drug deal gone badly that afternoon but Tim was able to work from home. By Thursday, they had their suspects in their sights. Armed with arrest warrants, the team brought the three miscreants in for questioning and this time Bob was given a shot at interrogation. He did a good job; he didn't break 'his' suspect but he wore him down and Gibbs swooped in for the 'grand finale'. Ellie and Tim tag-teamed the other two and played 'suspect #1 (Bob's) has already ratted you out'. It worked and by mid-morning Friday, they were deep into the paperwork.

Gibbs discreetly invited Ellie, the Palmers, Abby and Ducky for a cookout at his place Sunday afternoon, telling them it was to welcome DiNozzo home. After much discussion, they'd decided not to invite Bob. Even though they liked him and were already starting to consider him part of the team, Tony hadn't met him yet and they knew how uncomfortable he'd be meeting a new subordinate at a family gathering. Tim offered to pull Bob aside and tell him their news before work on Monday and his father agreed.

Just before dawn Thursday morning, Gibbs was sound asleep when his cell rang. Groaning, he answered with his usual, "Gibbs."

"Poppy, Daddy won't wake up. He's crying but I can't wake him up."

Gibbs grabbed the key to Tim's house from a hook by the door and hurried barefoot down the sidewalk, still talking to his grandson. "What happened Ty?"

"I woke up 'cause I heard my name, den I heard Daddy sayin' it again so I went to see what he wanted."

"OK, I'm outside your house, sweetheart, it'll be all right."

Entering the house, he ran upstairs; glad Tim made a habit of making sure toys were put away every night. He still had memories of stepping on Lego pieces, dolls and other toys in the dark during Kelly's short childhood. He'd forgotten about the upstairs baby gate but got it open without too much of a problem.

He heard Brynie's little sleep noises as he walked past her room, glad she was asleep. Ty was on the bed with Tim, his head on his chest. "His heart's going thump thump like it's 'sposed to."

"That's good, Tyler. Let's see if I can't wake your daddy up. Would you please go down to the kitchen and get a glass of apple juice for him? The gates are open, be very careful."

"Ok, Poppy." His grandfather kissed him as the little boy walked down the hallway.

Figuring Tyler had already called out to Tim and shaken him, Gibbs went the direct route. He closed the bedroom door, leaned down to Tim's ear and in one of his best barks, said, "McGee REPORT!"

That did the trick and Tim sat up, his eyes wide and...scared. "Tyler, Dad, where are the kids? I need to see them...oh God, she's gonna hurt them to get at me."

Shaking, he curled into his father's arms, who rubbed his arms. "It's all right Timson, you had a bad dream. You were calling Ty's name and he woke up, came in here but couldn't wake you up, got scared and called me."
Ty returned with a sippy cup of apple juice and stayed while his father sat up to drink it. "Thank you, Tyler. Come here son, I need some hugs from you. Brynie too, but I don't want to wake her up."

Tyler nodded and crawled into his father's arms. "You were having a really bad dream, Daddy an' you wouldn't wake up so I called Poppy."

"Thank you Tyler Dean; that was the exact right thing to do. I'm so proud of you!"

"Are you all right now Daddy?"

"I will be; I need to talk with my Daddy first. How about I tuck you in?"

"Ok. You tell that mean person to leave you alone!"

"I will do that, son." Hand in hand, father and son walked down the hall to Ty's room. Tim was back in a couple of minutes. "He's asleep already."

"Remarkable kid you've got there. You want coffee while we talk?"

"Yeah, let's go downstairs."

Tim started talking while he was making the coffee, "Dad, you need to tell Abby about us separately, before the others and without me there. I think she'll be too mad to come to the cookout."

"Does this have anything to do with your nightmare?"

"Yes. She poisoned me and told me as I was dying, too late for the antidote, that she'd also poisoned Ty and Brynie; that no one was allowed to replace her in your affections. She was your daughter and would always remain so. Then she said that if you changed anything, she'd have to punish you too. I know it was just a dream, a bad one but definitely a dream; my gut's not twisting. Nevertheless, don't you think you owe it to her to tell her separately? Like Tony, she's been your child for years."

"I guess; I'm just afraid she'll see it as some kind of softening of my attitude toward her."

"I know we scoff at people who say this when convicted felons are released, that they've 'done their time', but maybe she really has. She hasn't pulled any crap in years now and she can't have been on the probation I'm not supposed to know about all that time. Dad, I don't mean to sound critical but I know if this were me or one of your grandchildren, you wouldn't walk away when we have problems. And while I love that you want to spend time with me as my father, I also think it's going to take more time and maybe extra effort from you to help Abby through this."

"You're right, maybe she has done some growing up. I agree with you anyway, I think it is the safer and fairest way to let her know."

Smiling Tim kissed him on the cheek, "Now if you don't mind staying a little longer, I'm going to take a shower while you're here." His father patted him on the back as he headed past him and up the stairs.

Several minutes later, Gibbs heard signs over the baby monitor of Bryn waking up and went to greet his granddaughter. He had her cleaned up and downstairs, just putting her in the highchair when he heard Ty call out from the upstairs gate. Kissing Brynie, he went back upstairs and opened the gate for Ty who greeted him with a kiss.

"Hi, Poppy! Where's Daddy?"
He's taking a shower, Ty, he'll be right down."

"Actually I'm right behind you."

Ty grinned, "Did you sleep better Daddy?"

"I stayed awake to talk with Poppy, son, and thank you again for being such a good thinker and calling your grandfather."

"I know if der's a fire or somebody fell or was bleeding to call 9-1-1 but I thought a bad dream would be Poppy."

"And you were right, but one other thing, Ty. If you couldn't wake me up and I wasn't crying or talking, then you can call 9-1-1. Because then something might be wrong with me."

"All right Daddy, I'll remember that."

They had a quiet breakfast, both men tired. Tim looked at the kids. "Remember Lara isn't here today."

They nodded.

"I'm going to stay home, so no daycare today."

More nods.

"I have some work to do but I can do that this morning and then we can go to the park to play, take our lunches with us, then come home for naps and play outside this afternoon. How does that sound?"

"Fun Daddy!"

"Great! Now, Poppy has to go to work and us three need to comb our teeth and brush our hair."

Ty looked surprised and then laughed while Bryn scrunched her face in confusion. "Brynie, what do we do with our hair?"

"Piggy tails!"

"What about our teeth?"

"Brush a brush a brush." He'd taught her that little ditty so she would keep brushing rather than doing one pass and stopping.

"Very good." He'd tell her his little joke again when she was old enough to understand it or maybe it wasn't funny.

Poppy kissed them all goodbye as he went home to get ready for work. He missed his boys in the office, Ellie was doing fine and Tim helped her whenever she needed it, but he missed his boys. Tony and Tim, DiNozzo and McGee. Scrap paper battles that drove him crazy. Paper airplanes. The bickering. Sneaking up behind them. Well, mostly DiNozzo, he didn't do that to Tim very often anymore. He sighed as he showered; he was never going to have both his boys there in the bullpen, bickering again. It had been hard enough when Ziva left without any warning. Although she really just never came back after Parsons. However, losing his guys…well he wasn't losing Tony. He hoped DiNozzo liked Chalmers, he was proving to be a good agent, had a good eye, good brain, fit in well with Tim and Bishop and he didn't mind working with him. He snorted, from him that was
high praise. DiNozzo's return would be the decisive test.

He needed to remind everyone not to talk up Bob at the cookout, as that would get Tony's hackles up. Maybe not now, though. A month in Europe and another month of leisure, he should be pretty relaxed by the time he returned to work. Sure would be good to see him and he knew his son felt the same way. His son, he smiled as he towed himself dry.

Then he thought about Abby. He didn't want to tell her while they were aboard the Yard, too many ears and if she didn't take it well she was bound to be loud. Maybe he'd take her to breakfast. No, he'd feel like too much of a hypocrite. Although Tim had a good point there but Gibbs couldn't let things go that easily. She'd broken his trust and she needed to earn it back. In the end, he decided to see if the Habitat for Humanity crew was working Saturday morning. He could do some work, take a break, tell her and then finish up. He needed to be home in the afternoon anyway, to watch the kids while Tim went to the airport for Tony.

He'd told Tim this morning that he was very glad their news would soon be revealed to the rest of the family; he said he had to catch himself several times a day wanting to say or do something that would have caused raised eyebrows. Vance planned to announce Tim's promotion and move to the CCU the last week of Tony's leave; the Gibbs' men decided they might make some sort of general announcement then although with the extended team being told on Sunday the news would probably be widely known before DiNozzo's return to work. Tim had filed for his name change and was waiting for a court date; he hoped the change would be finalized by the time he returned to work.

The sales representative from the car dealership called Friday and said the Acura MDX would be ready on Sunday if Tim was still interested. He made an appointment to be there as soon as the place opened. The kids would stay with his dad; he didn't plan to be away all that long.

As his dad was busy Saturday morning, Tim and the kids spent the time together, mostly playing in the backyard. He'd found a toddler pool for free on a Facebook swap meet group he'd joined and picked it up during the week, surprising the kids with it that day. All three of them sat in it although Tim had to sit with his legs folded and crossed to fit. They had a wonderful time splashing around and made up their own merman, merboy, and mergirl story.

While his kids played, Gibbs worked alongside Abby, eventually taking a break. She stopped with him, "Gibbs, is that iced coffee?"

"Yeah Abbs, it's hot out here!"

"But you don't do that, you always keep on drinking hot coffee."

He smiled at her, "People change sometimes, Abby, even me."

She scoffed and he smiled, "Abby, I want to talk to you about something, something I hope you're going to be happy about. Want to find some shade?"

She made a face but grabbed her parasol and they headed for the trees. "What's up?"

"When Tim got the kids' DNA results, he got a couple of surprises. One is that he's their biological father and you know how that happened. The second one is that he didn't start out life as a McGee. He was adopted although he hasn't been able to find the adoption papers yet. The DNA chart showed him who his biological parents are and, Abby, he's my son. Mine and Shannon's."

"No way, Gibbs, that's gotta be wrong. No way is McGee a Gibbs! He's just a geek, nothing like you, there's just no way."
"He's my son, Abby; I'm very proud of him and we're working on becoming closer as father and son. I hope you'll be happy for us; we'd like you to continue as part of our family."

Feeling her tense and knowing she was angry and in denial, he got up and walked away telling the construction manager he had to babysit his grandkids.

Bothered by Abby's reaction, for the moment he put aside his unease. He stopped on the way home to have another coffee, this time with Fornell and was still back in plenty of time for Tim to dry off and leave to get Tony. Fornell came in with him, having heard nothing but chatter from his normally taciturn friend about Tim and the kids. He insisted on meeting them and asked to be called 'Uncle Tobias'. Tim didn't know what to think until the man called him Timothy Gibbs. That got a big smile from father and son!
Chapter 18

As Tim drove to the airport, taking the Boxster for its penultimate spin, he smiled. He was glad his friend would be home; he was happy and relieved things had gone well with Sarah and Rob and he couldn't wait to tell the others on Sunday. He was also relieved Dad had told Abby this morning, although he hadn't heard how it went. With Tony back, he had just four more weeks until his full-time leave started and he had many plans.

He parked and walked into the waiting area for Customs, spotting Tony with one of the officers. He'd evidently timed his arrival perfectly as Tony gathered his three suitcases and moved toward him. Tim grabbed him by the shoulders saying "Ciao Amico Mio, Bentornato."

Tony grinned, "Thanks, we'll work on your pronunciation but that wasn't half bad!"

"I had another phrase in mind but realized it was welcome to your house and I wanted to say it here."

"And that's a good thing because as it turns out my house is not welcoming me."

Tim grabbed the two smaller suitcases, remembering that DiNozzo had one big suitcase and his carry-on when he left. Now there were three suitcases and a different, larger carry-on.

"What's going on?"

"I got an alert at some point over the Atlantic that there's a problem with my floor of the apartment building and I can't go home just yet."

"Wow, sucky timing. Hmm, well, your first two options are my downstairs bedroom, complete with your own bathroom or Gibbs' house. I'm sure Ducky would welcome you or the…no the Palmers wouldn't work. Ellie or Abby."

"Tim, you're my best friend and I know I'm going to love your kids and hopefully them me, but I was thinking ease into things, not go for immersion therapy! And as fond as I am of Ducky, Ellie, Abby, and the Palmers, I've stayed with Gibbs many times before and that'll do fine."

Tim grinned, "Works for me, we're only a few steps away. Makes it easier anyway because we're having a welcome home dinner at his place tomorrow."

"What?"

"Yep, the whole team."

"Including the new guy?"

"Uh no, we decided to make it core family and you two haven't met yet. Not fair to either of you."

"I wouldn't mind."

Tim gave him a look and DiNozzo grinned, "Ok I'd mind but just a little."
Somehow, they managed to get all the luggage into the trunk and Tony sighed. "So glad you haven't traded her in yet." He looked at the expression on Tim's face, "Oh no!"

"Yep, tomorrow's her last trip and that's to the car dealership where my family friendly wheels are waiting for me."

"How much is she bringing you?" Tim told him and Tony sighed. "That's what I figured, I looked online. Wish I could afford her, keep her in the family."

Tim was horrified, "Tony, no, just no! I want her to have a long and happy life. Every car you've had since I've known you was destroyed. Not by you, of course, but totaled. Think how bad you'd feel when that happened to her! I can't let that happen to either of you!"

Tony opened his mouth to make a rebuttal, thought about it and nodded, "You're right. Cars don't stay with me very long. I don't know how to get past that."

"Buy a car you're not passionate about." He held up a hand, "I know, you're a car guy. I'm just saying maybe it's time for a new game plan and maybe that car will break the chain of unfortunate events."

Tony huffed at him as he hit the button to call Gibbs. He smiled at the warm welcome he got. "You can stay here as long as you want, Tony. You need anything?"

"No, should only be for a few days. The message said we should be able to return home Tuesday or Wednesday."

"Ok, I'll see you when you get to my place. Tell Tim I'll bring the kids over, meet you guys there."

Tony disconnected, looking nervous.

"What?"

"He's bringing the kids over to his house. So I'll be meeting them right away."

Tim laughed, "Relax, they won't bite…probably! Kidding, I'm kidding DiNozzo! They're excited about finally meeting their Uncle Tony."

"I have presents but it'll take a while to dig them out."

"They can wait. Just don't tell them, Ty's pretty good about it but Brynie will stick that sweet little bottom lip of hers out in a pout."

Tony snorted, "You mean the one just like yours?"

"Not exactly like mine. Hers has a little more 'bow' to it."

As they pulled into Gibbs' driveway, Tony looked up at the two small faces watching them from the living room window. "Geez Tim, they're adorable and I cannot believe I just said that!"

Tim smiled a little smugly but made sure to credit Sue and Deeny. "Good genes all the way around."

The two men hauled the luggage up the front steps to the door, which Gibbs opened. "Tony, welcome home!" He pulled him in for a hearty backslap and a one-armed hug. Behind them, Tony heard words that sounded an awful lot like, "Daddy, pwesents?" He smiled to himself; that must be Brynie.
He stepped back from Gibbs and before he saw the kids, he saw the evidence that they were in the house, a lot of evidence. Toys and books were strewn across the floor and the old TV was playing a Pixar Disney movie. Tim and two tiny kids moved into his vision and he mentally braced himself to meet his new family. "Tony, I'd like you to meet Tyler and Bryn. Ty, Bryn, this is your Uncle Tony!"

Ty held his hand out for a shake, "Hi, Unca Tony!"

Bryn mimicked her brother, "Hi, Unca Tony!"

He reached for her hand but with a giggle, she attached herself to his leg. He laughed, "Hi Ty, hi Bryn, I'm glad to meet you. Your dad has been telling me all about you. Uh, Tim, I seem to have an attachment on my leg."

"Oooh, she really likes you! Bryn, please let Unca Tony have his leg back."

She let go but held her arms up. "Up pwease!"

Feeling like he was going through a baptism by fire, Tony picked the little girl up and she gave him a smoochy kiss.

"Thank you Brynie!" He still had her in his arms and sent Tim a silent plea for help.

Tim held out his arms for his daughter and she went to him.

"There you go, Sweet Pea. Uncle Tony is tired from the flight so we'll be gentle with him, all right?"

Bryn had a serious expression on her face as she nodded, "Ok Daddy."

Ty touched Tony's arm to get his attention, "We flew too, Unca Tony."

"You did, where did you fly to?"

"Bryn an' me flew with our mommies to Seattle when Brynie was a baby." Looking sad, he continued, "Our mommies are angels now."

To his own amazement, Tony squatted down. Since Tim first told him about the whole "mommies as angels" story, he'd thought he could help with that.

"You know what, Tyler, Bryn? My mommy is an angel too."

"She is? Were you little when she went to heaven?"

"Yes, I was."

"Oh." Ty blinked back tears and again surprising himself, Tony swept him up into his arms. "You'll be all right, Ty. Your daddy and..." he looked at Gibbs; he didn't know his grandpa name. Gibbs mouthing Poppy to him and Tony nodded. "Your daddy and Poppy love you very much, plus your Granducky and uncles and aunts. I know none of us are your moms, but we'll take care of you, always."

Ty sniffed, "And Ellie."

"She's not Aunt Ellie?"

"No, she's Ellie. She's special."
Tony looked at Tim and noticed the tips of his ears starting to glow. Just weeks after breaking it off with Delilah? He needed to have a talk with his Probie; Bishop was not rebound material! He opened his mouth to say something when Boss cleared his throat.

"Anthony, stayin' up or down?"

"Uh, down Boss, thanks. No need to haul this stuff upstairs for the two or three days I'll be here."

"Either way. Don't worry about it."

Ty looked puzzled, "How come Poppy called you Antony?"

Deciding not to correct him with the 'th', Tony responded, "It's my full name. Like yours is Tyler but we call you 'Ty'; that's your short name. My short name is Tony."

"Oh, dat's good."

Tim picked up DiNozzo's big suitcase, "C'mon Ty, let's help Unca Tony get settled."

"Ok Daddy." Tony put him down and Ty started to pick up the roll-along handle of one of the smaller cases. Tim's eyes widened, those suitcases could weigh up to 50 pounds; there was no way his 2 ½-year-old should be even trying to pick it up!

"Ty, will you please carry Unca Tony's jacket for him?"

Ty nodded and marched into the guest bedroom with the jacket while Tony and Gibbs grabbed the rest of the luggage. While DiNozzo unpacked and put a load of laundry in, the others went out to the backyard. Gibbs and Tim were playing with the kids when Tony emerged. The sight was unbelievable: Brynie was on Boss's shoulders, Ty was on Tim's and making bullfighting noises, or at least that's what he thought the noises were supposed to be. He turned to head back to his room; apparently, he was so exhausted that he was hallucinating. There wasn't another reasonable explanation for the way Gibbs was behaving. Tim, sure, he could see him doing something so dorky; he was all grown up but he was still a geek and geeks can be very dorky. But the Boss? No way!

Unfortunately, it was too late; he'd been spotted. Ty called out, "Unca Tony, wanta play?" DiNozzo tried to school his features into some sort of expression that didn't include the horror he was feeling but once again, it was too late, Boss and McGee knew him too well.

Then he felt bad as he saw the looks exchanged between his teammates. Tim said something to Ty and the boy climbed down his father like a little monkey while Gibbs set Bryn on the grass. The kids found some of their toys and played together while the two men joined Tony on the deck. Gibbs disappeared inside while Tim gestured to one of the chairs. Tony opened his mouth to say something but Tim smiled and shook his head. That was good; at least he wasn't mad at him. When Gibbs reappeared with three beers, Tony felt a lot better. The beer meant the conversation would be lighthearted, if there were real problems, there would be bourbon involved.

Gibbs handed the bottle to DiNozzo. "Ordinarily this would be a bourbon conversation but not with the kids around and there's no way you'll be awake past their bedtime."

Tony frowned, working that out. "Uh, ok."

Tim nudged him, "It's okay, this is what we were going to tell you tomorrow but we think you need to know now."

Tony had a sudden thought and felt sick, were they a couple? In one short month...of course, kids
would be a big draw for Gibbs but they were both straight. He had to be wrong. When he felt Gibbs' hand at the back of his head, he was relieved and then surprised when he got an affectionate squeeze to his neck rather than the head slap he expected.

Tim started talking and Tony sat up straighter, knowing whatever this was had to be important. He told him about the DNA test results. Tony nodded; they'd talked about them. Then Tim said something very odd and DiNozzo put his beer down, he was hearing things now. Great, hallucinating and hearing things that couldn't possibly be said. With a snort, Gibbs leaned forward, "You heard him right, Tony. Tim is my son; Shannon was his mother."

His jaw dropped open and he sat there like a stone, trying to process the information. When he seemed somewhat recovered, they told him the rest of the story. He jumped up, "She did WHAT?" In the yard, the kids stopped and stared, their eyes wide. When their father and grandfather remained calm, Ty shrugged and went back to playing, little sister following his lead.

"She told my mother I'd died, and then she hired a medical transport with an incubator and drove me to Bethesda where she gave me to the McGees."

Tony swore in Italian, Hebrew and the few Russian swears he knew from Gibbs. "Your own grandmother! And she did that to her own daughter, broke her heart!"

"Yeah."

"Does she know? Wait a minute, we talked about her five years ago after her case was…whatever. How she treated us differently for no apparent reason. She knows, Tim!"

Tim nodded, "Yeah, I remembered the conversation we had, Tony and told D…uh Boss."

"That was gonna be Dad?"

Gibbs beamed. "Yes. My son Timothy calls me Dad."

Tony's still angry comments stuttered to a stop. Obviously, Gibbs and Tim had decided to move forward and not let their anger lead them. He looked at them, smiling, a genuine 'I'm so happy for you' smile. He squawked as he was pulled into a three-way hug. "Uh, guys?"

He heard something but his head was tucked between Tim and Gibbs, everything was rather muffled. He pulled back, "What did you say?"

"We said we're so glad you're home and we can tell you!"

Gibbs chuckled, "We wanted everyone together; so we waited for you."

Tim nodded, "The longest two weeks of my life." He looked at his father, "And then we caved and told him the first hour he was here!"

"And you're surprised?"

They laughed and Tony's head swiveled as he watched each of them. "How'd you do that so fast?"

"What?"

"Become father and son. It's like you've been doing it forever and I know it hasn't been."

Gibbs grinned as he ruffled Tim's hair. "Been working on getting to know him better since Somalia. But he brought kids into the mix and I was a goner." His eyes were twinkling, a phenomenon
DiNozzo wasn't sure he'd ever seen before. Tim grinned back at him and Tony understood Boss had been teasing about the kids being the big draw.

"Wow. You two...wow."

Tim looked shy, something Tony hadn't seen in a long time. "I haven't had a father since I was 9, Tony. He wasn't an absentee or neglectful father like Senior; he was dead. He was part-time when he was alive, although when he was home he was all ours. Now I have a full-time father and I'm a full-time son to the guy I've wished was my dad since I met him."

Gibbs was beaming again as he pulled Tim toward him and kissed him on his forehead. Tony tried not to shudder, "That's...you guys are so mushy!" They laughed, "Yeah, we are."

Tim poked his dad, "I suppose we'll get used to this and get over some of the touchy-feely."

Gibbs shook his head, "Speak for yourself, I got a lot of years to make up for."

"So I get that you don't want to deal with the anger, but are you going to pursue criminal charges?"

Tim had a funny look on his face. "I don't know. I talked with a couple of the attorneys in Legal and there are a couple of things, sorry, I'm starting in the middle. First, a friend has been looking around and there are things in question. There's been no proof discovered that I was legally adopted. If she just flat out sold me, that's illegal. Someone is also poking around looking at old records for medical transport companies and staff hired by Mrs. Fielding to transport me from the clinic to Bethesda; staff as witnesses if they're not actually complicit, the vehicle records as evidence. However, the most compelling thing, the one that would make this a viable case is that we know the home and clinic staff lied to my mother about my death and conspired with Joann to either sell or adopt me out without my mother's or grandfather's consent. My grandfather has a copy of a death certificate and remembers seeing my birth certificate. Somebody signed those."

"Are they still in business?"

"Yes. It's now a home for 'wayward' girls but the same people own it. And the clinic is still in business."

"So what's needed?"

"The financial transactions between Mrs. Fielding and the owners or whoever helped her kidnap me. Find the records for the medical transport from Pennsylvania to Bethesda. Find the originals of my birth certificate and the death certificate. I really want to know if I was legally adopted or purchased like a puppy from a shelter, so Fielding and McGee financial records. In some ways that would explain Commander McGee's neglect of his children, not naming a guardian."

Gibbs had an arm around his shoulders. "I know you don't want to hear this, but those long lost relatives of Sarah's might be able to provide some of the answers. Or at least point in a direction."

Tony opened his mouth to ask a question but a big yawn erupted instead, followed by his stomach grumbling.

Gibbs laughed, "Come on Tim, let's get Uncle Tony fed so he can get some sleep!"

Tony crashed as soon as he was through eating although it would be closer to the truth to say he was through eating when he fell asleep at the table. While the kids watched with wide eyes, Poppy and Daddy half-carried, half-dragged their new uncle to his bed. Tim got his shoes and socks off and helped maneuver him under the covers.
Note: Ciao Amico Mio, Bentornato means "Hello my friend, welcome back" in Italian (I hope, per Yahoo answers). Funny note: my grammar/spell checker wanted me to change bentornato to bentonite which is a kind of clay.
Chapter 19

After cleaning the kitchen, Tim and the kids went home. Sunday was going to be a big day; Tim thought it might be a little stressful and he was tired so he turned in early. The next morning Poppy and Tony joined them for a special breakfast of pancakes, bacon, and eggs. Tony grinned, "How did you know I've been dreaming of an American breakfast? This is perfect!"

Ty giggled, "We have pancakes and eggs every Sunday, Unca Tony."

Tim ruffled his hair, "Yup; the bacon is a special treat."

"What time are the others coming over?"

"Between 3 and 4."

At Tony's surprised look at the lack of military terms, Poppy explained, "Ty is just learning about time and the clock, don't need to muddy things."

Tony tilted his head in agreement, "Makes sense. So what can I do?"

"Relax, take naps when you need to and have fun."

"Is the party here or at your place?"

"Originally we thought Dad's place but the kids have more to play with here and Victoria will be here with her parents. Kids can play in the garden and the wading pool."

"Ooh, that sounds like fun! Do big kids get to wade too?"

That prompted memories of the water park and Uncle Tony heard all about that and the petting zoo. Tim finally distracted them, "Time to clean up, who wants to help?"

DiNozzo was astounded when both kids exclaimed, "Me, me!" Then he watched wide-eyed as the kids rushed to help, carefully carrying one plate or one cup to the dishwasher at a time. Bryn told him, "Dey gonna have a bath!"

Poppy cleaned the stove and countertop off, put the milk, juice, syrup, butter and jam away and they were done. Then Boss looked through the refrigerator and not finding what he was looking for, looked at his son. "Where's the meat?"

"I left it in your 'fridge, not a lot of room in here and Ellie's bringing a salad, Breena and Jimmy are bringing a vegetable dish, Abby's bringing rolls and Ducky's bringing...I don't know what he's bringing. I'm making dessert but not until later."

"Cake?"

Tim and Poppy looked at each other and turned away so Brynie wouldn't see them laughing. Finally, Tim said, "Yes Brynie, a type of cake."

As Poppy walked by Tony for more coffee he whispered, "We're pretty sure that was her first word."
Tony chuckled as he swung his little niece up into his arms; she chortled with glee. "Hey Ty, Brynie, would you two like to show me your rooms?"

They most definitely would so off they went.

Other than a trip back to Gibbs' house to change and help Boss carry stuff back to Tim's, they spent the rest of the day in the backyard. Tony was impressed with what Tim had accomplished in the few days they'd been in the house. There were flowers and food things growing and a little swing set for the kids along with the wading pool on the lawn. The grill was all set up, there was a large patio table with benches and chairs, Brynie's high chair was moved outside along with two booster seats - Tim hadn't yet returned Victoria's travel booster seat. The children helped their father make sun tea, that is putting water and tea into a large jar, screwing the lid on tight and putting it outside in the sun.

Tim looked up, "Ice! That's what Ducky's bringing. And your cooler's here, Dad."

"That's fine because all the bottles and cans aren't going to fit in the refrigerator."

Tony volunteered to put them in the cooler with whatever ice Tim had and then they put the cooler in the shade.

Ellie was the first to arrive and Tim nearly ran out the door to help her.

Tony looked at Boss who smiled, "Rule 12 doesn't count because he's leaving the team."

"You're not worried they're uh…rebonding?"

"I was but…well you'll see."

Ellie came in looking happier than Tony had seen her in a long time. Since before she followed Jake and figured out he was cheating on her. Maybe since her first year on the team. Tim was carrying a large bowl and a few bags while she carried a shopping tote.

She smiled at Tony when she saw him. "Welcome home traveler! It's good to see you!"

Boss took the tote and she hugged Tony. When she walked into the house, the kids went crazy.

"Ellie, Ellie!"

"Hi, sweeties! Mm, let's help your dad and then we can have kisses and hugs."

"Ok, Ellie!"

The kids each took a bag from Tim, Tony reaching out to help Brynie who picked the heaviest one, and put them on the kitchen table. Then Ellie opened her arms and the kids went right into them while Tim put the salad makings in the refrigerator.

Tony half-expected Tim to give her a kiss but he didn't, just smiled some more. Before Tony could tease either of them, the Palmers and Ducky arrived and after welcoming him home took their dinner contributions to the kitchen. Boss took the ice from Ducky and put it in the cooler, nodding in approval when he saw his old friend brought an extra bag. "I wasn't sure how long that would last, so brought this. I remembered Timothy has a smaller cooler I thought we could put this in."

Tim and Ellie went to the garage to get it. They weren't away for long, just enough time for a quick kiss or so Tony figured. Breena caught his look and grinned at him, "Isn't it great?"

"I hope so!"
She nodded, "They've just started dating but I think Ellie has had a thing for him for a while. She was upset about the disaster with the witch with a B, no swears with little ears around, but then the kids happened and Tim seems to be fine. Probably just too crazy busy to think about it, but think about this Tony - if he hadn't come home early he might never have known. He might have married that zona and gone years without knowing. And she'd been lying to him, cheating on him for months."

Tony bit back a smile at Breena's use of the Hebrew word, nodding at her. "Boss says he's not worried about him rebounding with Ellie. What about you?"

"Honestly, I think Ellie is the best thing that ever happened to him. Romantically I mean because the kids…wow. Finally, he's found someone who is as into him as he is to her, they have a lot in common besides work and they respect each other. And they laugh together. I always wondered about that with the other one." She smiled, "And Tim's little sister likes Ellie; she never trusted Delilah."

Tony made an agreeing noise, "Sarah's approval, that'll do it. I have to admit, I always liked Wheels, thought they were good together."

"And if she'd loved him enough to be faithful, they probably would have been."

Ducky overheard and sighed as he moved closer, "I don't know her social background but I have a suspicion her cheating has to do with needing to prove, to herself at least, that she is still a desirable sexy woman. That does seem to conflict with her choice to spend a year away from her lover, to prove she was still a valuable asset to her employer. Sadly, it's also apparent Timothy's support, love, and devotion to her wasn't enough, in hindsight this was a difficult situation for him. Ongoing counseling would have been more prudent. However, none of this is his problem, not any longer."

Tony noticed that Abby wasn't there yet and nearly whispered, "How's Abby doing with all this?"

Breena twisted her lips. "She's having a hard time adjusting to Tim having children who need him. He told Jimmy she's called him twice, wanting him to escort her to concerts."

"Oh geez."

Ducky sighed, "And she's not happy with Eleanor and what she perceives as her 'poaching' of Timothy."

"What? She doesn't want Tim but nobody else can have him?"

"Yes. She told Jimmy she was only nice to Delilah because Tim confronted her and Jethro and I supported him."

"Wow, that's actually a little scary."

"Ah, I'm sure she'll be all right, Anthony. It takes Abigail longer to adjust to change. Now, I suggest we change the subject, shall we?"

Breena smiled at him and launched into a story about something Victoria had done. Tony didn't know the little girl very well; he'd probably spent two hours with her over the course of her life and then only in the company of the rest of the group.

Abby came in a little later. "Hi, sorry I'm late, had to stop and get gas, then I forgot the rolls and had to go back home to get them." She'd been sitting at home, trying to think of a good excuse not to come to this thing. She still didn't believe Gibbs was McGee's father. Obviously, McGee had tricked
him somehow. Poor technophobe Gibbs.

"That's all right, Abs, we're just relaxing today." Boss steered her into the kitchen and out into the backyard.

She spotted Tony and squealed as she ran toward him. He braced himself and saw Tim give him a sympathetic look. Then she tackled him and he remembered how hard it was to breathe during an Abby hug. This one was the worst ever and his vision was going white when Boss pulled her off, sounding mad and anxious. "Abby, cut it out, he can't get any air."

Tony bent over, hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath. Jimmy put something on his face and suddenly there was air. He felt the thing and frowned, it was an oxygen mask attached to a small canister of oxygen. He looked at Palmer who was taking his pulse. "Ok, that's better. Leave that on for another minute."

Abby was upset that people didn't want her hugs anymore and stomped off into the house. Breena shook her head at Ducky when he started to go after her. "Leave her alone, let her sulk."

Tim and Ellie had been frozen in place after Jimmy got to Tony. Then a small hand tugged on Tim's sleeve and he looked at his son who said, "Daddy, how come Aunt Abby hurt Uncle Tony?"

"She didn't think about what she was doing, Tyler."

"But how come Poppy had to pull her away and she didn't apologize? You're s'posed to say sorry when you hurt someone, even if it was an accident."

Tim didn't have an answer for that and looked at his father who was still angry. Tim suddenly wanted everyone to leave except the kids, Ellie, and his father. And Tony. And the Palmers and Ducky. Ok, he wanted Abby to leave; this was his and Dad's party. He muttered something and Ellie looked at him, "What?"

"It's not about her! She always makes everything about her and this isn't. This is Tony's welcome home party, a family party but she's…never mind."

Tim walked toward the house; Ellie started to follow but saw several heads shaking no at her. Breena went past her, "I'll go. He needs to do this; it's his house and his party. But she won't listen to him so I'll repeat it."

"She'll listen to you?"

Breena gave her a grim smile, "I don't work at NCIS, she has no influence over me and she knows it."

Ellie smiled and turned around.

When Breena entered, Tim was telling Abby to grow up, get over her sulks or go home. If she wanted to be part of his family then she needed to get over herself, apologize and stay.

"Ellie told you, Bob told you, you need to think of other people, not what you need to do. Do you realize Tony could press charges? He's a federal agent and you attacked him. You've been told many times not to hug anyone that hard and especially Tony. You were there; you know what happened to his lungs. How was that being nice to your friend?"

Abby's face changed and she looked horrified. "But I wanted to welcome him home."
"Wanting to welcome him home is great. But you gave no thought to what Tony needed or wanted."

"But I always hug."

"And you hug him too hard and have to be pulled off of him. Abby, you're 46 years old, not five! My kids are better behaved than you are and they're not even three yet. It's way past time for you to grow up. I meant it the other week and I mean it now, you need to learn how to think of other people's needs before you take action. Wanting to hug them is your need, not necessarily theirs. It comforts you, not them. How many times have you hugged someone who's been hurt and hurt them more? Tony, me, Ziva, Gibbs, Ducky, we've all gone through that with you. Because you needed not because of what any of us needed."

He paused to give her a chance to say something but she appeared to be sulking. Fine, if she was going to act like a child, he'd talk to her like one.

"Abby, my 2 ½-year-old son just asked me why Aunt Abby didn't apologize to Uncle Tony when she hurt him. That we're supposed to apologize to people when we hurt them, even if it was an accident and we didn't mean to hurt them. I'm sure your parents taught you that but you have either forgotten or choose to ignore it. And you do the same thing again and again."

He softened his tone, "What happened? You and I have had two occasions recently where we've apologized to each other and meant it. I thought you'd changed, grown up, I hoped we were done with that. Guess not and I need adults who set good examples around my children, not bad. Abby, we love you, but you need to think about other people, not about what you want. It just seems like we have to watch you like we do the little ones or you manipulate everything to be about you. This was supposed to be a family party but as usual, it had to be about you. When it wasn't you made sure it was; even negative attention works for you."

She glared at him, wanting her old submissive Tim back. He wasn't having any, "Don't give me that look, I know you're pissed about what Gibbs told you yesterday. I thought you'd be happy about it, I thought you cared about us, at least Gibbs. For now, you need to apologize to Tony and the rest of us or leave, it's your choice."

"What?" She didn't think she'd ever been this angry in her life. Who was he to tell her what to do? She was Abby, the favorite; she could do whatever she damn well pleased!

"This is what I tell my children, these are your choices. You either practice the good behavior or take the consequences. Since you can't be trusted to follow good behavior on your own, I'm using the method I use on my toddlers. Apologize or leave, your choice."

Breena stepped in, "You heard him! You need to make a meaningful apology to Tony and to everyone here for hurting Tony and then drawing more attention to yourself with your stomping around and your sulking. In addition, thank Jimmy for helping Tony. Think about that, Abby, he was afraid you'd do what you did, so he and Ducky came prepared to help Tony."

Abby looked at them, eyes blazing, an ugly smirk on her face. "I don't have to stand here and listen to you two. If Gibbs wants me to apologize, then I will."

"Get out of my house." Tim was so angry, he wanted to pick her up and put her outside the door.

"Do what he says."

Abby whirled in shock at her 'silver fox'. "Gibbs!"

"This is his house and he's made the conditions plain for you staying. You've refused to apologize,
something that you should not have to be told to do. You're acting like a two-year-old throwing a tantrum. You've shown your disrespect for Tony, for Tim, for Breena and the rest of us. I'm finally seeing you in action, what other people have been subjected to for years and I'm disgusted. Now, you were asked to leave."

Whirling on her platform heels, she snatched the rolls she'd brought and marched out the front door. Tim locked it and set the deadbolt. Out in the yard, Jimmy made sure the front and back gates were locked.

Tim stood still, his eyes closed, and then opened them, thanking Breena for her help and support. Before she could say a word, she watched in shock as Gibbs crossed to him and took him into his arms. "You did good, son, so proud of you."

He sighed, "Is Tony all right?"

"Yeah and we have a party going outside. Need a minute?"

"Just waiting for her to..." They heard a hot rod burn rubber as it took off down the street. Tim huffed, "Ok, she's gone."

When the trio went back outside, Tim announced calmly that Abby had to leave and then thanked Jimmy for being prepared to help Tony. Jimmy looked at Ducky who shrugged, "We've gotten into the habit of having one of these available for Anthony anytime we think Abby is apt to hug him."

Gibbs shut his eyes and then walked over to Tony, pulled his head down and kissed the top of it. "Love you Anthony. Don't want anyone to hurt you. I'm sorry she hurt you today, I'm sorry she's hurt you before."

He looked up at the group, "I'm sorry for my part in Abby's actions over the years. If I hadn't been so gung-ho protecting her, she wouldn't have gotten away with a lot of it. Especially what she's done to Tim."

"Dad, we've talked about this." Tim looked at him and then thought about his words. Oops. He shook his head, "Well, we did say we were going to wing it!" He looked around at shocked faces. His father started to laugh and Tim leaned into him, his kids standing next to him.

"Yes, we did. All righty, here is our secondary reason for the party. When Tim got the results for the kids' DNA test, we discovered that he is not only Tyler and Bryn's father, he is my son; Shannon was his mother."

Tim quickly added, "And we decided to wait until Tony got home to tell everyone at once."

Ellie, who'd witnessed firsthand the change in their relationship, grinned. "Congratulations, Dad, Son...wow, four Gibbeses! Any more to share?"

The Gibbs men nodded and told the story of the discovery and their call to Shannon's father Mac Fielding and the grim story he'd told them. Breena and Ducky cried when they heard what had happened and Jimmy looked angrier than they'd ever seen him. Ellie had her hands in such tight fists she was afraid her fingers would break.

There was quiet when the two finished talking and Tim looked at their friends, their family. "We're all right. Somewhere, I found my way to my father without either of us knowing and we're all right. Since I got hurt in Somalia things have been getting better between us. Tony says we're mushy – but we figure we're entitled, we have decades of catching up to do. I get to meet my grandfather, Grandpa Mac soon; he's in Delaware until the weather cools down in Florida and we're planning to
bring him home so he can meet the rest of our family."

Tony chuckled, "If he's on the beach in Delaware I think you should take your family to him. Hint hint!"

Gibbs smiled and that was something they'd all noticed but thought was due to the children. Now they saw it was his son and grandchildren. "That's not a bad idea for a long weekend but we'd have to get rooms; the place he rents is pretty small."

"Or get a vacation rental."

Breena grinned, "That'd be fun! The kids would love it!"

Gibbs was back tending the grill, "Bet the kids will love this too...the meat will be done in about 3 minutes."

"Oh, I need to make the salad!" Ellie made a mad dash for the kitchen with Tim, Ty, and Bryn following close behind. Gibbs looked up with a smile, "They love to make a salad. I tell you, Tim must have been a lot of fun when he was little if his kids are anything like him."

Breena grinned and then said "Vegetables! I need to heat them up."

She ran inside and Victoria looked around, asking Jimmy, "Daddy, where are Ty and Brynie?"

"They're helping Unca Tim in the kitchen. Would you like to help your mom?"

She thought about it, "No thank you, I'll help Unca Jefwo."

Unca Jefwo asked her to fill one of the kids' watering cans; he placed it just below the grill. "That's for safety, Victoria."

She nodded solemnly and Gibbs smiled at her.

A minute later he said, "Victoria, would you please go ask Unca Tim for a big plate?"

"Ok, be right back!"

She disappeared and Gibbs turned to Jimmy, "She's a sweetie."

"Thanks! Tim and I have been joking about uniting our families in about 30 years."

Gibbs laughed. "Don't tell the kids, they'll run for their lives!" He paused, "Thanks for helping Tony with the oxygen; I was getting worried until I saw you with it."

"You're welcome. His lungs are doing all right, actually really well for the damage they sustained - we keep in touch with Dr. Pitt. But there's no need to take unnecessary risks or cause him more damage!"

"With you 100%.

"Congratulations on your new family, it was horrible the way it happened but I'm glad you two found each other. Pretty cool."

Gibbs beamed, "Yeah, it is. I can't believe how good it feels to be a dad again! And a granddad, all at once!"
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Surprise! It's rainy (California still needs rain and maybe this will roll over to the areas of the US burning up with drought) and gloomy Saturday here, my Christmas shopping is done, my ancient car doesn't do well in wet weather so I decided you all need another chapter to read. This is an important one, pay special attention to the first part, right down past the first scene cut (the NCIS's). And there's a surprise later on in the chapter. He he.

Chapter 20

They sat at the table and when Ty held his hands out for grace, the others each took a hand on either side. Poppy looked at Tim whose eyes widened but he gave himself a few seconds before speaking his grace. "Thank you for the food we're about to eat, thank you for the love of our family and friends here and elsewhere, please ease the heart of our angry friend, let her find her way back home and help me find a way through my own anger. Thank you for the safe return and health of our Tony, thank you for Ducky and Jimmy's foresight, thank you for our babies, Victoria, Bryn and Tyler, and thank you for my new family."

He stopped and Jimmy added, "And please bless our new child on its way." There were cheers as the family congratulated Breena and Jimmy. Tim nodded to himself as he looked around; yep this was family!

He smiled as Ellie nudged him, he nudged her back, and they played footsie under the table. The food was passed around; they dug in, enjoying their feast and talking about the new changes.

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While they were enjoying themselves, Abby was still upset and fuming. She drove around for a while, finally finding herself outside of a familiar building. She pulled up and sat in the car for a solid hour before finally saying, "I need help."

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After the party, Ellie offered to stay with the kids so Tim could meet Chalmers for coffee. Tony asked to go too; he wanted to meet the agent before he went back to work. That surprised Tim but he agreed with a smile.

When the two of them walked into the coffee shop, Bob was already there, just finishing a dessert. He was savoring the last bite and didn't see the two men approaching him. When they sat down, he looked up, "Glad you're good guys or I could be dead!"

They laughed and Tony liked him for outing himself as having been off-guard, it was something he would do, both the miss and the quip. Tim introduced Tony and they shook hands over the table. Tim smiled, "We're here because Tony wanted to meet the guy we've been talking about and I've got a personal thing I wanted to tell you."
Bob smiled, a little nervous. "Ok."

"It's kind of crazy but you've been around us long enough now to know we thrive on crazy."

He relaxed with a grin, "Really, I hadn't noticed!"

He smiled at the twin smirks he got in reply.

Tim took a breath, "You know about the kids - how they're mine and how that happened. What you
don't know is that the same DNA test had a couple of surprises for me. One, I'm not a McGee by
birth and I did not know that I was adopted. I actually still don't, we haven't found any adoption
papers filed anywhere. The second and more important surprise is that the DNA results showed my
birth parents; that is my father as my mother's DNA wasn't registered and she's deceased. However,
my dad, he's someone we know. In a few weeks, I'll be announcing a name change, from Timothy
McGee to Timothy Gibbs, son of Leroy Jethro Gibbs."

"Wow, you're Boss's son?"

Tim nodded happily and Bob grabbed his hand for a shake, "That's awesome Tim, congratulations!"

Tony added, "Actually, he's going from Timothy no middle name McGee to Timothy Jackson
Gibbs."

"TJG, nice set of initials!"

Tim beamed at his friends, "Thanks, I've always wanted a middle name and Dad vetoed me using
Leroy or Jethro. So Jackson it is and I'm pretty damn happy about it!"

Tony was looking at Bob's empty plate. "What was that, Bob, pie?"

"Yes, one of the best slices of key lime pie I've ever had."

"Mm, that's my favorite too. Gotta have some."

Tim looked surprised and Tony said, "What? I need to repatriate myself; get used to being an
American again after a month in the old world. And key lime pie is definitely one of the many
wonderful things about this country!"

Their server arrived with their coffees and Tony ordered two slices of key lime pie. When Tim
frowned, Tony nudged him, "You'll thank me. If we didn't get any for you, you'd be all, I want some
but I shouldn't. This way, no decision, it's there on the table in front of you!"

Tim dropped his head in shame and more laughter as Bob said, "You don't have anything to worry
about, you could eat the whole pie and burn it off running after your kids!"

Tony pointed his spoon at Bob. "You're all right Chalmers!" He nudged Tim, "Does he know the
rules yet?"

"The ones that have come up."

Bob recited the ones he'd learned: 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 15, 18 and 23.

Tony let out a low whistle. "Uh oh, who messed with Gibbs' coffee?"

"Nobody, it was just a friendly caution on our first case."
"And 13?"

"Dealing with the kids' mothers' lawyer. And something else...oh, yeah I had appointments with a lawyer about the kids. Thirteen got mentioned a lot that day."

Tony snorted, "Still better than Gibbs having a divorce lawyer on speed dial!"

Bob's eyebrows lifted but he didn't say anything and Tony thought, *Good, he's curious but already knows when not to ask. Thank you Tim! Wish it hadn't taken me so long to learn!*

"And 6, of course."

Tim shook his head, "Dad's revising that. He hates apologies for things like bumping into each other, you know, saying 'sorry' as a social nicety. But he's finally acknowledging that apologies when there's been a problem are a sign of strength and frequently necessary to fix things."

Tony looked at Tim, "Still weird to hear you call him Dad. And...that's why she had to leave."

"She owed you an apology and refused to do it. I gave her the same choice I give my babies, either practice the good behavior or accept the consequences. In her case, the consequence was that she leave. She's angry at me for being Gibbs' kid, she hates that people are standing up to her and she really hates that she just can't do what she wants anymore, can't walk all over people and then whine and have Gibbs or Ducky protect her poor sweet little misunderstood self."

Tony opened his mouth to tell Bob who they were talking about but saw he knew. Which was disturbing. Bob was frowning, "She's angry at you for being Gibbs' son?"

"Yes and I'd bet a month's salary she believes I tricked him somehow, that I manipulated the data or changed the test results. The ones Vance gave me that were processed by an outside lab. Oops."

Bob shook his head, "Sorry, was thinking about pie, didn't catch your last sentence."

Tony said, "Huh?" and Tim relaxed.

"Seriously, that's scary thinking." Tony nodded his agreement while Tim shrugged.

"Is she jealous?"

"Oh yeah. Has been for a while now. She was much happier when I was the 'outcast' of the team or thought I was and she could get me into all kinds of trouble with Gibbs. That started to change several years ago and she's been unhappy about it."

"Wow. Tell you the truth, I had no idea the forensics folks were so involved with the teams. I've only worked with a couple other teams and there was interaction, sure, but it was all professional."

"Yeah, we hear that's the case elsewhere. For all her idiosyncrasies, Abby is a hell of a forensic scientist; I've lost count of how many of our cases she's busted open for us. And to be honest, her brilliant work is the reason her behavior is tolerated."

Tim was enjoying a bite of pie and had to admit it was good to be out with his friends for a break. He loved his kids but he knew he needed time for himself too. So did his father, he was glad he'd seen Fornell yesterday.

They didn't stay late; it was a 'school' night for Bob, Tim and Ellie who still had to drive home from Tim's place. The kids were ready for bed when he got home and he tucked them in, kissing them
goodnight. Ellie said she wasn't in a hurry and the pair finally had some private time together. She did eventually get home – in time to shower and change for work. She knew she could easily fall in love with Tim, was already partway there and worried about them going faster than he was prepared to go or should go. After all, his split from Delilah, with an engagement ring in his pocket, was only a few weeks in the past. She knew she wasn't on the rebound, she'd dated a few men after her divorce from Jake, a couple more than once, but she should have waited for Tim to…what, date someone else? In the middle of the chaos his life had been recently? Still, when it was right it was right and this was the rightest Ellie had ever felt and Tim felt the same way, he'd told her last night. Not sure if there was anything she should do differently, she resolved to call her mother that night.

As Gibbs drove to work, he thought about the situation. Bishop apparently didn't know how early he was usually up and really, there was no reason she should. However, if she'd known, she might have moved her truck from Tim's driveway. He'd seen it when he went to get the paper; in the same place she parked it when she arrived for the party. Tim must have squeezed the Acura by it when he and Tony left to meet Chalmers. It was gone by the time he left for work and she was at her desk when he returned with coffee. Quietly wishing her a good morning, he handed her a 20-ounce coffee, blended just the way she liked it.

She looked up with a smile, "Thanks, Gibbs, that was thoughtful."

Leaving coffee for Chalmers, Gibbs sat at his desk. Usually he took a CafPow to Abby but he just wasn't feeling it this morning. On the other hand, she was their forensic scientist and worked very hard on their cases. Tim and Tony had talked with him about her, pointing out that he'd stepped up for her voluntarily, and it wouldn't be right to just abandon her. Asking her to change was one thing, cutting all ties because she was angry and confused about what was happening was quite another and the boys knew none of them wanted that.

Tim had already mentioned it to him a few times and he'd had to think about it. He'd done it before, with his own father. Instead of dealing with their problems, he'd cut Jack from his life completely. They'd spent too many years apart and here he was, about to do it again with Abby. He grunted, looked like he had some growing up to do too!

He stood up, checked to make sure he had money for the CafPow machine and tilted his head toward the rear elevators when Bishop glanced at him. She watched him walk away and smiled, he must be going to the lab because he was very much dragging his feet. It was the right thing to do though and she should do it too. At some point. Maybe not today.

Chalmers arrived and smiled at the coffee, looking at Ellie. She wished him a good morning and told him the coffee was Gibbs' treat this morning. He opened his mouth to say something about the news and then remembered they were in a very public bullpen, one with good acoustics. He rolled his eyes and smiled, giving her thumbs up and she chuckled. Didn't take long to learn the finer points of nonverbal communications on this team!

Gibbs carried the CafPow to the lab and was relieved to find the music at medium strength. Abby had her back to the door, working on something. Her hair was different, pulled back in a ponytail. That was good, it looked more professional and those pigtails had gotten old years ago. He put her drink down and waited until she looked like she was at a breaking point. Then he took a breath, "'Morning Abby."

She spun around and looked at him, giving him a small smile. "Gibbs, you're here, I'm glad…thank you."

"Don't have to thank me for coming to see you. Brought your drink." He paused before continuing, "Are you all right? I know things were rough yesterday but we missed you. You didn't get to see
"jaws dropping when we had our big reveal."

She blinked, "They didn't know?"

"Nope, told you and Tony on Saturday. Everyone else was yesterday."

"Oh...I didn't realize, thank you for doing that. I...needed the extra time." She paused, "Gibbs..."

She stopped again, "When it's convenient, I'd like to speak with you and Tim."

"That'd be great, Abs. I don't know what Tim's schedule is tonight, let me check and get back to you."

"Ah...it can wait."

He crossed the room and kissed her cheek, "Doesn't need to, we want to talk too."

She nodded, saying, "Uh, I have to get this done. O'Brien's team caught a case early this morning."

"So I heard. Ok, one of us will let you know."

She took a deep breath as he walked out the door, she'd survived and even better, Gibbs had come to see her. After hours spent ranting, crying and then talking, with a lot more crying, with Sister Rosita yesterday, she felt like she'd been through one of those old-fashioned meat grinders. The ones that hooked on a countertop or breadboard and had to have the handle turned to work. Her mother had had one that she'd gotten from her mother. Abby ordered her mind to stick to the topic and felt an enormous sense of relief settling on her. She stood still and let it envelop her whole body.

Gibbs waited until he got into the elevator and then stopped to take a deep breath. That was good, much better than he'd expected. Now he looked forward to the day. When he got to his desk, Chalmers caught his eye and smiled his congratulations. Gibbs let his face show his happy response and then got to work.

Tim arrived shortly after, having taken the kids to daycare first and found his team catching up on paper work and cold cases. He greeted them all with a smile, noticing that Ellie was smiling and Dad...Boss, for Pete's sake, was relaxed, as relaxed as he ever was here. He hoped that meant things with Abby had gone all right this morning. He found out when he logged on and found an e-mail from Boss. An e-mail! He couldn't remember the last time Boss had voluntarily composed and sent out an e-mail. Forwarded, sure, he could handle that. This one said that things had gone better than expected with Abby this morning and she'd asked to speak with them, both of them. Would tonight be all right?

Tim thought about that. He was tired, running on very little sleep and he felt like he needed a little more space. He wanted to curl up with his kids, spend some time with them. Maybe have dinner with Poppy and Tony and then some play in the wading pool and an early night. He understood they all wanted to move forward but as tired as he was, both physically and emotionally, he was a little afraid his temper would flare again. He fiddled around with his reply, finally just saying tonight wasn't good, tomorrow would be better if that worked for Abby.

Then he got to work! With four weeks to go until he left on leave, he needed to buckle down and make sure all the paperwork was done properly; he didn't want to leave a mess for Tony. Eyes on his monitor, he didn't look up until he felt a presence, Ellie. "My turn for the lunch run."

"Oh, yeah, uh, where are you going today?"

"The deli."
"Ok, then turkey with provolone, avocado, lettuce, tomato, dash of mayo and mustard, on a ciabatta roll." He glanced at Chalmers who'd made a noise, now he mouthed key lime pie at him. "Bishop, better make that whole wheat bread. I forgot I had pie yesterday. And a large diet coke please, I need more caffeine!"

She bit back a smile, nodding at the changes. Tim was almost tempted to ask to go with her but he knew how early Dad got up to get the paper, knew he would have seen Ellie's truck still in his driveway at 0500. Asking for time with her now would be suicidal, blood relative or not! He made a mental note to speak with Abby about his growing relationship with Ellie.

After they ate, Gibbs announced they were going to the firing range; Tim managed not to groan. He knew this was Boss's subtle way of saying he knew neither he nor Ellie had had much, if any, sleep last night. Yeah, they could have a case and yeah, their reflexes would be off and that could affect the whole team. He was right.

Ellie was wondering why they were going again already, they'd just been and usually only went together once every few months. Then she saw the stoic look on Tim's face and realized Gibbs must know about their night together.

Bob had noticed the attraction between Tim and Ellie, remembered Tim mentioning Ellie was staying with the kids while he was out last night and that Gibbs lived a few doors down from Tim. After that, it was easy to reach a conclusion. He may not have been an agent for as long as the others but he was an able investigator.

All four of them did fine shooting at targets although Tim would be the first to admit he had to concentrate harder than usual. When they were handed their scores, he nodded. He'd matched his previous score but he got the message.

Gibbs sent Chalmers to the car and then stood glaring at his two lovebirds. Finally pacing behind them, and growling, "Don't ever do that again," he smacked the back of both their heads and stalked off. Tim pulled Ellie along, "Come on, he'll leave without us!" He was letting the a/c cool the interior of the car when they climbed into the backseat and did his best ninja driving on the way back to the Yard.

Tim wasn't sure what personal protocols might be in place after work, but he'd wanted to spend time with his kids anyway. He picked them up from daycare and headed home, hot, tired and dispirited. The three of them got in their swim gear, he filled the toddler pool and he sat in it while they played around him. When their tummies started rumbling he picked them up, tucking each under an arm and carried them to their towels. Shrieking with laughter, they allowed him to dry them off and then tried to help dry him off. He wrapped his towel around him and they marched into the kitchen to find something for dinner. While leftovers from last night heated up, he checked his phone and found a text from Tony. "WTF wrong with Boss? Grouchy!"

Tim replied, "My bad, explain later."

They were just finishing eating when there was a knock and then a key turning in the lock, Dad. The kids greeted him enthusiastically while Tim got busy cleaning up the kitchen. Then he felt a calloused hand on his neck, "Tim."

"Dad I'm sorry. We finally had some time to ourselves and…next thing we knew it was daylight. Won't happen again." He turned, "I just don't want you to think I was taking advantage of our situation. I wasn't thinking about that, believe me."

"And I'm sorry too; I came down on you two pretty hard. I know you wouldn't take advantage of our
situation but I felt like I needed to be Super Boss to get my point across and avoid any show of favoritism." He sighed, "There's a reason we're not allowed on the same team."

Ignoring his feelings for the moment, Tim nodded, "I can start my leave. I'm sure Vance can bring in an additional TAD."

His father looked at him and reaching up cupped his face. "The one time you get caught bending a rule and you think I'm throwing you out?"

"I thought…"

"No. Lessons learned for both of us, all three of us. Unless you want out, I expect you in the bullpen as planned."

Tim nodded and then turned away. "Timothy."

"Dad, I'm really tired and so are the kid; we're going to have an early night tonight. If you want to stay and help with baths and story time, that'd be great." He took a breath, "Have you set something up with Abby yet?"

"No."

"I'm thinking Wednesday or Thursday evening might be better."

He heard the sounds of his kids being released from their booster seats and then strong arms wrapped around him. "Son."

"Don't know how you feel but I'm feeling pretty slammed with everything. Breakup, foster kids, moving twice or however many times, fatherhood, us, new relationship, telling everyone, Abby's crap, Sarah leaving, this…I'm exhausted. Doesn't matter that just about everything that's happened is good, wonderful, it's still new and all at once."

"You need some downtime. I'll take the kids to daycare tomorrow, you take the day off."

"Dad."

"If we get a case I'll borrow someone, you're off."

Tim felt a giggle rising, he must be more tired than he thought. "Maybe Tony and I trade days of leave. He works tomorrow and I'm off, then we swap back."

"You know that's a paperwork nightmare but it's a good idea. However, you two swap two days at a time. If we get a case, don't want you swapping in the middle of it. And don't know what either of you has planned."

"I want to spend a day with Sarah, just the two of us. And then…maybe take the k-i-d-s to a b-e-a-c-h."

"Sounds like fun!"

The two of them were on the sofa, Tim leaning into his dad, the kids curled into them. As he relaxed, he had another thought about the beach and meeting Mac for the first time. "Would you mind if I went to Delaware by myself? The first time I mean."

"No, that's a good idea, you two get to know each other. See if you can get him to come back with you."
"Yeah, that's what I was thinking. Fourth of July is coming up."

"Hmm, be a good weekend for that vacation rental."

"Uh Dad, I think rentals for holiday weekends are booked months in advance."

"Maybe…unless you know someone."

Tim looked at him. "And you do…of course. Where were you stationed together?"

Dad chuckled, "His father, not him. But we've kept in touch."

"And he just happens to have a rental available that weekend that's big enough for all of us?"

"Yep. Four Gibbses, three and a half Palmers, Rob, DiNozzo, Ellie, Ducky, Abby, and there's space for Bob if he wants to come. You and I are off starting Thursday night, back to work Wednesday and we can knock two days apiece off our leave time. The others can come up whenever they want, drive over Friday after work, drive home on Monday, up to them."

"Wow! How much?"

"Figured we'd split it by number in each party. So the Gibbses will pay five parts counting Rob, Palmers pay three and everyone else one. Don't have the final figures yet, doing some horse trading."

"Yeah?"

"Gonna take my tool box and fix a few things. Take me two hours max and will save the owner over a thousand bucks so a big chunk needs to come off the price. We need to decide whether to lower the overall price or apply the discount to us."

"Overall."

"Ok, that's what I thought but wanted your opinion."

"Take the Acura and the truck too?"

"Depends what tools I need. Probably both, then someone can ride with me."

"What about Fornell?"

"If he has Emily. If not, he'll want to work, I'll call him tomorrow."

"That's two more rooms."

"Or one more and he and I can share."

"Rob and I can share too."

"Thought that might perk him up, gonna be hard on him when Sarah leaves. Those two see more of each other than you do."

"Yeah, I know. Hope he can get time off." Tim shook his head, "I'd better make sure we meet Mac beforehand; he's gonna be overwhelmed with the whole clan!"

Gibbs relaxed; glad he and his son had gotten through the rough patch. When it got very quiet, Gibbs looked down, chuckling softly when he saw that his son and grandkids were asleep, mostly curled
up with each other, with Tim still leaning into him. He carefully moved Tim and then peeled off the little ones, carrying them upstairs to their rooms. They could have baths in the morning; he undressed them, put their jammies on and tucked them into bed, kissing them goodnight.

Back downstairs, he was tempted to wake his boy but finally settled on maneuvering him to lay flat on the couch with a pillow under his head. Removing his socks, he covered him with a blanket, kissed his forehead, checked the kitchen to make sure everything was put away and then let himself out the front.

Back at his house, he found Tony had been watching a movie but, still jetlagged, was now sound asleep. Laughing to himself, he turned the movie off and repeated for Tony what he'd done for Timothy. When he was done, he straightened up, smiling. Now his children were taken care of!
Chapter 21

Tim woke up on the couch during the night and went upstairs to his own bed. Checking his phone, he was amused to see his father had turned it off. So much for Rule 3!

He woke at his usual time Tuesday morning, feeling much better. He laughed later when he checked his e-mail and found one with an attached leave request form filled in for him, with Gibbs' electronic signature. Pam Cook sent him a copy with Vance's electronic signature and a smiley face asking him to also sign and return. He did so and then got the kids up and ready for their day. While they ate breakfast, he called Mac. For all he knew the man had plans for the day, then Tim would reschedule.

His grandfather was thrilled he was coming for a visit today; he had no plans and told Tim to bring his swim stuff. Tim laughed, telling him it was already in the car. He took the kids to day care, telling them he'd be out of town for the day and their grandfather or Uncle Tony would pick them up that evening. He felt a little guilty for doing this without them but felt he really needed to do it by himself. Selfishly, he wanted some time with his grandfather before the kids met him.

The drive to Fenwick was about 2 ½ hours and Tim made good time. He pulled up at his grandfather's bungalow about 10:30 and looked at the view as he gathered his belongings, camera, beach bag and iPad with all of his photos. The place was literally on the beach and every bit as small as Mac had told them.

He hoped their rental was nearby and did a 180 turn, looking for any large houses. He smiled when he saw the large two-story Victorian beach house right across the street and wondered if it would be theirs for the July 4th holiday. He knocked on the door of the bungalow and smiled as it was quickly opened by an older man, nearly as tall as he was with close to the same build and the same hair. Tim was relieved to see that at nearly 80, Mac's hair was still on his head, although thin.

"Hi Grandpa, I'm Tim!"

"Know you anywhere son, like looking in a mirror. Well more like an old photo of me."

They hugged and Mac kissed him, holding onto him and whispering how glad he was he'd survived, his baby grandson. Tim understood this man's grief was similar to that of his father. Mac lost his only child and not one but two grandbabies although he'd had 8 years with Kelly. Then his marriage had tanked although that was probably a blessing.

Eventually they entered the house and Tim smiled, it was a charming little beach house, perfect for a single person or a very close couple. Mac returned his smile, "I don't spend much time indoors here. Rainy days mostly but even then I'll head over to the clubhouse."

"Do you rent this house every year?"

His grandfather winked, "Used to but I bought it after we talked. With you, Jethro and my great grands so close, I couldn't resist. I've rented this place for about 9 years now. Had an apartment up here before that, rented it with a friend every year but she died and it was more than I wanted to maintain."

"Sorry you lost her."

"She was a good woman and we had 18 years together, much happier than with my ex. I met her up
here and it was her idea to move to Florida for the winter and early spring and then live up here on
the beach the rest of the year. We would have married but she had her finances all set up and neither
of us cared if we made it legal.” He chuckled, "Turned out she left me a good chunk of her estate so
it wouldn't have mattered but it saved us wasting time on paperwork!"

Tim smiled, "Hey, I'm in law enforcement, I know all about paperwork!"

"C'mon, it's a little early for a swim but I've got my chairs and umbrella down there, we can have a
drink and talk. I hope you brought pictures!"

"I brought my tablet which has all my pictures!"

"Will it be all right in the sand and the damp?"

"Yes, I have a cover on it so nothing can get into the electronics."

"Smart thinking! Now, the bathroom's to your right; go change and I'll help you with the sunscreen."
He laughed at the surprised look on Tim's face. "I'm as pale as you in the winter. Before they started
marketing sunscreen around the time you were born, I had to use zinc oxide and wear long sleeves.
So my nose and arms would be pale, my face a little pink because I wore hats in the sun and my legs
and feet were always red."

"Wow, I've never thought about it but I'm lucky to have been born after it was available."
He quickly changed his clothes, slipped on his flip flops, grabbed a shirt, towel, sunglasses, sun hat,
tablet and lastly his sunscreen rated SPF 50, stuffing everything but the sunscreen into a smaller bag.
He quickly slathered the sunscreen on what he could reach. In the main room, Grandpa Mac took the
tube from him and slathered it on his back.

Putting the cap back on, his grandfather chuckled as he handed it back to Tim. "Guess there's
something new or you just haven't told me."

"Huh?"

"It's been a while, but I still recognize a love bite when I see one."

Tim's eyes almost popped out of his head, he'd forgotten! Laughing, he nodded. "Busted! Yes, I've
been dating or trying to date someone but with kids, work, and everything going on it's been tough to
have any private time together. We were finally successful the other night." He leaned in closer, "We
got in trouble though."

"What? I have to hear this! Let's get outside first."

The two of them walked down to what looked like a permanent encampment on the sand, complete
with chairs, reclining lounge chairs, two umbrellas heavily weighted down and a locked cooler.

"I take a walk on the beach in the morning; put the day's ice in along with drinks, sandwiches,
books, whatever I might want that day. Makes it easier, then I only have to go up to the house once,
for the bathroom."

"Don't the books get damp?"

"Ha, knew you were my grandson! Love that's your first concern, just like your sister and your
mother!"
Tim grinned; he loved that.

"The books are wrapped in double plastic storage bags. And there's a tray that fits in the top of the cooler, sandwiches and books go there so neither get soggy."

As they sat down, Mac opened the cooler. "See, everything's all set up."

Tim peered inside and then at his grandfather. "I didn't say...didn't want to brag."

"But I like wordplay and I figured out years ago that Thom E. Gemcity is an anagram for Timothy McGee. When your father called and said your adopted name was Timothy McGee, I decided that was you. My grandson, the famous author!"

Tim laughed, "It's been interesting, I'll tell you that. And the money has really helped us recover from years of poverty."

"Tell me about your life, Tim. About your sister, brothers and your life as a Navy brat, when you should have been a Marine brat."

Tim smiled, "Devil dog brat."

"That so?"

"What my dad tells me. How about we look at pictures and I'll tell you about the more interesting ones."

"All right."

They sat for over two hours with Mac looking at his photos and listening to his stories. He started with the most current ones so Mac would know who was who when everyone showed up for the Fourth of July. He went back as far as Ziva's last year and then went to his earliest photos and started forward. Mac carefully studied the photos of Tim as a baby with the McGees. "You certainly don't look premature."

"I remember going to the doctor a lot in Puerto Rico where we lived until I was about 3 but it was normal to me. I think I had frequent checkups, I don't remember being sick. I have allergies, asthma and a problem with seasickness but other than that I'm fine."

"That's good son."

Eventually they got hungry and ate the sandwiches Mac had purchased that morning. "Normally I just make peanut butter and jelly but I wanted something special for today, so I went to the deli. I got turkey, seems pretty neutral."

When he described the sandwich, Tim grinned, "That's my usual Monday sandwich." At his grandfather's questioning look, he explained, "We eat in the office as we rarely have time to go out and we trade off weeks for getting lunch. Over the years, we've established a routine: Deli on Monday, Italian on Tuesday, Thai or Cuban on Wednesday when we need a little more spice for the rest of the week, Greek or Polish on Thursday. Friday is Chinese because we take whatever is leftover home or if we're working the weekend, we stash it in the breakroom refrigerator."

"So today you're missing...Italian?"

"Pizza usually yes. That's also our team dinner of choice. When we have tough cases, we don't go home until we can't investigate any further. The pizza and Chinese places deliver, most of the others..."
"What do you mean you don't go home?"

"We work until we run into a brick wall in our investigation. Might be because it's after midnight and we can't reach anyone we need to talk to or we're waiting for warrants or for electronic searches to give us more information. Depending on what time it is and how soon we estimate we can get back to work, Boss will send us home for a few hours or order us to get some shuteye at our desks. If we've been there more than two days straight, our director now dictates we go home for at least 8 hours. Usually we rotate that so that there's always two of us working and two getting some sleep. We all keep extra clothes there and there are showers in the gym."

"But no beds or cots?"

"No, Boss says they used to have them but regulations forced the agencies to get rid of them."

"Do you get confused at work, between Boss and Dad?"

"Not too much; it's easier now that the whole team knows and I'll only be working for him for three more weeks and three days. Going to be so strange!"

"Tell me about your dad. It's been so many years."

"I met him twelve years ago on a terrorist case out of Norfolk. I was working down there and a dead body showed up that I had no authority to investigate. So I called in the Major Case Response Team from the DC Navy Yard and that's when I met him. Tim grinned. "I followed procedures, wore a face mask and gloves and he made a little fun of me. I stood up to him and he liked that, kept requesting me for TAD to the Navy Yard. The man I met then is a lot different from the Gibbs I know now, even before I knew he was my father."

"How so?"

"He was a hard ass Marine; didn't put up with anything. Lived by strict rules and demanded his team did too. Never smiled, one of his nicer nicknames is 'Stone Face'. He can tear you apart with his tongue but we call him our functional mute. On our team, you quickly learn nonverbal communication skills or you don't last. It's funny to watch, we can have an entire conversation without saying a word, not even signing. We didn't realize that until our director clipped some security footage of our bullpen and showed us.

"We all know ASL, which is American Sign Language; it's saved our butts a few times. With Gibbs, when you're in trouble you know it, he's very direct and when it's over, it's over. If you ever need help, he's there for you. He handpicks his team members and it's still viewed as a blessing and a curse to be assigned to him. I was hazed, pranked, and teased when I transferred in, but after the years on the street, it wasn't bad and I learned so much. The man I work for now has mellowed quite a bit. He'll pat our shoulders; tell us he's proud of us, that we've done a good job. He'd never have done that even 8 years ago."

"What changed?"

"Us, I think. Three of us were together on his team for 8 years and we went through some tumultuous times. Over the years, the team, our Medical Examiners and our Forensic scientist have become family. At first we were a work family, now we're family outside of work too. We've lost people and that's brought us closer together. My first year on the team, we lost a teammate to a terrorist and we've lost more over the years. One of our previous directors was Dad's former agent
and…a former girlfriend. She was killed in the line of duty several years ago. Dad's best friend and actually the agent who took over Mom and Kelly's case was killed on a case four years ago. That was tough, he was Dad's first boss at the agency and they kept in touch when Mike retired. When Dad got too crazy or hurt, we'd call Mike and he'd come up from his beach in Mexico and straighten out 'his Probie'. When he died, we felt we'd lost one of us, part of the family. He was the last of the cowboys, Mike Franks."

"I know that name. Yes, from Shannon and Kelly's case, I remember. Tall skinny guy, always looked like he needed a shave, talked with a southern twang."

Tim smiled, "Born and bred in Louisiana; served as a Marine in Vietnam. Took care of Dad after the girls died. Made sure he ate and slept. If it weren't for him, I don't think Jethro Gibbs would be alive now."

Mac sighed, "We certainly weren't there for him. Joann blamed him for everything. I was too shattered to be much help to anyone. I assumed Jack would have been there for him."

"No. They had a falling out at the funeral, before or after I don't know and they didn't speak for 15 years. No one knew Boss had any family until we caught a case that took us to Stillwater. We didn't even know about Shannon and Kelly until Boss was hurt and woke up missing over a decade of memory. To him, he'd just been told the girls were dead. That's when we first met Franks, he was the only one Boss recognized. He left and went to Mexico with Mike; we didn't see or hear from him for three months."

"But you said you knew Jack."

Tim smiled, "I did; we all did. After the case in Stillwater, the two reconciled and Jack came down for Christmas that year. He brought candy into the office and made an instant hit. We had him for 6 years after that. He'd come down a couple of times a year and we'd see him. He treated us like he would his grandkids and when he died; he left each of us a letter and a personalized photo album."

Tim had to swallow, "I loved him, the only grandfather I'd ever known. He told us stories about Boss as a kid. That was fun. One year he stayed with Boss over the summer and we saw Jack with Mike Franks and Tobias Fornell, he's one of Dad's best friends. I'll tell you more about him later. Anyway, when Jack and Mike were both there, poor Boss almost didn't know what to do, his two father figures in the same room! We thought the house would implode from all that energy!"

Mac asked about Fornell and in the course of explaining Tobias, Tim mentioned the three ex-wives.

"Jethro has three ex-wives?"

"Yes, all beautiful strong women, redheads. Unfortunately, none of them magically turned into Shannon once they were married."

"Have you met them?"

Tim tried to stop his shudder but Mac caught it and started laughing. He laughed so hard he had tears rolling down his face. Finally, he stopped and caught his breath, drinking the water Tim pulled out of the cooler.

"Oh my Timothy that was priceless. Now you have to tell me and you said this Tobias was married to one of them?"

"Yes, he describes himself as the second ex-husband of Dad's first ex-wife."
"You have to love them being able to tease about it."

"You should see them whenever she's around! Tobias and Diane have a daughter together, Emily, so they have to be in contact. Tobias refers to Diane as 'the devil's spawn' or 'she-devil' and Dad just shudders. And I've had to spend more time with her than I liked…she cried all over me!" Then he told them the story of Col. Mann, Director Jenny Shepard and ex-wife number three, Stephanie, all meeting at NCIS and Gibbs' attempts to melt into the carpet. "And of course we were fascinated, current girlfriend, past girlfriend and former wife; as Tony put it, like a train wreck you can't help but watch."

"And what about the second one?"

"Rebecca. Yes, we met her last year. She and Diane teamed up, showed up at a crime scene; that was frightening!"

"And no children from the three of them?"

Tim shook his head and Mac was silent, apparently out of questions. Tim wanted to know about his mother as she was growing up and heard some wonderful stories. When one of Mac's friends walked down the beach, he asked why they hadn't been in the water yet and they laughed, they'd been so busy talking most of the afternoon was gone and Tim needed to leave in an hour. They went for a wade just so Tim could say he'd been in.

The drive home seemed to take longer but Tim smiled the whole way. His grandfather was excited about the Fourth of July invasion and could hardly wait to meet his great grandchildren, Ellie and of course see his son-in-law after so many years. When Tim later told him Tobias Fornell would be there he chuckled, "Oh, I'm going to get some Jethro stories out of him; this is going to be fun!"
Chapter 22

At home, Dad, Ellie and the kids were curious about Grandpa Mac and Tim showed them the photos they'd taken as well as those he'd been given to digitize, those with Shannon from babyhood to her wedding pictures. Tim and Dad agreed they'd keep just one with Joann, the photo taken when the Fieldings brought their new baby daughter home from the hospital.

Tim spent the next day with Sarah; she chose their fun for the day, a trip to Point Lookout State Park in Maryland. She said she wanted to remember warm weather and swimming while she was in London. Thinking it funny he was on a beach two days in a row, this time Tim did more than wade. After promising themselves they'd hike along Periwinkle Point trail, they spent the day in the water, floating, swimming, playing, talking and having a lot of fun. He'd brought his cooler and they stopped for deli food before they reached the beach. He laughed when he ordered, telling Sarah about his turkey sandwiches two days in a row. Today he decided to live dangerously and had roast beef on the ciabatta roll he'd denied himself on Monday and a large can of icy cold sweet tea. After they ate, they swam and played again, eventually treating themselves to ice cream from the stand next to the store. It wasn't until the drive home that they realized they hadn't had their hike. Tim laughed, "That's okay, we'll come visit you in the UK next summer and have a hike of some sort there."

Sarah smiled, "Promise? Because I'm going to be so homesick by then."

"I promise; if you're there we will be too."

Tony moved home to his apartment and the Gibbeses all missed him. When Ty asked why Uncle Tony wasn't living with Poppy anymore, Tim arranged for a visit to his apartment. It was time for the kids to expand their horizons. Once Tony got through freaking out and, as he put it, 'cleansing' his home, he enjoyed the kids' visit. If Ty or Bryn wondered why Unca Tony had a shower curtain hanging over a bookcase in the living room, they didn't ask and Tim decided not to remind Tony that although he appreciated his covering up his DVD porn collection (he knew what lived on those shelves!), his kids couldn't read. They loved meeting fishy Kate and Ziva and Ty did ask if they'd gone on the plane to 'Urp' with him. Uncle Tony paused while he imagined carting the fish bowl around 'Urp' and then told the kids that Kate and Ziva had stayed down the hall with a friend while he was away.

Abby came over to Gibbs' home one evening insisting on bringing dinner for the Gibbeses and apologizing for her behavior. She'd already apologized to Tony, treating him to dinner after helping him move back to his apartment. Now she told the adult Gibbeses she'd spent hours with her friend Sister Rosita after she left the family party and finally accepted she had problems that had been simmering for years and needed professional help. She'd made an appointment with Dr. Cranston, had her first session that Monday, and would have another one on Thursday. Relieved that she was welcomed by all four Gibbeses and forgiven by Tim and his father, she relaxed, played with the kids and slept better that night than she had in weeks. She opted out of the Fourth of July weekend at the beach, explaining she'd decided to take a few days to visit her brother and niece in New Orleans.

Back at work after his two days off (and Tony's two days on), Tim was glad to dig into a cold case and see what new information could be found. Chalmers found a lead on one he was working on and within a couple of days, he'd identified the killer; the young man, a troubled teen at the time of the murder, was apprehended and the rest was up to the courts and the lawyers.
The last weekend in June, Rob and Tim drove Sarah to the airport, all three doing their best not to cry. It was the first time in over twenty years, since Rob had joined their little family that they'd been separated for more than a few weeks. That happened while Tim was at FLETC; the kids, accompanied by Mrs. Ferguson had taken the train from Massachusetts to Georgia to visit.

Tim's court date for his name change was the Monday after Sarah's departure and he went home that evening as Timothy Jackson Gibbs. When he wondered at the speed with which it had been handled, his attorney told him that because he was a federal agent and had been thoroughly vetted by the government, the courts waived the usual waiting period. He'd handed over his list of contacts who were now being advised of his name change. Within a week some of his mail, both electronic and USPS, arrived addressed to T. J. Gibbs.

During Tim's last two weeks on the team, they landed a couple of complex cases that left him deeply satisfied; not only had they solved the cases, they saved several children and locked up a couple of really bad guys who'd been on the FBI's Most Wanted list for years. Also satisfying but more fun was the surprise they pulled on Boss. With Vance and HR's blessing, Tony came in to work the last two days of Tim's field agent life. Tim asked Dad to take the children to daycare that day and he of course agreed. When Gibbs arrived at the office, his bullpen was empty; however, he could see evidence that his team was in. He already had his coffee and settled in to work on the paperwork for their last two cases. He was starting to get annoyed when Vance called him upstairs. Grumbling, he took the elevator; his knee was bothering him today, courtesy of an attempted tackle by one of their suspects. Vance droned on about who knew what until he suddenly dismissed Gibbs.

Really annoyed by now but unable to stomp with his sore knee, Gibbs walked, very carefully not limping, out of the Director's suite and out of habit looked down at his bullpen. Then he smiled, understanding everything. His agents, all of them, were there, discussing something on the plasma. Tim, Tony, Ellie and Bob, that is Agents DiNozzo, McGee, Bishop and Chalmers, were calmly discussing their last case when he appeared in the bullpen. "DiNozzo, McGee?"

"We have permission, Boss. Couldn't stand the thought of never working together again so we begged for two days this week. Feels good, damn good."

Gibbs nodded. "Where's Chalmers working?"

Agent Chalmers, who had been notified earlier in the week that he was now permanently transferred to Gibbs' team, just nodded. "McGee and I got creative with his workspace. He's left, I'm right, we'll make it work."

Gibbs put his gruffest face on, "See that you do. Got lots of work to do, no time for chit chat and, DiNozzo, none of those damn paper bombs."

Tony opened his mouth to say something, noticed a little twinkle in Gibbs' eyes and nodded, "Got it Boss, no paper bombs. What about paper airplanes? Those take considerably more skill and I'm much better at it than McGee."

"You are not!"

"Am so!"

"No you're not!"

"Yes I am!"

Gibbs marched to his desk, slammed a drawer and sat down, doing his best to glare at them and
losing the battle. Somehow, they got through the day, closing the case and wading through the paperwork. Tomorrow was Thursday, Tim's last day as a field agent; he, Gibbs and DiNozzo were off Friday, Monday was the Fourth and they'd drive back from Delaware on Tuesday. Ellie was also taking Friday off while Chalmers, who had fewer vacation days, would work at least a half day and then brave the holiday traffic. The Palmers and Ducky would join them Saturday morning, as all three adults had to work on Friday. When Chalmers heard that, he considered driving early Saturday too, he'd rather get up early than sit in traffic for hours on Friday.

Tim grinned when he walked into the bullpen Thursday morning. The area behind his desk had sprouted balloons and a banner that thanked him for his good work and wished him luck in CCU. The top of his and Bob's desk was strewn with envelopes of many colors, cards from his fellow field agents and other agency friends. He was relieved to see them, he'd been a little afraid there'd be some sort of party and he'd be expected to speak. Vance's announcement had gone out yesterday and more than a few people had stopped by to congratulate him and ask about his new position.

The day was quiet much to everyone's relief. They chanced lunch out and for once didn't get a callout. Finished with the last of his paperwork and having successfully flown the last of his paper airplanes past DiNozzo's, Tim was reviewing the past month's CCU cases when he noticed it was awfully quiet. Even for a quiet day, it was quiet. He looked around and saw his team hard at work but the rest of the squad room was…empty? An eyebrow hooked, he nudged Chalmers who was still filling in forms.

"Huh?"

"Where'd everyone go? Squad room is empty."

Chalmers frowned, "That's weird."

As he spoke, the Public Address system squawked to life and Vance spoke, "Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs and team, report to the briefing room."

Tim groaned as around him his co-workers laughed. Tony shook his head, "Timmy, Timmy, Timmy you didn't really think we were going to let you go that easily, did you?"

"I had hopes."

"Eleven years, twelve really - have you learned so little from me, Probie?"

Tim smirked, "My paper airplane outflew your paper airplane."

"Let us not speak of that atrocity."

His father stood and gestured to him, "C'mon Elf Lord, it's time to pay the price for leaving us."

His team surrounding him, they walked into the briefing room where Tim was greeted with cheers and applause. He grinned, still hoping he wouldn't have to say anything. When the applause stopped, he looked around, knowing he had to say something…finally looking at his dad, he ventured, "Does this mean there's cake?"

That bought him another minute as the others laughed. He grinned again, "I was serious, but oh well. Thanks for the cards, the well wishes and the party, did someone alert the dirtbags so we'd have a quiet day? Anyway, I'm sad to be leaving the field. It's been wonderful busting criminals, jumping out of cars, enjoying exciting stakeouts, crawling through dumpsters and sewer systems, running after dirtbags, through mud, snow, rain and 100-degree weather. And that was just Tuesday!"
Another laugh and Tim silently thanked Tony for the years of movie references and bad jokes. "Over the years I've learned an incredible amount from my team, past and present as well as many of you and I thank you all. I've also had the pleasure of passing that knowledge along to some of you and now I'm going to apply all my field experiences to CCU, although I hope not the dumpster diving." He paused before continuing, "As many of you know, I've had a couple of surprises in the past months. What only a few people know is that there was a third surprise. The first two are my amazing children, Tyler and Bryn, and by the way, my daughter would be seriously demanding cake by now, and it's been an astounding and terrifying experience adjusting to fatherhood. Some of you know that I raised my younger sister and brother by myself but I was a kid then and did what I could. Now my expectations are much higher.

"As for the third surprise, when I return from leave and report to my new duties, I'll not only have a new nameplate, there will be a new name on it. See, when I got my kids' DNA results, I found out I'm their biological father and that I wasn't born a McGee. I still don't know most of the story but I do know I'm the luckiest person in the world. When I looked at the name listed as my father on the DNA chart, I thought I was hallucinating. When I told the man who is listed as my father on the DNA chart, he also thought I was hallucinating and then maybe that he was because he had never been told he had a son, dead or alive. However, both of us were in our right minds and we've been celebrating being father and son ever since. What's my new name? Timothy Jackson Gibbs, proud son of Leroy Jethro Gibbs and the late Shannon Fielding Gibbs."

There was a stunned silence and then Ellie, Tony, Abby, Bob, Ducky, Jimmy and Vance started the cheers and applause while Tim and his father stood arm in arm facing the room. When everyone had finally quieted down again, Tim said, "Now can we have cake?"

That cracked everyone up again and Dad stepped forward. "Not quite yet son. For those of you who've never seen me in this room, I'm Jethro Gibbs. I'm Tim's dad, grandfather to Ty and Brynie and I do some stuff around here too."

That got a laugh as Tony had promised him it would; Gibbs was well known for missing the 'all hands' meetings held in the room and for being a workaholic. He smiled, "Just wanted to say thank you to Tim for his years of service on my team, for everything he's done. I think he's ready to go, he sat at Tony's desk for a couple of months and apparently that was enough."

Most people had never heard Gibbs speak more than a word or two at a time. Even rarer were his references to his agents by their first names…and he'd made jokes!

He continued, "Speaking for Tony, Ellie, Bob and I, we are going to miss his work, his brilliance, his humor and his presence on our team. Tim, I'm proud of everything you've done and everything you will do in CCU. Semper fi."

Tony got up, looked at Tim, looked at the crowd and shrugging, pulled Tim into a hug. "From the greenest Probie to the best damn field agent and my best friend. Love you man, but your paper airplane overflew mine today so it's time for you to go." The two men cracked up at that while Gibbs managed to smile and roll his eyes at the same time.

Vance spoke after that, mercifully saying only a few words, the last few being, "And, Gibbs, Gibbsses, now we'll have cake!"

After the cake and festivities were over, Tim went back to the bullpen with the others and realized he didn't want to just walk out. Luckily his team had anticipated that and Gibbs dismissed them for the day. It was a lot easier pretending it was a normal evening as they left together.

NCIS NCIS NCIS NCIS
Before dawn Friday morning, the four Gibbses, Ellie, Rob and Tony loaded up the Acura and Gibbs' truck and headed toward Delaware, with the pickup truck making a slight detour to pick up Fornell. Both vehicles made good time to Fenwick and stopped for breakfast at a cafe Tim spotted on his last trip here. From there, Gibbs led the way to their holiday home. Tim had told his passengers of the house he'd spotted across the street from his grandfather's place and now they laughed when the truck pulled up in front of that same house, the Acura behind it.

Everyone took something to carry, Ellie and Rob carrying the children, on their first trip in. There were only three wide steps up to the wraparound porch and Ty and Brynie insisted on walking. Entering into a small foyer, on one side, they saw a very small and formal living area; Ellie said it reminded her of her grandparents' 'front parlor', never used by family. The other side was walled up with a door that was open, a bedroom that had probably once been the dining room. A full bathroom was next on that side and it had three doors in it, one to the hallway, one to the bedroom/former dining room and the third to a room they hadn't yet seen. As expected, it was another bedroom. The staircase was in the middle of the first floor, with a kitchen and large family room at the back of the house with a door to the backend of the wraparound porch.

Leaving that to explore later, they climbed the stairs, helping the kids, where they found an additional five bedrooms. The second floor was split by the staircase with three of the bedrooms on one side and two on the other with a bathroom on either side. Tim quickly made a decision for his little family and the Palmers, they'd take the three bedrooms, they'd planned for the three children to share and Rob would share with Tim. Ellie, Tony and Bob, who'd share with Tony, would have the two rooms at the other end of the hall. That left the two downstairs rooms for Ducky, Gibbs and Fornell.

Rotating staying with the kids and unloading the vehicles, they were done in no time. Before they did anything else, Tim gathered his dad, kids, and they walked across the street to Grandpa Mac's bungalow. Not surprisingly, they found a note saying he was on the sand waiting for them. Tim grinned as they walked around the house, noticing a large area of beach marked off on either side of Mac's camp; apparently, this was their turf for the holiday weekend. He was further amused to notice other spots further down the beach similarly marked off. Stopping, he pointed out the back of his grandfather's head to Ty and Brynie. "See that head over there, sitting under the umbrella?"

Ty wriggled, "Yes! Is that Grandpa Mac?"

"It sure is, you can run ahead and say hello if you want. Stay out of the water, though, no toes, feet, not even fingers in the water until Poppy and I get there!" Both children promised and ran forward calling to their new grandpa. Grinning at each other, their dad and Poppy followed close behind.

Mac heard children's voices and got out of his chair to look, hoping it was his children. Two tiny beings were running toward him, calling out "Grandpa Mac!" and he sat down again, holding his arms wide, bracing for impact and loving it. The kids ran into his arms and he kissed and hugged them. "Hello Tyler, hello Bryn, I'm so happy to meet you, my darlings." He'd certainly forgotten how small toddlers were…and how squirmy!

They giggled and kissed him back. Ty looked at him, "Grandpa, you look like Daddy and us!"

"I know, aren't we lucky!"

Tim and Jethro caught up and the kids went to their dad while Grandpa Mac and Poppy greeted each other with a long embrace. When they finally pulled apart both men still had tears rolling down their faces. That worried Brynie and she insisted on being lifted up to kiss each face to make things better. Tim and Poppy dropped their stack of beach chairs on the sand when they'd reached Grandpa Mac and now they set them out, with the kids' and Tim's chairs under the umbrellas. Mac laughed, "Ah yes, we are the sunscreen bunch, aren't we children? No sunburn for us!"
Poppy already had his swimsuit on, so he stayed with Mac while Tim took the little ones home to change and gather the troops, as he put it. As Tim walked his kids around the side of Mac's house and closer to the street, he saw the structures he thought he'd remembered seeing before, a kids' playground. That was great, if the kids got bored with the water or between meals and nap or bath/bedtime, he and Ellie could bring them over for some more fun. They'd bring Victoria with them and give Jimmy and Breena some time alone. He wondered if they could have a fire pit on the beach and looked for the sign he'd seen with the park rules. Not seeing it now, he shrugged, he'd ask his grandfather later. They could always do s'mores in the backyard grill. Might be easier anyway, Dad and Tobias planned to grill dinner every night so there would always be coals.

They'd brought lunch from home and Gibbs' big cooler, with sandwiches, snacks and plenty of beverages, all non-alcoholic, needed to be taken to the beach. Ellie had talked her boss into bringing the kids' red wagon with them and now the group saw her logic. It was much easier to put the coolers (Tobias had a smaller one full of bottled water) in the wagon, pile beach bags and towels on top and wheel that across the street and down to the water than to carry the coolers, towels, bags and chairs separately. Tim found the others had unpacked and were getting ready for the short trek to the beach. Ellie stayed back, waiting for Tim and the children while Tony and Rob muscled the wagon through the front gate and across the street, Fornell 'guiding' them.

With everything they needed and the bathroom in Mac's house so close, the group was on the beach through lunch. Poppy took the kids back to the house for naps; he stayed with them for about 45 minutes and then Tim and Ellie came to relieve him. With all the fun and excitement of the morning, the children slept longer than usual but their dad was fine with that, it just gave him more time with sweet Eleanor. This time they kept it cool, never knowing when the kids would wake or one of the group would come back for something. Mostly they spent the time talking, discovering more about each other.

Ellie grew up on a ranch and missed having horses to ride. She told Tim she sometimes volunteered exercising horses at a boarding stable. As far as Tim knew, he'd never been on a horse but it sounded like fun and he'd love his children to learn. He told her about his love for the stars, the constellations and the stories behind them. She asked him who'd taught him to cook and he told her two people, Mrs. Ferguson, their very first landlady, in Cambridge and surprisingly, Ziva. He figured he knew the basics and right now that was all he cared to learn. Laughing, he said he'd need to know more about baking once the kids got into school but for now, he was content. She said cooking had never interested her, especially if it meant being indoors instead of out riding Acorn, her horse.
Chapter 23

Finally, he woke the kids; otherwise, they'd be up all night. Back in their now dry swim gear, the four of them hurried back to the beach. There was more traffic now so the children were carried across the street while being admonished to never ever cross without one of their adults: Dad, Poppy, Ellie, Granducky, Grandpa, Aunt Breena or one of the uncles. Ty giggled, "Daddy, you forgot Mr. Bob!"

"Good catch, Ty…or Mr. Bob. I think we can count him as an uncle even if you still call him Mr. Bob."

Brynie liked saying Bob and repeated it often until Tony said the word pizza, one of her favorite words and foods. Along with cake of course. Then she entertained her people with pizza and Bob, until it became one word, pizzabob. Unfortunately, Uncle Tony and Unca Rob thought it was funny, encouraging her until a steely voiced Tim told them to stop. Poppy and Grandpa took the littles for a walk while Tim lit into the pair, telling them they were not being good uncles to their little niece. Chastened, Rob went for a walk, resolving to stay away from Tony the bad influence. Tony also stopped, although that took a headslap and strong words from Tim.

By that time, Ellie and Tobias had decided the small cooler needed more ice and both of them were needed. Then Tim let loose; first came the slap and then the words, "Tony, my children, my rules. You do not set up children to mock them! Ever."

"All right, geez, it was just a joke."

"She's a person, DiNozzo, not a monkey or an object of some sort to be made fun of. Unless she's doing something wrong, I expect our family to act positively toward her, sure as hell not mocking her. You oughta know; it's one of the things you hate the most."

Tony stared at his friend in horror. "I wasn't mocking her."

"Really, sure sounded like it to me. Sounded just like you mocking me and how I spoke when I first started with the team. It is one thing to mock a probie but Bryn isn't even 2-years old. She's got feelings; as I said she's a person and you just set as bad an example as Abby did at your party."

Tim was too angry to say any more and nearly ran to catch up with his children. Tony sat in the sand, horrified. She was such a cute little girl and it was fun to hear her repeat what he told her…and then laugh at her. Oh. Shit.

Tobias came back by himself; Ellie had split off to catch up with Tim. He looked at Tony, "He give you hell?"

"Yeah, but I was just joking around, teasing."

"She's too small to understand what you were doing Tony and you were mocking her innocence. Be glad Mac dragged Jethro off, he was ready to deck you and so was I. Good thing Tim's got control of his temper."
"He gave me a Gibbs slap."

"Well, he is a Gibbs and you deserved it. If you'd done that with Emily when she was that age, you might not have lived."

"Oh come on! It's not like I was hurting her!"

"Yes you were. She didn't know it but you were. You were mocking her. Kids get enough of that from their peers when they start school. Not from their families when they're still babies. That's bad."

"I still don't get it but I believe you and Tim. How do I make up for it?"

"Apologize to her. Treat her like she has a brain, learn more about what she understands, don't talk down to her and don't ever make fun of her again; seriously when she's 35 and big as a house pregnant, keep your mouth shut."

"35?"

"Emily knows she's not allowed to get involved with anyone until she's at least 30. Married at 33, first baby at 35. I'll be too old to kill her husband by then."

"Wow. Are all fathers of girls like that?"

"Yes, far as I know. What I said for Bryn goes for Tyler too. He's older; he might know what you were doing and be upset. In fact he may be upset with what you did to his little sister." Fornell sighed, "You've never been around kids, have you?"

"Not really. Boarding school started when I was 10 and that was brutal."

Tobias nodded, "Tim needs to remember that you're a civilian as far as kids go."

"He and I have worked through a lot of problems over the years and my mocking him was one of them."

"And now you mocked his kid. Have to remember his background, DiNozzo; can't have been easy to be an orphaned, homeless kid raising two younger kids. Jethro's told me some hair-raising stories about Tim's years on the street. Did you ever see the scars on his back? I mean before Somalia?"

Tony shook his head, "No."

"You worked Baltimore PD, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"Ever heard of the boy who was cut in half?"

The blood drained from DiNozzo's face, "That's an urban legend, has to be. And it can't have been Tim."

"Obviously he wasn't cut in half but damn near and yes it was him, true story."

"Shit!"

A voice behind him said, "But I lived and I'm here, Tony. Doesn't change anything. And I had plastic surgery on all those scars after Somalia, Tobias."
"Tim…I'm so sorry, I had no idea."

"I finally got that and thanks, Tobias. I've been so caught up in my kids having family and making sure they know everyone and everyone knows them that I forgot you haven't been around kids, aren't comfortable with them. I was so determined to change that for you, for Ty and Bryn. I owe you an apology for that."

Tony stuck his hand out, "I accept."

"And I accept yours."

"What can I do to make it up to Brynie?"

"Buy them both ice creams and maybe a beer for Tobias and we're good. But you'll have to wait, Rob's already claimed today's ice cream treat...for the same reason."

"Ok, I dibs tomorrow then!"

Rob came back to their beach settlement with a letter in his hand. "Tim, Tim! Look, I won - I got it!"

Tim's face lit up in a smile while most of the others looked puzzled. Rob was trying not to babble, "I forgot - I grabbed my mail on the way to your place Thursday night and then never looked at it, but look, here it says I won and I get to pick where I go!"

He was dancing around in the sand, waving the letter until Tim pulled him into a big hug. "Robbie, I'm so proud of you, so proud!" He turned to face the others, noticing Poppy's smile. "Ladies and Gentlemen, it's a pleasure to introduce you to the newest winner of the Arthur Garrod medical award."

"Wow!" The others were impressed and a still-stunned Rob had his hand shaken in congratulations.

"What's the prize, Rob?"

"A year at the medical school of my choice. And I'm going to Imperial College in London."

Tim nodded, "Sarah will be happy to hear that!"

Rob looked at him, "You won't mind, Tim? You'll come visit, won't you?"

"Absolutely! Already promised Sarah and I'll make that same promise to you. If you're there, we'll come visit. When do you need to be there?"

"Uh…wow, September 20th."

"That's 2 months, Rob!"

"I have a passport and they've included the paperwork I'll need to stay there. Just need clothes."

Poppy gave him a hug, "Proud of you, Rob! Hope you'll let me contribute to your trip."

"Thanks Gibbs!" Rob beamed, he couldn't believe he'd won and he was going to London! "I hope Sarah has room for me, at least until I find my own place."

Tim grinned, "She will or she'll make room, Rob, don't worry."

Looking at the time, Tim booted up his tablet, found wi-fi and they called Sarah to tell her the news.
She squawked when she got on Skype, "No fair, you didn't mention everyone else was there!"

"Sorry, didn't think, too excited."

"Rob, what...oh?"

"Yes, I won and I'm coming to London!"

"Wow, that's awesome, oh I can't wait to see you! You can stay here with me, don't know how far it is to your school but we can work that out."

While they were talking, Tony and Ellie ran back to the house for the sparkling cider Tim brought, wanting to toast his grandfather. Each carrying a bottle and cups, they returned just as Rob was disconnecting from Skype. "She says hi, she has a date tonight and couldn't talk long."

Tony held up the bottle and Tim nodded, "Thanks you two! Yes a toast is absolutely called for!"

Mac stood to make the toast, "To Dr. Rob, congratulations and much success. And don't forget to come home!"

"Hear, hear!"

They all drank, even the kids. Then Rob said, "Last time at a warm beach for a year, at least on this side of the Atlantic! Anyone joining me?"

Tim, Ellie and Tony joined him and they swam for another hour.

Gibbs and Fornell barbecued ribs that night and Mac said it was a good thing he was invited because he otherwise he would have had to beg for even a bite. Ty and Brynie thought it hysterically funny that everyone was so messy. After they finished, the kids chased their adults around the yard and that finished their day. The kids' day anyway. Baths, story time and off to bed they went with the baby monitor in place.

Ducky, the Palmers and Mr. Bob were unpacking their vehicles by 10AM on Saturday. Ty, Bryn and their father escorted Victoria and her parents to their rooms. Within minutes, they were on the beach meeting Grandpa Mac and adding their chairs and umbrella to Mac's encampment.

When Ducky heard Rob's news, he stood to pull Rob in for a handshake and a hug. "Congratulations, dear boy; you see I knew you could do it!" He turned to the others, "This is a prestigious award, only 3 winners per year. And the prize is a year at the medical school of his choice."

Rob finally smiled, "Ducky, you're leaving out a big part." He turned to the others. "Ducky won this same award when he was a young medical student in the 1950's. He spent his prize year at Imperial College in London and that's why I'm going there, I want to follow in his footsteps."

When Ducky heard how soon he needed to be there, he shook his head, "Warm clothes, lad, very warm clothes, with wool scarves, gloves and hats and the warmest coat we can find. Whatever you have for here won't be warm enough. I know just the place; we'll go shopping as soon as we get back."

After a fabulous weekend of fun and celebration, the last of the group left Tuesday morning, tired but satisfied. Tony said that if weren't for park rules they could have slept on the beach and skipped the rental house. They did spend most of the time in or near the water, swimming, wading, walking in the sand, sitting, napping, eating, reading, playing games, and more eating. Fireworks were shot off
the coast on the night of the Fourth and the beach was jammed with spectators. The three kids took extra-long naps that day so they'd be awake for the spectacle.

The Palmers left after dinner Monday night as Breena and Jimmy had to work Tuesday. Bob, Ellie and Tony left around 0530 Tuesday morning, going straight to the Navy Yard. While Tony originally planned to take the day off, he'd decided to go in. With three of them there, they could be on rotation; otherwise, the two juniors would be on cold cases and paperwork.

The Gibbses, Granducky and Tobias had breakfast on Mac's terrace with him, finished cleaning the house, said their goodbyes to Grandpa, making plans to come back in two weeks to bring him home for a visit, loaded up the car and truck, turned in the house keys and headed for home. Tim wanted the children home in time for some backyard time, lunch and naptime. He was discovering that routine was a good thing for his children.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter to go for Serendipity. The next story in this 'verse is called Ripples; hope you'll like that one too!
Chapter 24

Tim spent the rest of that week and into the next working to finish the basement. He and his dad drew up plans, consulting an architect. Then Tim sent the plan to the property owners who not only approved but asked that a half bath be added. They also offered to share costs with him. He'd originally planned to leave the room open but the addition of a bathroom meant walls and he decided that those walls should be extended to include storage. Lots of storage. That went into the plan. With the approval, the next step was permits and the homeowners sent back signed copies of the forms. While they waited for the permits, Dad taught his son the fundamentals of framing new walls and attaching them to concrete. With the permits in place, Tim's first steps after their return from Fenwick Island were painting the concrete walls and getting the framing started. They were lucky that when the house was built, someone added an outside door to the basement, poured and leveled a concrete floor. Now, no excavation was needed, there was no concrete to be poured and the exterior walls had already been waterproofed by the homeowners.

By the time Dad got home from work on Wednesday, enough framing had been done for him to inspect. He looked at every board, every nail, and angle, and then with a smile, said, "Well done, Elf Lord!"

Tim beamed at him, he loved learning new things and succeeding at what his father taught him was a great feeling.

Working side by side, father and son completed another wall that evening. By Friday night, the framing for the bathroom and storage room was done and over the weekend, they set the framing for the rest of the room. Next came the electrical and that was all on Tim. He planned to expand the wiring from the one light fixture to a fully functional space. He'd included that in his proposal to the property owners, sending a copy of his electrician's license. Although he'd had it for years, he'd never seen the need to mention it to anyone at work. When his dad looked at the full proposal they were sending, he was surprised to see Tim's name as the licensed electrician. He'd known his son could do some wiring, he hadn't realized he could do it all - and legally. Sometimes he thought he would burst with pride in his child. When he said that to Tim, he got a shy, happy smile.

As Tim finished the electrical, the McGees' friends Freddy and Jose arrived to do the plumbing, installing a full bathroom. Tim and the homeowners originally thought a half bath would be sufficient but decided that if another bedroom or even a rental unit was built down there, the full bath would already be in place.

Although it was work, Tim enjoyed having his friends there. Along with Barry, they'd been tent mates of Geordie's for all but the last year of Tim's residence at the camp. By then they'd finished their apprenticeships and were earning enough for a studio apartment. Eventually they started their own business and were always happy to help an old friend. It didn't hurt that for the duration of the renovation, Tim's house sported a sign advertising their business.

Next came the part Tim and Dad dreaded: installing the drywall. While Dad was at work, Tim researched several dozen sites and watched 5 YouTube videos. They had the drywall, the tape, the drywall screws and the mud. Finally they each took a deep breath and got started. They did the ceiling first and when that turned out all right, they tackled the rest of the room, first installing
insulation. Tobias kicked in a few hours of help as did one of their neighbors, Tony and Bob; between them all, it got it done. Wanting the kids to be able to ride bikes and skate meant leaving the concrete floors intact, but they did set aside a corner of the room for a more comfortable play area, installing cork flooring and cubbies for the kids' toys. They even built a little picket fence around it to keep bikes and skaters away. They primed and painted all the drywall in bright fun colors before tackling the trim and framework for the doors to the bathroom and storage room. Once they completed the rest of the finishing work for all three rooms, they were done. Nothing fancy but it provided a much needed play space for the children.

While they'd been working on the room, the kids were in daycare but Tim also spent a lot of time with them. With the basement work in progress, Grandpa Mac's planned visit was postponed until it was done. In the meantime, the three Gibbeses took at least one day a week to visit Grandpa and his beach. Sometimes they went on a weekend so Ellie could go with them and those were Tim's favorite visits. In between, they explored the many child friendly attractions in the DC Metro area. The water park was great during the week. While it was difficult with only one adult, Unca Rob loved going with them on his days off. With another adult along, they could handle three kids and Victoria came along a few times. When she could, Aunty Breena joined them. With Ellie's help, the kids had pony rides and loved them. They were too young for riding lessons but Tim filed the idea away for later. They wouldn't always be toddlers!

Tim saw a great little kid obstacle course video on Facebook, set up with pool noodles and had one set up on their own patch of grass within a day. He switched it around, found new things to do with it and the kids loved it; it helped their coordination, kept them active and happy.

Ty's third birthday was coming up in early September, the same day as Poppy's. With Ellie's help and a lot of input from Breena, Tim started planning the dual birthdays. The second, their actual birthday, was on a Wednesday this year so their parties would be held over the weekend and Tim asked Tony to work with Vance to have the team off rotation. This was Tyler's first birthday as a Gibbs and Jethro's first with his son and grandchildren, he wanted to make sure all their family was present without any worries about cases. Mac scheduled his visit for that week; Rob would drive up to get him, he'd stay over the party weekend and then Tim and the kids would drive him home.

Mac's visit and the parties that weekend were a smashing success. Tim arranged a visit to NCIS for him and the children went to daycare that day, Tim planned to bring them into the office at Christmas time to see the big tree. Otherwise, it was just office furniture and orange walls to them.

Mac loved seeing where his grandson and son-in-law worked. It was also fun seeing the rest of the NCIS group in what Tony referred to as their 'native habitat'. They'd just wrapped up a case so Dad showed him some of the steps they'd gone through. He was thrilled to meet his family's co-workers and friends, not to mention Director Vance. He hadn't yet met Abby but had heard wonderful things about her, her work and her 'magical' lab. She in turn was excited to meet Tim's grandfather and show him her lab. She'd made a lot of personal progress over the summer and even joined Tim and the kids for a trip to the petting zoo one afternoon. After some deep soul searching, she accepted Tim's relationship with Ellie, apologizing to both for her previous intransigence.

Although there were a few things around DC Mac wanted to see or do, he was most interested in spending time with his family and that worked out well. He loved getting reacquainted with the home his daughter, granddaughter and Jethro had lived in; spent hours looking at pictures, especially enjoying the shots with his co-grandfather Jackson Gibbs in them. He could see by the more recent ones, before Jack's death, that Tim had been right in describing Jack's relationship with Tim, Tony, Abby, Ducky, Jimmy, Tobias and a dark haired woman named Ziva.

His son-in-law took Wednesday, his and Ty's birthday, off and the family drove to Point Lookout for
the day celebrating with dinner out so no one had to cook and everyone got what they wanted. They
did have cake and ice cream once they got home; Tim was proud of the cake he'd made and the
writing he'd managed: "Happy Birthday to Jethro and Tyler! 1st birthday as Poppy and Grandson!"

The parties over the weekend were a lot of fun. After talking to Breena and the daycare folks, Tim
and Ty made invitations for 8 of his friends. The party was from 2-4 on Saturday, after naps and it
was clear there was only cake and ice cream being served. They'd decided on a 'beach' theme; Tim
attached a note to the invitation that the kids could come in their bathing suits or dress up as a fish,
dolphin, mermaid or merboy or even a sailor and there would be water. Rather than use the wading
pool, they'd have sprinklers on and the kids could run through them. He and Mac then filled the
wading pool with sand so the kids could build sand castles.

Buckets with a few toy sea creatures and shovels for all the invitees constituted their 'goody bags',
beach umbrellas and towels completed the look. Except Tim thought about barefoot toddlers, a hot
day and the concrete that made up the patio. He didn't want to make any permanent changes and that
gave him an inexpensive idea. First, he bought carpet squares from the bargain bin at the local home
center, all of them a sandy color. Strategically placing them on the concrete patio, they became
walking paths to and from the lawn. Adding a few large seashells and a tub of plastic sea creatures
helped set the theme. Very low tech but a lot of fun!

Following advice he found online, Tim hired an entertainer who would entertain the kids for about a
half an hour, then they'd have cake and ice cream, followed by playtime. Tim's only stipulation to the
entertainer was no clowns. He'd never liked clowns. The entertainer laughed when he said that,
saying people either loved or hated them but he liked to tie his costume into the theme of the party
anyway.

Tim ordered the cake from a bakery Breena recommended, in the shape of a beach with seashells, a
pair of flip-flops next to a beach towel, while the ocean would be blue waves, a smiling dolphin
watching the shore through the waves. Ty's favorite ice cream was a Ben and Jerry's flavor and Tim
didn't relish the idea of buying 5 containers of it so he bought a half gallon of vanilla and a little blue
food coloring. The kids loved it.

He'd been a little worried about slip and falls on the wet lawn but there were no mishaps. The parents
loved the kids being 'washed off' after their cake and ice cream not to mention the 'sand' stepping-
stones. Some of them, Tim included, joined the kids in the sprinklers. The sandbox swimming pool
was a big hit as well as the beach buckets and shovels.

Victoria was there with Jimmy, Granducky, Grandpa Mac, Poppy, Unca Rob and of course Ellie.
Breena opted for time to herself while the others would be at Gibbs' party on Sunday. Tim hadn't
been sure if he needed to do anything with the parents but they were an amiable bunch and had a
good time swapping daycare stories. Besides Jimmy, there were two other dads and Tim was
relieved it wasn't all moms.

It was funny, until the first parent and child arrived he hadn't thought about the daycare being aboard
the Navy Yard. So yes, he knew several of the parents from work, which meant that they swapped
work stories although there were no cases mentioned. As always, Tim was supremely happy to have
Ellie there with him.

Sunday was just as much fun although in a grown up way. They moved the party to Gibbs' backyard
and set up a volleyball net, croquet wickets and a ping-pong table. They borrowed the Palmers'
wading pool as the other one was still pretending to be a beach and set it up in the backyard so the
kids could have fun and stay cool.

Fornell had offered to do the grilling, much to Tim and Tony's relief. Today they were eating steak
with baked potatoes and a salad that Dad could pick at or ignore. The boys moved Tim's (Sue and Deeny's) large patio table, benches and chairs down the back alley to Gibbs' yard so there was room for everyone to sit at the table. Of course, there were balloons and Abby made a Happy Birthday banner that was tied to the trees.

They had a great afternoon playing volleyball and croquet for those who didn't want to jump around, Breena, Granducky, Dad and Grandpa. Ping-pong proved to be a big draw. Tony and Rob paired up to play Tim and Ellie who beat them and then they played Abby and Bob and won that game too. The kids were in the pool so long Granducky got them out, saying they were getting pruney. They also played croquet, with some help.

Tim was amused at how competitive Brynie was, she'd get her mallet and ball lined up and stand there concentrating, her little tongue posed between her lips. He'd observed this before and thought she was probably going to be the more athletic of his children. He was just thrilled to see any athletic ability! Granducky and Grandpa Mac spoke jokingly about teaching the kids to play golf and Tim smiled, that would be great for the four of them.

Finally, sitting down to dinner, Tim and his father smiled at each other as Ty and Brynie held out their hands to say grace. This time the nod was to Grandpa Mac who'd been forewarned. As he spoke, the others bowed their heads.

Tim looked at his dad and the warm look he got back said it all. Words were not enough to express how thankful they were for the surprises they'd been handed: each other, the children and their family.

The End

Chapter End Notes

Here's a bit from the next story, 'Ripples':

Gibbs flew upstairs, meeting Vance coming out of MTAC. "Tim's got trouble, he's being followed. We got Metro in place and they'll stay at the house until we can get a detail over there."

Vance nodded to his Lead agent, "Any idea who or why?"

"Don't know what he's working on; he said it's pretty hot."

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