The Inheritance

by jane_x80

Summary

After Tony's Uncle Clive dies, he keeps the fact that Clive left him an old family house in Virginia a secret from everyone at NCIS. As he works to restore the house, he falls in love with it despite its tragic and personal history. But ignoring the house's history will endanger his life and Gibbs seems to be one of the few people who can help.

NOTE: This is the first of two stories in the series.

Notes

This is the second of the Reverse Bang stories that I wrote for this year! Before I get to all the details, I had to split my original story into two separate stories within a series. This is because I was unhappy with the end of the story, and I need to rewrite it. Which means that you have one story now, and another story in a week or two, hopefully, that resolves this one. I was practically done writing it but I seriously disliked how I resolved it and it felt rushed, so... hopefully you'll bear with me and come read the sequel in the next weeks or so!

This is the original artwork prompt that my amazing artist WaterSoter made! She made several more pieces of art and we thought we were done, but when I ended up splitting the story (a mere 2 days ago), she created even more artwork! For this story as well as the sequel!! You guys, I have five separate artwork for The Inheritance, and five more for the sequel, Shadowed Spaces (coming to a theater near you soon)!! Holy cow! And in the last two days or so! It was amazing!

The dreamy quality of the original artwork hides a thing in the forest that is looking at us. So keep that in mind, and mind the tags! Also, bear in mind that this is a two-parter and the next story will contain the resolution of this series.

Jesco0307 was her usual unbelievable and amazing self, reading through not one but two different stories to be published for the Reverse Bang this year! I cannot thank her enough for all she's done to make this story better. Also huge thanks to Red_Pink_Dots who omegaread this story and gave valuable insight and feedback. Ma chere amie Red_Pink_Dots and cutsycat were both unbelievable cheerleaders, trying to help the muse along while she was recalcitrant and I was hiding under blankets. Thank you to all these
lovely ladies. All remaining mistakes are mine.

The music that helped inspire this is *Gnosienne no 1, 2, 3* by Eric Satie. The timbre of the story made it so this piece was perfect for the story.

Also check out this little entry. This little bit about "gnossienne" made it even more of a perfect match. I've called this series Gnossienne in honor of the music.

**gnossienne**

*n. a moment of awareness that someone you’ve known for years still has a private and mysterious inner life, and somewhere in the hallways of their personality is a door locked from the inside, a stairway leading to a wing of the house that you’ve never fully explored—an unfinished attic that will remain maddeningly unknowable to you, because ultimately neither of you has a map, or a master key, or any way of knowing exactly where you stand.*

See the end of the work for more notes.

- Inspired by *The Inheritance (Cover and Additional Art)* by WaterSoter
Chapter 1

Part I: Inheritance

“Yes, Mr Hubbard. How are you, sir*?” Tony’s heart was beating loudly in his chest as he spoke into his phone.

He knew that he’d been a complete pest about the fact that his late uncle’s solicitor had been trying to reach him, making it seem to the team as if he could be inheriting a lot of money and quitting his job. He’d wished he could have been there for the reading of the will, but he’d already taken time off to go to Uncle Clive’s funeral. Gibbs barely even believed that he had an Uncle Clive to lose, so he didn’t want to push his luck. But he would have liked to be there for the reading of the will, since he had been invited to it. Tony didn’t think that Clive would have left him any money, not that he needed any more since he hadn’t even touched what he already had, but what he had been hoping for was even more important: he’d wanted to be left Clive’s family albums. The ones containing pictures of his mother. He had so very few of them. That was all that he wanted from Clive, and he knew that the old gentleman had always allowed him to look through them and had always been endlessly patient with all of his questions about Clive and his mother and their childhood together.

“Hello, Anthony. We missed you at the reading, but Clive would have understood your commitment to your work,” Mr Hubbard told him, his tone pleasant and warm.

Tony blushed a little at that and nodded, even though he knew Hubbard couldn’t see him. Mr Hubbard was a sweet man, and an old friend of the family. He and Clive had been very good friends.

“Well, I’ll get right to it, shall I?” the man continued.

“Right, of course,” Tony stuttered. Albums, please, please, he kept his fingers crossed, picturing
the photos of his mother as a young woman, before she ever even heard of the DiNozzo name. So young, and innocent, and beautiful. Someone who didn’t need to drink to get through the day. Someone who laughed so openly, and had a smile a mile wide, and had no sadness in her eyes.

“Clive left you all of the photo albums of his childhood, and specifically designated that all of the photographs that contained your mother in them are to be bequeathed to you.”

“Oh, thank you!” Tony smiled gratefully into the phone, turning away and shielding himself from his team, not wanting them to see him when he was so genuinely emotional. “Thank you,” he repeated softly. “I appreciate you calling me to tell me that, Mr Hubbard. Thank you.” Tony was ready to hang up, having heard what he wanted to hear.

“That is not all, young Anthony,” Tony could hear the smile in Hubbard’s voice.

“Oh?”

“The bulk of Clive’s moneys he willed to your cousin Crispian.”

Tony shrugged and nodded. He’d expected that. Crispian was much older than him, since his mother was the youngest Paddington and the age difference between Crispian’s father and Clive and his mother had been a large one. Crispian was a good man and had been the one to care for Clive when his health declined so dramatically in recent years.

“However, he did put some aside for you in a trust.”

“Oh, he didn’t have to.”

“I know that you still have the trust funds that your grandfather and your mother left you, which Clive was the administrator of, and now that he has passed, you will have control over your trusts.”

“Oh!”

“But in addition, Clive has also left you a quarter of his estate, six million pounds, to be added to the trust that your mother left you.”


“I realize that you are at work and cannot speak freely.”

“Yeah.”

“I shall set up some time for us to speak at a better time.”

“Of course. Is Crispian OK with this?” Tony whispered.

“Your uncle spoke with Crispian about this matter, prior to his death. There are no issues with Crispian.”

“But…”

“Anthony, hello!” And there was Tony’s cousin on the phone now. “Be a good sport, shut up and take Uncle Clive’s money. He meant it for you and I won’t go against his wishes. But you know, I found that IOU you wrote him when you were in college? For ten thousand dollars? A loan?”

“Wow*!” Tony chuckled, remembering the document that he had written up and printed and tried to make look as official as possible.

“I’ll expect repayment of that in full,” Crispian continued. “With interest. To your trust fund, of course.”

Tony snickered. “Wow! That is unbelievable*!” he rolled his eyes.

“And don’t you dare ask him about his cupboard again. Clive might not be alive to paddle you, but I am.”

Tony rolled his eyes again.
“One last thing, Anthony,” Mr Hubbard was back. “You remember the house in Virginia, home of the last of the Paddingtons who immigrated to the New World in the 19th Century?”

“The house where Uncle Clive and my mother used to love to visit during summers?” Tony asked softly.

“Yes. That one. Clive had such fond memories of it.”

“Oh-huh?”

“He left that to you. You are the last of the Paddingtons in America. Clive wanted the house to go to you, despite what became of it and the rest of the Paddingtons who lived there. He had good memories of that house, and good memories of your mother with him, in that house.”

Tony sighed and nodded, bowing his head. He knew about the Paddington cousins who had died in what was supposed to be terrible circumstances – he didn’t really know the particulars except that everyone died – and he’d thought the house destroyed or sold. But apparently, no, he was now the owner of this house. This mysterious house with the tragic history.

He knew he was getting overwhelmed emotionally. All those pictures of Clive and his mother. He had so few of them, so few mementos of his mother. Because one of the stepmothers had done some ‘spring cleaning’ and ‘accidentally’ destroyed all of them. Except for a few that he’d hidden away. Getting the photo albums meant everything to him, and the fact that Clive had also left him money and a house, a house that was filled with good memories of his mother? It was too much.

“OK, well. Thank you very much*,” Tony murmured.

“I shall work with a solicitor on your side of the pond to finalize everything and send you the appropriate documents.”

“Thank you very much,” Tony exclaimed again, nodding as they said their goodbyes.

“Don’t be a stranger!” he heard Crispian yell.

“All right*! Well I’ll see ya, pal*!” Tony yelled back.

He hung up the phone, heart still racing, and saw that McGee, Ziva and Gibbs were all looking at him now. Shit. He didn’t need this right now. His fingers were starting to tremble, and he took a few deep breaths, trying to calm himself. Tears threatened to blind him for a minute. He would have all those pictures of his mother! The thought of going from having only a handful of well-worn photos to albums full of pictures was overwhelming him.

“Did… Uncle Clive have a big estate*?” McGee was asking.

“Huge*!” Tony exclaimed, licking his lips. “Twenty four million pounds*.”

Cash. Not including the properties and securities and bearer bonds. But Tony just kept thinking of those pictures of his mother. He couldn’t believe it. He would own more than three pictures of his mother! He wanted to laugh and cry at the same time.

“That’s over thirty five million dollars*!” McGee’s voice broke through to him, his brain whizzing around like crazy.

He needed to get away from them. Get a moment to collect himself. Shit. He was cracking in front of them and he needed to go, everything felt so brittle. And somehow he faked it. Told them some stuff. Lied and told them it had all been left to Crispian, mixed in the truth that it turned out he had signed an IOU to Clive which Crispian was collecting with interest, omitted the bit about repaying it to himself instead of to Crispian. Swept the picture of the red Ferrari that he’d told them he planned to buy into his trash can. He couldn’t bear to look at it when he would have the pictures that he truly wanted soon.

And when McGee patted him on the shoulder and told him facetiously, “I am sorry for your loss*,” Tony almost burst into tears. Because Clive was dead. Uncle Clive, who had always been so goddamned nice to him, was dead. Uncle Clive who had been the only one who remembered his mother fondly and without animosity, and had told him all these stories about her. Clive had left him all his pictures of her. Pictures that Tony had always wanted, but never dared to ask for.
Because he was just a far flung nephew, and his mother had been estranged from her brother and her entire family because she had chosen his dick of a father over them.

“It’s only money*,” Tony bit out. “Excuse me.”

He made his escape, not needing to see Ziva’s face, gloating with happiness at his supposed misery. He went to the men’s room and locked himself in a stall for ten minutes, trying to process it. He’d been sad, of course, when he’d been told of Clive’s death, and the funeral had been difficult, especially since some of the Paddington cousins were snooty and looked down on him, because his mother had been estranged from them for decades and they had no real idea who he was as a person. But Clive had never had any attitude with him, had always accepted him unconditionally, had always told him how like her he was. And Crispian turned out to be one of the nicest guys ever. But what was hitting him so hard now was that his mother was dead, and the only person who ever wanted to remember the good times with her, who had wonderful memories of her, and who, like him, had loved her, he was dead, too. It was like Tony was losing his mother all over again, when the last person other than him who had truly loved her died.

Eventually he had to get up because McGee might have been teasing him about it earlier but his ass really did hurt like the dickens. Tony hadn’t been on a horse since his eighth birthday party, when his mother had arranged for pony rides for him. It was also the final birthday party that he’d ever had, and the last birthday party that his mother had been alive for. A wave of sadness threatened to overcome him. He slunk back into the rest room and slammed the stall door shut and closed his eyes. Shit. He really had to get a grip on himself. He couldn’t go back out there to his teammates in this condition or they would absolutely tear him apart.

He focused on controlling his breathing, and relaxing his tensed muscles, and gradually his heart slowed down and he felt semi normal. He splashed cool water on his face and dried it with a paper towel, tweaking his hair in the bathroom mirror before he went back to the bullpen, smile firmly in place again. He took the teasing with an easy grin, teasing them right back, and forced himself to focus on work for the whole day, but when Gibbs let them go, he was the first one out of there, going right home. He had a small snack, changed into his clubbing clothes, and despite it being a work night, and went out, danced his troubles away, and went home with a man.

One of Tony DiNozzo’s secrets was the complicated nature of his sexuality. Sometimes, after some of the difficult days, he just needed someone to fuck him and use him, and just pound into him. A woman wouldn’t do. And today was one such day. Hell, every day since Jeanne had accused him of murder had been that kind of day. He hadn’t been able to fuck a woman since Jeanne and well, if sometimes the men he’d been picking up might have been a little rough with him and hurt him a little, that wasn’t too bad since he knew he deserved nothing less than pain for what he’d done to Jeanne.

That night, the man was younger than him, and gorgeous, and hung like a horse, which pleased Tony to no end. After a couple of mutually beneficial orgasms, Tony slinked back home and called Crispian at 0300, which was 0800 in London and Crispian had probably been at work for an hour or two by then. He winced, as his ass was hurting even more now, after the horseback riding and the subsequent rough fucking. He called Hubbard again after he was done speaking to Crispian, and they spoke at great length making final arrangements for everything to be delivered to him, and Tony was an emotional mess again after that.

He forced himself into the shower, napped for an hour, got up and showered again, and was back at his desk before the rest of the team appeared.

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Gibbs couldn’t help himself. He kept watching his Senior Field Agent as he worked. Tony seemed distracted that day. Quieter than normal. He barely even responded to Ziva and McGee when they continued to tease him about owing money instead of inheriting money from his dead rich uncle, and Gibbs could see that the words were actually hurting him. There was a tightness in his lips, and the lack of the usual participation in the team banter made Gibbs wonder what the hell was going on. Had Tony really wanted the money that badly? Did he want to leave the team? Leave NCIS? Leave Gibbs?

That last thought rocked Gibbs. He’d been giving Tony a hard time, prodding him about what he would do, when he would quit his job once he got his hands on his uncle’s North Sea oil money. But with the news that Tony owed his cousin now, Gibbs knew he should settle himself down. Tony wasn’t going anywhere. He would need a job in order to facilitate the payback of the loan.
But he'd always thought that Tony’s whole thing about money was just a front. That he didn’t really care about it. Not that much. Even though he did like his expensive clothes and whatnot. So was Tony that upset about not inheriting what he thought he would get? Or was Tony upset about something else? Because this behavior of his, this feeling of Tony deliberately putting distance between himself and his team, was definitely Tony being upset and hiding it. And for the life of him, Gibbs couldn’t figure it out this time.

Sometimes not even Gibbs who was the person closest to Tony on the team, could figure out what it was the man kept in his head, his masks were so fucking good. It had intrigued Gibbs at first, and over the years, he knew that he had developed an unhealthy attachment to DiNozzo, with his beautiful eyes, bright smile and a self that was more hidden than out in the open. Tony only hinted at everything that he could be, with his sly wit and his coy looks, and that mouth that looked like it was meant for filthy things. Even all these years later, Gibbs knew that he’d barely scratched the surface and that Tony kept himself insanely private by being ridiculously public about his indiscretions. He hid himself right out in the open, which was a talent. As if he knew where all the shadows were and could insert the pieces of himself that he never wanted anyone to see into the dark spaces while shining a light as brightly as he could on other pieces of himself in order to deflect and hide everything else.

He knew that he was obsessed with DiNozzo, and had been for far too many years now, but he couldn’t help himself. He always enjoyed watching the man interact with his team, enjoyed the banter even though he usually growled to stop them from doing it or getting distracted from their work, but he’d had to swallow his laughter at Tony’s words a lot over the years. So yeah, when Tony was having an off day, Gibbs knew it. Usually he knew why Tony was off, but this time he really couldn’t figure this out.

He watched Tony surreptitiously, a move that he had perfected over the years they’d worked together. That day, Tony seemed to have absolutely no idea that Gibbs’ eyes were on him. Usually, Tony would meet his eyes and give him worried looks, and Gibbs knew that Tony would start trying to figure out what he’d done wrong lately. And while Gibbs didn’t feel good about making Tony feel guilty for no reason, he’d rather the man feel guilty than be upset that Gibbs was lurking and being a creep, stalking him. But not that day. That day, Tony was completely oblivious, flipping through the cold case files, brow furrowed in concentration, completely focused on his task and shutting out all distractions. Gibbs knew that that was one of Tony’s avoidance techniques. If he didn’t want to worry about whatever it was he was worrying about, he would focus everything on to one task with laser like focus and let everything else fall away.

Gibbs usually liked the results out of those days because Tony had a knack for solving cold cases. He seemed to be able to put things together, things that looked as if they had no connection to each other, but then Tony would rearrange the pieces and clues and magically pull out some weird theory, possibly based on some movie or other that he had seen, and voila, that would be the key piece of information leading to arrests and cases being closed.

But that day, Tony didn’t come up with any new clues. It was a quiet day, with everyone working cold cases. And it was nice, because he and Tony had had a grueling few days out in Arizona. Truth was, he was feeling it in his bones, too. So maybe it was just exhaustion that was causing Tony to be off a little. Or could it be it something else?

Gibbs pursed his lips. Was Tony catching valley fever again? Hadn’t he said that he and Arizona didn’t mix and that he’d had valley fever before? He resolved to speak to Ducky and find out more about valley fever, including the possibility of reoccurrence, so that he would be able to monitor Tony for symptoms.

But at the end of the day, after Ziva and McGee had left for the day, Tony handed him a form requesting leave. He was asking for the upcoming Friday and Monday off, a long weekend, essentially. Normally, Tony would be babbling about the vacation that he was planning for weeks on end, planning his time off with great delight and well in advance. This time Tony just handed him the paper, lips pressed together in a straight line, dimples creasing his cheeks.

“What do you need time off for?” Gibbs asked him, knowing that he came across annoyed and grumpy.

Tony shrugged. “Have some stuff to do,” he said vaguely.

“This weekend?”
Tony nodded, not meeting Gibbs’ eyes.

“You doing OK?” Gibbs asked softly.

Tony’s green eyes finally met his, and he looked surprised. He nodded. “Sure, Boss. I’m fine. Never better.”

And that was when Gibbs knew that something was definitely up. Whenever Tony insisted that he was ‘fine’ and ‘never better’, it absolutely meant the opposite. He sighed. “You gonna tell me what stuff it is you’re planning on doing this weekend?”

Tony shrugged again. “Just some stuff around the house,” he muttered.

“You? Doing stuff around the house? Do you even know the business end of a screwdriver?”

Tony grinned. “I think it’s the end with the thingy that you use to hammer in nails, right?” he joked.

Gibbs rolled his eyes. “Need any help?”

Tony looked surprised again and shook his head vehemently. “Nah, I’m good. Thanks. Just need the time to figure out how to fix things after I screw them up. You know how it is.”

Gibbs gave him a long look, and despite the fact that he didn’t believe one word of what DiNozzo was saying, he signed off on the request and nodded, putting it in his outbox.

“Thanks, Boss,” Tony’s grin was small but genuine. Gibbs saw how tired Tony looked behind the smile.

“Sure you’re OK?” he tried again.

“You think a couple of days on a horse that would prefer to eat me rather than let me ride him is going to keep me down, Boss?” he winked saucily and Gibbs’ heart jumped a little. Even all these years of exposure to Tony and his flirtatious nature hadn’t inured him to the man.

“Get out of here,” he growled. “Before I change my mind about approving your time off.”

Tony laughed and grabbed his things before he sauntered away, and Gibbs allowed himself a moment to admire Tony’s ass as he walked away.
Tony drove out of DC on Thursday night, having taken the teasing about his Uncle Clive’s will all week. He’d packed his bags and left them in the car. And even though it was after 2000 hours when he finally left the office and Roanoke was a good four hours away, he got in his car and took first the I-66 west, then the I-81 south, taking the US-581 the rest of the way to Roanoke. He wondered if this was the way his mother and Uncle Clive had been driven when they were children, after sailing into Baltimore. It was also possible that they’d taken a private plane directly to Roanoke from wherever they arrived in the US. The Paddingtons had always been filthy rich. But he liked thinking that his family might have driven on this same road that he was on now, long, long ago.

He checked into his hotel, and fell asleep fully dressed on top of the covers, as he was completely exhausted. He’d been so anxious about coming here that he’d had trouble sleeping for days now. But now that he was finally here, the ball of tension was released and he slept like a baby, until his phone alarm woke him up. He snoozed a little before he got up, put on his running clothes, deciding to get a run in the tiny little exercise room downstairs at the hotel. He needed to shake off the hazy dreams that he’d had. He couldn’t quite remember any detail but it was quiet and calm and he thought he could hear the dying notes of a piano. The hotel was one of the historical buildings in Roanoke and Tony admired the décor and the interior of the building as he walked down the hallways. Once in the little room, he plugged his earbuds in and with his exercise playlist on, he focused on his run. Afterwards, he cooled down by walking on the treadmill, completing his usual workout and returning to his room to shower.

It was a gorgeous and sunny day. There was a slight chill still in the air, it was still March after all, so Tony had on a jacket and a scarf as he meandered down the street and found a coffee shop. It was a non-chain café. A little honest to god mom and pop café, which made him smile. He always loved the ambience of establishments that didn’t conform. He ordered a coffee and pointed at a couple of pastries in the case, taking his tray of goodies and relaxing in one of the comfortable armchairs in the corner. He pulled out his kindle and began reading. He had a couple hours left to kill before his appointment with the realtor who had the keys to the Paddington House.

He could feel the curious looks thrown his way, since Roanoke wasn’t exactly a huge city, and he was a stranger. Not that it was small enough that everyone knew everyone else, like Stillwater had been when they’d gone there for that case and met Gibbs’ father, but it was still small enough that people knew he wasn’t a local. Plus the fact that the barista has seen his service weapon holstered on his belt and this was probably being whispered around. But he ignored it, concentrating on his
They’d get bored of him soon enough. There were times when he definitely missed his shoulder holster because it allowed him to be a little more subtle with his weapon. But even though he wasn’t at work or on a case, he was armed, as per regulations, he was to carry from door to door.

He enjoyed his pastries and agreed to a second cup of hazelnut latte when the barista came over to clear his table, and he sat quietly and savored the silence. No phone calls, no bodies dropping, no scrambling to obey barely verbalized orders. It was peaceful. He stared out the window for long minutes, just breathing in the atmosphere. His eyes roved aimlessly around the shop – it looked as if it was old enough to have been in business when his mother and Uncle Clive were children. He wondered if anyone still remembered the Paddingtons who used to live here, and what Paddington House looked like now.

He could have done his research and gone to the county office to look up blueprints of the house, or even just googled for more information to see what was publicly known. But he’d decided to just drive to Roanoke and look at the house with fresh eyes, without being influenced by stories or history, or any of that. He wanted to look at it and form his own opinion before he learned more about it. He wanted to see if he could picture Clive and his mother running around the house as children. Maybe even feel a hint of their presence still there.

He daydreamed about the stories Clive had told him about their time at the house until it was almost time for him to meet the realtor, then he slipped a generous tip under his cup and headed out. The realtor was meeting him in the hotel lobby and he had just enough time to go up to his room, brush his teeth, fix his hair and grab his backpack before he went downstairs again.

There was only one person sitting in the lobby area, looking as if they were waiting for someone. She stood up, she was about Tony’s age with dark, almost black hair, brown eyes, beautiful caramel skin, and a lovely smile. She was fairly tall, even though she was wearing ballet flats, she was maybe only two or three inches shorter than Tony.

“Mr DiNozzo?” she asked.

“Tony, please,” Tony suppressed a shudder. Mr DiNozzo always made him think of his father and that was another story altogether, one that he didn’t want to think of on most days. He held out his hand. “Ms Graham.”

“Serena,” she smiled at him as they shook hands.

“Pleased to meet you,” Tony muttered.

“Shall I drive us, or would you like to follow me in your car?”

“I’ll ride with you,” Tony shouldered his backpack and followed her out to an SUV parked in a visitor parking spot outside.

“I was somehow expecting someone older. Certainly someone more British,” she grinned at him once they were on their way.

“My mother was a Paddington,” Tony explained. “I was raised here. Not here in Roanoke here. In this country. Well, I’m from Long Island.”

“Your mother?” Serena gave him a questioning look. “I was told that someone named Clive owned the property?”

“My uncle. He died last month,” Tony sighed.

“Oh. I’m so sorry!” Serena put a hand on his arm comfortingly as she drove.

“I’m the last of the Paddingtons to be on this side of the Atlantic,” Tony told her. “He left the house to me instead of to one of my British cousins.”

“Oh, well, that’s nice of him,” Serena said. “But I do have to warn you that the house is in a state of disrepair. It’s really such a shame but after what happened, the house was abandoned and it’s definitely uninhabitable now.”

Tony made a face. “My mother and Clive used to summer here when they were children,” he said softly. “I just want to see it.”
“And your mother is…?” Tony could see that Serena could guess that his mother wasn’t with them anymore but didn’t want to be the one to say it.

“She died when I was eight,” Tony shrugged.

“Oh, I am so sorry,” Serena said again.

Tony gave her a grin. “It would be nice to see the house, no matter what state it’s in,” he said softly.

“Like a connection to the past,” Serena nodded, immediately getting what Tony wasn’t saying.

Tony stared out the window for the rest of the drive, for once in his life not having much to say. The house loomed in the horizon and as they got closer, the SUV bumping along the dirt track, he could see that it was practically falling down. It was huge, with what would have been a grand looking entryway, with arches and stairs, one end of it was a turret, and it was like a building in a Gothic novel. He smiled to himself, and got out of the car, eyes trained on the house, noting the moss and lichen covering the red brick, the roof about to cave in, and everything else that could be completely wrong with the house. All the dark spaces along the house that should be scary and have his internal warning bells ringing, but for some odd reason, it felt like a homecoming to him. Something just clicked inside him when he saw the building from afar, and the feeling of rightness was only becoming stronger when he was this close to it. He belonged here, he could feel it in his bones. He stepped forward, eyes wide.

“It’s in such a state,” Serena said regretfully.

“It’s beautiful,” Tony breathed, tossing her a bright smile, even though he hadn’t taken his eyes off the house. “It’s perfect.”

“Do you want to go inside?”

Tony nodded enthusiastically.

“We should be careful. It’s probably dangerous,” Serena tried to warn him, handing him several keys. One of them was large, old and ornate, looking almost like a ceremonial key or even a key to a treasure chest. It was tarnished, though Tony could see how it would gleam if it were to be polished.

Tony inserted the tarnished key into the old lock, unlocked the front door and walked in. The house smelled both musty and fresh, and maybe some version of moldy. But Tony walked into the foyer and gasped. Stairs went up, with wrought iron bannister, and it was in terrible shape – pieces of the wall had fallen in and every surface was covered in inches of plaster dust and insulation as well as the accumulation of dust and dirt of decades. But it was still beautiful. There was so much potential here.

Tony carefully walked in, forgetting even that Serena was with him. They walked through room after room of the same – until they got to the library which was in the turret like area. The entire turret was one high ceilinged room and bookshelves lined it all the way up, still filled with books, but a tree grew right in it. There was a huge hole in the roof. Tony touched the tree, and fingered the spines of the books, sighing sadly. He would need someone to come in and look at the books to see if any of them could be salvaged. These were old and Clive had said that the Paddingtons who lived there had been scholars for generations. Who knew what treasures were still among these. And if even one of these old books could be rescued and restored, then that was one more piece of his mother that he had that was tangible.

Serena was silent as they walked through the house, but when Tony made for the stairs, she put her hand on his arm again, shaking her head. “I don’t think it’s a good idea to go up there,” she muttered. “This whole house is unsafe and the upstairs – I don’t want you to fall through the floor.”

“It’s fine,” Tony reassured her, patting her shoulder. “You stay down here.”

Carefully he went up the stairs, staying close to the wall, and testing his footing before putting his weight on the stair. Slowly he went up the stairs, eyes trained on all the detail of the interior of the house – he’d never realized how beautiful houses could be. Upstairs it was more of the same, until he came to a room that was empty but for the dusty yet still delicate looking baby grand in the
middle of the room. A rickety old chair stood where a stool should have, which made Tony sad.

He smiled. Paddingtons were Paddingtons, no matter where they went, they would always have a piano. He carefully walked over to the instrument and tried not to cough at all the dust that he stirred up when he opened the cover. He depressed a few keys, picking out a Bach Prelude with one hand, and the piano twanged discordantly. It was in pathetic shape. Tony knew he would be restoring it, too. He could see his mother sitting here, right at this piano, tinkling away the way she used to on their piano at their old home. His mother had been a talented pianist, and had been studying at Juilliard when she met his father. And then that was the end of that, of her original plans to be a world famous pianist.

He waded through the debris and carefully made his way back downstairs. The front door was open and he could see Serena out there fiddling on her phone. He found his way back to the library and stood there, admiring the view. The tree was so beautifully framed by the books and the sunlight streaming through the huge hole in the roof. It was gorgeous. It was a shame he would have to get rid of the tree but maybe he could think about putting in a skylight or something up there to increase the natural light in the room.

He turned around and looked upwards. Had he just heard the piano again? Serena was outside and she couldn’t have come back in and made her way up the stairs without him hearing her. The house was a mess and the wooden floors creaked at almost every step. The sound was gone now, though. Although he thought that he could hear whisperings now. He frowned, trying to catch words in the hush of whispers, keeping his eyes on the tree in the library and the play of shadows with the sun shining from above.

A hand on his arm made him jump.

“Just me,” Serena smiled.

Tony put a hand on his heart. He looked around in confusion. He could no longer hear the piano or the whispers now. He shook his head and calmed his heart. It had to have been his imagination going crazy in this spooky old house. Maybe it was the house welcoming him home.

“Paddington House is a historic building, part of the National Register of Historic Places, and we’ve been wanting to try to get it restored, but since it’s privately owned, we couldn’t really do anything without permission. So if you were inclined to donate it to the historical society, we would work with them to restore the house to its former glory,” Serena was saying.

“Donate?” Tony raised his eyebrows at her.

“It’s a money pit,” Serena told him flatly. “You can’t just renovate it to your liking because it’s part of the history building registry. You won’t be able to just modernize everything or tear anything down to put up something more appropriate for our time. There’s a ton of regulations on what can and can’t be done to restore it.”

“I can work with the historical society to restore this old house,” Tony said softly, wiping the dust off a book spine before he grinned at the title. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A favorite of his when he was a boy. He pulled the book out and blew the dust off before he carefully opened the book. It smelled musty, of old books and leather binding. It was still legible, although the pages were warped.

“Or you could sell it, if you want.”

“I’m not selling,” Tony told her closing the book with a snap. “This house… It’s amazing. I love it. I want to do right by it.”

Serena sighed. “I can put you in touch with people to work for grants to restore this house.”

“That would be good,” Tony grinned. “Thank you. You’ve been very kind.”

“My brother will be disappointed,” Serena grinned. “He was hoping you would either sell the property to him, or donate it to the historical society.”

“Why?”

“He’s been dying to restore this house.”
“Yeah?”

Serena nodded. “I believe he wrote to your uncle several times in order to ask him for permission to begin the restoration, or asking him if he would sell just the house to him, if not the entire property.”

“How much acreage are we talking about?” Tony asked.

“You don’t know?”

“I kind of zoned out when my uncle’s solicitor was telling me all the details,” Tony shrugged. “I just wanted to see the house that Clive told me was his and my mom’s favorite place to stay during the summers.”

Serena nodded. “It’s over a hundred acres. Most of it is wooded and since it’s private property, it hasn’t been touched, so we’re talking old growth trees.”

“A hundred acres!” Tony exclaimed.

Serena grinned at him as he shook his head. “Still thinking of keeping the property?”

Tony grinned back. “I’ll figure something out. I can’t let this go out from the family,” he pursed his lips. “I can leave it to one of my cousins when I die so it stays with the Paddingtons.”

Serena gave him a curious look. “No wife or kids?”

Tony chuckled. “No, no wife. No kids.”

“Girlfriend?”

Tony snorted at that. Yeah. His last girlfriend had been his mark and the daughter of a world class arms dealer and to nobody’s surprise, that relationship had blown up along with his car.

“Boyfriend?” Serena tried tentatively.

“Sadly, no,” Tony shook his head.

“Single and still young. You might have kids yet.”

Tony sighed. “Not really how I believe my life will work out,” he shook his head. His phone rang, interrupting them. “Excuse me. DiNozzo,” he barked curtly into the phone as he turned away from Serena. “Hold on, Probie. I can’t hear you.” He walked out the door before the reception cleared up. “What?”

“I need you to help me fill out Form 362A, Tony!” McGee hissed. “Gibbs wants it today!”

“I taught you how to fill that form out at least three times in the past month alone, Probie,” Tony snapped. “This is my day off. I’ll be back on Tuesday.” He ended the call and turned back to the house, seeing that Serena was now outside with him.

“Work?”

Tony snorted. “Probably the reason why I’ll die alone,” he rolled his eyes.

“And what do you do, exactly?” Serena asked carefully. “I’ll be honest. I’ve been ignoring the texts on my phone. Roanoke’s a small town and everyone wants to know why you’re openly carrying a weapon.”

Tony chuckled. “I’m a Federal Agent. I work for NCIS.”

“Oh. And that is?”

“Navy cops.”

“Oh!” Serena looked impressed.

“It just means I’m overworked, underpaid, and always stressed,” Tony shook his head.
“Are you someone who processes evidence, or…”

“I’m a field agent. We play the investigator role for crimes perpetrated by or against members of the US Navy and the US Marine Corp.”

“Oh!” Serena smiled at him. “And single? And a Paddington? People in town are going to love this.”

Tony laughed. “Please. I’m absolutely boring. But this house is something else,” he turned back to the house, looking up at it. That warm feeling of belonging was stronger than ever. He definitely belonged here. He was the last Paddington in the New World. And this was Paddington House. He would definitely do what he could to help restore the place and maybe one day he could see himself retiring here, to Roanoke, to live out the rest of his days peacefully when he was old and infirm. The image of an octogenarian Gibbs building a boat in the basement of Paddington House while he played piano in the salon upstairs made him want to giggle wildly. As if Gibbs would ever even know about this place. This would become his hiding place from the world.

He sighed. “She’s going to be beautiful again. Every detail, as good as it was before.”

“I’m glad you’re not one of those people we’d have to fight and argue with to restore this old place.”

Tony smiled at her. “Your brother? Would I be able to hire him?”

“You want to hire my brother?” Serena sounded surprised.

“Is he any good?”

Serena nodded. “He masterminded the restoration of another old house in the county and he’s worked as far as Savannah, Richmond, Charlotte, and even New Orleans on other restoration projects.”

“Good, then yeah, maybe he can still work on this house, without me giving up ownership of it.”

“That would make him very happy!” Serena beamed.

“If you don’t mind, could we walk around the house and I think I saw some outbuildings from the window upstairs?”

“Sure! Then I can call my brother and we can meet for lunch and he can talk your ears off instead of mine about his plans for restoring this house?”

Tony grinned and nodded. “That sounds good.”

They walked around the building and checked out the outbuildings and the storm cellar. There was an old barn, and the stables had fallen down. Everything was starting to get overgrown, and there was a lake out back, and beyond that, the woods.

“I’ll go down to the courthouse and get the blueprints for the house and the property lines,” Tony mused to himself. He looked at the book in his hand. “Maybe your brother can find someone who restores books, because that library about made me cry.”

Serena nodded.

“There’s a gorgeous baby grand upstairs. It’s old. Maybe even eighteenth century. I can’t be sure. But it’s definitely in great need of a lot of love. Maybe a piano restorer, too.”

Serena nodded, eyes widening. She watched as Tony leaned down and trailed his fingers in the lake, the water was chilly but not freezing, his eyes seemed to be far away now, gazing blankly into the woods.

“You know the history of the house, though, right?” she asked.

Tony focused on her again. “I decided not to read up on them before I came here. I only know what my uncle and cousins hinted at. My cousins who lived here, they all died. That’s all I know.”

“Oh, well, then you better gird your loins. People are going to talk your ear off about what happened here, whether you like it or not, once they know your connection to the house and that
you’re keeping it. Not even the crazy teenagers will come to this house.”

“Really? I did think that it was strange how there was a definite lack of used condoms and empty beer cans in there.”

Serena tried to shrug it off, but she seemed a little freaked out by it. “You want to look at more stuff, or do you think we can head back to town and pick up my brother for lunch?”

“Lunch is good,” Tony smiled. “I can tell this house is starting to freak you out.”
They got back in the car and Serena started the drive back to town. They said nothing until the house was out of sight of the rear view mirror.

“So. Is it the local haunted house?” Tony asked, keeping his tone light.

“Well, Franklin Paddington, who lived here…”

“Uncle Clive called him his cousin Frankie,” Tony interjected.

“Yes, well, Frankie Paddington, apparently stabbed his wife to death with a kitchen knife, shot all of his children and the staff living in the house before he walked into the lake and drowned himself. No one was left alive.”

Tony stared at her. “You’re shitting me?”

“I shit you not.”

“Rumor mill? Or truth?”

“It’s what everyone says,” Serena said grimly. “They say an evil spirit did it. That Frankie didn’t do it or it wasn’t him operating his body.”

“Nice.”

“They say the evil spirit is still there.”

Tony’s eyes widened. “You’d think that would make the kids want to go there even more!”

“They say they see things sometimes. Hideous things. In the house. Around the house.”

“Have you seen anything?”

Serena shook her head. “Are you kidding me? I can’t even watch the stuff in movies. No way I’d be going to a house rumored to be haunted at night. Absolutely no way!”

Tony laughed. “Yeah and if you did, don’t run from things by going upstairs, and if you’re there
with someone else, don’t separate! Don’t ever get separated! First rule of horror movies.”

“Even I know that much!” Serena laughed with him.

“I better check in with the police station and see if they’ll give me access to the case file,” Tony mused after a short silence.

“You can do that?”

“Amazing what a badge will give you access to,” Tony grinned. “But maybe someone down there will understand that I just need to know what the cops think. How their investigation went. I mean everybody’s dead now, for decades. My uncle Clive is dead, my mother’s dead. There’s nobody alive who can do anything to anyone, regardless of how the investigation went. I’m not looking to reopen the case, I wouldn’t even have jurisdiction. But it’s my family, and I’d like to see the file for myself. You know? Find out the truth and not just have rumors of what Frankie did, or evil spirits, or what have you.”

Serena nodded.

Tony’s phone rang again and he sighed as he saw that it was Gibbs. He swiped to answer it.

“Yeah, Boss?”

“Tell McGee how to fill out that form, DiNozzo. I need it right now.”

“I told him how to do it three times already. And that’s just this past month. If he can’t fucking bother to pay attention to me when I’m explaining shit to him, then you should take it up with him and not me.”

“Just tell him what to do.”

“No. Let him figure it out himself. I had to,” Tony said grimly. “I’m off work today and I can’t get to my laptop. I’m busy.”

“Doing things around the house?” Gibbs asked pointedly, and Tony totally understood that Gibbs was hinting that he should just drive in to work to show McGee how to do this stupid ass form.

“I’m not coming in today,” Tony scrubbed his face. “No, Gibbs. I have things to do which is why I took the time off. Let me talk to McGee.”

A moment later, McGee came on the phone. “Talk me through this, Tony.”

“No, Probie.” Tony said firmly. “If you seriously cannot remember how to do this, hack into the security feed and have Abby lip read my instructions to you from the last time I taught you because I’m not repeating it for the fucking fourth time this month, on my fucking day off.”

“But…”

“Bye, Probie.” Tony cut the call and muttered choice words under his breath.

Serena arched an eyebrow at him.

Tony sighed but before he could speak his phone rang again. “DiNozzo,” he muttered tiredly.

“He know what to do now?” It was Gibbs again.

“I told him to hack the security feed and have Abby lip read my instructions from the last time I tried to tell him how to do this.”

“You’re not helping him?”

“Not for the fourth fucking time this month, and no, not on my day off. Even if a body dropped and you get called in, I will not be back on the case until Tuesday. You authorized my leave. McGee can figure out a goddamned form that he has had to file weekly for the last how many years now? by himself. And if things get too fucking dire without me, get a goddamned TAD for once. Goodbye.” And for the first time in his life, Tony hung up on Gibbs. He stared at the phone, shocked, for a long moment.

“That didn’t sound good,” Serena said tentatively.
Tony snorted, running his tongue along his bottom teeth, wondering if he maybe wouldn’t have a job when he returned on Tuesday. Although he could probably sue NCIS if they fired him for not working on his day off, especially since all his paperwork had been filed correctly and approved in advance. More money for his coffers. It could help pay to restore his newly inherited house.

“Well, if it turns out to be a really, really bad thing, then I guess I’ll have all the time in the world to be here for the restoration in person!” he said brightly.

“Are you a glass half full kind of person?”

Tony laughed bitterly. “God, no. I’m more of a where the hell is a glass when you need it, kind of person,” he quipped.

“Sounds like your job is demanding.”

“You could say that.”

“Hence the no time for a personal life or wife or kids sort of thing?”

“You could say that.”

“Huh. You know the job isn’t everything.”

Tony smiled humorlessly at her. “Sadly, I do know that. But I am powerless to resist.”

“You could resist there.”

“Does this mean you’re begging off on lunch and going back to the hotel and doing work with that Probie guy? What kind of name is Probie anyway?”

Tony laughed again. “Probie is just a nickname. But no, they’re going to just figure their own shit out today. If your brother is still free to join us, I’d love to meet him and talk business. Talk about the house. And then I’m going to bring a bunch of donuts to the precinct and see what they can do about giving me access to the case files from what happened to Cousin Frankie.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Serena nodded her approval.

They stopped by a brownstone on the edge of town and Serena honked her horn. Tony watched as a man stepped out of the house and he saw that he was tall, perhaps a two or three inches taller than Tony was, and had a hulking build – broad shoulders, muscular torso. He was wearing a Henley underneath a denim jacket and dark jeans hugged his legs. His hair was close cropped, and he had a sexy trim goatee. Tony tried not to let his eyes bug out of his head when this tall drink of water opened the door and slid into the back seat of the SUV.

“Glad you could make it, Yan,” Serena greeted him. “This is the new owner of Paddington House, Tony DiNozzo. Agent DiNozzo, my brother Yannick.”

“Yan,” the man smiled as he held out his hand, and Tony shook it, smiling back, feeling a little dazed by the brightness of his perfect teeth and the darkness of the man’s skin. Yannick was sex on legs.

“Tony, please,” Tony told him.

“Agent?” Yannick raised an eyebrow.

“He’s a Fed. A Navy cop. NCIS,” Serena supplied.

“And you want to keep the house?” Yannick asked, and Tony nodded, not sure why his hand was still enveloped in Yannick’s huge paw.

“But I’d like for you to help me restore it,” Tony knew he was blushing but he couldn’t help it.

The man’s chocolate eyes looked him up and down, and Tony was glad that he wasn’t dressed in his usual work attire of designer suit and tie, and expensive shoes, as it would have not impressed this man. Instead Tony was wearing a button up shirt and an old, worn, favorite pair of jeans.
Nothing too special.

“It’s not going to be an easy job. And it’s going to be expensive.”

Tony nodded. “Your sister said we could apply for some grants to help with the restoration expenses, and I can finance the rest.”

“On a cop’s salary?” Yannick asked bluntly.

“I’m a Paddington on my mother’s side. So I have some Paddington money socked away,” Tony replied. “Never saw a need to spend it before, but it would be worth it to restore the Paddington House.”

Yannick looked him over thoroughly, which made Tony blush even more, before he released Tony’s hand and settled in.

Serena gave them both an amused look. “Buckle up, brother of mine, or Tony here might have to arrest you.”

“I told you earlier, I don’t have jurisdiction here,” Tony told her patiently. “I can’t arrest him for not wearing his seat belt, but if he goes flying through the windshield should we get in a wreck, dibs on saying ‘I told you so’.”

Both Serena and Yannick laughed, but Tony noted that the man did put on his seat belt.

They ate at a small French bistro that had beautiful and delicious food, and mostly Tony listened as Yannick talked him through the process of restoration for a house like his, and pulled out his portfolio of the other historic buildings that he’d had a hand in restoring. Tony looked at the before and after photos and knew that he was practically hanging on Yannick’s every word, but he was ridiculously excited to see how Paddington House could look again.

“It would be better if we had more pictures of the house as it used to be,” Yannick was saying. “I might have a few stashed away somewhere – I think I bought a box of photographs at an estate sale and I could have sworn I saw a few pictures of Paddington House there.”

“My uncle left me the family photos, everything that had my mother in them,” Tony volunteered. “I haven’t received them yet. Maybe next week some time. But I’m pretty sure I remember there being some that were taken during their summers here.”

“That would be perfect. Especially if there are photos of the interior of the house.”

“I’ll look for them and make you copies,” Tony slurped his iced tea. “Wait, so are you taking on the job of masterminding this restoration?”

Yannick’s smile was wicked and did things to Tony, making him blush. “I certainly am.”

Tony smiled, and turned to see Serena grinning into her hand. He raised an eyebrow at her and she shook her head.

Tony saw that Yannick was rolling his eyes and shaking his head at her, and he dismissed it. Siblings always had that sort of thing going for them, and being an only child, Tony had always been excluded from that kind of teasing and communication. Well, he thought he’d found a measure of it at NCIS but lately, he’d been rethinking his decision to stay there. He wondered if he should maybe rethink his career, given how McGee and Gibbs had spoken to him that day. After all, he could always look for a job at a different federal agency – Fornell was always trying to lure him away to the FBI. And maybe Tony could move closer to Roanoke if he was with the FBI.

He glanced at his watch. “I’m going to make a couple phone calls to see if I can smooth my way into the local police precinct to see the case files for the Paddington murders,” he told Serena and Yannick. “If you guys could point out the best bakery for donuts and pastries for additional lubricant?”

After he’d said the final word, he knew he was blushing again. Yeah, DiNozzo. Bring up lube in front of the hot guy, why don’t you, he told himself wryly. He avoided Yannick’s eyes after that.

Serena told him of a pastry shop about a block away from the police precinct that was apparently
amazing. Tony nodded and took notes on his phone.

“I don’t know why I expected you to have a notebook, like a proper one with a pen to take notes,” Serena looked surprised.

Tony drew out his little black notebook with the pen stuck in the binder from his jacket inside pocket. “You mean like this?”

Serena laughed guiltily.

“That’s for work. And you know, interviewing witnesses, noting down evidence and such. I prefer not to mix the two,” Tony grinned.

“That makes sense,” Serena nodded.

“If they have photographs of the interior of the house, we could use a copy of them,” Yannick said.

“Yan! That’s absolutely morbid!” Serena smacked her brother’s arm. “And insensitive!”

Tony shrugged. “I was thinking I might sweet talk them into making me a copy of the case file, photos included,” he offered. “Let me look through what they have and maybe I can show you some of the ones that don’t have blood spatter or any of the vics in them.” It felt weird to call them ‘vics’ when it was his own family, but Tony packed that feeling away and refused to think about it. No good could come of that.

Yannick grinned excitedly and Tony had the feeling that even if the photos had anything like dead bodies and such in it, that the man would overlook it all and focus on the details of the house itself.

“I can call my cousin Crispian and see if he might have other pictures of Paddington House, either from his own records, or maybe in the other albums, the ones that Clive didn’t leave to me. I’m sure he’d be happy to make us copies for the purposes of restoring the house.”

“Sounds like a plan!” Yannick rubbed his hands together. “I’m still a bit disappointed that you’re not interested in selling the place, but I am excited that I’ll still be getting my hands dirty with this project.”

“I’m very much looking forward to working with you to see the house restored,” Tony grinned.

“How long are you here til?” Yannick asked.

“I drive home Monday afternoon.”

“You’re based out of DC?” Serena asked.

Tony nodded. “And once I get back there it’ll be nuts. But I’ll be trying to get back here for more long weekends, or even just weekends. Especially when the actual work begins! I have absolutely no experience with anything like this, but I would love to watch the work and maybe learn something, if I could.”

“Nothing like putting your own blood, sweat and tears into a house to make it yours,” Yannick said approvingly.

They exchanged phone numbers, and Tony took his leave. Yannick paid for the lunch, despite Tony’s protests, telling Tony that he could claim it as a business lunch and refusing to listen to his arguments. And then Tony was off, first calling a few of his DC Metro contacts to see if any of them could introduce him to someone at Roanoke PD. One of them directed him to a Detective Vic Velasquez. Tony walked to the precinct, stopping first at the bakery and picking out an assortment of pastries, donuts and cupcakes, before he walked into the building that housed the Roanoke PD. He asked to speak to Detective Velasquez and flashed his NCIS ID before he was waved to the interior.

Victoria Velasquez was a beautiful woman in her early forties, with dark brown hair pulled into a chignon at the base of her neck, curly tendrils escaping the knot and framing her face attractively. She looked up at Tony and frowned at him.

“Yes?” she asked, her tone definitely not friendly, the way cops were when they see unfamiliar
“Hi, sorry to bother you, Detective Velasquez. I’m Tony DiNozzo, and I’m with NCIS out in the Navy Yard in DC.” Tony put the boxes down on Velasquez’s desk and flashed his badge. “Detective Carson from DC Metro pointed me in your direction.”

“Do we have a case that ties into NCIS?”

Tony shook his head. “Oh no. No. Actually, I came to ask you a huge favor, and hence the bribery.” He pushed the boxes towards her.

“From Harriman’s?” she asked.

Tony nodded.

“What’s the favor?” she asked, nodding to him to take a seat.

Tony sat and cleared his throat. “This isn’t official business. I’m not even working today or this weekend. I am here on a family mission.”

She raised her eyebrow skeptically.

“My uncle died last month, and he left me a house in Roanoke.”

“And?”

“It’s the Paddington House?”

Her expression cleared. “Ah,” she nodded. “You want to know what happened to the last of the Paddingtons who lived there.”

“I got the cliff notes of the rumor mill version of the case,” Tony nodded, pursing his lips. “It’s really not a good story.”

“Figured. I walked through the house today,” Tony knew he sounded sad, but he couldn’t hide his sorrow at what had happened to the house since the tragedy. “I’ve done my share of clearing derelict buildings and there’s always detritus from squatters or teens having a good time. But not at that house. No sign that people even went in there. And that got me curious. Plus you know, uncle Clive had been fond of his Cousin Frankie, and he had all these stories of the times he and my mother summered here when they were children,” Tony shrugged. “I just need to see the case files and just, look to see what happened for myself.”

“It’s a closed case.”

“I heard Frankie killed everyone in the house, kids included, before he drowned himself in the lake?”

Velasquez nodded. “That about sums it up.”

Tony blew out a breath. No wonder nobody ever talked about Cousin Frankie anymore.

“Let me verify that you’re who you say you are and then we can talk. Come back in a couple of hours.”

Tony nodded. He took a walk around the block and found a small park. He sat on the park bench, face up, enjoying the sun, giving it closer to three hours before he went back, and Velasquez waved him in. Tony could see that she had a dusting of powdered sugar on her blouse, and he smiled. The donuts had done their job. “Alright. I checked in and verified that you are who you said you are, and that your mother was a Paddington, and that your uncle did leave the house to you. So yeah, I pulled out the case files and made you a copy of it.” She pointed to a box on the floor.

“Oh, that’s awesome. Thank you!” Tony smiled.

“Carson in DC Metro vouched for you.”

“He’s a good guy. He comes and plays a little basketball with us at the Y some weekends,” Tony
crouched and ran his hands over the box.

“Open the box. There’s an envelope there you might want to look at. Right on top.”

Tony quirked an eyebrow. He pulled the lid of the box off and saw an ancient faded yellow envelope right on top. There were no names on the envelope. He opened the envelope and out fell a key.

“What’s this?”

“The county put most of the furniture in a storage facility, and the Paddington estate’s been paying for it for decades. That’s the key to the storage facility.”

“The original furniture?” Tony’s eyes widened.

“Except for the piano. They left that in the house to rot. Nobody wanted to touch that thing. Supposedly the piano is haunted,” Velasquez shrugged.

“That piano is a wreck now! It would have been absolutely gorgeous back then! It’s a crying shame they left it there,” Tony shook his head. “But this is awesome. Yannick will be pleased with this.”

“I did hear that you hired Yannick Rousseau to do the restoration.”

“You did some digging,” Tony grinned at her.

“Well, I heard that the new owner of Paddington House decided to keep the house and wants to restore it, even though it’s going to be a money pit.”

Tony sighed. “My mother and my uncle summered there a long time ago. I don’t have much family left, and you know, it’s nice to feel connected to something.”

Velasquez put a hand on his shoulder. “Well, if you need anything, you come by or call and we’ll do what we can.”

Tony grinned at her. “I appreciate that. Thank you.”

“I have to warn you though that that place has bad juju. It gives me the creeps when I go by it. And if you wanted to, you can check out the sensationalist version of what happened there in one of the local guidebooks.”

“Yeah? The house is in a guidebook?”

The detective nodded grimly. “It’s not completely accurate but it’s not far off. And they have the speculations that our case files won’t have.”

“What do you mean?”

“They say the house is cursed. Some say it’s haunted and that’s what made Franklin Paddington do what he did.”

Tony pursed his lips.

“I don’t like to pay attention to this stuff, but the old folks have some interesting stories about that house,” she shrugged. “I’m just passing this along.”

Tony nodded. “I do appreciate it, and the warning. If it’s any consolation, I have no wife and kids so even if the house is haunted, I’d be alone and all I’d do is walk into the lake and drown myself. I’d have nobody else to kill. I just have a goldfish and she’s in DC.”

Velasquez laughed at that. “Fair enough. Come by next time you’re in town and you can buy me dinner.”

Tony waggled his eyebrows at her. “An offer like that, how could I refuse?” he quipped.

Chapter End Notes
Red_Pink_Dots helped me cast Yannick, and we chose *Kris Elba* to play him
*sighs* *drools* :D
Thanking Detective Velasquez, he carried the box back to the hotel. He called Yannick and asked if he wanted to come with him to check out the storage unit, which Yannick accepted immediately. They agreed that even though it was Saturday, Yannick would pick him up at 1000 the next morning.

Tony ordered room service for dinner and started going through the case files as he ate his dinner. He forced himself to distance himself from it and approach the file as a cop instead of a family member. He carefully read the reports and the witness statements from the other employees and staff of the house, the ones that didn’t live in and that weren’t killed.

Franklin Paddington had been acting off for months, apparently. They found him sleepwalking and always ending up by the lake. A maid’s statement said that he had even been found soaking wet and still asleep by the edge of the lake one morning. Tony went through the crime scene photos, the grainy black and white images making his eyes hurt. It was lucky that Roanoke PD even had crime scene photos, since the murders occurred in 1951. He sighed and rubbed his eyes. Franklin Paddington had brutally stabbed his wife and five children while they slept in their beds. Each body had been found with multiple stab wounds, practically each wound fatal on their own. He’d then gone through and shot all of the house staff that lived in the house. And then he’d apparently just walked into the lake and drowned himself without weighing himself down. His body had been found floating face down, cause of death found to be drowning. How someone could just walk into the water and drown themselves was still a mystery. Franklin should have tried to breathe and all he would have needed to do was lift up his head. It should have been a reflex action. But yet, he’d drowned himself without the use of weights and autopsy report showed that his blood toxicology had come back clean. But of course, it was sixty years ago and forensic science had come a long way, so maybe the coroner had missed something.

Tony read the autopsy reports for all of the victims – his cousins, all of them, and finally when he was done with the documents, he pushed himself away from the desk, his eyes burning. It had to have been some kind of mental illness. Some kind of disorder – bipolar disorder? Dissociative Identity disorder? Who could sleepwalk themselves through ten murders and then drown themselves in the lake? The shootings had been precise and dispassionate. Two maids, the cook and the butler had been shot in the head. Clean shots. No defensive wounds on the vics. Which was odd, since the first gunshot would have been audible and people should have been trying to get away instead of just lying in their beds, waiting for him to shoot them. But the savagery of the stabbings – that took Tony’s breath away. The stabbings were the worst. Anger and hatred in every stab. Tony didn’t have Ducky’s qualifications in Forensic Psychology, but he’d seen enough autopsies and heard enough of Ducky’s explanations to come to the conclusion that Franklin had been deeply disturbed and filled with anger and hatred. Each stab had been vicious and fatal, but he had continued to stab away, stabbing as many as eight or nine times for each family member. Even the littlest ones. What could have caused him to do that?

Tony wanted desperately to believe that some random stranger had to have walked in to the house and done this, and maybe Franklin had killed himself because he couldn’t live with the fact that he hadn’t been able to stop the carnage. They didn’t test Franklin for gunpowder residue, and by the time they found his body floating in the lake, any traces of blood from the stabbings and the shootings had been washed away. It had been 1951, after all, and they didn’t have an Abby with her spectacular ‘babies’ that could figure out all kinds of things unseen by the naked eye.

Tony tried to stop himself from thinking about it, but the gory images of his little cousins lying dead in their little beds made him want to throw up. So he did the only thing he could. He raided the minibar.

He was just about out of liquor from the minibar in the room when his cell phone rang. It was late by then, and he knew it had to be someone from work. Rule #3. So he answered, even though he was drunk, and tired, and disturbed, and about ready to cry after seeing the pictures of his four year old fifth cousin or whatever the hell she was to him, cut almost all the way open, practically hacked to pieces. He didn’t want to talk to anyone but there were rules and he always obeyed the rules.

“What?” he answered without even looking at the caller id.
“DiNozzo?”

It was Gibbs. Of course. Tony rubbed his eyes tiredly. “Tell Probie I’ll call him tomorrow 0700 if you still need me to do his form 362A,” he murmured. “I’m too drunk to do it now.”

There was a long silence.

Tony nodded. “Good talk,” he told the silent Gibbs. “Later.”

“Wait, DiNozzo. Are you OK?”

Gibbs sounded like it hurt him to ask the question. Tony suppressed a hysterical giggle. “Peachy keen, Boss,” he finally bit out. “Just had a long day.”

“Doing things around the house.”

“Uh-huh.”

“You need any help, DiNozzo?”

Tony sighed. “I can handle it,” he finally replied, sitting up and draining the last little bottle of whiskey.

“You sure you’re OK?”

“Just fine,” Tony sighed, falling back on the bed. “Why’d you call again?”

Gibbs was silent for a moment. “Work stuff,” he said gruffly.

“What d’you need?”

Gibbs began talking about the case they had caught late that afternoon, and Tony listened and threw out ideas for new avenues of inquiry. They spoke for about ten minutes before Tony yawned, a big, huge, yawn.

“You sound tired.”

“Eh,” Tony rubbed his eyes and blew out a breath.

“You coming in to work this case with me, DiNozzo?”

“Tuesday,” Tony growled. “I’m off this weekend. You signed off on it.”

“I know.”

“Well, then.”

“Get some sleep, DiNozzo.”

Tony hummed a response and Gibbs hung up on him. He looked at his phone and threw it onto the desk with all the photos of his dead cousins. He buried his face in his hands, trying not to be overwhelmed. He pushed all the images down, out of his conscious mind, and got ready for bed. It was too late and he was too drunk to deal with things. He needed to sleep and it would look better in the morning. He made a mental note to hit the bookstore to pick up the guidebook with the lore about the murders and the supposed haunting before he fell asleep.

When he awoke, his eyes felt gritty and he felt even more tired than he did the previous night. He sat up and blinked, trying to clear his head. Half remembered snatches of his disturbing dreams filtered through his consciousness. He remembered walking slowly through a house, through a woods, into a lake, the water cold and refreshing his fevered brain. Well. He should really lay off hitting the booze and falling asleep depressed, he thought to himself.

He shook his head to clear it, put on his workout clothes and pounded out the weird visions on the treadmill, running extra this morning to try and sweat out the weirdness. After he grabbed a shower, he headed out to the same little coffee shop for breakfast, and it was filled with customers that day. He stood in line and got his coffee and pastries to go, nodding at the barista who remembered him and his drink of choice.
He walked back to his hotel and ate his breakfast before he swept all the Paddington House case information back into the box and covered it. He decided to put the box in the trunk of his car to ensure that nobody would accidentally see them. He didn’t need to see his little cousins’ bodies’ pictures in the next edition of the famous haunted sites of Roanoke guidebook. Which reminded him – the front desk directed him to the nearest bookstore, which was within walking distance, so he went and bought a couple of books. One was a generic historical guidebook of Roanoke – Paddington House was listed in the Index as a historical building. The other was the Haunted Sites of Roanoke, which devoted an entire chapter to Paddington House. He took his purchases and went to the coffee shop again – this time it had emptied out somewhat. So he sat, nursed a hazelnut latte, and began reading through the historical guidebook of Roanoke, wanting to learn more about the general information pertaining to the history of Roanoke. He googled information on his phone to see if he could find corroborating information online. Shit, he was always double checking. Damn Gibbs and his stupid ass rules, he smiled to himself.

He was lost in the guidebook when a cup of coffee plunked onto his table made him jump.

“You’re going to make a man feel ignored, Agent DiNozzo,” Yannick teased him.

“What?” Tony glanced at his watch and realized that he was a half hour late. “Oh my god. I’m so sorry. I was just going to sit here and head back to the hotel before we were supposed to meet.”

He saw that he had a few texts on his phone, too, that he hadn’t even noticed, which made him blush.

“No worries, Tony,” Yannick smiled down at him as he pushed the cup in front of Tony and set another down for himself. He unbuttoned his jacket and slung it over the back of a chair and sat down. “We might as well enjoy a cup of coffee together before we head out.”

“I’m totally out of it today,” Tony confessed when Yannick settled down in his chair and began sipping his coffee.

“I could tell. You look tired.”

“ Weird dreams last night,” Tony shook his head. “I got my hands on the case file for the House and fuck, I know I’ve been doing this whole cop thing for fifteen years, but you never get over seeing kids brutally murdered. And it was brutal. And done by someone my uncle called Cousin Frankie. These were my cousins…”

Yannick’s big hand was warm and comforting on Tony’s shoulder. “I am so sorry,” he said softly.

Tony nodded and took a deep breath, trying to center himself. He was totally thrown out of whack with this whole thing, and still emotional from losing Clive and the renewed loss of his own mother. He rubbed his eyes tiredly.

“You want to postpone?” Yannick asked, his tone gentle.

Tony waved it away. “Nah. I’m seriously curious about what’s in this storage unit,” he grinned.

“You don’t have a lot of things belonging to your mother, do you?” Yannick asked him thoughtfully.

Tony shook his head. “One of my stepmothers destroyed a bunch of her things, including photos and other stuff. Her clothes, books, and stuff,” he made a face. “I don’t even know which stepmother, to be honest. My father has made a career out of marrying and divorcing women.”

Yannick nodded. “And your father?”

“We don’t speak,” Tony confessed. He didn’t know why he was telling this man all of this private information about himself. But those chocolate brown eyes were gentle and understanding, and he couldn’t feel any judgement from the man. It was the first time in a long time anyone hadn’t made him feel guilty for being a terrible son. “Haven’t for years and years.”

“Sometimes that’s how it is,” Yannick said, his acceptance simple, making Tony feel warm and tingly inside.

They sat and enjoyed their coffee in pleasant silence. Tony was daydreaming about the house again, as he leafed through the guidebooks, when his phone rang, breaking him out of his reverie.
“DiNozzo,” he sighed tiredly into the phone.

It was Gibbs again. Tony listened to the curt words, made several noises of acknowledgement, before Gibbs hung up on him. His phone beeped a few times and he checked the pictures that McGee had texted to him, before he called Gibbs back with his thoughts. It took less than ten minutes, but Yannick had been watching him curiously.

“It’s not only Saturday, but it’s your weekend off,” he pointed out.

“Crime waits for no man,” Tony grinned. “We weren’t even on call this weekend, but sometimes that doesn’t matter. We catch a case and it’s go, go, go.”

“Sounds stressful.”

Tony grinned. “Stress is my middle name. This one time I was on this cruise in the Caribbean with my frat brothers, and I spent half the time on the phone and in my cabin with a basic murder board made with items I scrounged from different places because I chose not to bring my laptop with me. My frat brothers totally razzed me for it.”

Yannick rolled his eyes. “Vacations should be sacred.”

Tony snorted. “Don’t I know it.”

They walked back to the hotel together and Tony invited Yannick up to his room. He’d put a newly purchased memory card into one of the NCIS cameras and packed it and a tablet into his backpack, which had its usual complement of evidence gathering paraphernalia. You never knew when latex and baggies might come in handy, and Tony liked to be prepared. Then he handed Yannick a post it with the address of the storage facility, and Yannick first drove him to Yannick’s office downtown, where they drew up and signed the contracts so Yannick was officially hired, a contract that included a non-disclosure clause, and then they drove to the storage facility in Yannick’s pickup.

It was a climate controlled storage facility and apparently, the Paddington estate had rented four of their largest units. Which made sense, since it was a big house with many rooms. It made Tony sad that they hadn’t stored the books away or the piano, because that would have been ideal.

Tony used the key and opened a storage unit. They turned the lights on and Yannick’s eyes lit up.

“It’s like Christmas came early,” he breathed.

Tony laughed at that. He pulled two pairs of latex gloves out of his backpack and handed a pair to Yann. They spent the afternoon photographing and cataloging the items in the unit. There was furniture, wall hangings, rugs, curtains, and boxes and boxes of things, including clothes and books and when Tony opened a box that contained framed photographs that must have been displayed in the house, he whooped happily. They worked hard together, going through boxes, photographing and documenting everything on Tony’s tablet. They were completely lost in their task, and Yannick was a wealth of information on everything — what things were, what period they were from, and what condition they seemed to be in, and Tony documented everything.

Yannick’s phone ringing interrupted a conversation they were having and Tony just ignored it as he continued to photograph and document while Yannick answered.

“What? Oh! Right. I’ll be there. I will be right there.” Yannick hung up the phone and gave Tony a sheepish smile. “We have a weekly family dinner that I’m supposed to be at.”

Tony glanced at his watch and was surprised to see that it was after 1800. They’d worked half the morning and all of the afternoon in here, and they had barely made a dent in the first storage unit. “Oh man, sorry. I’ll catch a cab back to the hotel.” He turned back to the item he was fingering.

“Are you going to stick around and keep on going?”

“Maybe?” Tony grinned.

“You haven’t eaten since breakfast, and I have a feeling if I leave you here you’ll still be here photographing and documenting when I come back in the morning.”

“There’s just so much here,” Tony’s voice was filled with wonder. “I can’t believe how much
“It’s amazing,” Yannick agreed. “But you need to eat and get some sleep before we come back and continue on with this.”

Tony tried to wave it away but Yannick insisted and he found himself turning the lights off, locking the unit, and agreeing to come and have dinner with the family. “They won’t think I’m crashing the party?” he asked nervously when they were in the truck.

Yannick shrugged. “Serena and I have been dragging friends and other strays home all of our lives. Everyone will love meeting the new Paddington in town.”

And it was true. Tony was made to feel very welcome, and Serena introduced him to her husband and their two daughters. Yannick’s mother was a force to be reckoned with and she hugged him to within an inch of his life. There was a grandmother who sat in a rocking chair and watched him intently, and Tony was on his best behavior all evening, feeling those dark eyes on him almost at all times.

“Don’t worry, Nana’s harmless,” Serena whispered to him at some point that evening. “She used to be a lot more present but it’s dementia, the doctors say. It’s sad, but some days she just gets paranoid at everyone and everything.”

Conversation topics ranged from the kids’ school and friends, to what Ms Rousseau was working on, to Serena and her husband’s feud with their neighbor across the street. When talk turned to the Paddington House, Tony let Yannick go on and on about what they’d found so far, smiling and nodding when his input was required.

“You’re a Paddington then?” Nana’s voice surprised them all.

“On my mother’s side, ma’am,” Tony answered politely. “She was one of the London Padдинgtons.”

She scrutinized him, making him squirm inwardly. Outwardly he projected his usual calm with a slice of insouciance. “You have the look of them,” Nana nodded.

“Yeah?” Tony was surprised. “Everyone usually says how much I look like my father.”

Nana shook her head. “You’re tall, like they all were. You have the Paddington eyes – they were all green eyed, like cats, they were. And you carry yourself in the way that Mister Frankie used to.”

“Did- did you know my Cousin Frankie?” Tony was surprised.

“I was away from the house that night, my mama was sick and needed me at home,” Nana told him.

Tony’s mind went through the case files quickly in his head. “Veronique Cloutier?” he asked. “The kids’ nanny?”

Nana nodded.

“Mama, you never said you worked for the Padдинgtons,” Ms Rousseau chided her.

Nana looked sad. “Those poor, poor children. I think of them all the time,” she murmured softly.

“You found them in the morning,” Tony gasped. “You did.”

Nana nodded, eyes tearing up. “My beautiful bonny babies,” she sighed. “All of them, gone. Just like that.”

The hair on Tony’s neck was rising and he was getting goosebumps.

“Mister Frankie was so very nice and so gentle. He taught at the college, you know. Always had his head stuck in his books and so devoted to his wife and his children.”

“Did you ever meet my Uncle Clive or my mother? Elizabeth?”

Nana shook her head. “I didn’t start there until after the war. They were before my time.”
Tony sighed. His mom and Clive had been sent to stay in Roanoke during the World War II. To be away from London during the bombings.


Tony gave Yannick a surprised look.

“Come here, and let me look at you.”

Yannick jerked his head at his grandmother so Tony stood and went around the table, hesitantly kneeling down in front of her. She put soft hands on his cheek and looked into his eyes. She smiled at him, gently petting his cheek and his hair. “I think Samuel would have looked like you, if he’d grown up.”

Samuel had been three when he’d been killed.

Tony smiled up at her, her hands were so warm, gentle and soothing. She must have been a nice nanny to his cousins. Tony had had his own barrage of nannies, good and bad, and he knew that Veronique would have been gentle and kind, someone a child could go to for any reason.

“It’s good to see a Paddington in town again,” she murmured softly.

Tony’s smile widened. “Thank you, ma’am.”

When he returned to his seat, Serena reached over and squeezed his hand, smiling at him. Nana went back to quietly watching him after that, but then Tony wasn’t so worried about her anymore, and flashed his smile at her every so often, as he participated in the evening’s conversations. He told them a few stories from some of the more interesting cases that he’d worked on, at NCIS and going back to some of the PDs he’d worked at as well.

After dinner, Yannick drove Tony back to his hotel and they arranged to meet in the morning. Yannick took him out to breakfast on Sunday, and then they went back to the storage unit and worked through inventorying and cataloguing the unit. They got almost all the way through the first one – the work slowing down whenever they came across something interesting that they needed to look at in great detail. Serena drove by and dropped sandwiches off for them for lunch, and they worked all day and well into the evening. They had a quiet dinner together at a restaurant.

Monday morning, Tony worked with Yannick to get the paperwork started on building permits, grant applications and other boring but necessary stuff. They went to the County Records Office and made copies of the blueprints of the house, and the map of the property. They were kept busy with all of these details and didn’t get a chance to return to the storage facility. Tony downloaded the photos from the camera and emailed Yannick his inventory sheet, but they decided that since it was filled with such personal things, that Yannick would wait for Tony’s next visit to go back and work through the storage unit with him. In the meantime, he would get the ball rolling for the actual restoration of the house and get the piano restorer and book restorer on board.

Tony left Roanoke that evening, exhausted but excited about the plans for Paddington House. He knew that he’d found a great partner in Yannick and he was looking forward to seeing the house come together. It was difficult, but he forced himself to drive back to DC. He knew he had to go back to work and pretend like nothing else was happening with his life, and that was fine. As long as he made time to go back to Roanoke as often as he could. For one thing, he wasn’t going to miss a second of the inventory of the storage units, and for another, he really enjoyed being in Yannick’s company. Not that there was ever going to be anything there because Tony wasn’t doing relationships right now. The last one had been Jeanne and he was just about ready to throw in the towel on any kind of future with anyone at all. Yannick was way too nice a guy for him to inflict himself and his baggage on. He wasn’t even sure if Yannick would even be receptive to a guy making passes at him, so he put it out of his head entirely and with great difficulty turned his focus to work instead of the Paddington House.
Something was up with DiNozzo and Gibbs did not like it. Not one bit. When Gibbs thought about it, it all stemmed from when they returned from Arizona for the case involving Dina Risi and her artwork. It wasn’t anything he could point his finger to and say, there, that is something that the ‘normal’ DiNozzo wouldn’t do. He seemed to be acting like himself. And it wasn’t like DiNozzo was slacking off at work either – he was, in fact, focused and efficient. He continued to banter with the others, but he did his work quickly and was always the first one out of there for a change. He had also taken a couple of long weekends since the first one he took right after they got back from Arizona, and he was adamantly refusing to come back to work on those weekends he took off. At the most, he would talk to him or to McGee on the phone, discussing some aspect of the case they had caught while he was out of office. In the past, Tony would have canceled his plans and come right back to work, but now, he wasn’t doing that anymore. He was pushing to get all his work done early so he could leave for his vacation or whatever the hell it was he was doing with himself during his time off.

Every time anyone asked what he was up to, he came up with a different woman’s name and all kinds of sexual exploits and intrigue, one time even confiding to McGee (while Gibbs was fairly sure that he knew Gibbs was eavesdropping) that he’d spent the entire long weekend tied up in some brunette’s basement, being spanked and fucked all weekend long. And even though that picture made Gibbs all hot and bothered, he knew DiNozzo’s tells and knew that Tony was lying out of his ass. Hell, Tony seemed to be acting almost too much like himself and yet different enough that Gibbs could see it. Little things bled through. For one thing, instead of hiding the fact that he worked extremely hard, he seemed to be pushing himself even harder and it all seemed to go towards needing to get out of work and leave for the weekend. He was even actually taking the replacement time off for overtime worked, which meant that he openly worked his crazy hours and then would be gone for three or four days at a time, whether it was Saturday and Sunday or whenever their ‘weekends’ off ended up being if they caught a hot case and worked through the actual weekend.

But without fail, DiNozzo left the office and unlike the past, he never canceled his plans and never came back to work, even if the team caught a hot case. It was maddening. Gibbs had no idea what was going on. He wondered if Vance could have possibly blackmailed him into some weird undercover op or something. La Grenouille and Jeanne Benoit were still in the forefront of his mind. But he felt certain that the man would have come to him to talk about it this time. Especially after how that particular fiasco ended. Gibbs still hadn’t recovered from the shock, the fury, the absolute desolation he’d felt when he thought that Tony had been killed when his car had been
blown up. So yeah. He was sure that no matter what Vance might have threatened DiNozzo with to keep him quiet, Tony would’ve told him if he had been pulled into another unsanctioned op.

He would suspect that DiNozzo might have found a new girlfriend if not for the fact that he could see how off the man was every time they were faced with a woman. Jeanne Benoit had truly rocked the man and he hadn’t regained his footing yet. So Gibbs could say with certainty that DiNozzo did not have a girlfriend. From what he could see, DiNozzo was only pretending to be interested in the women that he was flirting with. He was only making the effort when McGee or Ziva or he was in sight. Otherwise, he seemed to be fairly oblivious to the presence of the fairer sex. But yet, he was up to something with these long weekends that he kept taking.

One time, he caught DiNozzo laughing into his phone, an open joyful laugh that made his chest tighten up. DiNozzo almost never laughed like that anymore. He’d used to, before Gibbs had been blown up, lost his memory and ran off to Mexico. Before things went so pear shaped. DiNozzo had become so bitter, almost, his biting humor sharper, his smile more brittle. But whoever he was on the phone with that day had pulled out that laugh, that infectious laugh that made Gibbs want to laugh with him. Gibbs wanted to know who was on the line that was making him laugh like that. Wanted to know how to make him laugh like that again. But when he came into view, his Senior Field Agent immediately became guarded and wary, and spoke silently, ending the call as quickly as he could.

Anyone else would have said that DiNozzo must have gotten a new girlfriend, but the vibe still wasn’t quite right. He was flirtatious, sure, but this was DiNozzo. He flirted with Miss Francine, the ninety year old who volunteered at one of DC’s visitor center kiosks not far from the Navy Yard. He was the only person Gibbs had ever seen to make Miss Francine blush like a schoolgirl with his words. DiNozzo flirted with everybody. Besides, Gibbs had overheard some of DiNozzo’s calls to Jeanne, and knew how he sounded when he was speaking to someone he loved. This call had a completely different tone. But it definitely sounded like Tony was speaking to someone he knew, and who knew him.

So maybe DiNozzo had made a new friend. One that he was not telling anyone about. So why wasn’t he talking everyone’s ears off about his friend? What was it about this particular friend that made him keep things to himself?

Gibbs didn’t quite know what to think. But he let it go for a few weeks. Until he realized that Tony had not come to visit him in his basement in a long time. Tony used to just show up and sit there, and blather on about anything and everything, and Gibbs would work on his boat as he did it. And while Gibbs always made it was such a bother that he was there, and that Tony’s chatter was annoying, he actually found it quite soothing. He liked having the younger man there, sitting on his step, looking so comfortable in his home. He liked that he didn’t have to work at finding the energy for conversation because DiNozzo was more than capable of having one sided conversations, while still somehow engaging Gibbs and still getting his opinions, skillfully pulling it from him during his neverending yabba yabba. But he hadn’t been by the house since Arizona.

What the hell happened in Arizona that made DiNozzo change like this? Was he going back there for his long weekends? Had he had some kind of epiphany there? If so, what was it?

And even more worrying was the fact that Tony was looking run down and tired all the time now. Not just during the difficult cases where the team worked 24/7. Tony looked exhausted, as if he wasn’t sleeping well. He was even looking thinner. Gibbs started monitoring his food intake and realized that Tony wasn’t eating with abandon, the way he usually did. He still ate, sure. But it seemed as if he only ate if someone reminded him to do it, or brought him something. Gibbs realized that Abby was bringing Tony cupcakes and donuts almost every day and wondered if Abby knew what it was that was going on with Tony. Something that required comfort food on a daily basis?

After another couple of weeks, and Tony seemingly gradually getting even worse physically – bags under his eyes, band aids on his fingers – and his continued absence from Gibbs’ basement after hours, Gibbs had had enough. Tony had practically flown out of the office for the weekend, leaving Gibbs glaring at his empty desk. Gibbs knew that he couldn’t just sit and wait for Tony to come to him now. He had to make the effort and go to DiNozzo’s instead.

Half an hour later, Gibbs was growling under his breath as he carried the six pack down the hallway to DiNozzo’s apartment. He banged on the door loudly and waited. No answer.

Gibbs glanced at his watch. He’d come here directly after work, so there was no reason that Tony
wouldn’t answer the door. It was too early for Tony to be hitting the clubs yet. Unless he’d stopped somewhere for dinner, which was entirely possible. Grumbling under his breath, Gibbs set the six pack on the floor and, knees popping, sat himself on the floor by Tony’s front door. Sure, he had keys and he could just open the door and wait inside in comfort, but he wanted to talk to Tony, not intimidate him into lying to him. So he sat and waited.

And waited. And waited.

An hour later, there was still no sign of the man. He resisted the urge to call him. Maybe he was hooking up with someone. Tony had always been one of those people who needed sex like most people needed air. Gibbs knew that he fucked his stress away. They had had a stressful week. Maybe Tony had found some stress relief.

Two hours later, Gibbs had broken down and used his key and was sitting on Tony’s couch, drinking the first of the now-lukewarm beer that he’d brought. The apartment was empty, Tony was definitely not home. And there was no sign of any kind of renovation or DIY projects in the apartment. He was going to wait another half an hour before he went home. A half hour for Tony to come home. It was getting to be the time that Tony would be at a club dancing and fucking the night away and Gibbs wasn’t going to be sitting in the man’s living room waiting for him to come home like a scorned lover.

Forty five minutes later, still nothing. Gibbs sighed. He took his empty bottle and the rest of the six pack with him, and drove home. He didn’t want to leave any trace that he’d been at Tony’s apartment. Tony was weird about some things, his apartment being one of them. Gibbs remembered the shithole Tony lived in in Baltimore, his things not even unpacked from his boxes, despite having lived there for two years. He’d definitely unpacked his things in DC. He’d furnished his apartment fairly lavishly with what Gibbs knew was expensive furniture. He’d even brought his mother’s piano out of storage, putting it in the living room. Gibbs remembered helping him push it around to place it when Tony was moving in. At the time he’d been mostly grumpy about having to help Tony move the heavy ass thing, and he’d lamented the condition of the floorboards when they pushed the instrument into place. But he was also secretly pleased that Tony was actually unpacking. It felt to him like Tony was committing to NCIS. Committing to him. That Tony had more than his usual record of eighteen to twenty four month per job period in mind. That Tony wanted to stay for the long haul in DC. And that was a good feeling.

Gibbs liked the man. He was a brilliant and intuitive investigator. He was tenacious and hardworking, and able to make the difficult decisions. Gibbs had seen it during their joint investigation. And that he was great eye candy to boot, hell, Gibbs wasn’t going to complain.

But now that Gibbs was back in his basement, sipping bourbon by himself. He wondered. Had Tony reached his expiration date at NCIS, finally? Despite his anxiety at Tony’s two year mark, the man had stayed. Defied all odds and baffled the entire NCIS pool when year after year, the man stayed. The pools now no longer predicted when Tony would leave NCIS, but instead when Tony would take over Gibbs’ role on the MCRT. There was even a pool on when Tony would give it up and just move in with Gibbs. A pool that Gibbs was ashamed to admit that he’d asked a lowly summer intern to put money on for him.

The idea of Tony moving into his house was one he relished. One he indulged in in secret, especially on the mornings that Tony stayed over after being put to bed, drunk, in the guest room, and the man shuffled downstairs for coffee, hung over and wrecked, and yet still the most beautiful thing Gibbs had seen in years.

So maybe Tony was finally leaving? But why the long, drawn out goodbye? Tony had historically given notice and left town without lingering. So why the secrecy and the strange behavior, and the unexplained vacations? Whenever Gibbs asked him, Tony kept telling him that he was ‘doing work around the house’. Gibbs had just been in Tony’s apartment. There was no sign that the place was having any kind of work done. Everything looked the same. Pristine, the way Tony kept it.

Without thinking about it, he picked up his phone and dialed DiNozzo. It rang a few times.

“DiNozzo,” Tony’s voice was husky with sleep.

Gibbs lost his train of thought for a minute, wondering what it would sound like if Tony were to say his name in that deep, husky, sexy purr.
“Gibbs?” Tony cleared his throat and yawned. “If we caught a case, you know the drill. Get a TAD if you need a fourth man.”

“No. No case.”


Gibbs sighed. “You doing OK, DiNozzo?”

“Yeah,” Tony said it around a yawn. Gibbs could hear the bedclothes rustling in the background as Tony settled himself.

“You’ve been looking pretty exhausted lately.”

There was a long silence. “Boss? Are you drunk?”

Gibbs chuckled. “No. Just concerned.”

Another long silence. Finally Tony yawned again. “The house stuff is taking a lot out of me,” he finally admitted. “It’s turning out to be a bigger job than I expected.”

Gibbs could hear the truth in DiNozzo’s words, even though he was picturing the man’s pristine and definitely not under construction apartment that he had just been in. He grunted a response, unsure what to say about that. DiNozzo’s abilities to lie to him were even better than he’d realized. The man must have been practicing for years.

“You getting enough sleep lately?” Gibbs finally asked.

“I think so,” Tony sighed and muffled another yawn. “I’ve been asleep at least a couple hours tonight. Thanks for waking me up by the way.”

Gibbs grinned at the last, but he checked his watch. He hadn’t been home two hours. He’d been at DiNozzo’s apartment two hours ago. And Tony had definitely not been fast asleep in his bed at that time. What the hell? The man was just lying to him left and right now. For what seemed to be absolutely no reason.

“OK. Sorry to bother you.”

“Wait, Boss. Really. What the hell is up?” Tony sounded confused.

“Nothing. See you Monday.”

“Bright and early!” Tony chirped.

Gibbs hung up on him. The lying sack of shit. He wasn’t working on his house. He hadn’t been asleep for a couple of hours. What in the hell was he up to? Gibbs wanted to know. Hell, he needed to know.

He kept to himself, working on his boat for the rest of the weekend. Dispatch tried to pull them onto a case on Sunday, but since they weren’t on call, for the first time ever, Gibbs told Dispatch to route it to the on call team and hung up. Maybe he needed to crack down on NCIS taking advantage of Gibbs’ team. He hated turning down a case, hated doing it, knowing he and his team could make a difference. But it also meant that his team was the most overworked team in the agency. Maybe if he started being more reasonable, DiNozzo would go back to normal and not take these enforced vacations where he refused to come in to work, no matter what Gibbs said to him. He didn’t abandon them entirely though, and still looked at the evidence and told the team his ideas on the case, but unlike the past, where Tony would end up working during his vacation even if he was out of town, these days he never did that. Wherever it was he was going, whatever he was doing and who he was doing it with, he was definitely not giving it up and coming in to work, regardless of the situation.

On Monday morning, DiNozzo came in a little after Ziva and McGee had arrived, which made Gibbs look at the man sharply. Not that Tony was an early bird, but he liked to be at his desk or have evidence that he’d already arrived, before the other two made their appearance. Gibbs didn’t really understand why, but if DiNozzo felt he had to do that, then Gibbs wasn’t going to say anything. But Tony came in five minutes late, and dressed down, for once. He was clad in a pair of battered jeans that might have been black at some point, but had been washed to a faded
indescribable color. And the jeans lovingly hugged Tony’s pert ass. He had on a crisp white shirt and a slightly wrinkled jacket, and no tie. Gibbs realized that he was gawking at the man, along with Ziva and McGee.

“What?” DiNozzo looked down at himself and behind and around him before he threw his backpack down and winced.

“What happened?” Gibbs glared at him, taking in the even deeper circles around his eyes and the lines of pain around his mouth.

Tony held up his left hand. Two fingers were in splints.

“Sorry, was in the ER for half the night. Broke a couple of fingers, but luckily they’re my left hand so I’m good to go still,” he grinned. He cocked his right hand like a gun. “No problems with my gun hand.”

“How’d you break your fingers?” McGee asked.

“Yes, Tony. Tell us how you have managed to injure yourself again,” Ziva purred.

Tony rolled his eyes. “Just caught my fingers in a door, is all. Blam. Broken. Owwie. The nurse was cute, though, and we have a date next week, so something good came out of it,” he shrugged.


“Right away, Boss!” Tony responded, before he obediently followed the older man.

It was barely a second after the elevator doors closed that Gibbs slammed his hand on the emergency off button and deactivated it.

“What gives?” he demanded, jerking his head at Tony’s hand. “What the hell happened?”

Tony grimaced and sighed. “I was helping with the house stuff – I did end up hiring some people to do it because it was too big a job for me to even attempt on my own – and I was helping to take down a wall. I don’t honestly know quite what happened, but somehow when I pulled the sledgehammer back, part of the wall came with it and slammed into me. I went down hard, and the sledgehammer fell on my hand. Hence the broken fingers.”

Gibbs looked at him in disbelief.

“Just look,” Tony said tiredly, and he shrugged out of his jacket, wincing slightly at the movement, and pulled his shirt out of his jeans, pulling it up, exposing his golden skin, showing Gibbs how his side and belly and chest were absolutely covered in bruises.

“What the fuck, DiNozzo?” Gibbs muttered angrily.

“Yeah. My sentiments exactly,” he tucked his shirt back into his pants and winced as he put his jacket back on. “Stupid wall hit back! I was in the ER getting patched up last night. Sorry I’m late this morning. Won’t happen again.”

“What exactly are you doing with the ‘house’ stuff?” Gibbs barked.

“Completely redoing everything!” Tony’s green eyes glittered with enthusiasm at that. An enthusiasm that seemed absolutely genuine. His words seemed genuine. But Gibbs had just been to Tony’s apartment on Friday night and there were absolutely no signs of any kind of renovation, never mind a whole redo of everything.

“Everything?”

“Every single thing needs work,” Tony nodded, and the smile on his face was soft, and fond.

Gibbs barely held on to his temper. Tony was lying to him, and Gibbs couldn’t even tell anymore. Not by listening to the man. If Tony were to be believed, his entire apartment would be gutted. A wall was being taken down. He angrily reactivated the elevator.

“Make sure Ducky clears you for field work. Show him all your bruises. Everything, DiNozzo,” he barked.
Tony nodded.

“I mean now, DiNozzo.”

“Oh my way, Boss.”

In the middle of the morning, Abby came skipping in, bearing two beautifully iced cupcakes for Tony. She stuck her tongue out at both Ziva and McGee, claiming that they weren’t getting cupcakes because they didn’t break their fingers, and that the cupcakes were one for each broken finger. Tony laughed and happily ate his treats, and Gibbs watched as Abby’s sharp eyes lingered on the man and she waited until he was done eating them both before she waved to everyone and skipped away.

Abby knew something. Gibbs could tell.

Ignoring the banter between Ziva and McGee and Tony, he stood and stalked away, down to Forensics, where Abby was blasting her music as usual. He turned it down and she turned in surprise, before giving him a happy grin.

“Bossman!” she exclaimed, snapping a salute.

“Wrong hand, Abs.”

Abby laughed, her husky voice practically tinkling. “You think I’d have learned it by now, right?”

“You would think,” Gibbs agreed.

“What’s up, Bossman! New case?”

Gibbs shook his head. He grabbed Abby’s arm and pulled her into her office and closed the door. He didn’t want anyone to overhear this conversation.

“Are we throwing someone a surprise party?” Abby’s eyes brightened. “Wait, the next birthday is mine. Surely even you can see the folly of planning a surprise birthday party for me with me?”

Gibbs couldn’t help but grin at that. “When the hell would I ever be involved in planning a party, Abs?” He shook his head. “No. I want to know what’s going on with DiNozzo?” he asked without preamble.

Abby threw up her hands. “I don’t know,” she told him. And Gibbs glared at her, wanting the truth. “I honestly don’t know what the hell is up with Tony, Bossman,” she admitted sadly.

“But you do think someone is up with him?”

“Yeah! Why? Did he say anything to you?”

Gibbs shook his head. “Why do you think something is up with DiNozzo?”

Abby sighed. “He hasn’t come out with me in a while, Gibbs,” she bit her lip. “Not bowling, not for drinks, nothing. I mean I know we work really hard, but he used to come hang out with me like once a week. Practically every weekend. Or whenever the weekend falls for you guys. You know what I mean.”

Gibbs raised his eyebrows. He hadn’t know that about his two favorite people in the world. That they hung out on a regular basis. Of course he knew that they would hang out, but that they did it that often? That he had not known.

“What does he say when tells you he can’t hang out?” Gibbs asked.

“All kinds of things that I know is bullshit. But lately he’s just told me he’s too tired. And he looks it, too. He looks exhausted. That’s definitely true. And now he’s somehow broken his fingers! Palmer walked in on Ducky examining him, and he said Tony had bruises all over his torso, Gibbs! I have no idea what the hell is going on with him, but I have to tell you, I’m worried.”

Gibbs pursed his lips. “Why do you keep bringing him food?” he asked.

“He’s losing weight!” Abby exclaimed. “He doesn’t seem to be eating! Haven’t you noticed that?
And I don’t think he’s sleeping much. Or getting much rest. He’s looking terrible!”

Gibbs nodded. Although ‘terrible’ was subjective. Tony always looked good, he just didn’t look healthy right now.

“I’m not just going to sit around and let him waste away and die. God. Do you think he’s sick and he’s just not telling us?” Abby was getting worked up.

“I’ll talk to Ducky,” Gibbs said grimly.

Abby nodded. “I don’t know what to do,” she sighed. “He won’t tell me anything.”

Gibbs hugged her and dropped a kiss in her hair. “We’ll figure it out,” he told her.

She smiled, relief in her eyes.

“I’ll make sure he eats when he’s here,” Gibbs told her.

Abby sighed with relief. “He’s been like this for weeks. He seems to be obsessing about something and he’s just not telling me about it.”

Gibbs nodded grimly. “I’ll get to the bottom of this.”

“Let me know if you need any help.”

“Yeah. Do me a favor, track his phone’s location from this past weekend. I want to know where the hell he’s going on these weekends of his.”

Abby nodded, seeming to be happy to share the burden of worrying about Tony with Gibbs. If Gibbs knew her, she would be off working on tracking Tony’s phone right away and hopefully he would get some answers to this mystery that was surrounding Tony.
Gibbs’ next stop was Ducky, who assured him that other than the injuries sustained from blunt force trauma that matched his story of pieces of a wall and the sledgehammer hitting him, there seemed to be nothing else wrong with Tony that several good nights’ worth of sleep and a few good meals couldn’t fix. Gibbs nodded grimly.

After work that day, Gibbs grabbed Tony’s arm before he could run off and steered him towards his own car.

“What’s going on?” Tony asked Gibbs, looking confused.

“Intervention.”

“What?” Tony sputtered.

“Ducky says you need more sleep. You’re coming over, eating dinner with me and taking my guest room. No going out. No partying. You’re going straight to bed.”

“What?” Tony said again, staring at him in shock.

“You’ll be staying at my house all week.”

“What?” Tony was like a broken record.

“Ducky’s orders. Or he’ll take you out of the field.” Slight exaggeration. But if Gibbs asked Ducky to do it, he would, so technically not a lie.

Tony sighed. “I don’t even have my go bag,” he whined.

Gibbs held it up. He’d made sure to grab it from under Tony’s desk that day.

Tony growled under his breath but slipped into Gibbs’ passenger seat without bothering to protest any further. Gibbs watched as Tony actually fell asleep during the drive home, despite Gibbs’ atrocious driving. He really was exhausted, whatever the hell it was he was up to that he wasn’t telling anyone about.

He gently shook the man awake when they got to his house and waved away Tony’s excuses. That night, he watched closely, ensuring that DiNozzo stuffed himself full of his favorite pizza – sausage, pepperoni, extra cheese – and then ordered him up to bed before he went down to the basement. After working on the boat for a couple of hours, he went up to check the guest bedroom.

DiNozzo was sprawled on his belly, one hand under the pillow, covers low on his back, barely covering his ass. He was shirtless. Gibbs sighed and pulled the blanket up over his back. The house could get cold at times, even though spring was upon them. He watched as the younger man slept on, dead to the world. Asleep, he looked even more tired, and Gibbs could definitely see how much weight the man had lost now that his shirt was off.

After another moment where he just stared at DiNozzo’s face, mouth slack and slightly open as he slept, his breaths coming in little snores. He hoped that they would figure things out, whatever it was that was going on with his Senior Field Agent. With his friend. With the man he’d been infatuated with for years now. They needed to figure it out because he needed for DiNozzo to be healthy. He needed Tony to be healthy and himself again.

He went downstairs and his phone rang.

“Gibbs,” he growled into the phone, hoping that it wasn’t a case, since Tony definitely looked like he needed to sleep.

“Bossman!” Abby greeted him.

“Abs?”

“I checked the GPS on his phone. According to his phone, he didn’t go anywhere over the
“All weekend? What about Friday night?” because Gibbs definitely knew that Tony hadn’t been home for a good chunk of Friday night.

“Friday night too. But get this, I double checked and according to his phone, he was home since Thursday night!”

“He was home on Thursday night, Abs.”

“No, I mean that the phone was there at his apartment since Thursday night. And he was at work on Friday. Without his phone.”

“He had his phone with him on Friday. I saw him use it,” Gibbs contradicted her.

“He had a phone, Gibbs. Whatever phone it was he was using on Friday at work, it wasn’t his phone because his phone was definitely at home. In his apartment.”

Gibbs sighed. “The fuck does it mean?” he asked.

“I think he must have a second phone, and he forwards the calls to it before his mysterious weekends off,” Abby sounded both excited and upset about this. “Another La Grenouille in the making?” Her voice trailed upwards with an edge of hysteria.

Oh yeah. Abby was definitely upset now.

“I don’t think so,” Gibbs told her. “Track all the other weekends that he’s been gone and let me know what you find.”

“I’m on it.”

“Can you also find out what number he’s forwarding his calls to?”

Abby sighed. “I taught him how to mask that,” she blew out a breath in frustration. “Even I don’t know how to break my own encryption for that one. Sometimes I’m too clever for my own good.”

Gibbs snorted. That would have been too easy and he should know better that if DiNozzo wanted to keep his location to himself, he would have found a way to do it, without breaking any of Gibbs’ rules. Nothing they could do for now about it, though.

“Thanks, Abs. And keep this between us for now?”

“Of course, Bossman.”

There was nothing left to do, so Gibbs turned in for the night, settling down on his couch where he always spent the night. Some time in the middle of the night, he wasn’t even sure what it was that woke him, but he opened his eyes and immediately knew that he wasn’t alone in the room. He carefully moved his hand under his pillow and pulled out the Glock that he kept there. He waited until his eyes had adjusted and he could see from the streetlight shining through his windows. Someone was quietly opening his front door.

Gibbs tensed, ready to jump out with his weapon when he realized that instead of someone trying to break into his house, someone was stepping out of it. He kept his gun pointing downwards, and quietly slipped off the couch and to the front door. His jaw dropped when he saw that Tony was walking down his driveway, barefoot and clad only in his boxers.

“DiNozzo!” he barked.

Tony showed no sign that he’d heard Gibbs, continuing to walk slowly and gracefully. Gibbs stuck the Glock in the waistband at the back of his sweatpants and ran out, barefoot as well. He grabbed Tony’s arm and Tony stared at him woodenly, eyes completely glazed over and expressionless, his pupils blown wide. Gibbs couldn’t help wondering if that was how his eyes would look if he was aroused.

“DiNozzo,” he said gently. “Where the hell are you going?”

“The lake,” Tony whispered. “I have to go to the lake.”
Gibbs waved his hand over Tony’s face and Tony didn’t respond. His eyes didn’t follow the movement, he didn’t flinch. He didn’t even blink.

“Tony? There’s no lake here.”

“The lake is there,” Tony whispered. “I have to go. I have to follow the music.”

Gibbs waved his hand in front of Tony’s face again, and again there was absolutely no response. He stared at the man for a moment before Tony started walking away from him again.

“Wait, wait,” he grabbed the man’s arm. “The lake is this way.” He started steering him back towards the house. There was still a chill in the air, and Tony was clad only in boxers. Gibbs winced when he saw all the bruises blooming on Tony’s torso and side, and his eyes flicked down to the splinted fingers. What the hell had DiNozzo been up to?

“I have to go to the lake,” Tony repeated. “The music is calling me.”

“I know. I’ll take you there. OK?” Gibbs led him back to his front door and coaxed him back into the house. He grabbed his phone off the table by the couch and dialed Ducky as he carefully led Tony up the stairs. “Duck? It’s Gibbs. DiNozzo’s sleepwalking.”

Ducky was understandably sleepy and confused. “Jethro? What are you talking about?”

“I think he’s exhausted because he’s sleepwalking,” Gibbs hissed into the phone. He released Tony for a second and the man immediately turned back to head downstairs. “Wait, wait. Tony. Come on, let’s go this way. This is where the lake is.” He lunged for and grabbed Tony’s arm. “Come on, attaboy. Lake’s this way.”

“I have to go to the lake,” Tony repeated woodenly.

“Are his eyes open?” Ducky was asking.

“Yes, Ducky, his motherfucking eyes are open,” Gibbs whispered as he herded Tony up the stairs and back to the guest bedroom. “Yes, his pupils are dilated,” he answered Ducky’s next question. “Is it safe for me to wake him up?”

“Make sure he’s sitting or lying down so he doesn’t injure himself if he falls down when you wake him. And be careful in case he strikes you as he wakes.”

“Got it.”

He tossed his phone onto the bed and gently pushed Tony to sit down on the bed.


“On it, Boss!” Tony murmured before he blinked and flinched, yelling and scrambling away from Gibbs whose face was right in front of his, maybe a hairs breadth away, at that moment. “What the hell, Boss?” he yelled.

“You awake now?” Gibbs yelled back.

“You fucking woke me up! Of course I’m awake!” Tony yelled right back. “What the fuck is going on?”

Gibbs sighed and picked his phone up off the bed. “He’s up, Ducky. You think maybe you could come over? I know it’s the middle of the night and I’m sorry.”

“Yes, Jethro. Of course. I shall be there, shortly. It’s no trouble,” Ducky agreed.

Gibbs hung up the phone and gave Tony a look. “You’re sleepwalking.”

“What?” Tony rolled his eyes. “No, no. I stopped doing that when I was a kid.”

“You used to sleepwalk?”

“My nannies told me I used to do it all the time. But I stopped when I was sent to boarding school.”
Gibbs rubbed his face. “Well, looks like you’re doing it again, then.”

“What? Seriously?”

“I just stopped you from walking down the street in your boxers in the middle of the night.”

Tony looked completely shocked. “Oh,” he scrubbed his face. “Oh. That’s not good.”

“No, DiNozzo. That is definitely not fucking good,” Gibbs growled.

“I don’t understand why I’d be sleepwalking again if I haven’t done it in almost twenty five years?”

“I don’t know, DiNozzo. All I know is you could’ve been anywhere else, run over by cars on a highway or something,” Gibbs sat on the bed next to the man.

“Yeah, yeah. I get that,” Tony sighed. “Fuck.”

There really wasn’t much else to say after that. They sat in silence until they heard Ducky’s Morgan pull up in Gibbs’ driveway. Ducky came up the stairs when Gibbs called out to him and the elderly ME walked into the guest bedroom and just looked at the two men sitting on the side of the bed together. He clucked soothingly as he helped Tony back into bed and sent Gibbs down to make a pot of chamomile tea with tea leaves that he’d brought with him, and he took Tony’s vitals and talked to him while Gibbs was completing his task.

When Gibbs brought up the pot of tea and two cups – what? He was not going to drink chamomile tea – and poured a cup each for Ducky and Tony.

“What’s the verdict?” he asked Ducky.

“This may be why young Anthony has been looking so tired lately. Perhaps he is up and walking for much of the night and exhausting himself without even being awake,” Ducky said somberly.

“How do we stop it?”

Ducky sighed. “Somnambulism cannot be cured,” he finally said. “It may be medically treated and controlled, but not cured. Children usually just grow out of it. Like Anthony did in the first place.”

“So what do we do?”

“Anthony could benefit from a proper diagnosis,” Ducky was talking to them both now. “A sleep clinic. A doctor who specializes in sleep disorders.”

“It doesn’t make sense why I would be sleepwalking again!” Tony protested. “I’m fine. It’s probably a weird one off.”

“Drink your tea, dear boy, and go back to sleep.”

“That’s all?” Gibbs demanded. “We can’t do anything else for him?”

Ducky sighed. “There isn’t much anyone can do at all, never mind right now, in the middle of the night.”

“What about sleeping pills?” Tony asked.

“They may make it more difficult to wake you, should you become ambulatory while you sleep,” Ducky told him.

Tony snorted in frustration. “Sleepwalking,” he muttered in disbelief.

“Have you woken up somewhere else lately?” Ducky asked. “Somewhere other than where you started the night asleep?”

Tony screwed up his mouth – his delectable mouth, Gibbs thought – as he thought. “No. I don’t think I’ve woken up anywhere unexpected,” he muttered. “But I have noticed that my door’s been unlocked when I’m leaving for my morning run. And I always lock and deadbolt my door when I go to bed.” DiNozzo had been a detective in Philadelphia and Baltimore. Gibbs knew his stance
on locking his doors.

“How often are you finding your door unlocked in the mornings?” Ducky asked, his voice gentle.

“I don’t know.” He was hedging. Gibbs could tell.

“DiNozzo,” Gibbs growled softly.

Tony sighed. “Every day,” he whispered. “Every day for the last few weeks. I guess.”

“Well, *that* doesn’t sound like anything any of us should be worried about!” Gibbs snarled, suppressing the urge to roll his eyes. “Didn’t you think something was wrong?”

“I don’t *know*!” Tony growled back. “It’s not like I’m going to look at my door being unlocked every morning instead of locked the way I know I left it the night before, and think, oh, I must be sleepwalking and unlocking my goddamned door, so I can wander the hallways of my building all night. I thought I was just too tired to remember that I’d left my door unlocked. I thought maybe I forgot. I thought maybe my fucking apartment was haunted or something!” Tony laughed at that, but his laughter had a hint of panic to it.

“Calm down, both of you,” Ducky admonished them sternly. “Anthony, my dear boy, do drink your tea and try to relax. Chamomile is meant to calm you down so you can go back to sleep.”

“I don’t think I should,” Tony’s eyes were wide and a finger went into his mouth and he nervously chewed on a thumbnail. “Go back to sleep, I mean.”

Gibbs pulled his hand out of his mouth, his movement gentle. “No, you need to sleep. You’re exhausted. I’ll watch over you and make sure I wake you before you get too far, if you start sleepwalking again.”

“Somnambulists tend to only have one episode a night,” Ducky told them. “So the chances of Anthony sleepwalking again tonight are very low.”

“Well, that’s good,” Gibbs gave Tony a reassuring look, nodding approvingly as the younger man sipped the tea.

“OK,” Tony sighed. “OK, I’ll drink my tea and go back to sleep. And if I’m gone in the morning, let’s hope you’ve hammered it into my head enough that I know how to make it to work in my sleep so I’m not late again.”

Ducky laughed at that. “You’ll be fine, Anthony,” he said. “At least we now understand why you have been so tired, despite the fact that you are sleeping.”

Tony made a face, but nodded.

Ducky and Tony drank their tea in companionable silence, and Gibbs offered Ducky the bed in the other guest room, which he gratefully took. Gibbs paced downstairs for a half hour and when he checked, Ducky was asleep but Tony was lying in bed and staring at the ceiling.

“You should be sleeping,” Gibbs whispered.

Tony shrugged. “I don’t want to start walking again.”

“Ducky said the chances of you walking again tonight…”

“I know,” Tony interrupted.

“I won’t let you get far.”

“I know.”

“I can stay until you’re asleep, if you like.”

Tony shrugged again, and Gibbs took it to mean yes, so he pulled a chair closer to the bed and sat in it, placing his feet on the bed. Tony turned on his side and gave Gibbs a small smile.

“Were you dreaming?” Gibbs asked him. “Do you remember anything from before I woke you?”
Tony shook his head. “I don’t remember anything.”

“You were talking.”

“I was? Tell me I wasn’t saying anything embarrassing,” Tony groaned.

“No. Nothing like that. Just said you had to go to the lake.”


“That was my question for you. That mean anything to you?”

Tony shook his head. “Never had a lake near by when I was growing up,” he mused. “I mean, if I’m sleepwalking again, and I used to do it as a kid, then it’s got to be related, right?”

“Maybe.”

Tony blew out a breath. “I don’t remember anything.”

“It’s probably nothing.”

“Hmm.”

“Stop worrying about it and relax. Go to sleep.”

“Yeah, like I can just tell myself to go to sleep.”

“That’s what I do,” Gibbs smirked at him.

Tony scratched his nose with his middle finger, making Gibbs chuckle. Then he sighed and closed his eyes. Gibbs knew he was staring at the man, but he couldn’t help it. Tony looked so tired, and so worried.

“It’ll be OK,” he said.

Tony nodded.

“Sleep now.”

Tony nodded again. They stayed that way for a long time and between one breath and the next, Gibbs saw that he’d fallen asleep again. He sighed and relaxed. Ducky had said that the chances that Tony would have another sleepwalking episode that night were very low, but he was keyed up and he watched Tony sleep for another hour or so before he felt relaxed enough to sleep again. He crossed his arms, leaned his chin forward on his chest, and went to sleep, right there in the chair, his feet propped up on the bed, DiNozzo sleeping on his side, still facing him.

His feet falling off the bed woke him up. Tony had tugged the covers off the bed and was upright again.

“Tony?” Gibbs whispered.

No answer. Gibbs watched for a long moment, shock paralyzing him, as Tony slowly walked to the door and opened it. And then he realized that Tony was sleepwalking again, and making another run for it. He sprang out of the chair and ran to grab Tony’s arm, steering him back into the bedroom.

“I have to go to the lake,” Tony told him in a monotone.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Follow the music,” Tony whispered. “To the lake.”

“Oh huh. Come on. The lake’s back this way,” he pushed the man onto the bed, held his shoulders when he tried to stand again, and loudly barked, “DiNozzo!”

Tony blinked and inhaled sharply, staring at Gibbs, alert now.

“You back with me?”
He nodded.

“Not gonna try to head to the lake?”

“Wh-what lake?”

“Good answer,” Gibbs sighed, releasing the man’s shoulder.

“Was I…?”

Gibbs nodded.

“Again?”

Gibbs nodded.

“But I thought, Ducky said…”

“Well, DiNozzo, if anyone’s going to be the exception to anything, you know it’s gotta be you, right?”

Tony snorted at that. He sighed and rubbed his eyes. “I’m so tired,” he finally whined.

“Go on. Back in bed.”

He shook his head. “Obviously I’m just going to try to escape again.”

“I’m gonna stay right here and catch you if you try to head out again.”

“Then both of us are going to be exhausted.”

“Ducky’ll fix you,” Gibbs told him firmly.

Tony snorted at that.

“Come on. Get back in the bed.” Gibbs helped him settle in and pulled the covers securely around him. “We’ll figure it out, OK? You’re OK. Go on back to sleep.”

Tony nodded, the movement small and hesitant. Gibbs sat in the chair again, making sure his feet were on the blankets tucked around Tony. He wanted to feel every movement to ensure that the man didn’t just slip out of bed and go wandering down the streets.

“I feel like I should put my shoes on, in case I do get out. You know? At least I’d be prepared.”

Gibbs chuckled at that. “Shut up and go to sleep, DiNozzo,” he told the man, knowing that Tony could hear the amusement in his voice.

It had to be a testament to how exhausted Tony was, because he did fall asleep again. This time Gibbs stayed awake. When Tony got out of bed a third time, he woke him up swiftly and pushed him back into bed, covering him and running his hand through Tony’s hair. An hour later, he was steering Tony right back to bed again.

“I have to go to the lake,” Tony kept saying.

“I know. But you know, this is the lake,” Gibbs told him, coaxing him back onto the bed. And this time he climbed in himself. Tony lay on his side and he was behind the man, spooning him, and holding him down with his arm. “This is the lake. You’re at the lake. You’re just lying on a blanket by the lake.”

“OK,” Tony muttered finally.

“Close your eyes. Sleep.”

“Do you hear the music?”

“I hear it, baby.” The endearment slipped out and Gibbs made a face and silently berated himself. “It’s saying you’re at the lake. And you can relax now.”

Gibbs felt Tony relax against him, and he whispered soothing words, keeping Tony anchored
down with his arm. And this time Tony closed his eyes and went back to sleep without awakening. After long minutes of spooning, Gibbs wondered if he should get off the bed. Experimentally, he moved his arm off of DiNozzo, and the man grumbled in his sleep, the words unintelligible, and started to sit up again. Gibbs slung his arm back around him and he settled back down without protest.

OK. So that settled it. Gibbs was going to have to stay on the bed and hold on to Tony – to DiNozzo, his Senior Field Agent – to ensure that the man would sleep in the bed instead of walking off into the street. He sighed and breathed, unable to stop himself from nuzzling into the back of Tony’s neck. He inhaled deeply, breathing in his scent, and sighed. Shit. How the hell did they end up in bed together and how was he going to come back from this?

He ignored his dick which started to twitch, and he moved his ass back somewhat, so he wasn’t cuddled right up against Tony, and forced himself to relax. He’d just told Tony that he could tell himself to go to sleep, and usually that worked for him. But with Tony in his arms, and he was the only one anchoring Tony to the bed, his usual methods of just telling himself to go to sleep was definitely being tested. Finally, he cleared his mind, told himself to hold on tight to Tony, and go to sleep. And that worked.

Sunlight was streaming through the windows when Gibbs jerked awake. The guest room door was starting to close.

“Duck?” Gibbs whispered, realizing that DiNozzo was still asleep, and they were still spooning. His body was flush up against Tony’s, and he carefully moved back, putting space between them.

“Jethro,” Ducky slipped into the room and sat on the chair that Gibbs had left by the bed, by Tony’s head.

“He kept trying to leave,” Gibbs explained. “Look.” He released Tony, and for a half a minute, the younger man slept peacefully, and then his eyes opened and he tried to sit up. Gibbs put his arm back around Tony’s chest and pulled him back.

“Lake,” Tony murmured.


“Mmm,” Tony sighed and closed his eyes.

Gibbs made a face at Ducky.

“That is worrying,” the elderly gentleman whispered.

Gibbs nodded. “Three more times he walked in his sleep last night. Finally realized I needed to hold him down. Didn’t want to handcuff him to the bed.”

“No, of course not, Jethro. I shall call some of my colleagues to speak to them about what is happening here.”

“No, of course not, Jethro. I shall call some of my colleagues to speak to them about what is happening here.”

“Should we wake him?” Gibbs asked, pushing himself up on his elbow, and looking down on Tony’s face. His expression was peaceful, but the bags under his eyes were prominent, like bruises, made even more obvious by the paleness of his face. And he looked completely and utterly drained.

“Stay here and let him awaken naturally,” Ducky told him. “I’ll alert Timothy and Ziva that you will both be late.”

“Thanks.”

Some time later, Ducky returned with a mug of hot coffee which Gibbs thankfully sipped, juggling it carefully so he never let Tony go. And as long as he kept his arm around him, Tony slept on. It was mid-morning before he finally stirred, sighing softly and stretching his long limbs, scooching himself backwards until he was pressed right up against Gibbs’ body and his crotch. Gibbs gave Ducky a guilty look, while the ME hid a smile behind his hand. Tony laced his fingers with Gibbs and smiled, still mostly asleep, eyes closed, slowly moving Gibbs’ hand down his belly towards his –

Gibbs yanked his hand out of Tony’s and pulled back before his fingers could make contact with
Tony’s dick. And this time, Ducky was definitely grinning at him. Gibbs shot him a glare.

Tony turned his head and gave Gibbs a confused look. “Boss?” his voice was hoarse, his hair mussed from sleep.

“Ducky’s here, too,” Gibbs pointed.

Tony turned his head to where Gibbs was pointing and saw Ducky sitting there, smiling at him.

“Oh, hey, Ducky,” he greeted the man casually, as if he hadn’t just almost made Gibbs grope him as he awoke. He yawned, stretching himself more. Gibbs could hear some of his joints popping, and he gave a sigh of relief at each popped joint. “What’s going on?” He sounded curious but not worried.

“How are you feeling, my dear boy?” Ducky asked.

Tony shrugged and yawned again. “OK, I guess. Still a little tired. Oh shit, what time is it?” he grabbed his phone which was charging on the side table.

“You’re not going in to work today,” Gibbs told him. “It’s OK.”


“You were sleepwalking last night. Do you remember?”

Tony frowned at him. “No, I don’t think so,” he shook his head. “I used to sleepwalk when I was little but I outgrew it. I have to pee.”

Gibbs sat up and gave Ducky a look, and the ME shrugged, looking slightly perplexed. They heard the toilet flush across the hallway, and the sink, before Tony shuffled back, still only clad in his boxers.

“You really don’t recall being woken up because you were sleepwalking last night?” Ducky asked.

Tony shook his head. “I just had some weird ass dreams, the details escape me now. But I’ve been feeling like that every morning lately, so that’s no surprise.”

“What kind of dreams?” Gibbs asked.

“I don’t know. Weird ones. I just know that there’s always music. Piano music.”

“And a lake?” Gibbs raised his eyebrows.


Gibbs sighed. “You’re sleepwalking. First time I caught you, you were almost to the street, outside, dressed just in that.”

Tony looked down at himself, maybe realizing for the first time that he was only wearing his boxers. “Wait, wait. The first time?” he gaped when Gibbs’ words seeped into his consciousness. “How the hell many times was it that I was sleepwalking?”

“Four times until I figured out if I held you down in the bed you’d stay in it and sleep.”

“Well, that’s quite the story there, Gibbs,” and Gibbs knew that Tony was starting to get defensive and going into his default snark mode.

“How long has it been since your door was locked in the morning when you go for a run?” Gibbs demanded.

Tony immediately paled. “How would you know that?” he asked.

Gibbs sighed. “We already had this conversation. Last night.”

“Why don’t I remember this?” Tony was utterly confused.
“You seem to be in something of a fugue state,” Ducky interjected. 

“What?”

Gibbs stood and steered Tony back to sit on the bed.

“Have you had a change in any of your medications?” Ducky asked.

Tony shook his head. “No. Just the inhaler if I need it. That’s all. And, like, aspirin if I have a headache or something.”

“Nothing else?” Ducky asked carefully.

Tony shook his head.

“How are your migraines?”

“Haven’t had one in months,” Tony shook his head again.

“Any new allergies?”

Tony shook his head yet again.

“I’ve made you an appointment with a friend of mine, attached to Bethesda Hospital’s Sleep Clinic. She is a sleep specialist, and she will see you this afternoon.”

Tony’s eyes widened. “Today?”

“Yes, Anthony. Today. How long did you say you’ve been waking up to your door being left unlocked and deadbolted, even though you know you did it before you went to sleep?” Ducky asked gently.

“Weeks,” he whispered.

Ducky nodded. “I shall drive you there myself. And if you like I can come in with you.”

Tony nodded, swallowing nervously.

“I’ll drive you both, Duck,” Gibbs told them.

“Oh, no, no. You don’t have to…” Tony started to make excuses.

“I want to go, if you’re OK with that,” Gibbs told him, his tone gentle for once. He could have made it an order, but Tony was looking panicked enough as it was.

Tony sighed and swallowed with difficulty before he nodded again. “OK,” he nodded. “But seriously, what’s the big deal? So I’m sleepwalking a little. It’s fine.”

“We should still get a consult and see what is going on,” Ducky told him. “If it has been going on for weeks, we need to find a way to can stop this. It isn’t safe for you to be wandering around DC in your underwear in the middle of the night, with no memory of what happened.”

Tony scrubbed his face before he nodded.

They left him alone to shower and get dressed. While downstairs, Gibbs saw that Ducky had put his cellphone on the kitchen table. And there were many missed calls from Abby.

“Abigail keeps calling for you, and I did not want the ringing to wake young Anthony up,” Ducky explained.

Gibbs nodded and called Abby as he made coffee.

“Bossman! Are you all right?” Abby sounded breathless and excited. So, the usual, then.

“Fine.”

“You, Tony and Ducky aren’t at work and McGee and Ziva have been pestering me for information.”
“Don’t tell them anything,” Gibbs sighed. “We have to take the day to take care of something.”

“Is Tony OK?”

“We’re figuring that out.”

“What happened? Seriously, is Tony OK?”

Gibbs sighed. “I’ll tell you later, OK? I don’t want to ambush DiNozzo.”

“So there is something wrong with Tony?” Abby gasped.

“Abs,” Gibbs said warningly.

“OK, OK. I’ll wait. But for the record, I checked Tony’s phone GPS for the past five weekends and his phone was at home from the night before the last day he worked,” Abby whispered. “He’s been forwarding calls to his secret phone and going somewhere all those weekends. Somewhere he doesn’t want us to know about.”

“Thanks, Abs. I’ll ask him about it.”

“Is he OK though?”

Gibbs gentled his tone. “He’s OK. We just need more information right now.”

Abby huffed a breath of frustration. “I hate being kept out of the loop,” she grumbled.

“I know. But we need to focus on making sure DiNozzo is OK. You can wait for that, right?” Gibbs asked.

“I suppose. But what if he needs me? Or Bert?”

For a moment, Gibbs frowned in confusion, before he realized that Abby was talking about her farting hippo. He suppressed a snort of derision and shook his head, grinning. Abby was always so… Abby. “Then I’ll call you. Keep this to yourself, Abs. All of it.”

“I will, Bossman. You can count on me,” Gibbs could picture the vehement nodding and the bouncy ponytails.

“Thanks.”

“Keep me posted!”

“Will do.”

Gibbs called to check in with Ziva and McGee and assigned them more cold cases to review, as well as to work on some reports. It had appalled him that McGee couldn’t fill out that one report the first time Tony had refused to come back to work, or teach him – again. That was when he realized that maybe he’d been taking advantage of Tony’s willingness to work extra, and allowing the other two to get away with taking advantage of their Senior Field Agent as well. He’d been forcing them to do their work without getting Tony involved, which seemed to make Tony happy. But still with the secrecy and the lack of coming to see him, which had originally worried him, and now with the whole sleepwalking for weeks thing, Gibbs couldn’t help but worry about the man. He sighed to himself.

“He will be all right, Jethro,” Ducky told him, his tone soothing.

Gibbs nodded.
The sleep specialist, while informative, had no answers either. There were too many worrying aspects of what Tony was going through. One of which was that Tony was persistent enough in his sleepwalking that Gibbs had needed to physically keep him in the bed, despite having been woken up prior to that. Also the fact that Tony had no memory of being awakened, even though he had been lucid and seemed alert and awake at the time. The fugue state, as Ducky had called it, was uncommon. Somnambulists were asleep, and should have no memory loss of time they were awake, unlike someone having a drug-induced or alcohol-induced blackout. It was also worrying that Tony was exhausted. Most somnambulists are deeply, deeply asleep during their episodes, and awaken rested. But not Tony. Tony was definitely suffering from symptoms of exhaustion and sleep deprivation. His episodes were atypical. Of course they had to be. It was DiNozzo, after all.

Tony agreed to spend a night being monitored at the sleep clinic. Not that night but the next night. And until they had more information, and given that Tony had been functioning normally during the day, the doctor recommended rest for the exhaustion, but no medication at the time. But Doctor Foster was clear, no going back to work until he was more rested or he would be a danger to himself and others.

Tony chafed at the fact that he was to stay home and rest when he didn’t think anything was wrong with him, but when Gibbs told him that they were both out on sick leave for the rest of the week, Tony had to sigh and give in. Gibbs just wasn’t in a trusting mood. He wasn’t going to trust that Tony would stay in bed or on the couch, and would make a break for somewhere else if he was left alone. Gibbs felt like Tony would make a beeline for wherever it was that he had been going to hide from the world, and that was unacceptable. What if Tony was sleepwalking somewhere that actually had a lake? Was there such a thing as sleep-swimming? Gibbs didn’t know, especially if the end result of sleep-swimming was sleep-drowning with a side of actual drowning.

So Gibbs ordered Tony to stay at his house and personally stayed there with him, even though there wasn’t anything physically wrong with Gibbs that would prevent him from going in to work. That evening, Abby came over to get her Tony time, which she had been missing, and she brought take out Thai for them all to eat. Gibbs noticed that she had brought two orders of Tony’s favorite noodles and the fresh spring rolls that he liked. And she watched him like a hawk until he ate all of the rolls and a whole carton of noodles before she relaxed. Tony told her about the whole sleepwalking thing, and then there was a good half hour where all Abby did was sit on the couch and hug Tony.
After Abby left and Tony got ready for bed, Gibbs stood in the guest bedroom doorway awkwardly.

“You’re worried I’ll escape again tonight?” Tony asked.

Gibbs shrugged.

“Do you want to spoon me again?” Tony couldn’t help but grin maniacally at that, but there was a strange gleam in his eye that made Gibbs hesitate.

He shrugged again. “You think you’ll need me to anchor you to your bed again?”

“I suppose we could always cuff me to the bed,” Tony pursed his lips, displaying those damned dimples of his.

“I don’t want to do that,” Gibbs shook his head. At least not in this context, his brain supplied. Naked and cufffed to the bedposts, splayed out for his pleasure, now that was a totally different story. He put that image out of his mind. “I don’t want you to freak out in the middle of the night.”

“I don’t know. Better freaking out cufffed to the bed than run over on the interstate.”

“I won’t let you get that far.”

Tony giggled a little. “Shit. Is this really a conversation that we’re having with a straight face?” he shook his head.

“Maybe you won’t have an episode tonight,” Gibbs muttered.

“You think so?”

Gibbs blew out a long breath. Yeah. He felt sure that Tony would be walking all night again. But he didn’t want to say it out loud. But of course, DiNozzo understood his non-verbal expressions.

“Yeah, I think that if I’ve been going out every night for the last few weeks, then I’m probably going to do the same tonight, too,” he said glumly. “So, handcuffs?”

“Just get in the bed and go to sleep,” Gibbs told him gruffly. “I’ll go work on the boat and I’ll spoon you later.”

Tony gave him the saddest look then, and Gibbs didn’t understand why. But the younger man nodded.

“Good night, DiNozzo,” Gibbs told him.

“Good night.”

Gibbs turned away and shut the door, but before he made it to the stairs, he heard Tony muttering softly to himself, “Fuck my life.”

Gibbs sighed but went down to the basement to work on the boat. Or at least he meant to, but he ended up sitting in the kitchen waiting to see if Tony would start sleepwalking. He couldn’t concentrate on the boat that night. After over an hour of sitting in the dark, he heard footsteps padding down the stairs and headed straight towards the front door.

“Goddamnit,” he sprinted out of the chair and headed Tony off before he could make it outside. He coaxed Tony back upstairs and into bed, assuring him that they were at the lake, and then he spooned the man, anchoring him down, preventing him from leaving the bed. As before, Tony closed his eyes and seemed to be peacefully asleep, as long as Gibbs held on to him.

Strangely enough, Gibbs fell asleep soon after, and had one of the best night of sleep he’d had in a long time. And when he woke up, his front was plastered against Tony’s back, one arm around his waist, and he realized that Tony had laced their fingers together by his belly. Gibbs had also managed to wedge one arm under the pillow, and under Tony’s head, one of legs were in between Tony’s, so he was truly body hugging the man. And at that moment, they were warm and comfortable, and Gibbs didn’t want to wake him up by trying to edge himself away, so he closed his eyes and allowed himself to drift back into sleep again.

When Gibbs next awoke, he realized that he was alone in the bed. He felt Tony’s spot and it was
cool to the touch. He pushed the covers off and sprang off the bed, running down the stairs and to
the front door, wrenching it open and staring down the street, wondering where he should start
looking and if he should call for backup.

“Boss?” Tony’s voice made him jump.

“Fuck!” he growled, whirling around to see that Tony was on his couch with his laptop, the TV
on low, a cup of coffee on the side table. “I thought you…”

“I didn’t want to wake you.”

Gibbs scowled fiercely, his heart still pounding with the panic that he’d felt when he woke up and
thought that Tony had gone a-gallivanting towards the lake in his sleep. “You wake me up next
time or I’m going to call 9-1-1 to be on the lookout for you, wandering up and down the streets in
your sleep.”

“I will,” Tony told him, looking penitent. Gibbs knew he wanted to apologize, but they had rules
against that.

He nodded, accepting the tacit apology.

“There’s coffee,” Tony said hopefully, as a peace offering.

Gibbs nodded and stomped into the kitchen, pouring himself a mug of coffee and slurping it down
quickly, before pouring himself a second cup.

“How long have you been up?” he asked, when he was finally ready to be civil.

“Maybe an hour or so?” Tony muttered, slightly distractedly, and he was tapping away on his
laptop.

Gibbs nodded. He couldn’t believe that he’d slept so well and so deeply, that he didn’t even wake
when Tony got out off the bed. He began to seriously consider cuffing DiNozzo to the bed for his
own safety.

“Did I have an episode last night, or was the spooning a preemptive strike?” Tony asked.

“You made a break for it,” Gibbs confirmed.

Tony sighed. “Damn it.”

“Although I don’t know how effective spooning is if you got out of bed without waking me this
morning,” Gibbs grumbled, mostly to himself.

“I was wide awake, and extra careful escaping your death grip, Boss,” Tony assured him
cheerfully, looking up from the laptop and giving him a mischievous grin. “Who knew that my
skills at running out of my one night stands’ beds would come in handy this morning?”

Gibbs rolled his eyes and snorted derisively, and enjoyed the fact that it made Tony’s grin widen
even though he turned back to his laptop.

“You’re not working are you?” Gibbs asked him.

Tony shook his head. “Nope. Fun stuff. For the stuff around the house thing.”

Gibbs frowned at that. Again with the whole re-doing his apartment lie.

“I’m not going to let this whole sleepwalking thing stop my project though,” Tony continued to
speak even though he was focused on the laptop. He tilted his head as he considered something.
“Here. Look at this and tell me which one you prefer.”

Gibbs strode over and sat down next to Tony. Tony turned the laptop screen towards him and he
gawked at what he was looking at – it was an old black and white photograph of what looked to
be two paintings on the wall, a small ornate table pushed right up against the wall, and a small rug
on the floor.

“The wall is wood,” Tony told him. “And that table has kind of a cherry finish? At least that’s
what my restorer tells me it used to be. It’s been in storage for almost sixty years. But the wall?
What should we do with it?” He clicked his mouse and the picture changed to a color photo of the wall without the paintings or the table or the rug. He clicked his mouse a few times and the wall finish changed from cherry to pine to maple, different options for the wood finishing.

“That’s not your apartment,” Gibbs said firmly.

Tony sighed. “Yeah. No. My apartment isn’t the project.”

“What’s the project then?”

“It’s a house,” Tony pursed his lips. “I’d prefer not to say more about it?”

Gibbs growled at him.

“Look, it’s personal,” Tony told him, and Gibbs saw that look in his eye that meant that he was deadly serious about it. He didn’t want to tell Gibbs about it.

Gibbs’ scowl deepened.

Tony sighed and put his laptop on the coffee table and rubbed his eyes. Even after two nights’ worth of sleep, he still looked exhausted. “It’s a family thing,” he finally said.

“When have you kept family secrets from me?” Gibbs wanted to know. When Tony had come to work for him, they had openly discussed the fact that Tony’s father was a conman and that they were estranged, and that Tony wasn’t particularly close to his mother’s family in England either. Gibbs had even told Tony about Shannon and Kelly. It had been one of those enlightening conversations, and it had strengthened their friendship.

Tony shrugged. “It’s not something I’m comfortable talking about, never mind having it be known.”

“You think I’d gossip?”

“Well, no. But sometimes you give Ziva and McGee dirt on me and they’re not known for their sensitivity or discretion. And I realize that in many many ways, I’m asking for it, so yeah, I get it and I can take as much as I give. But this is one thing I don’t want to discuss with them or anyone from work. Not for any reason.”

Gibbs wanted to deny that he’d given either of the two ‘dirt’ on Tony, but he realized that he had opened the subject to a couple of things that might have truly been hurtful to the man. He took a breath and stopped himself from denying it outright. “Fair enough,” he muttered.

“Thanks,” Tony nodded, giving Gibbs a small but hesitant smile. “I hope they can fix me before the weekend because I have plans! And I don’t want to delay them just because I can’t stay in bed once I’m asleep.”

“Does it involve walls attacking you back?” Gibbs snarked.

Tony laughed at that. “Oh, I’m sure Yannick’s put the kibosh on me working a sledgehammer,” he shook his head, and looked at his still splinted fingers. “At least until the fingers are good to go again. But they’ll let me help on some of the less dangerous stuff, I’m sure. I just want to really participate in the work, you know? And not just sit around and make decisions and visit the site once a month, nose in the air. I want to really own this place. Make it mine. Put my own sweat into it.”

“Blood, too,” Gibbs nodded at his splinted fingers, and resisting the urge to ask who the hell this Yannick was, given the warmth in Tony’s voice when he said his name.

Tony huffed an embarrassed laugh. “Yeah, well. I’m definitely not anywhere close to being an expert at anything related to renovations or woodworking or anything like that! But this is something I’m enjoying, and the guys are so patient with me, and they really go out of their ways to explain things and let me try stuff if it’s not going to be too difficult to fix my mistakes. It’s really nice, you know? To learn new things. And do things. And be truly invested in this house.”

Gibbs didn’t know how to feel about that. This was something Tony obviously was passionate about, and it had been a while since he’d seen Tony so happy. Talking about this family house thing made his entire face glow with happiness. Gibbs didn’t want to quash his spirit but he had to
ask the tough questions. It was part of his job description, after all.

“If they can’t fix you by the weekend?” Gibbs voiced the question.

Tony sighed. “I’ll just have handcuff myself to the bed then. Because I am not skipping this weekend. The first floor is turning out so beautifully and there’s no way I’m staying away from it just because I’m having a little trouble sleeping.”

“You can’t just cuff yourself to things at night,” Gibbs told him.

“Why not?” Tony picked the laptop back up, put his feet on Gibbs’ coffee table and balanced the laptop on his lap. “What’s the big deal, anyways? It’s just handcuffs. As long as I put the key somewhere I can reach when I’m awake in the morning, but hopefully complicated enough that I’m not going to figure it out while I’m asleep, then what’s the issue here? I’ll be contained and I can function normally throughout the day.”

“You’re exhausted!” Gibbs told him sternly. “You’re not actually getting enough rest at night.”

“Maybe,” Tony shrugged. “But I’m used to operating on not much rest or sleep, so how would this be any different?”

Gibbs growled under his breath. “You’re determined to do this thing you’re doing, this weekend?”

Tony nodded, eyes back on the laptop, as if he was done speaking about it.

Gibbs sighed. “I have been known to be handy around the house,” he finally muttered. “Familiar with traditional hand-tool carpentry even.”

Tony looked up, eyes wide with shock. “What?”

“Well, obviously your new house thing isn’t in DC, right? It’s out of town somewhere and that’s why you’ve needed all these weekends away from work. Otherwise you could just pop back in to work, but you haven’t. So it’s gotta be somewhere else.”

Tony blew out a long breath. “You’re not going to leave this alone, are you?” he sighed.

“Not until you’ve stopped running off down the road looking for lakes at night.”

“Just because you can help with the house doesn’t mean you should come with me. I don’t need you spooning my ass all night every night and getting mad at me for needing you, and taking it out on me in a million different little ways later that I probably can’t even imagine the possibilities right now,” Tony told him bluntly. “I know you. I know you’ll get sick of being around me, and you’ll hate that you’re stuck with me, and you can’t even get a good night’s sleep because of me. I’m telling you right now, I am not going down that road.”

“I won’t be sleeping either if you’re not in my sight, until they fix this whole sleepwalking thing.” Gibbs knew that he was being stubborn. But he was not going to be the one they called to identify DiNozzo’s remains after he had been run over by a semi.

“Stop being so dramatic,” Tony told him firmly. “I know where I stand with you and this concern you’re showing? Overdone. I’m not dying from the plague again. It’s just a bit of sleepwalking. No big deal. So go back to being you and just yelling at me like it’s my fault, because let’s face it, it probably is. And things will be back to normal.”

“That’s not really what you think?” Gibbs was shocked at that. When had Tony started feeling like they weren’t even friends anymore? Because he was always concerned for the man. Always. But he’d been hiding a lot of it due to the inappropriate feelings that he had for him. Had he also squelched their friendship too, because he couldn’t get a hold of his other, stronger feelings?

Tony shrugged. He stood and reached for his coffee mug and Gibbs’, leaving Gibbs on the couch as he went to refill their mugs. He handed Gibbs the mug, grabbed his laptop, and headed for the stairs.

“DiNozzo…” Gibbs tried again.

Tony heaved a long sigh before he turned to face Gibbs. “Look, let’s just see what the sleep clinic
says about me after tonight,” he cut him off. “They’ll have some solutions that doesn’t involve
someone holding me down while I sleep or cuffs or whatever. It’ll be fine. I’ll be out of your hair
before you know it.” Then he spun and went up the stairs, staying in the guest room all day,
refusing lunch when Gibbs called him down to eat. Gibbs scrubbed his face. He was supposed to
be ensuring that Tony ate, too, and now he was failing in that task as well.
Chapter 8

Tony scarfed down some of the leftover Thai food in the evening before they headed out to the sleep clinic. Gibbs had elected to stay and observe everything overnight, which the doctor allowed. Gibbs watched as Tony stripped down and put on the scrub pants and laid on the bed while the doctor affixed little probes to him. To his forehead, temples and the top of his head, his arms, his torso. He winced at the multicolored bruises decorating Tony’s chest and side. The wall had done a number on him.

They were going to be measuring and recording everything, from brain activity to his respiration, heart rate, blood pressure, blood oxygen saturation, and even put in a port in his wrist to allow for easy drawing of blood during his episodes, to test for endorphins and other reactions. Tony was grumpy and close to being upset again at the end of the whole thing, even though Doctor Foster was gentle and explained everything before she did anything.

Gibbs could see that Tony thought that they were making a bigger deal of things than they should, which was par for the course with Tony. He was always the first to push his own welfare aside, which made it so much easier for everyone else to do it, too. And Gibbs realized that he’d been guilty of the same thing as well. He’d disregarded Tony’s needs, even though a long time ago he told himself that he would be different. He would be the man that saw Tony for who he was, who saw through all the damned masks that the man wore, and he would be the one person who treated him fairly in the way that the inner DiNozzo deserved. But he’d lost sight of that original goal somewhere along the way. It would be easy to blame it on losing his memory and the months away in Mexico trying to figure everything out again. But he’d been back a couple years now, and he still hadn’t let up on how he was behaving towards Tony, both in the office and away from it. So much so that Tony didn’t even come whining to him to get his perspective on Jeanne and how that relationship ended.

Gibbs sighed. He settled in the observation room with the doctor, and she spoke through the intercom to Tony. They waited until he was settled in and he was full of complaints and whines. The mattress was lumpy. The pillow was too fluffy. He hated sleeping on his back – which was true. Every time Gibbs looked in on him sleeping, he tended to be on his belly. The sensors were making him itch. The room smelled funny. His complaints went on and on.

Finally, after letting the man go on for a few minutes, the doctor’s soothing words seeming to ruffle Tony’s feathers even more, Gibbs pushed the intercom button and growled “Shut up and go to sleep, DiNozzo.”

“On it, Boss,” came the automatic response. Before Tony squawked a protest and crossed his arms, glaring at the one way mirror angrily. The doctor gave Gibbs an amused look, and the team
lead shrugged, knowing he looked smug but he did love it when Tony snapped to obey him. But despite Tony’s protests, Gibbs’ words seemed to settle him and he was still tired enough to fall asleep fairly quickly.

Gibbs sat and watched as the man turned on his side, seeming to be peacefully asleep. He noted the lines of pain and grumbled to himself because Tony had adamantly refused to take the painkillers that he had been prescribed for the broken fingers. He hated losing control and being loopy, and most painkillers absolutely made him loopy. But Tony still looked utterly exhausted as he slept, his bruised looking eyes making Gibbs want to gather him in his arms and hold him while he slept, if that was what it took for him to get some rest.

The doctor made notes on her tablet and looked over her checklist. She was monitoring his brain activity which was displayed on a monitor in the room. About an hour after he’d fallen asleep, Tony’s eyes opened and he slowly sat up, swinging his legs down off the bed. Gibbs was on his feet, ready to chase him down if need be.

The doctor’s eyes widened. “He’s not even in Stage Three sleep,” she mumbled, before muttering into the intercom. She gave Gibbs a reassuring smile. “I have orderlies right outside the door. He won’t get far. But I want to record his brain activity during this episode, so please remain here.”

Gibbs gave her a curt nod. He would stay put. For now.

In the other room, they watched as Tony stood and began walking towards the door. He opened it and walked through it. Gibbs chafed in his seat when Tony disappeared out of the room, but not thirty seconds later, two burly orderlies were gently leading him back into the room. Gibbs could catch Tony muttering about the lake softly.

The orderlies herded him back to the bed. One of them woke him up once he was seated while the other began drawing a vial of Tony’s blood. Tony showed signs of confusion until the doctor popped in to remind him that they were observing his sleep and that he’d had an episode before she managed to get him back into bed. He fell back to sleep eventually, and before an hour had passed, he was sitting up and walking dreamily towards the door again.

The doctor was frowning as she looked at the information being gathered and hummed thoughtfully. The orderlies brought Tony back and this time the doctor went in and woke him up herself. Again they took a vial of blood as she asked him a series of questions before she convinced him to settle back in the bed. Tony was looking exhausted by this time, and it took everything in Gibbs to just sit there and watch it all when every instinct made him want to hustle Tony into his car and back to his house where he could wrap his body around the man and make sure he slept.

Inevitably, Tony dropped off again, although his brow was creased and it didn’t seem as if he was sleeping peacefully. The doctor muttered to herself again when Tony sat up, not even a half hour after he’d fallen asleep.

“You say he will go back to sleep if you hold him down?” she turned to Gibbs.

Gibbs nodded, eyes on DiNozzo who was walking in that slow, graceful, careful walk to the door. Tony never walked like that when he was awake. Even his walk was different, unrecognizable, when he did it while asleep. And for some reason, this angered Gibbs. These people were observing Tony when he wasn’t himself. Tony hated scrutiny of any sort, and this level of scrutiny had to grate on him more than he would ever admit to anyone.

The doctor muttered into the intercom again. This time, they didn’t wake him. The orderlies herded him back to bed and one of them held him down gently as the other secured his wrists and ankles to the bed with what looked to be padded bindings. The kind that wouldn’t leave a mark, unlike Gibbs’ metal handcuffs. Gibbs looked at them thoughtfully, thinking they might be something he would need to invest in to keep Tony safe, if they couldn’t figure out this whole sleepwalking thing soon. Again, they took a vial of blood using the port already conveniently placed in Tony’s wrist.

But Tony didn’t settle back to sleep the way he did when Gibbs held him down. He strained against the bindings, pulling and pulling – his wrists, his ankles, arching his back and his neck, whimpering to get loose.

“Is he awake?” Gibbs asked the doctor when she just kept observing him and making notes.
She shook her head. “No,” she told him. “He’s asleep. Although it doesn’t look like he’s gone
anywhere close to Stage Three of sleep. He shouldn’t be ambulatory at this stage. Parasomnia
should only occur during stages of deep sleep.”

Gibbs gestured to the monitors. “And yet…?”

She shrugged. “We’ll have to wake him if he doesn’t stop struggling,” she sighed. “It’s no wonder
he’s suffering from exhaustion and sleep deprivation if he doesn’t ever get to deep sleep.”

“Is this serious?” Gibbs asked.

She nodded. “Very.”

“Can’t you do something to help him?” Gibbs growled, feeling himself get upset as Tony kept
trying to get loose, his soft whimpers of frustration getting under Gibbs’ skin.

“I would prefer to have a full night of observation,” the doctor said sadly. “So we have a proper
baseline. Maybe he will slip into Stage Three or further if we just let him be.”

“Do you think it’s likely?” Gibbs growled.

“We can’t rule it out,” she didn’t sound positive, but Gibbs understood the need to get a baseline
reading.

They sat back down and Gibbs closed his ears to Tony’s sad little noises of protest. He was
muttering about the lake now and the music. His eyes were wide open and he kept struggling
against his bindings. He kept this up for over an hour before the doctor turned to Gibbs, her eyes
serious.

“Does Agent DiNozzo fight you when you hold him down on the bed?” she asked him.

Gibbs shook his head.

“He just lies there?”

Gibbs nodded. “Closes his eyes. Goes back to sleep. Or whatever the hell it is that passes for sleep
for him these days. But no, he doesn’t keep trying to do that,” he pointed to Tony who was still
trying to pull himself free.

She nodded and turned back to the monitor, settling back in and making notes. A nurse came into
the room and took another sample of Tony’s blood. After another hour had passed and Gibbs felt
like his heart was being torn to pieces, as Tony’s mutterings and whimpers were beginning to
sound desperate, the doctor sighed.

“I don’t think he’s going to get past Stage Two,” she said softly. “It’s been hours. His brain isn’t
going through the sleep cycles normally.”

“What can we do? Sedatives?” Gibbs asked.

“Not tonight,” she pursed her lips. “But I do want to try one experiment.”

“He didn’t sign off on experimental drug testing,” Gibbs growled.

She smiled at him. “No, Agent Gibbs. I want you to go in there and hold him down. Sit by the
bed, and put your hand on him to restrain him.”

Gibbs stared at her. “What?”

“I’d like to see if he actually goes through the proper sleep cycles if you hold him down, like you
have the past few nights, or if he is still just lying there awake and trying to leave. Maybe just a
hand on him will do it.”

“He doesn’t try to leave unless I let him go,” Gibbs muttered.

She raised her eyebrows and cocked her head expectantly.

“You really want me to go in there and hold him down?”
She nodded. 

Gibbs sighed. Of course she did. And of course he’d do it. What choice did he have? He needed to make sure that Tony was OK anyway, and if he had to stay and listen to him try to free himself from his bonds in his sleep for the rest of the night, he would spontaneously combust or something. She walked with him into the next room where Tony was mindlessly struggling against his bonds. Gibbs immediately went to the bed and put his hand on Tony’s chest, shushing him softly.

“I have to go to the lake,” Tony mumbled.

“I know,” Gibbs told him gently. “You’re there. At the lake. With me.”

“I am?” Tony’s struggles slowed down.

Gibbs kept his hand on Tony’s chest and brushed the hair off his forehead with his other hand. “Shhh,” he told him softly. “We’re at the lake. I hear the music, too.”

Tony breathed out a long sigh. He still jerked at his bindings but only sporadically now. Gibbs kept murmuring soft words and shushing him gently, keeping his hand on Tony’s chest. The doctor watched them for some minutes before she disappeared. Fifteen minutes later, Tony was still struggling weakly against the bindings and she came back.

“Does he do this when you held him down the previous nights?” she asked. “Keep on struggling?”

Gibbs shook his head. “He settled right down.”

She pursed her lips and frowned thoughtfully. “How is this different from what you’ve been doing?”

Gibbs found himself blushing. “I get in the bed with him,” he mumbled. “He doesn’t like to sleep on his back. I just…” Gibbs broke off and sighed. “I spoon him.”

The doctor hummed thoughtfully. “Can we replicate that now?”

“You want me to spoon DiNozzo here?” Gibbs managed to choke out the words without yelling.

She nodded blithely, apparently not thinking anything of this request.

“I don’t usually make it a habit to spoon my Senior Field Agent,” Gibbs told her primly.

“I need to see how he responds to you,” she told him. “If you spooning him means he actually gets restful sleep, then…”

Gibbs fought the urge to facepalm himself. “Fine,” he grumbled. He took his hand off Tony’s chest and immediately the man began struggling against the bindings. “But let’s get him free or he will hurt himself.”

The doctor began by slipping Tony’s ankles free of the leather cuffs while Gibbs took his shoes, belt and shirt off, leaving his pants and a crew-necked white t-shirt on.

“I can get you scrubs?” she offered.

Gibbs snarled at her.

“Or not,” she grinned back.

Gibbs carefully undid one of the bindings around Tony’s wrist and crowded onto the bed, maneuvering Tony onto his side and sliding into position behind him. The doctor undid the final cuff and nodded at him before she left. Gibbs felt completely self conscious since he knew that his every move was now being monitored and recorded, but he continued to murmur soft words to Tony, and the man slid closer to him, allowing him to hold him. After a few minutes, Tony’s breathing was deep and even and his eyes were closed. Gibbs leaned up on an elbow and looked down, ensuring that his arm was securely around the man’s chest.

Tony looked like he was finally sleeping again.
Gibbs sighed, brushed Tony’s hair off his forehead again, and laid himself down, forcing his muscles to relax although he kept his arm around Tony. At least he knew that if he did fall asleep tonight, that there were two burly orderlies out there who wouldn’t let Tony get in any kind of danger. He was keyed up, though, and laid there, holding Tony, breathing in his scent, wide awake.

Some time later, the doctor came back into the room. She walked right up to the bed, smiling. “He’s in REM sleep now,” she whispered.

Gibbs pushed himself up on his elbow and looked down and saw Tony’s eyeballs moving under his closed eyelids. He looked up at the doctor, eyebrows raised in question.

“He calmed down and slept, going back to a normal sleep cycle after you did this,” she gestured to their sleeping arrangement.

“What does that mean?” Gibbs ventured.

“I don’t rightly know, but it’s great news for him since you’re actually keeping him healthy by sleeping with him.”

“I’m not sleeping with him,” Gibbs hissed, blushing again.

She made an impatient noise. “You know what I mean. Why don’t you try to get some sleep and we can talk more tomorrow after I’ve had a chance to go over his results with a few of my colleagues.”

Gibbs rolled his eyes and nodded.

“I’ll raise this to make sure you don’t fall off,” she quickly raised the railings on the sides of the bed. After she left, he flopped down on the bed, sighing noisily. Tony made a quiet noise, sounding like a question. He hurried to shush him and soothe him, and Tony sighed and smiled, a soft smile that Gibbs had never seen before. Then he laced his fingers with Gibbs’ on his belly and settled right back to what looked to be continued REM sleep.

Gibbs was glad then that his vitals weren’t the ones being monitored, because that little smile and the movement of Tony trustingly holding his hand while he slept? That made his heart pound in his chest. He was sure he was blushing again and no doubt his blood pressure was through the roof at this point. Sighing, he pushed out of his head all thoughts of how attractive Tony was, the little spoon on the bed with him. He tried to arrange it so Tony’s back wasn’t plastered to his front, but the bed wasn’t that big so it wasn’t like he had much of a choice. He laid there for a while, convinced that he wouldn’t go to sleep, but somewhere along the way he did.

The next thing he knew, Tony was wriggling deliciously against him and mumbling softly in his sleep. Their hands were still linked and again, Tony moved it down towards his dick. For a moment, Gibbs pulled him even closer to him, rubbing his erection on the man’s ass, before he realized that they were still at the sleep clinic and he was about to touch Tony’s dick for the first time while they were on camera. He pulled his hand off Tony’s body as if it were burning hot and Tony whined sleepily in protest, and the sound did things to Gibbs’ Dick. Good things. Or bad, since he was being observed in a sleep clinic and his dick was hard as a rock now. He backed away as much as he could given the confines of the bed, and was immediately trying to get his erection to subside, but Tony wiggled himself backwards, chasing him.

“DiNozzo,” Gibbs growled in his ear.

“Mmm,” Tony sighed, smiling softly, and Gibbs ignored his own twitching dick.

“DiNozzo!” Gibbs barked.

“Yeah, Boss!” Tony sat up so quickly he almost hit Gibbs’ face with his shoulder.

Gibbs couldn’t help but snicker at that. Tony frowned, blinking sleepily, before he realized where he was and who he was with.

“What’s going on?” he rasped, his voice still hoarse with sleep.

“Yeah, we better get the doctor to explain stuff later,” Gibbs told him.
“We’re spooning again?” the frown deepened. “What’s the deal?”

“Basically? You’re sleeping strangely, and you only calm down and go through normal sleep if I hold you down.”

“Restraints?”

“You were active throughout, trying to break free.”

“Fuck,” Tony buried his face in his hands. “Fuck my life.”

There was a soft knock on the door before the doctor entered, seemingly oblivious to the tension in the room as she smiled at the two men still on the bed. “Good morning, Agents,” she greeted them cheerfully.

Gibbs wanted to smack the smile off her face. A glance at his watch showed that it was actually mid morning. The woman had apparently stayed up all night and was still chipper. Gibbs hated people who were chipper before his first cup of coffee. Scratch that. Gibbs hated people who were chipper, other than Abby, period. But the lack of coffee was not going to make for a pretty scene.

“You need to bring him a cup of coffee before he explodes,” Tony told the doctor, as if he had read Gibbs mind.

She chuckled at that.

Tony gave Gibbs a wary look. “I’m serious. He’s going to go medieval on someone’s ass if he doesn’t get coffee like, right the fuck now. And since you’re a doctor and standing way over there out of his reach, and I’m right here on the bed with him, I’m the one who’s going to be beaten to a pulp. Any time now.”

Both men jumped when Ducky strolled into the room, bearing a tray of to go cups. He handed Gibbs two of the cups, one to the doctor and one to Tony before he smiled at them. Gibbs practically inhaled the first cup, giving the empty to Tony to hold before he started to leisurely sip his second cup. He could smell that Ducky had brought Tony hot chocolate and the sounds Tony made as he sipped his drink made him want to just storm out of there angrily before anyone could see how much Tony’s happy moans were affecting his dick.

Luckily, Foster began giving them a short recap of what the overnight had found: Tony was experiencing his parasomnia episodes without being in Stage Three or deep sleep, which should be impossible. And he never went past Stage Two sleep for the hours that they waited including the time he was restrained. However, once Gibbs got on the bed and spooned him, his brain activity indicated that he slid into Stage Three, Stage Four and achieved REM sleep and he slept normally for the rest of the night, experiencing all of the stages of sleep in a normal fashion. When questioned, Tony had no memory of the two times he was awakened over the course of the night, and no memory of the question and answer session. Even though he had apparently correctly answered some of the more complicated questions Doctor Foster had asked him.

“What does this all mean?” Tony asked.

“Haven’t got a clue!” Foster exclaimed brightly. “But we’d like you both to be here again tonight. Based on your brain activity and the preliminary review of your bloodwork and hormonal readings, it’s definitely a mystery. I want to see how you react to a sleep aid – one that isn’t Agent Gibbs, that is,” she chuckled and shook her head.

Gibbs and Tony exchanged a look. Tony rolled his eyes. “Why do I have to be here if you’re going to drug me?” he asked. “I can sleep drugged up in the comfort of my own home, thank you very much.”

“Because since the entire pathology of your sleep disorder is completely inexplicable, I can’t predict what the sleep aid would do to you. How it would affect your sleep. So I can’t in all good conscience, just prescribe a sleep aid and just let you go. You’re suffering from severe sleep deprivation if this has been going on for weeks. You aren’t getting restful sleep. You may as well have been completely awake for the past few weeks.”

Tony sighed noisily.

“We’ll be here tonight,” Gibbs told the doctors.
Tony glared at Gibbs but didn’t object.

After they left the hospital, Gibbs stopped by the diner and bought Tony brunch, sitting there and ensuring that Tony ate before they went back to the house. After they had both showered, Gibbs received a phone call and sighed before he grabbed his car keys.

“Heading in to the office for a few. You can come if you want,” Gibbs told him.

Tony’s eyes brightened.

“But only paperwork. Don’t let those two nitwits upset you. Go lie down on Abby’s futon if you get tired.”

“I’m not exactly an invalid, you know,” Tony grumbled.

“Your doctor just told you you’ve essentially been operating on no sleep for weeks,” Gibbs told him grimly. “I’ve seen what sleep deprivation can do to a person. You’re not going down that road on my watch.”

Tony gave him a wide eyed, slightly scared look before his lips turned down. Gibbs could see him about to object to the limitations Gibbs was putting on him.

“Either that or you stay here while I go in for a couple of hours,” Gibbs told him.


Gibbs looked him up and down – he was dressed in old, dark jeans and a gray t-shirt. “Get your jacket and we can go.”

“I should probably put something on that’s more appropriate for work,” Tony looked down at himself.

“We’ll only be there a couple hours tops and you’re not supposed to be working.” Gibbs stopped himself from telling Tony that he fully expected Tony to be lying down on Abby’s futon for at least half of that time. Tony would definitely balk at that.

They drove to the office in silence. By the time they arrived, Tony was asleep in the passenger seat, leaning against the window. Gibbs sighed and turned the engine off, deciding to sit and wait rather than wake the man up or leave him to wake up on his own. Despite it getting some REM sleep the previous night, he still looked exhausted. Gibbs might be a bastard but he wasn’t that much of an asshole that he would wake Tony up if he’d been essentially awake for weeks now.

Ten minutes later, Gibbs’ phone rang and that woke him up with a snuffle snort that made Gibbs want to smile. Sometimes the noises the man made were ridiculous and adorable, and there was no way Gibbs would ever admit that to anyone.

It was Vance, inquiring about his ETA. He reluctantly told the man that he would be there in a minute and hung up.

Tony was blinking in sleepy confusion. Gibbs hustled him out of the car and straight to Abby’s lab, settling him on the futon. Tony turned onto his belly, smooshed his face into Bert who farted loudly, and went right back to sleep. Gibbs took Abby aside and told her that Tony was suffering from weeks of basically no sleep and she promised that nothing would disturb his rest. He also warned her to watch him, in case he had a sleepwalking episode. Abby’s eyes were wide as she solemnly nodded.

Gibbs spent the next couple of hours in MTAC. When he came down the stairs to the bullpen, he saw that Ziva and McGee were shooting the breeze, bantering with each other, relaxed in thinking that Gibbs wasn’t in the office.

Gibbs’ growl made them snap to, and he barked orders at them for ten minutes before heading down to Forensics. Tony was sitting on a stool, still hugging Bert, eyes heavy with sleep. He blinked sleepily at Gibbs, ignoring the fact that Gibbs was scowling, which made Gibbs suspect that he wasn’t actually awake.

“He had an episode,” Abby confirmed, looking concerned.

Gibbs grunted. This was why he didn’t want to leave Tony home alone.
“I woke him up before he could get far.”

Gibbs nodded and thanked her curtly. He helped Tony put his jacket and shoes on before he steered the younger man back to the car. Tony slept the entire way home. He woke up to answer his phone, gave Gibbs an apologetic look before he ran up to the guest room to have a long conversation with whoever the hell that was that he didn’t want Gibbs to know about.

Gibbs decided to put it out of his head and not drive himself crazy with jealous thoughts. Because that was what he was. Jealous. He could recognize that. Jealous that Tony had someone he wanted to talk to other than Gibbs. Someone he didn’t seem to want Gibbs to even know about. No use dwelling on that when there were other, more serious things to worry about. Like the fact that Tony hadn’t been sleeping for weeks now.

Tony’s second night at the sleep clinic was fairly disastrous. The prescription sleep aid never got him to the deep sleep stage, but ended up leaving him trapped and unable to awaken from the Stage Two sleep during which time he experienced his parasomnia episodes on a practically continuous basis. He didn’t even calm when Gibbs spooned him. By the time he woke up eight hours after he’d been dosed, everyone, himself included, was exhausted. Tony looked even worse than before, the bags under his eyes making it look like he’d been punched in the face. Foster was hesitant to try any other sleep aids until she consulted her colleagues with all of the findings and Tony’s hormone readings wouldn’t be available for at least a week, so they had time to kill. And so far, it looked like Gibbs was the only thing that was allowing Tony to get proper sleep.

With nothing else that they could do for the time being, the doctor sent them home and prescribed another week off work for Tony. She cautioned him about his diet and told him to avoid driving, operating heavy machinery, and just about everything else. Tony was upset – especially since there was a ban on caffeine and alcohol until they figured out his sleep issues. Gibbs drove them back home and refused to listen to anything Tony said, insisting that they both just get into bed and take a nap. Gibbs was tired too, having been up with Tony for most of the previous night. But a combination of guilt and Gibbs’ trademark move of ordering Tony to do things ended up with them both on the bed in the guest bedroom, and for the first time, Tony was actually awake when Gibbs got into the bed with him and arranged them both on their sides, spooning him.

“This is fucking weird, Boss,” Tony whined when Gibbs put his arm firmly around the man.

“Shut the fuck up and go to sleep, DiNozzo,” Gibbs told him.

Tony continued to whine for a few minutes before he dropped off, practically mid-word. Gibbs grinned, brushed Tony’s hair off his forehead and before he snuggled in to his body. He was tired, and DiNozzo was asleep, he wasn’t even going to pretend he didn’t just deliberately close the distance until he was firmly plastered to Tony’s back. He was going to soak it up as much as he could, he thought, as he fell asleep.

When they awoke several hours later, Gibbs was much more clearheaded.

“I have plans this weekend,” Tony muttered as they sat in his kitchen. Gibbs was nursing a mug of coffee and Tony was drinking a Sprite. Nothing with caffeine, and happily for Gibbs, Ducky had swung by to stock Gibbs’ fridge with all kinds of non-caffeinated drinks. He had also removed all the beer from the fridge, which displeased both Gibbs and Tony.

“You’re gonna have to cancel,” Gibbs told him.

“I don’t want to. This is important.”

“This house stuff?”

Tony nodded miserably.

“It’s out of town?”

He nodded again.

“You know it’s not safe for you to drive yourself. Doctor told you no driving.”

He shrugged.
“I know you’re excited about this project,” Gibbs was sympathetic. “But you need to sleep.”

Tony ran his fingers through his hair. “I’m just a little tired. That’s all.”

“No. You’re sleep deprived. Severely.”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re not.”

Tony sipped his soda, pouting.

“But if you’re determined to do this, you’re going to have to let me help you.”

Tony stared at him, eyes wide. “What do you mean?” he asked, his eyes narrowing suspiciously.

“I understand you want to keep this private. And lately, I haven’t given you reason to trust me with your personal stuff. But you just might have to tell me what this project is and where, and maybe I can help.”

Tony scrubbed his face. He stared out the window in silence for a good ten minutes but Gibbs had been a sniper. A good one, too. He had patience. He could wait the man out.


“In Roanoke?”

Tony nodded. “Yannick, this awesome guy I met and hired, is really in charge of the whole restoration, but I’m trying to be as involved as I possibly can.”

“How big is the house?”

“Big,” Tony said shortly.

“And it’s a historical site?”

Tony nodded.

“How are you affording it?”

“We have some grants from a few places.”

“That cover it all?”

Tony shrugged, and Gibbs understood that to mean that it didn’t cover it all.

“And the rest or it?”

“I have family money,” Tony muttered.

“Thought you said your father disowned you?”

Tony sighed and scrubbed his face with his hands again, fingers then scraping through his hair. “I have some money. When I turned thirty five, the Paddington lawyers informed me that my mother and my maternal grandfather left me money in trust, that I would only be told about when I turned thirty five.”

Gibbs raised an eyebrow.

“It wasn’t any of your business,” Tony muttered. “It didn’t matter.”

“And what else did Clive leave you? Other than the house?”

“More money,” Tony shrugged. “Does it matter?” There was more that Clive had left him but he didn’t want to tell Gibbs about it. Gibbs could tell from the deflection.

“So a lot of money, then?”
“Enough,” Tony said shortly.

“What about the Ferrari? The house in Hawaii?”

Tony’s lips were pursed together tightly. “I could’ve bought that when I turned thirty five and came into the trust,” he muttered, almost under his breath. “Clive just added to that. But then what would I do?”

“Lie on the beach?”


Gibbs sighed. “So you don’t want to leave NCIS?”

“Most days I do want to leave,” Tony’s voice was soft. “Most days I have to remind myself that I’m doing good. That I’m contributing. That I’m making a difference.”

“Doesn’t sound like you love the job anymore.” Gibbs’ heart fell at the sadness in Tony’s voice.

“The job doesn’t love me, more like,” he was staring out the window. “Maybe it’s time to move on to my next job. I don’t know.”

“In Roanoke?” Gibbs asked sharply.

Tony shrugged. “Maybe. It’s a nice house. The people are nice out there.”

Unsaid was that the people weren’t nice here in DC. Gibbs growled under his breath. Tony turned and met his gaze with sad eyes and a brittle smile.

“What does it matter anyway? It’s not like you want me on your team anymore.”

Gibbs gaped at him. He couldn’t help it. “Why the fuck would you say that?”

“I do want you on my team,” Gibbs growled angrily. “Always. Told you when I hired you I didn’t waste good. That’s still true.”

The look Tony gave him was sad and disappointed but he said nothing, turning back to the window and staring out of it in silence. Gibbs sat there trying to find words to say but they weren’t coming. Finally he sighed.

“I’ll take you to Roanoke tomorrow morning if you want,” he finally said, resigned now. He’d absolutely fucked up in his treatment of Tony in the last couple of years. Since his Mexican siesta, at least. He knew it.

“I’m not going to make you drive me there and come back for me on Sunday,” Tony shrugged. “I can take a bus there. No biggie.”

“And what about the nights? You’re not sleeping properly and you’re sleepwalking!”

“So what are you proposing? You’re going to keep spooning me every night, even going to Roanoke with me so I can keep working on my house, and that’s OK with you?” Tony scoffed.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

Tony laughed at him. “Yeah, right,” he sneered.

“I’m handier with tools than you are. I can help with the house, too.”

“I don’t even want to talk about this with you,” Tony scowled.

“Well, too bad. Because right now, I’m the thing that gets you to sleep. So right now, you’re stuck with me.”

He disappeared into the guest room with his laptop. That night, Gibbs deliberately climbed into bed with the younger man. Wordlessly, Tony turned onto his side, away from Gibbs. It made Gibbs’ heart hurt when he flinched as Gibbs slung an arm around him and pulled him close.

“So not awkward at all, Boss,” he muttered grumpily.

“Shut up…”

“Yeah, yeah. Shut up and go to sleep, DiNozzo,” he said mockingly. “I got it.”

“We leave for Roanoke at 0700.”

“Fine.”

“Good night, DiNozzo,” Gibbs settled in and closed his eyes.

After a long minute, he heard the faint reply. “Good night, Boss.”

After Tony fell asleep, Gibbs told himself that he needed to show Tony that he was a good friend again. He needed to prove to Tony that he didn’t waste good, and he still knew that Tony was good, that he still saw what Tony kept private and hidden. He needed to stop pushing Tony away or he would lose him. Once Tony was healthy again, he would walk away from NCIS and Gibbs, and that was unacceptable.

End Notes

The end... for now! I’ll be posting the sequel and resolution of this two parter, Shadowed Spaces, hopefully in the next couple of weeks.

Thank you to WaterSoter for the prompt and all the fabulous additional artwork made, for this story as well as the next! And thanks for being flexible and allowing me to change the title and split the story, etc. I really can’t thank you enough for how you responded to the change, so encouraging and even making me plenty more artwork! :D Go check out her art post here and give her all the appreciation and love!

Thank you again and hugs and kisses to jesco0307 (beta), Red_Pink_Dots (omegareader and cheerleader) and cutycat (cheerleader)!

Of course, many thanks to Jacie for organizing this challenge!

I did listen to a bunch of other music but that was pretty random. The main influence was Gnosienne no 1, 2, 3 by Eric Satie.

I hope you enjoyed this, and will be back to read the sequel Shadowed Spaces in the near future! I do apologize for having to break this into two stories, I hope you’ll bear with me. The sequel is almost done. I promise! <3 <3

-j
xoxoxo

Works inspired by this The Inheritance (Cover and Additional Art) by WaterSoter

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