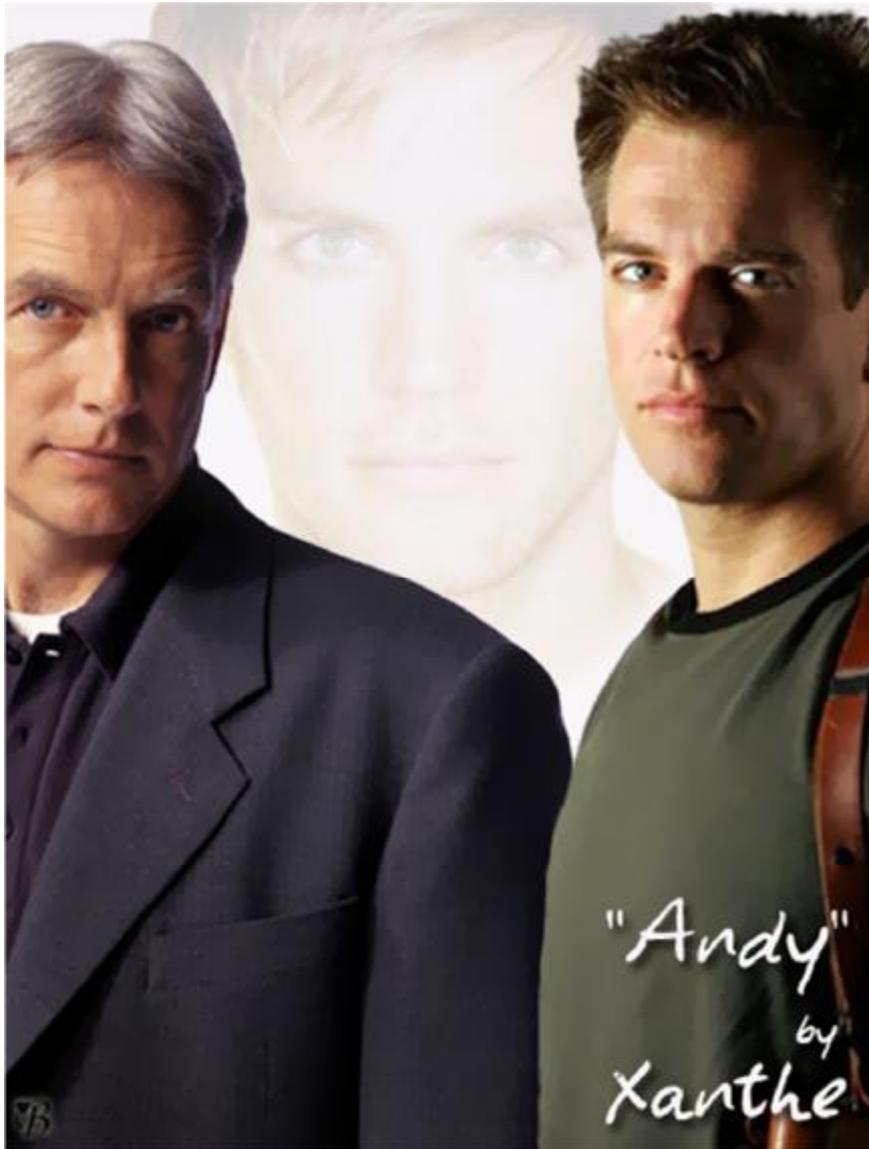


## Andy by Xanthe



Story is archived: <http://www.xanthe.org/andy/>

### Story Notes:

*Extract: Gibbs had been waiting for a dead body to turn up, and it seemed one just had - only not the way he'd expected. This was one of those bodies that had been hidden for seventeen years, and those kinds of corpses always stank to high heaven when they finally rose to the surface.*

Wall to wall angst, a dollop of hurt/comfort, and a massive side order of daddy issues.

Timeline and canon: In this story I've based Tony's age being 36 in 2008 on the fact that it's explicitly stated by both him and Kate that he's 32 in the episode "Split Decision" which aired in 2004, and he mentions playing college basketball in 1992 in "Swak" which ties in with this dating. Other canon facts are not entirely consistent on this subject (surprise!) but that's what I've used for this story.

I found Gibbs's timeline and canon inconsistent and confusing so I've put my own spin on it here – trying to stay as accurate as possible while steering a middle path. If this bothers you, then you might want to consider it an AU – which it pretty much is really anyway \*g\*.

Thanks to Bluespirit for being so supportive, encouraging and all-round fabulous; also, and very importantly, for beta-reading and for the stunningly beautiful graphic.



Nominated for Best Angst and Best Romance in the **Tony/Gibbs category** of the **NCIS Awards, 2009**

**1. Chapter 1** by Xanthe

**2. Chapter 2** by Xanthe

## Chapter 1 by Xanthe

**2008**

Gibbs knew. He knew the minute he woke up and felt an old, achingly familiar sense of foreboding in his gut. It had been a long time since his gut instinct had made its presence so strongly felt but today it was pretty much waving a bright red flag at him. Something was going to happen today, and, if past experience was anything to go by, it wasn't going to be good.

A glance out of the window revealed several inches of snow covering the world; Gibbs hated snow. Then he had to take a cold shower because his heating wasn't working for some mysterious reason so he was already feeling pretty pissed off before he even left the house. He shovelled enough snow from the drive to get his car out, only to find the damn thing had a dead battery and wouldn't start, and by the time he got it moving he was half an hour late. He stopped off for his usual coffee and was halfway down the road before he took a sip, only to find they'd given him chai by mistake. By now in a really ferocious mood, he opened the car window and threw the drink onto the sidewalk where it spilled out, staining the snow brown. He ignored the startled curse of an irate passer-by and stamped his foot down hard on the accelerator. Yeah - today was going to be a really bad day.

He stormed into the NCIS building, stamping the snow off his feet and trampling it into the elevator, leaving a wet trail all the way to his desk.

"Uh..." McGee said, the minute he got into the squad room. Gibbs looked at him, his body language warning anyone within sight that he was not to be messed with this morning. "It's, uh...just that the director was here – you're having a meeting with him this morning...and...uh..." Gibbs raised an eyebrow. "You're late?" McGee offered, looking as if he'd just thrown a grenade and was waiting for it to blow up in his face.

"I know I'm late, McGee!" Gibbs roared, taking a perverse delight in seeing McGee duck behind his computer screen in alarm. Agent Shay, who had been walking over, turned smoothly and walked back the way she'd come, without missing a beat. "Someone get me some damn coffee!" Gibbs ordered as he stalked off towards the director's office.

His mood had only improved fractionally by the time he returned to his desk an hour later. It was covered in bits of paper. Gibbs hated bits of paper. He gathered them all together in a pile and dumped them on McGee's desk. The probie could sort through it when he returned from Abby's lab and make sure that only the really important stuff was returned for him to deal with.

He had just sat down at his desk for the first time all morning when he caught movement out of the corner of his eye. He glanced up to see Tony standing there.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Uh...I just wanted to know if you'd signed my vacation request," Tony asked, with an apologetic wince.

"I don't know. When did you give it to me?"

"This morning - when I got in." Tony glanced at Gibbs's pristine desk. "I left it on your desk. It should be here somewhere."

"McGee has it," Gibbs told him tersely.

"Why would McGee have it?" Tony asked blankly.

Gibbs was in no mood to explain. He just had a feeling that at some point in the next hour someone was going to bring him a dead body and his gut was churning accordingly. He hadn't felt this bad in a long time. It was like there was a dark cloud looming nearby and he was just waiting for the storm to start. When it did he had a feeling it was going to be a bad one, complete with lightning, thunder and pouring rain. He could almost hear it, pounding in his head.

"Okay...I'll just...go fish it out," Tony said.

Gibbs nodded curtly that he should do just that, and turned to his computer and clicked on his email. Maybe that dead body he was expecting would show up in one of his messages. He was dimly aware of Tony silently sliding a piece of paper onto his desk, which he ignored.

He went through his email messages but they were all pretty much routine. He deleted a ton of spam and then glanced up - to find Tony still hovering in front of his desk.

"What?"

"It's just...I was wondering if you could sign it," Tony said, pushing the vacation request form towards him.

"Can't it wait?" Gibbs pulled the piece of paper over and then held it up, at arm's length, trying to decipher it without putting on his glasses. "Why the urgency?" Gibbs demanded.

"Just it's for...I want to leave well...kind of now," Tony replied. Gibbs glared at him.

"You're giving me a request for a vacation starting \*now\*?" he demanded. He hated it when any of his team was ill or away for whatever reason, and he especially hated it when it was Tony who was absent. Besides, now was not a good time for his second to be away – not with this sense of foreboding gnawing away at his gut, heralding, as it very likely did, the possibility of a dead body turning up soon.

"Yeah," Tony said quietly. "So...will you sign it?"

Something about his tone of voice alerted Gibbs and he looked up at him sharply. Tony gazed back, and there was something subdued about the way he was standing and the expression in his eyes. Usually he was playing around, making an idiot of himself...but not

right now. Gibbs frowned and glanced back at the vacation request form.

"You didn't fill in your return date," he said, handing the paper back to Tony. Tony hesitated, and then pushed it back towards him.

"That's because I don't know when I'll be back," he said.

Gibbs felt that sensation in his gut again, and he picked up the piece of paper, irritably, scrunched it into a ball, and threw it into the trash.

"No," he said tersely. "You can't make an open-ended vacation request. What happens if we get a case? The dead bodies won't just hang around until you decide to get back from sunning yourself in Cancun, DiNozzo! What the hell happened? Did you wake up this morning, see the snow, and decide to head somewhere hot?"

"I never take my full vacation allowance, Gibbs," Tony said, in that same quiet tone of voice. "I've got weeks built up. I'm entitled to it."

"I said no," Gibbs growled, getting up and striding down the hallway to get himself a cup of coffee from the vending machine in the staff area. It was a poor substitute for the real thing but it would do.

He got his coffee and was about to take a sip when he became aware that Tony had followed him there.

"I have to go," Tony said quietly, leaning back against the wall, arms folded across his chest.

Gibbs took a gulp of his coffee and was grateful for the immediate caffeine hit. That sense of foreboding in his gut was now worse than ever – and suddenly he knew where that storm was coming from. For the first time that morning he took a real look at Tony and saw the expression in his eyes – an expression he hadn't seen in many years. It took him back so far that he felt like he'd been punched in the gut, and he was momentarily winded.

"It's my father," Tony said softly, and Gibbs felt the storm rising around them; darkness, rain, a howling gale of a wind - the full works, just the way it had been that night they first met. "He's dying."

Gibbs studied Tony's face, waiting.

"He's had cancer for six months but apparently now he's near the end. My cousin called me last night. I'm going to take the shuttle to New York in a couple of hours. I don't know when I'll be back. It depends on how long it takes him to die," Tony said, his voice completely flat, without any kind of emotion. "I thought I'd stay for the funeral and then come home straight after."

Gibbs continued to gaze at him.

"Hopefully it won't be too long," Tony added, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Although, knowing him, he'll drag it out just to inconvenience everyone. I'm...uh, not asking if I can go - I have to go," he muttered, glancing up at Gibbs with eyes that were as serious as Gibbs had ever seen them.

"Yeah. You do." Gibbs nodded. Tony nodded back, and then turned. Gibbs followed him back to the squad room. He grabbed his gun and badge from his desk drawer, and then stopped by Tony's desk.

"I'm going home to pick up some stuff," he said, tersely. "You go to National and buy the tickets. I'll meet you there in a couple of hours."

"Tickets? Uh...for my shuttle? My shuttle home?" Tony looked startled.

"Yes, DiNozzo, for your shuttle home."

"You're coming with me?"

"It looks that way."

"But...uh...I mean - why?" Tony frowned.

He gazed up at Gibbs and Gibbs gazed back at him, and the past was standing right there, in front of them, the giant proverbial elephant in the room, and he knew that neither one of them was going to mention it. Did Tony even \*know\*, he wondered? Did he even know it had been him, all those years ago? If he didn't, Gibbs wasn't going to tell him. Maybe he did know but thought that Gibbs didn't - and, ditto, Gibbs sure as hell wasn't going to let on that he knew exactly who he'd met in that bar seventeen years ago.

"Just a feeling in my gut," Gibbs replied, turning on his heel and striding towards the elevator. "Wait for me at National, Tony," he threw over his shoulder as he went.

Gibbs got into the elevator and thumped his hand on the button for the parking garage. He'd been waiting for a dead body to turn up and it seemed that one just had - only not the way he'd expected. This was one of those bodies that had been hidden for seventeen years, and those kinds of corpses always stank to high heaven when they finally rose to the surface.

~\*~

1991

At first, everything had been a blur. It was all mixed up in his head - the funerals, Kuwait, the explosion, the coma, the hospital bed in Bethesda, and killing that bastard who'd murdered his family - it was all just a jumble. Slowly clarity returned, piece by piece, and then...then he'd had to decide what to do next. He knew he couldn't stay in the Corps. That part of his life was over. He wasn't sure how he knew that, but he did. His CO tried to talk him out of it

but he just knew he had to get out. He couldn't face the discipline of life in the Corps right now in any case. He'd fuck up again if he didn't get out, the way he'd fucked up when he got blown up – only next time around he might take some of his unit with him and he didn't want that on his conscience.

So he got out, and woke up one day in an empty house with nothing to do. To begin with people were kind, but soon his drinking and the morose savagery of his moods frightened them away. Even his closest friends disappeared, one by one, and he didn't care. He barely noticed.

Mike Franks took him out to a bar one night and offered him a job at NIS. He turned it down. He was a Marine – he didn't belong behind a desk.

"Suit yourself," Franks said, taking a long drag on his cigarette, leaning against the bar, other hand wrapped around a glass of bourbon. "Offer's still open if you change your mind."

"I won't," Gibbs told him.

"You might." Franks gave a little shrug.

"Why me?" Gibbs asked.

Franks gazed at him from unsympathetic dark eyes. "You can shoot a gun and you won't piss your pants when things get tough. You should see the wussy little kids they give to me – and then they complain when I give 'em back broken. You won't break."

"Yeah?" Gibbs knocked back the drink that Franks placed in front of him.

"Yeah. If you were gonna break, this would have broken you." Franks beckoned the bartender over and ordered a refill for Gibbs's glass.

"You think I'm not broken?" Gibbs poured the bourbon down his throat like he was dying of thirst, enjoying the way his belly warmed up as it went down.

"Yeah." Franks shrugged. "You're all beat up and bruised maybe but not broken."

Gibbs finished the drink and waited for another refill. He *felt* broken. He felt shattered into a thousand tiny pieces, shards of himself scattered everywhere. Franks stayed with him while he got drunk, then took him home and slung him onto the couch to sleep it off.

"You think about it," he said, before he left.

Gibbs woke up the next day with a pounding headache. His tongue felt like it was covered in fur and his body protested every move he made. He walked, unsteadily, to the bathroom. The house was cold and empty, the way it had been every single day since they'd been killed. He hated it here. He held onto the basin and puked his guts up into it. Outside he could hear kids playing and he puked again.

If he looked out of the window, maybe he'd find it hadn't happened. Maybe he'd see Kelly out there in the back yard, playing with little Maddie Tyler, Kelly's dark head pressed against Maddie's blonde one as they plotted some mischief together. Maybe downstairs Shannon would be singing as she brewed some coffee; she was tone deaf but she more than made up for that with the sheer gusto with which she belted out a tune. He opened his eyes to find the room empty and silent, only the sounds of his own stupid thoughts reverberating around.

He took a shower and got dressed, knocked back a few painkillers, and then walked back down the stairs again. He picked up the mail, and leafed through it. Most of it was junk and he dumped it straight in the trash without opening it. He tore open a bank statement and then screwed it into a ball and threw it after the junk.

"I don't want your fucking blood money," he growled to the empty room. He hadn't even touched the money to pay for their funerals – he'd taken care of that himself. Something about the payout almost offended him. Not that it was much but he didn't intend to spend it. He had his savings – he'd go through them first before he touched that money. Hell, he'd starve before he touched that money.

The house seemed claustrophobic; just another day without them, another day without the Corps, without a job, and without any reason to get up in the morning. He had no idea what the hell to do with himself. The past few weeks he'd just drunk himself into oblivion so he wouldn't have to feel anything but he needed to make a decision sometime soon. He just didn't know what the decision was. Whether to take that job at NIS? Whether to get up in the morning? Whether to carry on living?

He went into the kitchen and pulled his gun out of the drawer where he kept it. He could swallow it, right now, pull the trigger and end this. He'd never thought he was the suicidal type but everyone had a breaking point. Was there anything left in the world for him now? Anywhere to go? Anything to do? Everything seemed grey and meaningless without them. Everything he'd done these past few years had been for them. He couldn't make sense of the shape of his life without them. How was it possible that he was still here and they were gone? He just couldn't get his head around that.

He couldn't stay here though. He knew that, suddenly, and without doubt. Not in this house where Kelly had laughed and played, and Shannon had sung and smiled. Where he had been someone else, and not this shadow he now was – insubstantial and formless. He didn't have a damn clue who he was any more. Not a Marine since he'd quit the Corps. Not a husband any more, or a father.

He threw the gun down on the kitchen worktop and ran upstairs. He found a bag and slung some clothes into it, then ran back down again. He grabbed his gun and keys and then left the house, without looking back.

He got into the car and started driving. He wasn't sure where he was going, just that he needed to get away from that house, where he'd lived with them. He'd keep the gun close,

keep that option open, because maybe there wasn't anything for him in this world now, but he needed to know that for sure before he took that final step.

His car seemed to know where he was going even if he didn't, and he found himself heading out towards Stillwater. He tried not to think of other journeys he'd taken in this car; trips where Kelly had been playing "I spy" in the back, and Shannon had been by his side, laughing and being totally useless at navigating.

He wasn't sure what he was going to do when he reached Stillwater. As he got closer, he felt something inside him protest. Stillwater would be the same as always. Nothing there would have changed – but everything had changed for \*him\*. He felt that frozen nugget of resentment inside turn into a roaring, towering rage at his father for turning up at their funeral with a date on his arm, like it was some kind of social occasion. Maybe he'd found it easy to get on with his life after his own wife's death but Gibbs couldn't understand that. He wasn't like his dad – he never had been. Jackson Gibbs was easygoing and sociable – he didn't \*feel\* things with the same dark intensity that his son did.

The junction for Stillwater came and went but he didn't take it. Stillwater wasn't the answer he was looking for. Then again, it never had been.

He drove aimlessly, stopping when he was hungry, taking a room at whatever motel he ended up at when he was tired, finding the nearest bar and drinking himself quietly into numbness before heading back to his motel room. Sometimes he'd stay for a couple of nights, and sometimes he'd move on straight away. He didn't count the days. He was a shadow...he just followed the sun, heading West, going wherever his car took him.

The inside of bars, wherever they were, tended to be pretty much the same. He nursed his drink in yet another one, his dark mood radiating out, keeping people at bay. They seemed to know not to talk to him and that was just the way he wanted it. It was about him and the liquor, about getting drunk and staggering back to a motel room to sleep it off before heading out again in his car the next day.

He gazed into the distance, watching as people entered and left the bar. Early on it had been busy but as it got later and later the place got quieter. He saw everything, and registered nothing. The next day he wouldn't remember these people at all, but now they were just part of the furniture, moving wallpaper, something that flitted by in front of him. He saw the old man at the bar, telling a long, involved story to the bartender. Then there was the woman in her forties, lonely, hoping she'd meet someone. She'd tried to meet his eye earlier but he hadn't responded. Over there was a man in a suit was making notes on a pad – maybe a travelling businessman, on the road. A kid, about college age, went and sat next to him.

"This seat taken?" the kid grinned, all white teeth, and wide, hopeful eyes. Gibbs found himself staring. Something about the youth rang some kind of alarm bell. The businessman barely spared him a glance – he just moved his pad a little to give the kid space to sit down and then kept on writing. "What you doing?" the kid asked.

"Working," the man said, and then he looked up. "You want something?"

"Depends? Do you?" The kid moved forward, licking his lips a little. "Just thought you might be on the road, a long way from home. Might need some company?"

The kid was a hustler. Gibbs grunted and took another sip of his drink, then glanced around. This was a risky kind of a place for the kid to trawl for trade.

"I don't need company," the businessman said. The kid grinned at him, widely, then picked up the businessman's bottle of beer and took an obscene gulp, his mobile mouth making it clear what kind of service he could offer if the price was right. The businessman gazed at him, transfixed.

"I need to piss," the kid said, putting the beer bottle down, and then he got up and walked over to the restroom. He didn't look like a hustler, Gibbs thought. He was wearing a pair of faded jeans and a red plaid shirt. He was a little on the skinny side but he looked more like a college student than a young punk working the streets. Gibbs counted slowly to ten, and, sure enough, the businessman got up and followed the kid into the restroom. Gibbs grunted again and took another sip of his drink. He'd seen many encounters like this over the past few days; women picking up men, men picking up women, men picking up men. Nobody had been stupid enough to try and pick him up.

He glanced at his watch, giving it about five minutes, and sure enough five minutes later the businessman exited, folding his wallet and returning it to his pants pocket as he walked. He looked like a satisfied customer. He returned to his table, collected his belongings, and left. The kid returned to the bar a few seconds later, rubbing the back of his hand over his mouth as if trying to get rid of a bad taste. He shoved some money into his back pocket and glanced around.

Gibbs took a deep gulp of his drink, waiting for the familiar sense of oblivion to wash over him. He wasn't there yet and he needed to get there, to where he felt that click in his head and nothing mattered any more.

"Hey...mind if I sit here?" a voice asked.

Gibbs glanced up. "Oh you have got to be kidding me," he growled, looking into a pair of hopeful green eyes.

"I'll take that as an invitation then," the kid said, sitting down opposite him. He was the first person in days, maybe even weeks – Gibbs wasn't counting – to approach him. Everyone else had the good sense to give him a wide berth.

"I'm not buying whatever it is you're offering," Gibbs said abruptly. "And you are taking one hell of a risk doing that here. Shouldn't you be...someplace else?"

"Don't know what you mean." The kid shrugged. "You drinking that?" he asked, looking at Gibbs's drink.

"Yeah." Gibbs lifted his glass and downed the rest of it in one go, then held up his hand and got the bartender's attention, pointing at his glass for a refill.

"Buy one for me?" the kid asked, white teeth gleaming as he grinned, hopefully. He had a certain kind of puppyish charm, Gibbs decided. He was tall – about 6 feet, almost as tall as he was and maybe in a few years when he stopped growing he'd be taller. His hair was streaked blond, darker underneath, and he was undeniably pretty.

"No," Gibbs replied tersely. The bartender came over, and refilled his glass.

"He bothering you?" he asked, glancing at the kid. Gibbs shook his head.

"No. He'll be leaving soon," he predicted. The bartender shrugged and left, with a glare in the kid's direction.

"You gonna be leaving soon too?" the kid asked. "I could leave with you."

Gibbs shot him a look that would have had the men in his old unit quivering in their boots. The kid chewed on his lip, his green eyes anxious.

"Didn't mean anything," he muttered.

"And I told you – this isn't a good place for you to be doing...what you do," Gibbs growled. This place had to be full of straight men who'd beat the crap out of a hustler like this just for suggesting they might be interested in what he had to offer.

"I know." The kid shrugged. "I usually work the Trojan – nightclub down the street," he explained, when Gibbs raised an eyebrow. "But I got thrown out and I need to make some money so I thought it was worth a try."

"Why don't you get yourself a job?" Gibbs said. "A real job," he added, before the kid got a chance to speak.

"I've got one," the kid shrugged. "But I need more money than that pays."

"For drugs?" Gibbs asked, gazing at the kid distastefully, suddenly wanting to be rid of him.

"No. For college," the boy snapped back at him, looking momentarily angry. Now Gibbs figured out what was bothering him about the kid. He had a preppy feel to him – he wasn't like the rough kids he'd come across before, the ones who usually hung out on the street. This boy had bucket loads of charm and an easygoing manner, and was clearly intelligent and educated – although Gibbs suspected he could be quick with his fists in a fight if he needed to be.

"College? You're kidding me." Gibbs gulped down half his drink.

"Sure you want the rest of that?" the kid asked, pointing at the other half still in the glass.

"Damn sure," Gibbs replied.

The boy stared at him, licking his lips. "You always know what you want?" he asked.

"Usually." Gibbs shrugged.

"You want me?" the kid asked softly. "You're staying in the motel opposite, right? I could come back with you."

"How do you know I'm staying in the motel?" Gibbs demanded.

"I watch. I see things." The kid shrugged. He leaned across the table, and his warm breath wafted across Gibbs's cheek. "No need for you to be alone tonight," he said. "I'm good," he added, his tongue drifting over his lower lip invitingly.

"I'll bet you are," Gibbs growled. "And the answer is still no."

He finished his drink and got up. The room swam around him and the boy reached out a hand and grabbed his elbow, steadying him. His hand was surprisingly strong. Gibbs blinked, and his vision cleared.

"Here." He reached into his wallet and got out a twenty. "Go home," he said, slapping the money down on the table, wondering if he was going soft in his old age.

The kid pocketed the money in double quick time. Gibbs rolled his eyes and walked, in a swerving line, towards the door. His vision was hazy and he berated himself momentarily for being an idiot. The kid could come up behind him and try and steal his wallet from him while he walked back to the motel, blind drunk like this. The kid hadn't seemed like a thief but he was desperate, and Gibbs had seen what desperation could do to people.

He paused in the doorway, and held onto it for a moment, then stumbled through it. He staggered across the road to his motel directly opposite, and then fumbled for his key. He got inside, shut the door behind him, and fell down on the bed. The room swam around him and he blinked, gazing at the ceiling, and then passed out.

He wasn't sure how long he lay there but he came to awhile later and realised he needed to piss. He got up, slowly, and made his way to the bathroom, holding onto the walls and furniture as he went. He took care of his full bladder and then washed his hands. There was a thin blind covering the window, but it only just took the glare off the flashing motel sign outside. It was starting to rain. Gibbs flicked the blind aside and gazed out as a streak of lightning flashed through the air, competing with the motel sign for brightness.

He frowned as something caught his eye, and he saw the kid climbing into a dumpster outside the bar opposite. The bartender was closing up and a few seconds later he turned off the lights leaving the place in darkness. Gibbs gazed at the dumpster for a moment, then

turned and went back to his room. The kid wasn't his responsibility. They all had their problems in life, and he had enough of his own. He wasn't taking on any more.

He lay down on the bed and gazed at the ceiling again. Sometimes the drink made him fall straight to sleep, but sometimes, like now, it kept him awake. He hated it when this happened. He longed for the oblivion. Being a gunnery sergeant in the Corps it had been his job to whip kids like that one out there into shape and he'd done a good job of it too over the years. Gibbs grunted; somehow he didn't think that kid out there would do well in the Corps. There was something too glib and easygoing about him, something both charming and knowing at the same time. He wasn't Corps material. All the same...Gibbs remembered the expression in those green eyes; hope mingled with anxiety. That kid was damaged, and Gibbs realised he only knew that because he was too.

A clap of thunder was followed a second later by the sound of hard rain pounding on the motel roof. Gibbs sighed. He got up, grabbed his keys, and walked out into the storm. He crossed the street, reached under a half-dozen cardboard boxes in the dumpster, and then hauled the kid out by the collar of his shirt. The boy looked at him, wide-eyed.

"I thought I told you to go home," Gibbs said.

"I did," the kid replied, raising his chin defiantly. "I am." Those green eyes defied Gibbs to comment on that.

"With me," Gibbs ordered curtly. "Now."

He turned on his heel and marched back across the road, feeling suddenly stone cold sober. This was a bad idea on so many levels. The kid could steal his wallet in his sleep – or worse. Gibbs grunted – drunk or sober, there was no way that kid would get out of the room alive if he tried to steal from him. His instincts were too finely honed from too many war zones.

He walked into his motel room without looking back, and heard the door close quietly behind him.

"You can sleep on the floor. There's a spare blanket in the closet," he said, turning. The boy stood there looking like a drowned rat, his blond hair stuck down on his head from the rain, his shirt sticking to his slender body.

"The bed would be nicer," the kid said, with a beguiling little smile.

"Floor," Gibbs repeated, taking a pillow from the bed and flinging it at him. The kid caught it easily, his face breaking into a grin, and that was when Gibbs noticed he had a large bag over his shoulder. The kid saw where he was looking and grabbed the bag and held it close to his body. "You got any drugs in there and you can turn around and walk straight out again," Gibbs said.

"No drugs," the kid said, still holding onto the bag like it was a precious object. Water trickled out of his wet hair and down the side of his face.

Gibbs strode into the bathroom, got a towel, and returned to the bedroom. He flung the towel at the kid, who dropped the bag in order to catch it. Gibbs picked up the bag, opened it, and dumped the contents out onto the bed.

"Hey!" the kid protested. "That's my stuff!"

"And this is my room and I don't have anything in my room that I don't know about," Gibbs told him.

The bag contained a change of clothes, some toiletries, some sport sweats and a pair of expensive sneakers. There were a couple of books and a pile of letters, held together with string. There was also, inevitably, a tube of lubricant and a stash of condoms. It was an odd combination but the kid hadn't been lying – there were no drugs and no weapons either. Gibbs put the stuff back into the bag and handed it back to the kid, who was rubbing his hair with the towel.

"Okay – you can stay," Gibbs said. "On the floor," he repeated, pointing. He went over to the closet, found a blanket, and threw it at the boy. "How old are you?" Gibbs asked curiously.

"Nineteen. How old are you?" the kid asked cheekily.

Gibbs found a spare tee shirt and pair of boxer shorts in his own luggage and gave them to the boy, ignoring his question.

"Go get changed. In the bathroom," he said, pointing the boy in the right direction.

"I usually sleep naked," the kid said, eyes gleaming suggestively.

"You got a room for the night. Don't push your luck."

"Just saying – if you wanted paying..."

"I don't." Gibbs pushed the kid in the direction of the bathroom.

He spread the blanket out on the floor and then placed his wallet and gun beneath his pillow – it wasn't worth taking any chances. Then he took off his outer clothes and lay down on the bed again. Christ, this was madness. What would Shannon say if she could see him right now? Or his CO? Or even Mike Franks? They'd all think he was being a total idiot – and he was. It was just...there was something about that kid, something that made it impossible for him to just turn his back on him. Maybe it was the obvious desperation in his eyes, or maybe it was the mystery. How did a boy like that end up on the streets?

The bathroom door opened and the kid stood there, framed for a moment in the doorway. He looked about ten years younger in Gibbs's tee shirt and boxers, his damp hair sticking up in spikes, those green eyes of his still glowing with a cheeky kind of charm.

"What's your name?" the boy asked.

Gibbs pointed at the blanket. "You don't need to know. This is just for tonight, because of the storm. Tomorrow you're on your own again."

"My name's Andy," the kid said.

Gibbs glanced up at him. "No it isn't," he said. "But it'll do. Good night, Andy." He grabbed his pillow and turned his back on the kid, closing his eyes.

"G'night," Andy said.

Gibbs heard him settle down under the blanket beside the bed and a few seconds later he heard his breathing change, and the slight snuffle of a snore. He turned over, berating himself in his head. Andy had drawn the blanket up to almost cover him completely, so all that Gibbs could see were the spikes of his hair. He was lying on his side, knees drawn up against his chest, sleeping in a foetal position.

"Oh Christ. What the hell are you doing, Jethro?" Gibbs whispered to himself.

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2008

Gibbs watched while Tony flirted with the pretty brunette at the ticket desk at the airport, and then flirted with the petite blonde at the gate. They boarded the plane and Tony slung his luggage into the overhead, and then slung Gibbs's bag in after it. They took their seats, Tony by the window, Gibbs beside him.

A flight attendant – very tall, very handsome and very gay - served them drinks and handed them each a plastic-wrapped sandwich. Tony flirted with him too, although more discreetly. Gibbs was all too familiar with it and let it wash over him. Tony flirted like other people breathed – although usually he was careful not to let people notice him flirting too obviously with men. The over-active flirting with women was a cover for that but it was a cover Gibbs had seen through years ago – besides, he knew precisely how practised Tony was in the bedroom, with women \*and\* men. His senior agent didn't advertise his bisexuality - in fact he did a standard DiNozzo misdirect where his sexuality was concerned - so Gibbs doubted that anyone else at NCIS was aware of it, but Gibbs had known Tony DiNozzo before he became an NCIS agent – long before.

Tony kept up a running commentary as the plane took off, telling him the latest sport scores, describing a movie he'd seen a couple of nights ago and why Gibbs would have hated it, and then moving on to an overly detailed appreciation of the female flight attendant's shapely legs. Gibbs sat there and listened. Tony always talked too much when he was anxious, and right now he was clearly very anxious indeed. Gibbs wondered when he'd last seen his father, and whether it was as long ago as he suspected.

"How long have you known he had cancer?" he asked, breaking into Tony's monologue on Jack Nicholson's career to date, including some pretty good impersonations of the catch phrases from his best roles. Tony flinched, and Gibbs had an old, familiar sensation of having kicked an annoyingly overactive puppy. Tony's shoulders hunched and he gazed out of the window, all his earlier exuberance gone.

"My cousin called me when he was diagnosed," he said. "Liver cancer. Not a surprise – I'm just amazed his liver held out this long to be honest. The way he drinks I thought he'd get cirrhosis years ago."

"You go and visit him when you found out?" Gibbs asked.

Tony's shoulders hunched even more but he turned to face Gibbs. "I called," he muttered. "He said there was no need to visit. So I didn't." He gave a bright, false smile. Gibbs stared at him, and the smile faltered, and then faded completely. "Look," Tony said, in that serious tone Gibbs rarely ever heard him use. "It's not that I don't appreciate you being here, boss – it's just that I don't know why you are – here I mean. Doing this. With me. This doesn't concern you. It's family. I can do it alone."

"I know." Gibbs shrugged.

Tony gazed at him, clearly expecting – or hoping – for more. Gibbs raised an eyebrow. Tony sighed. "You seemed pretty curious about \*my\* family a few weeks ago, DiNozzo," Gibbs added, which wasn't an answer but might do for now. Tony had sniffed around his hometown like a bloodhound when they'd gone to Stillwater on a case recently. That was Tony though; his insatiable curiosity – some would say nosiness - made him an excellent agent and a really annoying co-worker.

"What – and this is payback?" Tony looked incredulous. "He's \*dying\*, Gibbs."

"I know – and no, this isn't payback." Gibbs wondered if Tony really thought he was that crass and insensitive. "When did you last see him, Tony?" he asked quietly.

"I don't remember," Tony said, although Gibbs was certain that was a lie. "A long time ago. Eighteen years maybe."

"Eighteen?" Gibbs felt mildly relieved about that.

"Yeah – what the hell is wrong with that? I call him every Christmas," Tony snapped, mistaking Gibbs's question. "At least it wasn't nineteen-fucking-seventy-six when I last visited," he muttered.

Gibbs slapped the back of his head, and that seemed to snap Tony out of it.

"Sorry. I didn't meant that," Tony said sheepishly. "It's just...I'm not looking forward to this, Gibbs. I'm not sure how it'll be, or whether he'll even want to see me."

"He's your dad, Tony, and he's dying. Of course he'll want to see you," Gibbs said softly.

"You think?" Tony shook his head. "Trust me, Gibbs – my father is nothing at all like yours," He turned back to look out of the window again, those hunched shoulders making it clear he didn't have anything more to say on that subject.

Gibbs leaned back in his chair and folded his hands across his seat belt. "Yeah, I sure as hell know that, DiNozzo," he muttered under his breath.

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1991

Gibbs woke to find himself pinned down by a warm, heavy weight.

"Shannon?" he muttered, moving his arm down to find a body curled up almost on top of him, about as close as it was possible to get without suffocating. He hugged the body for a moment, relishing the warmth, and it moved sleepily against him. A head was resting on his shoulder, an arm was slung over his chest, and a leg was entangled in his. He could feel soft hair under his chin, and smell the warm scent of...not Shannon. The memory of losing her hit him again, making his gut clench.

He looked down and saw Andy, hanging onto him like a limpet, and felt a savage surge of anger. He shoved the boy aside, roughly unpicking arms and legs from around his body, ignoring the kid's hazy squawk of protest, rolled out of the bed and strode into the bathroom. He looked at himself in the mirror and grimaced. He had a few days growth of beard on his chin and he looked like he'd aged ten years in the past few months. His hair, which had once been brown, was now peppered with grey streaks. His breath stank so he cleaned his teeth, and then returned to the bedroom.

Andy was sitting up in the bed, looking confused, hair sticking out in a dozen different directions, eyes half-closed.

"Who the hell said you could get in the bed with me?" Gibbs demanded.

"I was cold," Andy said.

"Not as cold as you'd have been if I'd left you in that damn dumpster!"

"And lonely," Andy added and there was something about the way he said it that dampened Gibbs's anger immediately. He glanced up at Gibbs from sleepy eyes. "Come back to bed. I can make it up to you."

"Christ, you never stop trying, do you?" Gibbs sighed. "Get it into that thick skull of yours that I'm not interested. D'you think that if I fuck you that you'll have some kind of hold over me? Or do you think that if I fuck you then I'll have to give you more money – that it?"

"I'd let you fuck me for free," Andy said unexpectedly. Gibbs blinked. "I like you." Andy

shrugged. "You smell like my dad."

"I smell of fucking liquor!" Gibbs growled, lowering his face to sniff the tee shirt he'd slept in.

"Yeah. Like my dad."

"Where the hell is your dad? Does he know you're living rough, whoring yourself out like this?" Gibbs demanded.

Andy's eyes darkened. "No," he said, with a terse shake of his head.

He slid out of the bed, keeping his distance from Gibbs, eyeing him warily. He edged past him into the bathroom and shut the door behind him. Gibbs heard the sound of the toilet flushing, then the shower being turned on, and then a few minutes later the kid returned to the bedroom, damp and completely naked. He slung Gibbs's boxers and tee shirt on the bed.

"Thanks," he muttered.

He turned to his bag and bent over it, searching for his spare set of clothes. Gibbs couldn't help looking at the youth. He had long, slim legs, strong, broad shoulders, and a surprisingly sturdy torso, even if his ribs were sticking out a bit too much. There were a couple of bruises on his thighs and buttocks, which didn't surprise Gibbs considering his line of work. His body was firmly muscled, as if he worked out a lot, or ran, or played a lot of sport, or a combination of all three.

Andy stood up, and looked at Gibbs looking at him. He stood there, naked and unashamed. His cock was long and loose, hanging down over his firm balls. He knew he looked good, and he wanted Gibbs to know it too.

"Last chance; I have to get to work. It's free," he said. "And you look like you know how to give a good fuck."

"Oh just get dressed and go," Gibbs growled, but he couldn't help grinning slightly, despite himself. There was something infectious about the kid's charm, energy, and sheer damn persistence.

"I don't have to be there for an hour. There's a diner down the street. You could buy me breakfast first," Andy suggested, with a broad grin.

Somehow, fifteen minutes later, Gibbs found himself washed and dressed and sitting in the diner opposite Andy.

"So what work is it you do in the daytime?" Gibbs found himself asking. He didn't want to be interested but somehow he couldn't help himself.

"I caddy – at the country club," Andy replied. He took a brief look at the menu and then his head swivelled as a pretty girl in tight, ass-hugging jeans passed the table. Andy's gaze remained fixed on her ass until she disappeared into the restroom and then he turned back to the menu.

The waitress came over, and smiled at them both.

"I'll have the scrambled eggs with sausage and toast," Gibbs said, handing back the menu.

"And what would your son like?" she asked, glancing at Andy.

"Oh he's not..." Gibbs began, and then he saw the wide grin on Andy's face and he stopped. It wasn't worth it. He was sixteen years older than the boy – only \*just\* old enough to be his father, but he supposed the newly greying hair, the bags under his eyes from all his recent drinking, and his years in the Marine Corps gave him an air of authority and made him seem older.

Andy ordered three different kinds of donut. Gibbs shook his head, and grabbed the menu away from him.

"He'll have the same as me," he told the waitress, who nodded approvingly at the fact he wasn't allowing his "son" to opt for the empty calorie choice for breakfast.

"I like donuts," Andy pouted.

"I don't care," Gibbs shrugged. "So – don't you make enough from caddying at the country club to afford somewhere to sleep at night?"

"No." Andy's shoulders hunched miserably under his shirt, and Gibbs felt like he'd kicked a puppy. Clearly the kid didn't want to talk about this. Gibbs wasn't even sure why he wanted to know; it was none of his business.

Their meal arrived and they ate in silence. Gibbs had never seen anyone eat the way Andy ate – he wolfed the food down in seconds, and then eyed the food on Gibbs's plate. "Oh go on – have it," Gibbs sighed, pushing his plate across the table. He wasn't hungry anyway – he still had the last vestiges of a hangover.

"So what about you?" Andy asked, around a mouthful of sausage. "You're not from around here, are you?"

"What makes you say that?" Gibbs frowned. Andy grinned.

"Your car number plates," he said. "I told you – I watch – I see stuff," he added. "What are you doing in Columbus?"

"That's where we are?" Gibbs glanced around. "Columbus, Ohio?"

“Well...yeah.” Andy raised an eyebrow. “You don’t know where you are? Hah – you’re even more fucked up than me, man.”

“Yeah. I probably am, Andy,” Gibbs said softly.

“You want to talk about it?” Andy seemed suddenly older than his nineteen years, those green eyes curious.

“No,” Gibbs replied shortly. He hadn’t wanted to talk about it to his friends, to Mike Franks, to his old CO, even to his father. He sure as hell didn’t want to talk about it to a hustler he’d met in a bar.

“You just drive? I’ve always liked that idea; just head out in a car, going wherever you feel like.” Andy’s eyes glowed a bit as he said that.

“You like cars?”

“I love cars. I’m going to own a bright red Ferrari one day. Like my dad. I always used to think he’d give me his when I turned eighteen but...well...” Andy broke off and shrugged.

“You want to talk about it?” Gibbs mimicked. Andy grinned.

“Nah. I’ll buy my own one day,” he said. “So – what are you running from? Wait! Did you kill someone? Are you a fugitive on the run from the cops?” His eyes lit up expressively, and Gibbs thought he’d make the kid’s day if he said yes.

“Do I look like a killer?” Gibbs asked, grinning all the same because there was something infectious about Andy’s glee.

“Well...yeah,” Andy said, as if that was a really stupid question. “And you keep a gun under your pillow so I figured you were on the run.”

Gibbs didn’t even want to think about how he knew about the gun under his pillow. “Maybe I am,” Gibbs sighed. “Just not the way you think”.

“Is it a girl?” Andy quirked a sympathetic eyebrow. “I can totally see why you’d be on the run from a girl – guys are easy, but girls want stuff; emotional stuff.”

“You like girls, Andy?” Gibbs asked, curious about the young man’s sexuality, wondering where his natural inclination lay, leaving aside the issue of money.

“I like sex,” Andy told him cheerfully. “I don’t really mind who it’s with as long as they’re hot. You’re hot,” he added. “I’d fuck you.”

“I think we’ve established that – many times,” Gibbs said dryly.

“I like how hard your body is,” Andy said, leaning forward, his tongue wetting his lower lip

again. "You work out?"

"I used to," Gibbs muttered.

"So – how does this work for you? You drive until you feel like stopping, you check into a motel, you get drunk, and then you wake up and start driving again?" Andy asked. Gibbs had a sudden flash of insight that this kid was far sharper than he appeared on the surface.

"Maybe," he said, glancing at his watch. "And it's getting late. I need to head out."

"Out of town? Now? You're moving on? Already?" Andy's eyes looked suddenly sullen.

"Yeah. Like you said – that's what I do. You need a lift to the country club?"

"Yeah. Thanks. Just...let me use the restroom – I'll be right back." Andy slid away and disappeared. Gibbs called the waitress over and paid the bill.

"Oh – and give me those donuts he asked for earlier – to go," he told her. She rolled her eyes at him in a conspiratorial way and filled up a bag for him. Andy was a long time in the restroom and Gibbs was about to go in there and find him when the kid suddenly reappeared.

"Here." Gibbs gave him the bag of donuts.

"Cool!" Andy grabbed one out of the bag and began eating it immediately.

"I thought you could eat them later but clearly you're still hungry," Gibbs muttered as they walked out to the car. "Although how that can be physically possible god only knows."

They got into the car and Gibbs stuck his key in the ignition. Andy was keeping up a running commentary on how good the donuts were, complete with orgasmic noises, and didn't pay any attention when the car failed to start.

"Oh shit," Gibbs sighed. He turned the key again and the engine made a wrenching sound and then crunched into silence. Andy winced.

"Sounds bad. You'll need to get it fixed," he said. "I know a good garage down the road – just over there." He pointed. "You could walk there and get them to come and tow it. Shit – I'm late. I'd better head off. Thanks for the donuts. And, you know – good luck with the running away thing." He leaned over and pressed a warm, sloppy kiss to Gibbs's cheek. "See you then."

And then he was gone. Gibbs felt a sudden pang of loneliness, which was absurd. He'd only known the boy a few hours, and while he was amusing company he wasn't exactly the kind of person he'd choose to be around right now.

The mechanic in the garage wasn't helpful. Gibbs knew he could have fixed the damn car

himself if he had the tools and parts but he had no choice but to hand it over to the mechanic with a vague agreement that he'd get it back someday soon but no promises as to when. It wasn't like he had anywhere to be, but it chafed all the same. He didn't want to spend long in any one place, and he hated the idea of just sitting around waiting.

In the end, he remembered what Andy had said about working out and found a boxing gym in the area. He paid for a few sessions and lost himself in the old routines of stretching, skipping, punching and sparring that he'd always enjoyed back in the Corps. Despite all the recent drinking, he wasn't as out of shape as he had expected – years of vigorous Marine Corps exercise had clearly paid off - and he was soon almost back up to his old fighting speed.

The endorphins helped his mood, and he spent the best part of the day there before heading back to the motel for a shower. He realised he'd gone through all his clothes so he did some laundry and then went back to the bar across the road for his usual date with alcoholic oblivion.

Maybe he'd started drinking earlier than usual, or maybe the exercise had affected him, but he got drunk quicker than usual. He missed his car, and the knowledge that he could just get up and run away tomorrow, and that made him feel belligerent. He got into a couple of arguments, and finally the bartender refused his request for another drink. Gibbs slurred out a protest but left, grumbling under his breath as he staggered back to the motel.

He nearly fell down in the road, and a car blared at him as it swerved to avoid him. A second later he felt a strong arm go around his waist, and someone dragging his arm across their shoulder. He turned to see a pair of bright eyes grinning at him.

"Could have got yourself killed there, Leroy," Andy said. "Good thing I was passing."

"How do you know...? Oh fuck it, I don't care," he said, glad of Andy's strong body holding him up because he couldn't seem to put one foot in front of the other right now. Andy helped him over to the motel and propped him against the wall, then frisked through his pockets for his key. He hauled Gibbs into the room, dumped him on the bed, and then began unlacing his boots. Gibbs sat there, gazing stupidly at the boy's hair. It was brown at the roots and streaked blond on top.

"How'd those get there?" he muttered, suddenly acutely interested in the blond streaks. He ran his hand through Andy's hair. Andy grinned up at him.

"Lemon juice," he said. "Sun bleaches through where I've squeezed it on."

"Why the fuck bother?" Gibbs slurred.

Andy shrugged, and pulled his boots off. "I like it, Leroy," he said.

"Jethro," Gibbs muttered, annoyed. "Not Leroy. Jethro. You look in my wallet, Andy? That how you know my name?"

“Yeah.” Andy grinned proudly, as if he’d done nothing wrong. “One day I’m going to be a Private Investigator – like Magnum.”

“Who the hell is Magnum?” Gibbs asked, frowning.

“You know – Magnum PI.” Andy hummed a few bars of what might have been a TV theme tune. Gibbs shook his head. He had a sudden flash of worry that cut through his current drunken state and he slid his hand under the pillow.

“I didn’t take your gun,” Andy said quickly. “I just looked in your wallet this morning – while you were in the shower. I didn’t take any of your money either.”

Gibbs pulled out the gun, and held it loosely in his hand. Andy bit on his lip, looking worried. He reached out and tried to take the gun from him. Gibbs shoved him away.

“Don’t touch it. I might need it. I haven’t decided yet,” he muttered.

“You thinking of killing someone, Jethro?” Andy asked quietly.

“Yeah. Me.” Gibbs slid the gun back under the pillow.

“I hope you don’t,” Andy said, a pleading look in his eyes.

“What the hell does it matter to you?” Gibbs snapped at him.

“I like you.” Andy shrugged. “I told you that already.”

He undid Gibbs’s pants and pulled his shirt out from the waistband, holding him up as he lolled against him. Gibbs was suddenly very sure the kid had done this before – many times.

“Your old man get drunk a lot?” he asked. Andy grinned.

“Yeah. All the time.” He pulled Gibbs out of his clothes, leaving him in his boxers and tee shirt, then pushed him back onto the bed and pulled the sheets up around him. Then he stretched, and yawned. “I’d better stay the night...make sure you’re okay,” he said. He shucked off his own clothes, leaving them in an untidy heap on the floor, and then slipped into the bed beside Gibbs.

Gibbs had one sudden moment of total clarity before unconsciousness claimed him.

“Oh fuck it – it was you, wasn’t it? You screwed around with my car; that’s why it wouldn’t start.”

Andy stiffened guiltily beside him and then it was too late – Gibbs was out cold.

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2008

They picked up a rental car at LaGuardia. Tony took the wheel, and Gibbs gazed out of the window, watching as the high-rise apartments of Queens gave way to the leafy, well-heeled suburbs of Long Island's north shore.

They drove through affluent areas, large houses with long, elegant driveways protected by gates and expensive security systems. Tony got quieter and quieter the further they drove, until finally he shut up completely. A silent Tony was an un-nerving thing – usually he talked more, not less, when he was anxious - and Gibbs didn't like the way this was headed.

They pulled up at the Holiday Inn near Tony's family home in Old Westbury where Tony had booked two rooms for them. Gibbs dumped his bag in his room, and then went back downstairs to find Tony standing in the lobby looking...kind of lost. He didn't even notice the attractive young blonde who passed him by wearing a short, tight skirt – and that wasn't like Tony.

Tony saw him, and Gibbs went over to where he was standing.

“So...I'm going to head over to the house,” Tony said. He stared absently over Gibbs's shoulder for a moment. Gibbs gazed at him, waiting for his cue. “I...uh...”

“You want me to come with you?” Gibbs asked. “Or stay here?”

Tony looked relieved – as if he hadn't been aware he was actually going to be given a choice in the matter. Gibbs bit back a growl of annoyance. Being in the vicinity was enough – he didn't need to actually accompany Tony to his father's deathbed – although he would if Tony wanted that. He had to be nearby though, because he had a feeling that when this seventeen year old corpse was finally opened up and autopsied, and the remains pored over and analysed, it might get very ugly. At the very least there would be fallout, and as it was fallout he'd partially created the least he could do was be here to take his fair share of it. He couldn't tell Tony that though; Tony still didn't have a clue why he was here.

“Tony?” Gibbs asked softly. Tony's shoulders hunched, and he morphed in seconds from the capable if fairly annoying senior agent he'd want on his six in a shoot-out, to the nineteen year old kid he'd met in a bar a long time ago. Gibbs found the whole thing a little freaky. In all the years Tony had worked for him at NCIS he'd only seen glimpses of Andy in him. Now though...it was as if the years had been turned back, and they were lying in a bed in a motel room in Ohio. It was only momentary though, and then Tony was back with him.

“Yeah...come with me,” Tony said, and then he looked surprised, as if he hadn't been expecting to say that. Gibbs nodded.

“Okay.”

The DiNozzo family house was grand and imposing, set at the end of a long, sweeping driveway. They pulled up outside, and a man around Tony's age came out to greet them.

“Hey – you made it,” he said, grabbing Tony and pulling him into a hug. Gibbs got out of the car and leaned on the open door, watching.

“Pete! You’re looking old – when did you lose all your hair?”

“Must have been around the same time you got so fat!” Pete grinned. Insults duly exchanged, they gazed at each other happily for a few seconds, and then Pete’s grin faded, and he cleared his throat. “I’m sorry about...you know, I wanted you to stay here,” Pete said. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with only slightly receding dark hair despite Tony’s comment, and looked enough like Tony for Gibbs to guess he had to be his cousin. “It’s not like there aren’t enough bedrooms,” Pete added, with an apologetic wince. “I just thought...you know – he’s dying. I didn’t want to stress him out by asking him and I wasn’t sure how it’d go with you two so...”

“It’s okay. I understand. And quit lying, Pete – it wasn’t that you didn’t want to stress him out – you *did* ask him and he said no.” Tony’s hunched shoulders were a giveaway to Gibbs that he while he might say he understood, it still hurt that his father didn’t want him staying in his house.

Pete winced again. “At least he’s said he’ll see you.”

“Old man must be mellowing then,” Tony said, with a bright grin, slapping his cousin’s arm. Gibbs didn’t think the bright grin was fooling anyone. “What happened to the whole ‘never darken my doorstep again’ thing, huh?”

“Well, that was years ago. I thought the two of you had...not exactly patched things up but...that you’re talking again?”

“Once a year. Christmas day.” Tony shrugged. “I tell him what I’m earning now and he tells me about his latest tax avoidance scheme. Then we, you know, argue. I think that phone call kind of makes his Christmas – it sure as hell makes mine.”

“Better than nothing,” Pete offered. Gibbs closed the car door, and Pete looked up, surprised.

“Uh...this is...” Tony hesitated, clearly unsure how to introduce Gibbs. Gibbs saw the shock in Pete’s eyes and knew immediately that he suspected Tony had brought a boyfriend home with him. So, it seemed that Tony’s misdirection in respect of his sexuality hadn’t been entirely successful where his close family was concerned. That might explain a lot.

“Gibbs.” He stepped forward and held out his hand to Pete. “Leroy Jethro Gibbs – I’m Tony’s boss at NCIS.”

“Oh. Right.” Pete looked relieved but still a little puzzled as he shook his hand.

“And his friend,” Gibbs added, to help explain away his presence a little more easily. He almost wished he hadn’t said that when he saw the little spike of happiness in Tony’s eyes at

being called a “friend”. It was always the little stuff with Tony – a tiny word of praise or expression of satisfaction at his performance at work would make his eyes light up and stay that way for days. Gibbs wondered how he’d feel if he finally got a chance to meet the bastard who had made Tony this way. Maybe he would soon. Very soon.

They went into the house and Gibbs looked around discreetly. He didn’t think he’d ever seen such a grand place – at least not somewhere people lived in, as a home. He’d seen hotels that came close. Pete led them into the enormous kitchen, where several people were milling around, drinking coffee. This must be what happened when you were rich and died in your own home, Gibbs thought to himself, feeling a sudden wave of gratitude that his own family origins were so humble. If you were rich like Tony’s dad, people just gathered around and waited, like vultures, hoping to pick over the corpse and see what they could carry away with them.

Tony was enveloped into hugs by various aunts and cousins while Pete explained away Gibbs’s presence to anyone who was interested. He felt a hand on his arm and turned...to come face to face with a bespectacled man, a few years older than Tony.

“Uh, Mr Gibbs – this is Daniel Weston – the DiNozzo family lawyer,” Pete said.

Gibbs held out his hand, expressionlessly, looking into the face of a man he’d met once before, seventeen years ago. He’d lost that air of young earnestness that he’d had back then; now he radiated a kind of quiet, experienced capability. If he remembered Gibbs, and Gibbs was pretty sure he did, he gave no sign of it. He just shook Gibbs’s hand and gazed at him thoughtfully.

“It was nice of you to come up here with Tony,” he said, and Gibbs remembered from before how deceptively sharp those blue eyes behind the spectacles were. Gibbs gave a non-committal grunt in reply. Weston moved away as Tony was released by a large, overly enthusiastic aunt who had been kissing his cheeks for the past several minutes. Weston took hold of Tony’s arm and guided him into a private corner, murmuring to him. They were close enough for Gibbs to overhear the conversation.

“I just didn’t want you to get your hopes up,” Weston was saying to Tony. “His will remains pretty much as it has been for the past few years – he’s made no secret of it so I’m at liberty to tell you.”

“No death-bed changes of heart, huh?” Tony rubbed his hand over his chin.

“Not unless you can work a miracle in the next day or so,” Weston told him.

“Oh I don’t care about his damn money,” Tony snapped, with an uncharacteristic display of temper. “I never did. Well...maybe once,” he grinned, smoothing over his lapse in temperament with his usual charm. “When I was younger; I always did want that red Ferrari of his.”

Weston’s eyes were sympathetic behind his glasses and he shook Tony’s hand, holding it

tightly between his own, then he released him and moved away. Tony came over to where Gibbs was standing.

“Sorry about this, boss. I had no idea all these relatives would crawl out of the woodwork. It’s like something out of The Godfather – and I really don’t want to give you the impression that we’re one of \*those\* types of Italian families.”

Gibbs gave a little chuckle and was about to reply when Pete butted in.

“So – you ready to see him?” he asked Tony.

“Now?” Tony’s voice was tight and anxious.

Pete grabbed his arm. “Tony – I can’t promise you he’ll still be here tomorrow. Now might be all you have,” he said urgently. Tony gazed at him, then took a deep breath and nodded.

“Okay then.” He put down his coffee and followed Pete towards the door, and then turned. He glanced back at Gibbs, and, once again, that expression was there - the pleading one, the one that took him back seventeen years to when he’d been drop dead drunk in a motel room, staring at his gun and trying to decide whether to kill himself. Tony had been a lifeline for him then – the least he could do was be there for him now.

“I’ve got your six, Tony,” he said softly, walking on behind. Tony gave him a look of relief and Gibbs followed him out of the kitchen and up a massive flight of stairs. They walked along a long hallway, passing several doors as they went. Gibbs wondered how any father, deathbed or not, would make his son stay in a hotel when he had this much space in his house, but then again, what kind of father disowned his own son when he was just a kid? He’d always wondered, and now, it seemed, he was about to find out.

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1991

Gibbs awoke to a warm, entirely pleasant sensation in his groin. The pounding headache and savage pain behind the eyes caused by his hangover were offset a little by the waves of pleasure currently coursing through his body. He lay there for a moment, trying blearily to figure out why he felt so good. He could hear sucking noises, and his cock was rock hard, and...oh shit. He moaned, and moved his hand down, groping blindly until he found Andy’s head nestled against his groin. The sucking noise stopped, and he bit back a curse because it had felt so good having Andy’s mouth wrapped around his morning hard-on.

He glanced down to see Andy looking up at him warily, his lips sinfully swollen from his recent activity.

“Well don’t damn well stop now,” Gibbs growled, his balls aching. “Finish what you started.”

Andy grinned at him happily, and then bent his head again and enveloped Gibbs’s cock between those wide, mobile lips, an expression of intense concentration on his face as he

slowly drew back, then dipped his head forward again. Gibbs bit back a moan. Christ, the kid was good at this. He carded his fingers through Andy's hair, stroking softly as the kid sucked him; it felt so good...too good.

Gibbs didn't even want to think about insane this was. Being in the Corps had hardly been a sheltered existence, and he'd had a handful of homosexual encounters – although they'd all been before he met Shannon. He'd allowed other men to jerk him off, and back when he was no more than Andy's age, and his raging hormones had made him open to all kinds of offers, he'd embarked on an entirely sexual relationship with one of the men in his unit of his own age, Joe Ellis. He could remember stroking Joe's buzz cut hair while Joe knelt in front of him, sucking him off; or meeting Joe in the head, both of them crowding into the stall, Joe bracing himself over the toilet while Gibbs fucked him hard from behind.

At the time he hadn't viewed their clandestine encounters as anything more than a way to blow off some sexual steam, to get it out of his system so he could concentrate on his job and avoid pissing off his CO who thought he was a hot-headed troublemaker. However, looking back he wondered whether it hadn't meant a whole lot more to Joe than it had to him. Gibbs had enjoyed the sex far more than he'd wanted to admit and keeping Joe at arm's length had been his way of handling what they were doing. Falling in love with Shannon on his first leave home after joining up had been a huge relief – he hadn't gone near another man since then. Until now.

Andy's hair didn't feel anything like Joe's. Andy's hair was longer and softer, but his mouth felt just as good on Gibbs's cock. He stroked Andy's hair the way he had once stroked Joe's, and, when he came, he thrust his hips up with a hoarse shout, and wrapped his fist in that thick hair, holding on tight as he spurting out into Andy's mouth. Joe had always spat out his come, but Andy swallowed it, a satisfied, almost smug grin on his face, then he swiped his tongue over the head of Gibbs's cock a couple of times to clean it.

"See, I told you I was good," he said.

Gibbs released his hold on the kid's hair and Andy snaked his way up towards him. He snuggled up against Gibbs's right side, rested his head on Gibbs's shoulder, and wrapped an arm around Gibbs's midriff. Gibbs lay there, gazing up at the ceiling. When Gibbs didn't move, Andy reached out, took hold of Gibbs's left arm, and pulled it across his own body, so that Gibbs was now holding him. Then he pressed a kiss to the side of Gibbs's face.

"I haven't forgotten about the car," Gibbs said, glancing at him, although he didn't move the arm that Andy had carefully positioned into a semblance of a hug. Andy winced, theatrically. "What the hell were you thinking?" Gibbs demanded.

"That if I gave you a really good blowjob you might not remember?" Andy admitted, that cheeky glint back in his eyes.

"Not that! What were you thinking sneaking out from the diner while I thought you were in the restroom and messing with my car yesterday?"

Andy chewed on his lower lip. "You told me you weren't going anywhere special so I thought it'd be nice if you hung around here some more. With me," he added.

"You mean you wanted a room to sleep in at night," Gibbs muttered.

"No. I told you – I like you. And I figured if you kept on driving, and kept on drinking, that one of these days you'd get yourself killed – or you'd turn that gun under the pillow on yourself," Andy said. "And that's just a waste."

"When I could be your meal ticket instead?" Gibbs raised an eyebrow.

"Why are you so damn suspicious?" Andy asked, his eyes sullen again, the way they had been at the diner yesterday when Gibbs had told him that he was going to leave.

"Because you're a hustler, Andy, and a devious little shit – you screwed with my car and you've been lying to me."

"Okay – I admit that I messed with your car and I'm sorry about that but I haven't lied to you," Andy said, with a frown.

Gibbs shoved him away, got out of the bed, and strode over to where Andy's bag was lying in the corner of the room. He opened it, found the sneakers, and held them up.

"Where did you get these from?" he demanded. "They're expensive, Andy. You steal them?"

"No." Andy sat up in bed, hair sticking up at all angles from where Gibbs had had his fist in it, looking pissed off now.

"Then how the hell did you afford stuff like this? And what's this?" Gibbs reached into the bag and found a different set of clothes to the ones Andy had been wearing yesterday, shirt and pants nicely laundered. "These are expensive as well. Where did these come from? You steal these too?"

"I haven't stolen a damn thing," Andy said sullenly. "They're mine."

"How can you afford this kind of stuff when you can't even afford a room for the night?" Gibbs snapped. "Who are you, Andy? You aren't like any hustler I've ever seen. You don't do drugs, you're educated, you have way too much self-confidence, you've got all this expensive shit and yet you whore yourself out and sleep in dumpsters. What's your story?"

"My mom bought me the clothes," Andy told him. "Happy now?"

"Happy? I'm not even close to happy, Andy," Gibbs growled. "Where are you stashing this stuff anyhow?"

"At the country club," Andy replied, glaring at him. "I get the use of a locker. I might have, uh, appropriated more than one locker – several in fact. When I got thrown out of my

apartment a few weeks ago because I couldn't pay the rent any more I moved my stuff in there. If I make nice with the girls there they wash my clothes. I can use the showers. I can't sleep there though – I got caught doing that once and I'd lose my job if it happened again."

"If your mom can afford to buy you these clothes then couldn't she help you with the rent?" Gibbs demanded.

Andy's eyes darkened to a dull shade of grey-green. "My mom died a few months ago," he said quietly. "And before you ask, she didn't leave me any money. She didn't have any damn money. She was an alcoholic – oh, not the drunk in gutters type like you – no, she was the genteel kind – she'd dress up nice every day and go and sit in places like the country club down the road, where she'd sip on martinis all day and all night long. Any money she had she spent on drink apart from the stuff she sent me. She paid for me to go to college by selling off the jewellery my dad gave her when they were married, but there wasn't a whole lot of that left when she died and she was up to her eyeballs in debt. I didn't find that out until after she was gone though."

Gibbs stared at him but he had a gut feeling for when people were telling him the truth, and he was sure the kid wasn't lying.

"What about your dad?" he asked. "Can't he help you through college?"

A mixture of emotions so complicated Gibbs couldn't even begin to unravel them passed over Andy's expressive face, and then he shut down, and shook his head, firmly.

"Listen – you got the stuff about my mom for free but we're done now," Andy said. "I'm sorry I messed with your car – here..." He scooted down the bed until he got to the side nearest to Gibbs, reached out, grabbed his bag from Gibbs's hand, and felt around inside it. He pulled out a fistful of money. "Maybe this will cover it," he said, thrusting the notes into Gibbs's hand and closing his fist around them. "If not, let me know and I'll go blow a few guys in the bar tonight to make up the rest."

He unravelled himself from the sheets, got off the bed, and walked towards the bathroom. It was hard to maintain an air of wounded dignity while walking stark naked across a motel room, and, faced with Andy's disappearing butt, Gibbs did the only thing he could in the circumstances – he laughed.

Andy stopped in the bathroom doorway and turned to look at him, anger and curiosity warring in his eyes. Gibbs shrugged.

"Just thinking – gotta be the first time the hustler ever gave the john money," he said.

Andy was one of those people who couldn't hold a bad mood for long, and his face broke into a grin.

"Yeah. I may not be the world's best at this," he said, with a rueful shrug. "I haven't been doing it that long."

“How long?” Gibbs asked.

“Just a few weeks. That’s when the money ran out,” Andy sighed.

“Talking of which – I don’t want your money.” Gibbs thrust the handful of dollar bills back into Andy’s bag. “I shouldn’t have accused you of stealing, Andy. I just couldn’t figure you out. I still can’t.”

“Well, I can’t figure you out, either,” Andy replied, shaking his head. “Whatever you’re on the run from, it must be bad.”

“It is, Andy – it is,” Gibbs told him. “And I’m not an alcoholic.” Andy raised an eyebrow. “You said that I was earlier – the drunk in the gutter kind? I’m not.”

“If you say so,” Andy muttered dubiously. “But I’ve been around alcoholics all my life and you don’t seem any different.”

That brought Gibbs up short. He’d always enjoyed a drink but he’d never had a liquor problem before. Still, Andy had seen him get blind drunk twice in the two nights he’d known him; it was hardly surprising he thought he was an alcoholic. Was he, he wondered? Could he go an evening without drinking himself into the ground? Did he want to?

“I am sorry about your car,” Andy said. “I can see why that would piss you off. I didn’t mean anything by it. I just wanted you to hang around a bit longer.”

“Well, you got what you wanted,” Gibbs said. “And look, I’ll prove to you I’m not a drunk. If you want, we can do something this evening after you finish work - something other than getting drunk in a bar,” he clarified.

Andy’s face broke into a ridiculously pathetic grin. “It’s my day off today so you can prove it to me all day,” he said. “If you want?” he added uncertainly. Gibbs thought he really was the strangest mixture of total confidence and complete insecurity.

“Well, I don’t have any place else to be,” he sighed.

It was a surreal day. They ate in the diner, then Andy showed him around town, and in the afternoon he took Andy to the boxing gym.

“This is so cool!” Andy said as they got changed. “This is like something a dad would do with his son. Do you have any kids, Jethro?”

Gibbs stood there for a moment, gutted by the question. If he closed his eyes he could still remember what her face looked like, but it was becoming so hard to hang onto that memory. It felt like she was fading a little bit every day. He struggled all over again with the finality of losing her.

How was it possible that just a few short months ago he'd been playing with her in the yard, swinging her around and around and then setting her down and watching her walk in dizzy circles, giggling away the whole time? How could she have been so real and alive then, and now be gone forever? How could she not be here any more? And what did that make him? Was he still a father, or, if you lost your child did that mean you weren't allowed to call yourself that any more? Did being a father once mean you were always a dad? Or did you lose that status when your only child died?

"No," he said shortly, in answer to Andy's question, still seeing her in his mind's eye, pigtailed swinging over her shoulders as she ran towards him. "Do you know how to fight, Andy?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Sure." Andy grinned. "I'm good. I'll beat you easily, old man."

Five minutes sparring with ex-Gunnery Sergeant Gibbs soon disabused him of that notion. The kid had a smart mouth on him, and he pulled faces and made stupid jokes as he danced around opposite Gibbs, goofing around, full of exuberant energy. Gibbs stepped in and landed him on the floor in seconds. Andy didn't seem to mind. He just bounced back up again. Gibbs wondered how many times you could knock this kid down and he'd keep coming back for more. He suspected, if you played him right, that this was a game that could go on indefinitely.

The time went more quickly than he'd have thought possible when every single dull grey second since he'd lost his family had hung on him like a heavy weight. They walked back to the motel and Gibbs claimed the first shower but he'd only been in there a couple of seconds when he felt a warm, hard, naked body behind him, and Andy's hands began sliding soapy lather over his chest and down to his groin. His cock hardened almost immediately and he growled, and batted Andy's hands away. Andy grinned at him, and pressed a kiss to his collarbone, then moved up higher, lips searching for Gibbs's mouth. Gibbs turned his head away – that wasn't somewhere he was ready to go to yet. He saw the flash of disappointment in Andy's eyes and then the kid started sinking to his knees. Gibbs grabbed him before he got to his destination.

"Not that," he said, his voice a low, guttural growl. He was surprised by how much he wanted to bury himself in this boy, and fuck him hard. He remembered Joe Ellis and how good it had felt pounding into his strong body all those years ago. Sex with women was different – gentler, softer, more loving and tender – and he didn't want any of those things right now. He knew he couldn't go with another woman so soon after losing his wife in any case. He didn't want curves, long hair and the familiar comfort of plump, yielding flesh. He didn't want anything that would remind him of making love to Shannon – and fucking Andy was as far away from that as it was possible to get.

He was filled with a sudden, strong sense of need. He grabbed Andy's arm, pulled him out of the shower and shoved him into the bedroom. He threw the boy down on the bed and then landed on top of him. Andy grinned up at him.

"Fuck me, Jethro," he said, moistening his lower lip with his tongue, making Gibbs's cock

ache. "I want to feel that big cock of yours inside me."

That was enough to tip Gibbs over the edge. He ran his hands over the boy's hard body, grinding his hips against Andy's straining erection. Andy gasped and reached out to grab Gibbs's buttocks. Gibbs lowered his head and bit down on the little area of skin where Andy's neck and shoulder met, sinking his teeth into the inviting flesh. Andy yelled something, his nails digging hard into Gibbs's buttocks. Gibbs pinned him down beneath him, sucking and biting at his neck, then licking along his collarbone, before finally moving further down, and swirling his tongue around a hard, flat nipple.

Andy was squealing now, making little gasping sounds of pleasure, his cock hard and leaking beneath Gibbs's belly, pressed between their two bodies. Gibbs found himself turned on by Andy's obvious enjoyment, and his balls tightened. He needed to be inside this boy, needed to bury himself in all this young hard flesh and fuck Andy into the mattress.

"Stuff...in my bag..." Andy gasped.

Gibbs tore himself away for long enough to grab Andy's bag, throw the contents onto the floor and locate the pack of condoms and tube of lubricant. He tore open a condom with his teeth and slid it over his hard cock, then grabbed hold of Andy and turned him onto his stomach.

"Hands and knees," he hissed into Andy's ear.

Andy complied, getting into position, ass in the air, the dark hole between his buttocks inviting, promising him exactly what he needed. Gibbs knelt on the bed behind him. He squeezed some lube onto his hand and finger fucked Andy cursorily, wanting to push his hard cock into the boy but holding back just long enough to prepare him for it. Andy made the same orgasmic noises of pleasure as he finger fucked him as he'd made while eating those donuts the previous day and Gibbs couldn't hold on another second. He removed his fingers, took hold of Andy's hips, and slid his hard cock between Andy's ass cheeks. Andy pressed back against him eagerly, head back, sweat starting to trickle enticingly down his throat.

Gibbs paused for a moment to get into position, then tightened his grip on Andy's hips and thrust into him with one hard, smooth motion. He didn't go slowly, and once he was inside that warm, tight channel he couldn't stop. He moved his hands up higher on Andy's flanks, holding the kid tight, trying to get more purchase, and then he began thrusting. He closed his eyes, threw his head back, and abandoned himself to the sheer enjoyment of how damn \*good\* this felt. He didn't have to worry about breaking Andy – he was young and strong, and Gibbs could fuck him into oblivion, the way he'd been drinking himself into oblivion these past few weeks. Maybe he was exchanging one drug for another but right now he didn't really care.

Andy seemed to be enjoying himself well enough in any case. He was still making those damn noises, the ones that turned Gibbs on and irritated him in equal measure. His eyes were closed, his hair, still damp from the shower, was sticking up every which way, and his

body was open and willing, his ass rocking back to meet each hard, strong thrust as Gibbs fucked him mercilessly.

Gibbs was as close to brutal as he'd ever been with any sexual partner, not caring about anything save the sensation in his cock and the way Andy's skin felt beneath his hands, hard muscles moving smoothly beneath the warm, taut surface. He could hear Andy's breathing hitching, could hear Andy gasping in pleasure, and then Gibbs was coming, spurting out into the condom, buried deep inside Andy's body. Gibbs hung there for a moment, feeling the sweat start to cool on his body, his cock still balls deep within Andy. Andy was moaning, still rocking back, trying to impale himself on Gibbs's softening cock, and Gibbs realised he hadn't come.

He reached his hand down and took Andy's hard cock in it, then brought him off with a few expert strokes. Andy came with series of happy little gasps, and then he pulled free of Gibbs and flung himself forwards onto the bed, turning as he went so he was lying on his back, gazing up at Gibbs from heavy-lidded eyes.

"I knew you'd be a good, hard fuck," he muttered lazily.

Gibbs grinned and removed the condom from his spent cock, tying off the end and disposing of it in the trash next to the bed. Then he threw himself down next to the kid, and lay there, gazing up at the ceiling. Andy scooted over and rested his head on Gibbs's shoulder, the way he always did, then placed his arm across Gibbs's midriff and tangled his legs in between Gibbs's legs. It was like having a big, heavy puppy lying half on top of him, and Gibbs thought about pushing him off, but, in the end, he just wrapped an arm around Andy's body and held him close instead. He felt Andy relax against him, and then the kid began tracing little patterns on Gibbs's chest with his fingers, idly playing.

It felt good. Gibbs closed his eyes and felt himself floating away on a happy, post-coital haze. Andy started talking but Gibbs wasn't really listening. Andy talked a lot and it wasn't always necessary to listen to every word he said; he did talk a lot of crap.

"...and then we could do this again..."

"Hmmm."

"...playing the...phys ed...basketball...you could watch..."

"Hmmm."

"Country club...Did you see that movie?...If I had a car that's the kind of car I'd have..."

"Hmmm."

"Where did you get the gun anyway...listen to it on the radio...I'm good..."

"Yeah. I know."

“Military judging by the weird hair...better movie...Sean Connery...”

“Uh-huh.”

“Thinking...would you let me...dad?”

“Hmmm.”

“You’d let me? I’d blow you. We could pretend...what do you say? Could I?”

“Let you what?” Gibbs was suddenly aware that he was being asked a question.

“Call you ‘Dad’?”

Andy’s green eyes were too close, looking up at him hopefully, and Gibbs suddenly felt ill.

“What?” he said, raising his head and looking down at the kid.

“It’s not a big deal. It’s just...that waitress in the diner thought I was your son, and the guys down the gym thought so too. I just thought...if I could call you dad...” Andy’s voice trailed off. “I want to call you dad,” he whispered, suddenly looking scared.

Gibbs’s gut clenched so violently he thought he was going to throw up.

“You don’t have that fucking right,” he found himself saying, in a hoarse, growling voice he barely recognised as his own, taut with pain. “You don’t fucking have the right to call me that,” he said, shoving Andy off him, wanting to be rid of him. Only one person had called him that and she was gone, and for this stupid kid to suggest that, after what they’d just done...after the way they’d just fucked like animals in this bed; it made him feel physically ill.

“Get out,” he hissed. “Get the fuck out.”

He got a glimpse of Andy’s shocked eyes and then his gut roiled and he staggered off the bed and into the bathroom and threw up into the toilet. He heaved his guts up, feeling angry, guilty and full of a savage, bitter grief. Shit, what kind of a man must he be? His wife and daughter were barely cold in their graves and he was fucking a stranger in a motel room, burying himself in a warm, willing body the way he’d buried himself in the burning comfort of glass after glass of Jack for god knew how many weeks now.

He finished throwing up and then sat back on his heels, gasping for breath. Kelly was gone; he might not be a father any more but he sure as hell wasn’t going to sully the title by allowing that kid he had just fucked to use it.

He wiped the back of his hand over his mouth and then got up and walked back into the bedroom. It was empty. The kid’s bag had gone, along with his clothes, and the door was hanging open. Gibbs took a run at it and kicked it shut, roaring out his anger and grief as it

slammed.

His mouth felt dry and he could taste the acrid foulness of vomit in it and smell it on his breath. He got dressed, grabbed his wallet, and then went across the road to the bar. He sure as hell knew one good way to get rid of that taste.

~\*~

2008

Pete took them into a dimly lit room. It was decorated too grandly for Gibbs's personal taste – there were several dark old paintings on the walls, hung over thick, heavy wallpaper that was probably expensive but just felt oppressive to Gibbs. The room smelled as if nobody had opened a window in months, which was probably the case, and the stench of illness and imminent death hung all around them.

There was a massive bed in the centre of the room, and, next to it, an array of shiny new medical equipment that was at odds with the musty feel of the room. There was also an oxygen tank, an IV, and a whole load of other stuff that Gibbs presumed served some purpose. A nurse was sitting by the bed but she got up and left the room silently when they came in.

Tony stood in the doorway for a moment, and Gibbs resisted an urge to prod him over to the bed. Instead he waited – he'd told Tony he had his six and he intended to keep that promise. If Tony asked him to leave then he would, but until then Gibbs would be here.

He glanced over Tony's shoulder to catch a glimpse of the man in the bed. He had Tony's broad build, and his hair was a luxuriant silver, thick and abundant even despite his age and ill health. The cancer had eaten away at him, and while he had once clearly been a big man, probably even fat, now he looked as if he'd collapsed in on himself, his cheeks sunken and hollow. The skin on his face had crumpled into a series of papery folds, yellowy in hue, and his long fingers rested on the blanket, their constant jitters the only sign that this might once have been a man who lived life at an impatient pace.

Gibbs suddenly realised why Tony wasn't moving; the last time Tony had seen his father he'd been eighteen years younger, in the full prime of his life. It must be hard for Tony to reconcile the strong, vigorous man his father had once been with this shell of a man in front of him. He heard Tony make a little sound in the back of his throat, so soft that nobody but Gibbs could have caught it, and he rested his hand on Tony's shoulder and squeezed, hoping that would help.

It seemed to. Tony pulled himself up tall, and then walked slowly over to the bed. Gibbs took up position in the corner of the room, beside a window covered by thick, dark green, silk drapes. Now he was closer, he could make out the features on the old man's face more easily, and he was startled to see just how much Tony resembled his father. The likeness was unmistakable, from the wide mouth to the freckle on the side of his nose, and, most particularly, a pair of green eyes, greyer and darker in tone than his son's, but still familiar.

"Hey Dad," Tony said softly, reaching the side of the bed. The old man exhaled a sigh, his lungs rattling in his chest.

"Tony?" he muttered, and his grey-green eyes flashed with some emotion Gibbs couldn't quite place.

"Yeah." Tony stood there, looking uncertain. He hesitated for a moment, and then leaned down and pressed a kiss to his father's cheek. The old man accepted the kiss with a dour kind of look at his son.

"Pete said you were on your way. I guess that means they don't expect me to hang around for much longer. I told him the only way you'd make the journey was if they promised you a funeral at the end of it," the old man said.

"You know me – I'll go anywhere for free food," Tony replied, but the attempt at humour didn't fool Gibbs.

"Yeah," the old man grunted, in a tone so low and gravelly it sounded almost like he was clearing his throat. "Let's see you then," he said, moving his hand in a feeble gesture that Tony should move into the lamplight. Gibbs bit back an urge to turn on the overhead lights – he had no idea why it had to be so damn dark in here.

Tony did as his father requested, and moved to one side. The old man examined him critically for a moment; he might be dying, but his eyes were as sharp as a hawk's as he stared at his son. Tony shifted uncomfortably, clearly ill at ease with the scrutiny.

"Hmmm. You still look like a DiNozzo," the old man said. "Shame you never carried on the family line, like Pete." He glanced over to where Pete was leaning against the wall. "How many kids you got now, Pete?" he called, a querulous whine in his voice.

"Five," Pete answered quietly.

"Five," the old man repeated. "And how long you been married, Pete?"

"Ten years," Pete replied.

"Ten," the old man told Tony pointedly.

"Yeah. I know," Tony said sullenly.

"Credit to his dad," the old man said. "Shame my brother didn't live to see those kids – he'd have been so proud."

"You hated him," Tony muttered.

"What?" The old man glared at Tony.

"Uncle Nico. You hated him your entire life. You never did one thing that wasn't motivated by that insane competitive shit you felt towards him."

Gibbs winced. It seemed that these two just couldn't help themselves; they were never going to let old wounds heal – they'd rather rip off the scabs and watch them bleed. He didn't blame Tony though – even on his deathbed, it seemed that Anthony DiNozzo Senior's disapproval of his son was as strong as ever, and Tony turned into a petulant teenager around him. He could empathise – his own father was a much kinder personality than this man but it was easy to fall back into old patterns with him all the same.

"You've still got a smart mouth on you, I see," DiNozzo grunted. "Always got you in trouble."

"Still does," Tony said, a faint glimmer of a smile on his lips as he glanced at Gibbs.

"Who's that over there?" the old man wheezed. "Standing over there? Who is it?"

Gibbs stepped over to the bed, into the lamplight. "I'm Leroy Jethro Gibbs, a friend of Tony's," he said quietly.

"A friend?" DiNozzo glared at him, and then glared at Tony.

"I'm his boss – at NCIS," Gibbs clarified, not liking the suspicion he saw in the old man's eyes, or the accusatory way he was glaring at his son.

"A cop," DiNozzo sighed. "I always told him he wouldn't make any money being a damn cop."

"Not a cop exactly – a federal agent," Tony said. "But I've explained that to you many times, Dad – you just never want to understand."

"What I don't understand is why you didn't take a degree in business or law, like Pete over there, and come and work with me, like a son should. Why couldn't you have been like him? Pete knows about the value of hard work. What did you ever do except get thrown out of all those expensive schools I paid for – how many was it?"

"Three," Tony said quietly.

"Three. First couple of times you got thrown out just for being the damn idiot you are, but the third time..." Gibbs glanced at Tony to see that he'd gone pale, his shoulders hunched, his eyes dark. "You have any idea what that was like? Getting a call from the principal to say that my son - \*my\* son..."

"You got any idea what it was like when Mom left to be the one who had to put your stinking carcass to bed when you got drunk every night? Or when you left me in a hotel suite because you forgot I even existed?" Tony shot back at him. "Your memory is one-sided, Dad – always was."

"You shouldn't have come," DiNozzo said, with a tired wave of his hand. "I know why you're here though – you've come sniffing after my money, the way you always did."

"You think that's why I'm here?" Tony rocked back on his heels, looking winded. "Seriously? You're dying and you think that's why I came here?"

"You like money. You always did," DiNozzo chuckled. "Always knew you could be bribed with a new pair of those fancy shoes you like, or some other shit like that."

"You're right. I do like money," Tony said quietly. "And yes, I do have expensive tastes. I'm like my father in that."

"You're nothing like me," DiNozzo said flatly. "I had nothing when I started out, Tony – and you - you had everything I could give you, and never appreciated a dime because you never had to work for it."

Gibbs watched them go at it, back and forth, and he suspected this was a very old argument that had been rehashed many times over the years, and the only reason Tony was allowing the old man to land this many punches was because he was dying. Tony was slugging it out with both hands tied behind his back and it was hard to see how he could win in that position.

"I work hard too," Tony said, and Gibbs didn't think he'd ever seen him look like this, in all the years he'd known him. Tony was a big, robust man but right now he looked as fragile as Gibbs had ever seen him. Being around his father had stripped away all those defences of his, laying the man bare.

"Running around with guns, flashing that badge of yours at people?" DiNozzo snorted. "You never did want to grow up."

"Yeah, well, you could be right there," Tony said, with a grin. "Look I didn't come here to argue, Dad..."

"Oh I know why you came here," DiNozzo interrupted. "You thought I'd be weak because I'm dying. You thought you'd just come along, flash that grin, and throw your mother's charm at me and that I'd change my mind and leave everything to you. Well it won't happen. I'm leaving it all to Pete; the business, the house, the money, the cars – all of it, Tony."

"Good. I don't want it," Tony said abruptly.

"Pete's been more of a son to me than you ever were," DiNozzo said. Gibbs knew, even as the words were being spoken, that they'd be a body blow to Tony. He saw Tony flinch, visibly, and then nod.

"Yeah – he has, Dad, he has," he said. "And god knows he deserves the money, after putting up with you for all these years. Now, I need the bathroom. Try not to die before I get back."

He turned on his heel, and left, almost at a run. Pete glanced at Gibbs, and Gibbs glanced back at Pete, and then Pete turned and ran after him.

Gibbs moved back into the lamplight again, so that DiNozzo could see him clearly, and then he bent down and spoke directly into his ear.

"You are lucky, old man, that you are dying," he said, in a low, clear voice. "Because if you weren't, I'd put a bullet through your head myself."

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1991

The next couple of days passed in a blur of drinking. Gibbs didn't even wait until evening. He headed for the bar as soon as it opened, stayed there all day, and staggered back to his room to sleep it off. Whenever he closed his eyes he saw Kelly, staring at him reproachfully, somehow judging him for the way he was behaving – and sometimes, just as he fell into a drunken stupor, he imagined he saw Andy, looking at him just as reproachfully, and that made him damn angry because he didn't owe the kid anything.

He lay on his bed staring at the ceiling, missing Andy's warm, lean body curled up beside him. He remembered what Andy had said about his mom dying, and thought about how the kid was living right now, out of a few lockers at the country club, carrying that bag of his around with him the whole time, blowing strangers in the restrooms of bars. Gibbs couldn't help but feel some empathy – yes, he'd lost his family, but Andy had lost someone too, and Gibbs didn't have a monopoly on grief.

On the third day he was woken by a knock on the door, and he found the mechanic standing outside dangling his car keys between his fingers.

"Fixed," the man said morosely. "I left her over there." He jerked his head over to the parking lot.

"About damn time," Gibbs growled. He got out his wallet and paid the man, and then got washed and dressed and went out to check on the car. It started fine. Gibbs sat there for a moment. Now what? The car was fixed so he could just head out, start driving again...or maybe he could find this country club Andy worked at, and drop by and give the kid some money before leaving. That might ease his conscience a little if nothing else. Then he could just leave and never come back, put this whole sorry incident behind him, chalk it up to the drink, the grief, and his current fucked-up state of mind.

The country club wasn't hard to find – it was a big, plush place, and the parking lot was full of fancy cars. Gibbs parked and went inside to find himself in a mahogany palace, dark brown wooden panelling lining the walls, massive vases of flowers everywhere in reception.

"Can I help you, sir?" a pretty girl in a uniform asked.

“Yeah...I’m looking for a kid who works here – as a caddy,” Gibbs said. “Andy...” He paused, realising he didn’t have a clue what Andy’s second name was.

She gazed at him blankly. “We don’t have any caddies called Andy, sir,” she said. “I can go and check with Moira but I’m pretty sure about that.”

Gibbs could have kicked himself. He knew that Andy hadn’t given him his real name.

He turned and left, annoyed with himself. He hung out around the place for a few hours, watching, hoping to catch a glimpse of Andy. He saw some other caddies – they were all young men like Andy, all clearly college students, frat boys earning some extra cash to see them through the semester. He wondered if any of them knew about the life Andy was leading. He could see Andy fitting right in here, completely at ease in this affluent environment, and once again he found himself wondering how a kid like Andy ended up on the streets. He clearly came from a wealthy background and had just as clearly received an expensive education. It didn’t make any sense.

He didn’t catch a glimpse of Andy all day but when the final set of golfers left the range he made one last ditch attempt to find him. He wasn’t sure why he was making the effort, he just felt a little nugget of guilt eating away at him inside, goading him on. Besides, he didn’t have anyplace else to be – he could start driving again tomorrow.

He saw one of the caddies run back to pick up a sweater he’d dropped, and he followed him, wanting to catch him alone.

“Hey...can you help me? I’m looking for one of the caddies who works here. He’s...about 6 feet tall, green eyes, brown hair with light streaks in it, talks about movies the whole time. Kind of annoying.”

“You mean Tony?” the young man said. He was a tall kid, with sleek dark hair. “That sounds like Tony.”

“Tony? Yeah. I mean Tony.” Gibbs nodded. “Where is he?”

“Didn’t show up for work today – called in sick,” the kid said, with a shrug, and then he frowned. “That’s not like him – usually he takes all the work he can get so he must be really ill. Of course, he could just be on the trail of some hot girl,” he grinned. “One thing that could make Tony fake a sick day it’s a hot girl. He’s a legend, man!” He patted Gibbs’s arm with a conspiratorial smile.

“Yeah, I can believe that,” Gibbs muttered, wondering where the hell Andy – Tony? – could be.

“A few weeks ago he hooked up with this older chick and he hasn’t been around as much since then. He says she’s loaded, got a fancy place out in Bexley and takes him everywhere - shows him a really good time he says. So he moved out of his apartment and moved all his stuff in with her. ‘Course that might all be over by now knowing Tony and there might be

some new hot chick around!”

He grinned gleefully, clearly impressed by Tony’s prowess with the opposite sex. He was a real motormouth – but then presumably he didn’t think Tony had anything to hide and this was harmless enough stuff. The lie about the older woman was kind of sad – Tony clearly didn’t want his friends knowing he’d had to move out because he couldn’t pay the rent. The kid suddenly grimaced, and slapped a hand over his mouth.

“Oh shit! Are you his old man? He said his old man was in town but to be honest I didn’t believe him ‘cause he’s always talking about you and most of it sounded like made up shit. Look, I shouldn’t have said all that stuff – I hope it won’t get Tony into any trouble.”

Gibbs shook his head. “Don’t worry,” he said. “Tony’s not in any trouble. And thanks.” He gave the kid a generous handful of dollars for his help and then strode back to his car. He wasn’t sure why, but something about this whole situation felt wrong to him. He could feel it in his gut.

It was starting to get dark now, and he wondered what he should do. The thought of spending another night in the bar getting drunk suddenly didn’t seem so appealing any more. He realised that he’d actually enjoyed doing something today, even if he hadn’t found what he was looking for. He liked hanging out, asking questions, trying to get to the bottom of the mystery that was Andy. Maybe he’d enjoy that job Franks had offered him more than he thought. He pushed that thought aside and headed back to the motel room, still trying to figure out what he should do next.

It was completely dark by the time he got back and he was so lost in thought that he almost tripped over the body sitting hunched up on his doorstep, bag clutched to his chest as usual.

“Andy?” He felt a little spike of relief that he’d found the kid, which was immediately replaced by a sense of foreboding when he looked at him. “You okay?” he asked softly.

Andy’s shoulders were hunched, the way they always were when he was miserable, but it was the way his eyes were glowing with unnatural brightness that worried Gibbs. His skin was flushed and his face shone with a light sheen of sweat. He remembered what the young man at the country club had said about Andy – Tony – calling in sick.

“Andy.” Gibbs crouched down beside the kid, and touched his shoulder. The kid pulled away from him.

“I need somewhere to stay tonight,” Andy said quietly, without any of his usual attempts to charm and wheedle. “I thought you’d gone. I’m sorry I made you mad. I didn’t mean to. Please let me stay here tonight. I’ll go in the morning. I just need to sleep.”

“You can stay here, Andy.”

Gibbs got up and opened the door to the room. He noticed that Andy was moving slowly, as if he was in pain, and he wondered again about that feverish look in the boy’s eyes. Andy

dumped his bag on the floor, as he always did, and then stood there, looking around him as if he wasn't sure where he was.

"How long have you been sitting out there?" Gibbs asked quietly.

"A few hours. I went down to the garage and they said you had your car back. There was no sign of you. I was sure you'd moved on. I didn't know what to do." Andy bit on his lip. "So I just sat there."

"Are you sick, Andy?" Gibbs moved his hand up to touch the kid's forehead and check his temperature and Andy flinched away from him. "Easy. I'm not going to hurt you," Gibbs said with a frown. This wasn't the Andy he'd come to know these past few days, the Andy who leaned into every touch like a puppy wanting to be petted.

"I just need somewhere to sleep tonight," Andy said tiredly. "I thought about paying for a room – I have the money but I don't want to waste it. I've been trying to figure it out in my head but I can't...I'm not feeling so good," he admitted. "I can't think straight."

Gibbs took hold of the kid's arm and then slowly, very slowly, moved his hand up to Andy's forehead. "Christ, you're burning up," he said. "What the hell happened to you?"

"Nothing." Andy pulled away, and Gibbs noticed the wince that crossed his face. "I just need to sleep it off and then I'll be fine," he muttered.

"Sleep what off?" Gibbs asked.

Andy ignored him. Moving slowly, biting on his lip, he sat down on the edge of the bed and leaned forward to try and undo his boots. He took a sharp intake of breath as he bent forward, clearly in pain, so Gibbs knelt down in front of him and undid them for him, then pulled them off and slung them away to one side. Then he reached out and started to unbutton Andy's shirt.

"No." Andy slapped his hand away.

"Yes. I want to see what you're trying to hide," Gibbs told him firmly. Andy gazed at him, an expression of mute pleading in those feverish eyes. Gibbs wondered what the hell was going on. "Is this something to do with your father?" he asked. Andy's eyes flashed. "Did you go and see him? Did you ask him for money? Did he hurt you?" He felt a savage surge of anger inside.

"No." Andy shook his head. "I haven't seen him since Mom's funeral. He doesn't live around here – he lives on Long Island."

Gibbs rocked back on his heels. "So what's going on, Andy? You might as well tell me because I'm going to find out anyway."

"You're different." Andy stared at him. "You're more...together. What happened to you?"

“I pulled my head out of my ass for long enough to realise I’m not the only one with problems,” Gibbs told him.

He stood up and unbuttoned Andy’s shirt, and Andy just looked at him the entire time, his eyes confused, as if he wasn’t sure what to do around a Gibbs who wasn’t either drunk on his ass or stewing in self-pity. Gibbs eased the shirt off Andy’s back and winced as it stuck in places. He peeled it off slowly, revealing several ugly bruises and a number of deep welts, seeping blood. Andy stared at him, looking guilty, angry and scared all at the same time.

“Who did this to you?” Gibbs asked quietly.

“Nobody did anything to me,” Andy replied.

“Don’t lie to me!” Gibbs roared. Andy flinched. Gibbs got control of himself and reached out gentle fingers to examine the wounds on Andy’s body in more detail. The many large, purple bruises looked like fist marks, and then there were the welts – Gibbs wasn’t sure what those had been made by. His jaw tightened as he found a couple of burn marks, clearly made by the butt of a cigarette.

“Nobody did anything to me that I didn’t agree to,” Andy clarified, sullenly. “I went there. He pays well. I knew what I was doing.”

“You’ve done this before?” Gibbs was incredulous. “You go to someone and let him beat you up?”

“Like I said, he pays well. I met him down the country club. He asked me if I was interested in making more money, on the side. I said yes. I thought he wanted to fuck me and that was okay – he’s not hot like you but he’s not repulsive either. He never has fucked me though. He explained it to me that first time and I agreed. The first couple of times weren’t so bad. He just kicked me around then jacked off over me but he gave me enough money to pay the rent for a few weeks. Then last time I went to him he got out this stick and wanted to use it. It hurt like hell so I told him to fuck off and left. Then I couldn’t pay the rent and ended up on the street.”

“And you went back there?” Gibbs asked, his gut clenching at the story.

“Yeah, a couple of days ago. He said...what he likes about me is that I’ve got a smart mouth. He likes that I’m so cocky – that’s what he says. He likes shutting me up. When I went back this time he paid in advance, but he locked the door and said I wasn’t walking out on him again until he was done. He had me mouth off at him – that was the easy part.” Andy gave a bright grin that never went anywhere near reaching his eyes. “Then he punched me a few times, and then he got out that stick. Christ that hurts.” He shivered. “If he hadn’t locked the door I’d have been out of there but he’d given me the money and I told him he could do it so I thought I should hold up my end of the bargain. He called me an arrogant son of a bitch who needs to learn a lesson. I think I remind him of some preppy rich kids who beat up on him years ago or something.”

“Why, Andy? I know you need the money but it can’t be worth going through this to get it. Why did you go back there?”

“You threw me out, and I am trying to keep this together without anyone finding out,” Andy said through gritted teeth. “I admit I might not be doing it very well, but I can do this. I can figure out a way to get through college, and pay my way, and show him...” He broke off with a shrug and then winced as that small movement pained him.

“Show who?” Gibbs demanded.

“He doesn’t think I can do this but I can,” Andy murmured, his eyes glassy. “He thinks I’m a spoiled brat and he’s not throwing good money after bad.”

Gibbs noticed the beads of sweat on Andy’s forehead, soaking into his hair, turning it dark, and he cursed. Some of the cuts on his body must have become infected and he was starting to sound delirious.

“Come on. Let’s get you into bed,” he said.

He gently removed the rest of Andy’s clothing and got him under the sheets. Andy was shivering now, burning up and freezing cold at the same time.

“I wanted you to come back,” Andy slurred. “I waited because I wanted you to come back. I really like you, Jethro.”

Gibbs smoothed Andy’s sweaty hair away from his face.

“Yeah, I know, Andy. Look, I need to get you some medicine. You stay here and sleep – I’ll be right back. I promise.”

Andy’s eyes were so glassy that he wasn’t even sure the kid had understood him. Gibbs grabbed his wallet, then went to the motel reception and asked them to call for a doctor. This was more than he could handle alone.

The doctor clearly thought he’d been the one to hurt Andy, and he clucked around disapprovingly. He prescribed drugs for the infection and some kind of cream to rub into the welts and then he left - but not before charging Gibbs a small fortune for his services.

Gibbs got the prescription filled and the first dose of medication into the kid and then sat down on the chair in the corner of the room and ran his hand through his hair.

How the hell had this happened? When had his life become this fucked up and complicated? This kid really wasn't his responsibility and yet somehow it felt like he was. There had to be someone else though – someone else who would care that he was whoring himself out and allowing some bastard to slap him around in exchange for money. His mom was dead but wouldn't his father want to know about this? Gibbs knew he'd want to know, if this had

been Kelly. What father wouldn't care that his son was lying beaten up in a motel room with some guy he barely knew looking after him? There had to be someone better than him to take care of Andy right now.

Gibbs glanced at Andy's bag, lying on the floor, and he got up, opened it, and rifled through the contents, keeping one eye on Andy the entire time to make sure he remained asleep. He found what he was looking for – the letters he'd seen the other day – and held them for a moment, wondering what gave him the right to look through something so personal. He shrugged that attack of conscience away, and opened up the first letter.

It was from Andy's mom, and was dated several months ago. It was full of long, rambling sentences that went nowhere and made little sense – Gibbs could well believe the woman had been an alcoholic. It was also painfully evident that she adored her son and was doing her best for him, such as it was. A quick check revealed that all the letters were from her and they were all pretty much along the same lines – which was useless to him. He tied the letters back together, the way they had been when he'd found them, and replaced them in Andy's bag.

He wondered about that dark-haired kid he'd met at the country club earlier – he seemed to be one of Andy's friends. Maybe he should contact him? He thought about it for a moment but something about it felt wrong. What was it that Andy had said earlier? He was "trying to keep this together without anyone finding out"? That kid at the club earlier had spoken about Andy like he was some kind of frat boy superhero, a legend – there was no way that kid had any idea that his friend Tony was leading some kind of double life – and Andy clearly wanted to keep it that way.

Gibbs silently worked his way through the rest of the bag, looking for some kind of clue that would help him unravel the mystery that was Andy. He found a porno magazine, full of explicit pictures of naked women – exactly the kind of magazine he'd expect a kid Andy's age to have in his possession. He gave it a cursory glance and slung it on the floor...then looked at it again when something fell out of it. He picked up an envelope, hoping it wasn't another long, rambling missive from Andy's mother. It wasn't. It was a formal letter from a firm of lawyers in New York called Weston and Grant, and it was addressed to an Anthony DiNozzo. He opened it up and began to read.

Dear Anthony,

As you may know, my father retired a few months ago, and I have taken over his practice. I am therefore now your father's chief legal adviser in respect of his business and personal interests.

Your father has directed me to reply on his behalf to your recent letter to him in respect of your college tuition. As he made clear after your expulsion from Drewes Military Academy, and as he reiterated at your mother's funeral, he is no longer prepared to fund your education.

He would like to remind you that he himself started out with nothing, and built his business

by dint of his own hard work. He believes that it is perfectly possible for you to do the same and he looks forward to seeing you make something of your life without the cushion of his financial help.

He expresses his hope that this will be the making of you. He has not entirely given up on the possibility of you joining him in the business, provided that first you show an aptitude for hard work, discipline and application – all qualities that he feels have been sorely lacking in your conduct to date.

If you can prove to his satisfaction that you have changed, and if you can demonstrate that you are ashamed of the conduct that led to your expulsion from Drewes, then he will be prepared to see you again upon completion of your college education. However, he does not, at this stage, believe that any such improvements in your attitude have taken place.

He has therefore directed me to advise you that he will not be offering any financial assistance to you now or at any point in the future, and asks that you do not approach him in respect of this matter again.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Weston  
Weston and Grant

Gibbs winced – that was a harsh letter – not just in tone but in the fact that Andy's father hadn't even bothered to write it himself. There was a handwritten note attached to the letter. Gibbs glanced at it.

Dear Tony,

On a personal note, I would like you to know that I recall those summers I spent at your father's house when I was younger with great affection and have fond memories of that time. I am enclosing a cheque - it's just a small sum from my own money but I hope it will be of some use to you in your current predicament.

Kind regards,

Daniel

This Daniel Weston sounded like a decent kind of man. Gibbs grabbed a pen and paper and made a note of the man's number; it was too late to call now but maybe tomorrow. Then he glanced over at Andy. The kid's face was flushed but he was young and strong – hopefully he'd bounce back from this. There was something about his irrepressible spirit that made Gibbs suspect that he was pretty good at bouncing back.

Gibbs felt a surge of sympathy for the boy - and also a glimmer of understanding about where his desperate need for a father figure came from. His request the other day that he might call Gibbs "Dad" suddenly made a hell of a lot more sense. He might have the libido of highly-sexed nineteen year old but inside there was also a part of him that was a ten year

old boy who just wanted to hang out with his father. It would have been touching if it wasn't so completely fucked up.

It was late. Gibbs got up, got undressed down to his boxers and tee shirt, and slipped silently into the bed beside Andy. The kid muttered something and shifted in his sleep, whimpering. Gibbs looked at him for a moment, and then, with a sigh, he put his arm around him and pulled him over so that his head was resting on his shoulder. Andy's arms went automatically around Gibbs's midriff and he wrapped himself around him.

Gibbs looked down on him, wondering how the hell he had come to feel so fond of a kid he hadn't even known existed a few days ago. The only emotion he'd been feeling for months was a deep, savage, angry grief – it was actually a relief to feel something else. He hadn't realised how weary he'd become of feeling so raw and sad all the damn time.

When Gibbs woke a few hours later it was to the usual suffocating weight of Andy lying almost on top of him, legs entangled in his, arms wrapped around him, the way he seemed to like sleeping. Gibbs wasn't used to being smothered quite so comprehensively and Andy was heavy, but all the same there was something appealing about Andy's puppyish need to be in such close proximity. Gibbs extricated himself quietly, and then reached out a hand to Andy's forehead. The kid was still flushed but he wasn't burning up any more, so hopefully he was on the mend.

Gibbs got dressed and slipped silently out of the room. He found a phone booth down the street and called the offices of Weston and Grant. Hopefully, this would soon be over, and Andy would soon be his father's problem – which was the way it should be. Then Gibbs could drive away from all this and return to his own problems, and the important decision of whether he wanted to live or die. He still didn't feel like he'd \*made\* that decision, damn it. Andy had got in the way and made everything more complicated, when it should have been simple.

"I need to speak to Daniel Weston," he said to the girl who answered the phone.

"Oh, sir, I'm sorry, but he's away on vacation this week. Is there anyone else who can help?" she replied. Gibbs sighed, wondering when he'd catch a break with this.

"I need to get in touch with a Mr DiNozzo," he said. "I believe he's a client of yours? I have his son, Andy - I mean, Tony - staying in my motel room. He's not well. He's uh...been in a fight and he's beat up pretty bad. He's going to be okay but I thought Mr DiNozzo might want to know that his son needs help. Can you tell me how I can get in touch with him?"

"We can't give out confidential client details, sir," she told him. "However, I will call Mr DiNozzo and tell him what you've said."

"Do it now. And get him to call me straight back," Gibbs commanded impatiently, giving her the number.

She assured him that she would, so he put the phone down and waited. Fifteen minutes

later, the phone in the booth rang. Gibbs snatched it up.

"Mr DiNozzo?"

There was an apologetic silence, and then the girl from Weston and Grant spoke.

"I'm sorry, sir. It's me again. Mr DiNozzo asked me to call you. He said..."

"What?" Gibbs frowned, wondering what the hell kind of father didn't want to talk to someone who had news that his son needed help.

"He said that he can't help, sir."

"He can't help?" Gibbs repeated, in disbelief. "That's what he said? He can't help? Does he realise that his son has been hurt?"

"Yes, sir. He...Mr DiNozzo is a man of very strong views, sir, and he said to say he's washed his hands of his son and doesn't want to be involved in his latest drama. He advises you not to get involved, either. I'm sorry, sir."

She sounded extremely apologetic and it wasn't her fault but Gibbs treated her to a volley of expletives all the same. Then he slammed the phone down and struck his hand, hard, against the wall of the booth. Christ, some men didn't deserve to be fathers. He'd give his right arm to have Kelly back for just one second; to hold her, speak to her, see those blue eyes of hers light up when she saw him, and yet this man, this bastard, didn't give a damn that his son was in trouble. He didn't know how lucky he was to have a living, breathing child and it made him mad as hell.

He walked around the parking lot of the motel for a few minutes to calm down, pausing only to kick the kerb a few times. He didn't want to go back into that room while he was still this angry; the last thing he wanted was for Andy to find out that his father didn't give a flying fuck about his welfare. He wondered just what the boy had done to make his father treat him this way. He tried to think as a dad, as Kelly's dad, wondering if there was anything she could have done that would have made him reject her in a similar situation but he couldn't think of anything so bad that he'd have turned his back on her if she'd been hurt. He might have been angry with her, and disappointed in her, but he'd always have been there for her.

What had Andy done that was so bad? The kid could be annoying; he had a smart mouth on him and he was definitely trouble but he was also funny and completely without any kind of malice. In that letter, Daniel Weston had spoken of Andy being expelled from some kind of a military academy – had it been that? He'd also spoken of Andy's lack of discipline and application – but surely that couldn't be the whole story? If Andy lacked those virtues, Gibbs thought that was partly his father's fault for raising him wrong. You couldn't raise a kid and then turn your back on them if they didn't turn out the way you wanted. How they turned out was at least partially your responsibility after all.

So now what? Gibbs turned it around in his head but he couldn't see any answer for it save

the obvious. The kid didn't have anyone except him, and, fucked up though he was right now, that was as good as it got. Gibbs had taken responsibility for too many kids Andy's age to turn his back on this one; he'd trained hundreds of young men to fight in the Marines, treating them with a combination of gruff affection and military discipline that he'd hoped would help keep them alive in whatever combat situation they encountered. So Andy was stuck with him, and he with Andy, for now at least.

He finally calmed down enough to return to the room. Andy was awake and he sat up in bed when he came in, his hair sticking up on end as usual, eyes anxious, but they'd lost that glassy look they'd had the previous night, and his face was no longer flushed.

"I wondered where you were," he said. "I woke up and you'd gone. I thought maybe you'd paid for the room and left."

"How are you feeling?" Gibbs asked, ignoring that. Andy seemed to expect to be abandoned or rejected and Gibbs didn't want to deal with that right now.

"Fine," Andy said. "Much better. I'm sorry I crashed out on you last night. I felt like shit and wasn't thinking clearly. I'll just grab my stuff and be on my way."

"Not until you're better," Gibbs told him firmly, crossing over to the bed and sitting down. He reached out a hand and stroked Andy's untidy hair, smoothing down the messy spikes.

"I can stay here?" Andy asked, looking surprised. "I thought you were pissed with me?"

"Oh, I am," Gibbs chuckled. "I am, Andy, but you're here now and you'll stay here until you're well." He glanced down at Andy. "Son," he added softly. Andy didn't say anything but his eyes lit up, glowing from within with a kind of joyful luminosity, and Gibbs gave an inward sigh, wondering what the hell he'd started.

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2008

Tony's father moved his hand, grabbed hold of Gibbs's jacket, and pulled him down, close, so he could get a good look at him. Gibbs found himself subject to the intense scrutiny of those grey-green eyes. DiNozzo Senior might be dying but his mind was still razor sharp. Gibbs took hold of the man's thin wrist and removed it from his jacket, but then, to show this embittered old man that he wasn't scared of him, he sat down on the bed beside him, and moved the lamp so the man could see him clearly.

DiNozzo gave a gurgling little laugh. "Oh, I know you," he said.

"Never met you before today," Gibbs replied.

"Yeah, but I know you – you're a bastard," the old man said. "Just like me."

Gibbs couldn't bite back the smile. "Plenty of people have called me that," he said.

"So, you don't like the way I talk to my son, huh?" he asked. Gibbs shrugged.

"Like you said – you're a bastard. Tony's worked for me for seven years and he's saved my life more than once – just last year he threw himself into the river and pulled me out from the car I was trapped in down there. He's risked his life doing his job more times than I can count. I wouldn't expect you to understand, or care, because you judge a man's worth by how much he earns, but Tony is loyal, brave and a damn good agent – the best I have. He's good at his job, and he works damn hard at it too."

DiNozzo lay back on his pillows, wheezing, and gazed at Gibbs speculatively.

"You ever been married?" he asked.

"Yeah, four times," Gibbs replied, wondering what the hell that had to do with anything. DiNozzo gave a little laugh that turned into a cough.

"Three times," he gasped, pointing to himself. "Never could figure women out."

"Me neither." Gibbs shrugged.

"You sleeping with my son?" DiNozzo asked suddenly, taking him by surprise. "Oh don't look at me like that – you must know Tony likes to walk on the queer side of the street every now and then."

"No. I'm not sleeping with your son," Gibbs replied shortly. Not right now, anyway, Gibbs thought to himself. Not for seventeen years.

"Good. Wish my son was more like you," DiNozzo said. "You got any kids, Gibbs?"

"No," Gibbs replied shortly. He never had figured out the right way to reply to that question, even after all these years.

"Then you wouldn't understand," the old man said. "You think I'm hard on Tony but you try and imagine how it felt, getting a call from your son's military academy saying they're throwing out your boy because he's been found screwing another student."

Gibbs gazed at him, expressionlessly. So that was it. He'd always wondered, although he'd guessed it had been something like this.

"A male student," the old man added, clearly not satisfied with Gibbs's lack of reaction. "I had to drive straight down and pick him up – they didn't want to keep him under their roof for one more night. Thought my son was many things – he always was a charmer, and he'll play the fool for anyone who'll watch him - but a fag? I never saw that one coming."

"Tony's had plenty of girlfriends," Gibbs pointed out.

"Yeah," the old man chuckled. "Never got married though, did he? Never had any kids. I know my son, Gibbs, and I'll bet you he's still dicking around with any fag or any piece of skirt that'll show him a good time."

Gibbs grunted – the old man was right about that at least – or he thought so. It seemed to him that Tony's flirting wasn't as rampant nowadays as it had once been, and he rarely talked about the women he was dating any more.

"I work in a closed little world, Gibbs," DiNozzo said. "And the circles I move in...well, let's just say that word about why Tony was expelled from Drewes didn't just get out – it spread around like wildfire. Couldn't show my face for weeks afterwards because of the shame."

"So you washed your hands of Tony?" Gibbs asked.

"Like I said, you wouldn't understand. You're not a father," the old man growled at him.

"I had a daughter. She was killed when she was eight," Gibbs said quietly. "If I could have her back I wouldn't give a damn who she slept with or what the hell job she did – I'd just tell her how much I love her and how proud of her I am."

DiNozzo's eyes flashed.

"Call yourself a father? Man like you doesn't deserve the title," Gibbs told him, in a low, dismissive tone.

"What does it matter to you?" DiNozzo demanded, his eyes cloudy and tired. "What the hell does any of this matter to you?"

"It matters to Tony," Gibbs replied. "Listen, old man – you're dying, what harm would it do to give Tony something before you go? Oh, not your money," Gibbs growled, as he saw the old man open his mouth to interrupt. "Just tell him you love him, and that you're proud of him. That's all. It's only words – they won't cost you anything and they'll mean a hell of a lot to him."

"What if it's not true?" DiNozzo asked quietly. Gibbs stared at him icily.

"Be a man," he said. "No, be a \*father\*. Say it – even if it's not true. Do that for him."

The old man looked at him and Gibbs looked back. There was a long silence which was disturbed only when they heard a sound in the hallway. The door opened, and Tony walked back into the room. His hair was completely wet, as if he'd stuck his whole head under the faucet – maybe he had. Gibbs could understand the impulse – this room stank of an old man's anger and the bitter scent of reproach – he wasn't surprised Tony had tried to wash it away. It must have been crippling living with that hanging over him all these years.

Gibbs got up, vacating his bedside seat to Tony. Tony looked more purposeful now, less hunched and miserable. He crossed the room and sat down.

"Listen – I didn't come here to quarrel," he said softly, taking hold of his father's hand and squeezing lightly. "Haven't we done enough of that over the years? I'm sorry you're dying, Dad, and I'm glad I've got this chance to say goodbye. Whatever's happened between us – it's in the past. Let's just let it go."

Gibbs stood behind Tony, and glared, meaningfully, at the old man lying in the bed. "Now would be a good time to say that thing we talked about," Gibbs muttered.

DiNozzo gazed at his son for a long moment, and then at Gibbs, and then, finally, he extricated his hand pointedly from Tony's grasp, and closed his eyes.

"I'm tired now," he said.

~\*~

1991

They spent the day watching TV. For an active man like Gibbs, it was a novelty he'd never experienced before – an entire day doing nothing except lie on a bed watching TV - but Andy seemed to relish it. Or, more particularly, Gibbs suspected the kid liked having a father figure around with nothing better to do than give him attention.

Andy was in his element; he started talking after finishing the bagels Gibbs brought him for breakfast and didn't stop for a solid few hours. He bounced around on the bed, nudging Gibbs in the ribs every few minutes in an effort to make him look up from the newspaper he was trying to read, constantly pointing out useless pieces of trivia related to the dire daytime TV he was watching. Gibbs found it incomprehensively relaxing after all the recent weeks of driving followed by drinking. The drink might have numbed his grief but it also had made his mind fuzzy and his body bloated; drying out felt good.

Andy was a fidget, unable to stay in any one position for more than a few minutes, and he was forever throwing his pillow around the bed and then launching himself on top of it, elbows and feet often digging into Gibbs in the process as he tried to get comfortable in his new position, only to abandon it a few minutes later. Gibbs could forgive him that – the kid was bruised and battered so he guessed that lying in one position for any length of time must be uncomfortable.

Spending time with Andy was hardly a restful experience but it was endlessly entertaining. Andy's constant demand for some kind of connection or interaction with Gibbs should have been irritating, but somehow Andy's natural charm rendered it endearing instead.

After lunch, and another dose of medication, Andy zonked out for a two hour sleep and Gibbs found he missed the kid's stream-of-consciousness verbal diarrhoea. He put down his paper and glanced at Andy. He was lying on his side, facing Gibbs, nestled under the blanket, his hair a mess of long, bleached spikes on the pillow. It was impossible not to feel fond of the kid; there was just something appealing about him, even when he was being a pain in the ass – which was most of the time.

Gibbs moved his own pillow a fraction higher to ease a crick in his back and frowned when he felt something digging into his ass. He pulled out his gun from beneath the pillow and gazed at it. Those suicidal impulses that had brought him on this journey no longer felt so acute. Maybe he just needed to be needed – by the men in his unit, by his wife, by his daughter...by all those things that he'd lost. Instead he'd found this young man, who sure as hell needed him, and that need was an anchor for him right now.

He put the gun in the nightstand drawer and closed it – he wasn't sure that he was done with it yet, but he did know that he didn't need it right now. Then he settled down beside Andy, face to face, one arm placed protectively around the kid's midriff, and closed his eyes. There wasn't much else to do except take a nap.

He woke half an hour later to find a pair of eyes gazing at him hopefully, and something hard digging into his thigh.

"Oh Christ," he sighed. "You can't be serious. You're ill, Andy."

"What? You never been ill and horny at the same time?" Andy grinned, grinding his hips hopefully in Gibbs's direction, making the presence of his rock hard erection even more firmly felt.

"Are you seriously always this sexed up?" Gibbs grunted. Andy made a show of thinking about it for a couple of seconds and then grinned again.

"Yeah," he said. "So...?"

Gibbs gave another grunt, more strangled this time, as Andy slipped a hand into his boxers and stroked his cock, which responded with a more eager leap than Gibbs would have expected.

"You could fuck me," Andy whispered. "That was pretty damn hot last time."

"I'm not going to fuck you, Andy, not while you're ill."

"I could fuck you then," Andy suggested.

Gibbs reached out and grabbed his wrist, firmly, in his fingers. "Not going to happen," he said. Andy pouted.

"You should try it – it's good," he said. "But if that's not your thing – how about I suck you?" He pulled up the blanket and began sliding down the bed. Gibbs grabbed hold of a fistful of his thick hair to stop him in his tracks. Then he hauled him back up again.

"Is this payment, Andy?" he asked. "For the room? For the doctor? For the medicine? If it is then forget it – I don't want sex in payment for any of that."

Andy rolled his eyes. "No. I told you, you're hot, and I \*like\* sex. A lot," he added.

"Why aren't you out there chasing girls then?" Gibbs asked. "Kid your age – that's what you should be doing and I know you like girls - your head swivels whenever you see anything in a short skirt."

"I do like girls," Andy agreed. "I really do," he added with a laugh. "And trust me, I definitely chase after girls. But I like guys too. I like being fucked, I like sucking cock. I know I'm not supposed to but I do. I've tried not to but I can't help myself. Is it that bad?" He looked at Gibbs for confirmation. "It doesn't feel that bad – it just feels like sex, but other people get freaked out about it. I've learned to pretend to freak out too, so nobody figures out what I like. It's easier that way."

"Your friends don't know, do they?" Gibbs said. "That you're bisexual?"

"Hell no!" Andy grinned. "I'm majoring in Phys Ed, Jethro – they'd never let me in the showers with them after a game if they knew."

"Yeah – but that means you have to lead a double life," Gibbs pointed out. Andy shrugged.

"Cool," he said. "Kind of like being a spy. Talking of which - ah, Mr Bond, vot haff we got here?" he asked, in a terrible Eastern European accent, moving his hand down to find Gibbs's semi-erect cock again. He gave another one of those infectious grins and moved his hand rhythmically up and down Gibbs's cock.

Gibbs gave in and grabbed Andy, stripping the kid out of his underwear and tearing off his own at the same time, getting them both naked within seconds. Then he pulled Andy over so that he was sitting astride him, over his groin, taking care not to touch any of the many cuts and bruises on the kid's body.

Then, with a determined grin, Gibbs took hold of their erections and pressed them together. Andy gave him a startled look, and then grinned back at him, delighted by what Gibbs had in mind, and within seconds he was making those orgasmic noises again.

There was something very erotic about being with a partner as uninhibited and up for anything as Andy, and somehow, and Gibbs wasn't sure how, it became an unspoken competition as to who could hold out the longest before coming.

Andy tried to push Gibbs over the edge by grinding his balls into Gibbs's groin, moving his long, dextrous fingers over his own body, tweaking at his nipples as he worked. He locked gazes with Gibbs while slipping his tongue enticingly between his lips, wetting them, making the full lower lip seem especially plump and inviting. His eyes were gleaming with challenge and he was utterly confident in his own sexual prowess, sure that he could turn on Gibbs as much as Gibbs was turning him on, and win the competition.

In return, Gibbs moved his hands with expert precision, making Andy gasp with every firm, confident stroke on his cock. Their cocks pulsed together, both of them rock hard and slick

with pre-come.

"I don't think you can hold it much longer," Andy teased, rocking his hips so that his hard cock bumped against Gibbs's. Gibbs gritted his teeth as the movement sent pleasure waves coursing through him, almost sending him over the edge.

"That what ya think, Andy?" Gibbs growled, barely holding on as Andy taunted him with those sinful eyes, daring him to give in and come. Gibbs held back manfully, working both his hands on their cocks, rubbing them in synchronous time, enjoying the sensation of having two handfuls of hard, pulsing flesh instead of the usual one. There was no way he was going to lose this challenge. He was Leroy Jethro Gibbs, and there was no way some cocky kid was going to get the better of him, in the bedroom or out of it. He gazed up at Andy, a small, confident smile tugging at the corner of his lips, daring him to give in.

"Oh you really don't like to lose, do you?" Andy grinned, and then he started to laugh, and at almost the same moment he came, spurting out onto Gibbs's belly, his laugh turning into an orgasmic moan and shudder of pleasure.

"Call that stamina, kid?" Gibbs smirked, continuing to pump his own cock with a triumphant flourish of his hand. Andy grinned down at him.

"Yeah – but I'll be ready to go again in ten – while you'll be struggling to get it up again this side of Christmas, old man," Andy teased him back.

Gibbs came with a groan of pleasure, his come mixing with Andy's on his belly, and then he lay there for a moment, completely out of it, waiting for the blood to return to his head.

Andy sat astride him, smiling down at him, his lips still wet from where he'd licked them. Gibbs stared up at him, transfixed, and then he found his hands sliding up Andy's body, and he twisted one hand in the kid's hair, took hold of it, and pulled Andy down so that he was flat on top of him, belly against belly. He kept his hand tangled in Andy's hair as he kissed him on the mouth for the first time, sliding his tongue between those teasing lips and working them open. He slid his arm around Andy's body to keep the naked flesh pressed hard against his own, and pushed up into Andy's willing mouth, his lips relentless and his tongue ravenous as he worked.

This should have felt wrong, it should have been guilty or furtive, a betrayal of Shannon and what they'd shared, but it didn't. Gibbs paused for breath, and then pushed Andy over, and rolled on top of him. He held the kid's arms above his head and gazed down at him, gasping for breath, wondering what the hell had gotten into him. Andy gazed back up at him, chest heaving beneath Gibbs's knees. Gibbs surrendered; he moved his head down to kiss those inviting lips again, biting, nibbling and sucking on them, thrusting his tongue deep into Andy's mouth.

He thought that if Shannon could see him now she'd understand. She'd understand that this wasn't just a kiss – it was the kiss of life - a way back to being a living, breathing human being when he'd only been a shadow these past few months. He wasn't sure why it had

been this person, this mixed-up, irrepressible kid who had somehow brought him back to life, but it was. Maybe Andy wouldn't have been his choice, if he'd been given one, but Gibbs knew there was no way this would be happening if Andy had been a woman. He couldn't kiss or make love to a woman like he'd just done with Andy - not yet. He wasn't ready for that yet.

He kissed Andy for a long time – deep, powerful, intense kisses, full of need, like a drowning man welcoming air into his lungs after months of holding his breath. Then, finally, he rolled off him and lay down on the bed, gazing up at the ceiling blankly, feeling the blood course through his veins and the pounding of his heart.

He was alive. His body smelled of sex, his mouth tasted of Andy, and he was alive – and, what's more, he knew now that he wanted to stay that way.

Andy rolled over, propped his chin on his hand, and gazed at him.

"Shit," he whistled. "And, uh...wow. I thought you didn't do kissing."

"I don't," Gibbs said tiredly, and he reached up and traced one finger over Andy's swollen lips.

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2008

Waiting for someone to die wasn't an interesting pastime. Gibbs leaned against the drapes, and watched Tony watch his father sleep. Tony looked exhausted but it was late now, and it had been a long day.

He wondered if DiNozzo Senior would relent before he died and say the words Gibbs had asked him to say, but Tony's father was a stubborn old bastard so maybe not - although Gibbs hadn't yet given up hope.

After DiNozzo withdrew his hand Tony made no attempt to touch him again. He just sat there, gazing sightlessly at him as the old man slept, a faraway look in his eyes. Gibbs wondered what he was thinking and how he was feeling. Tony's unresolved issues with his father were an integral part of his make-up, so Gibbs had no doubt that this was affecting him deeply. He just hoped that Tony wasn't so badly broken when this was over that he wouldn't be able to put him back together again. Tony was resilient though – he knew that from experience. No matter how many times he got knocked down he always got back up again, the wide, flashy grin on his face distracting anyone from seeing the shadows in his eyes.

Gibbs's gaze travelled from Tony to the yellow, sickly face of the dying man in the bed, lips set in a rigid, implacable line. Gibbs knew something about dying. He'd been close to it a few times himself. Last time had been less than a year ago when he'd been trapped in a car at the bottom of a river...

Gibbs took a deep, ragged intake of breath, remembering the slow loss of consciousness as his lungs filled with water. In his mind's eye he could see Tony, swimming through the murky depths towards him. He could feel Tony's strong hands on his body, pulling him free, and the weight of Tony's arm wrapped around him as he carried him back up to the surface and dragged him out onto the dock.

Then there had been the firm, warm press of Tony's lips on his as he tried to breathe air back into him. The feel of those particular lips on his had resurrected a memory of the first kiss of life that Tony had given him, when he'd been dying in a very different way, and that was what had caused him to breathe in. Tony always did have a knack for bringing him back to life.

"You guys want some coffee?" Pete asked, from his place over by the door, cutting through Gibbs's thoughts and breaking into the silence.

"Sounds good," Gibbs said, relieved to have an excuse to move. "Tony?"

"What? Oh. Yeah." Tony glanced up at him, the faraway expression in his eyes fading. "In fact – I'll come with you. I need some air."

"I'll call the nurse back in to sit with him," Pete said.

Gibbs followed Tony out of the room and they walked in silence back down to the kitchen where the crowd had thinned considerably, and only a couple of diehards remained. Tony slipped out of the kitchen door and stood outside, leaning against the wall, gazing up at the full moon hanging overhead, his breath clouding the frosty air around him. Gibbs hung around by the window, wanting to give him space but keep an eye on him at the same time.

"He going to be okay?" Pete asked as he got out some cups. Gibbs thought it was ironic that a member of Tony's own family should be asking \*him\* that, like he was the expert on Tony and not them. And, in a way, he probably was.

"Yeah," he said. "He'll be fine. He's strong. Always bounces back."

"Mmm." Pete looked uncertain. "Look I don't know what you know about our family...uh...is it Gibbs, or do you like to be called Leroy, or what?"

"Gibbs is fine," he said curtly. Pete nodded.

"Just...I know you heard all that stuff in there but I don't want you to get the wrong idea," Pete said, looking almost embarrassed. "I know my uncle sounded like a total bastard when he was talking to Tony but he's always been good to me. When my dad died he took me under his wing - he put me through college, and offered me a position in his business...he's spoiled my kids rotten and he's charm itself with my wife. He's a good man, Gibbs, he really is. He just has this real blind spot where Tony is concerned."

"Okay." Gibbs shrugged.

"No...I mean...I don't want you to think I pushed Tony out or anything because I really didn't. He and I have always got along. I guess what I'm saying is that I didn't try and take Tony's place with my uncle - it just happened."

"Tony bear any grudges?" Gibbs asked, glancing out of the window, his gaze settling on the back of Tony's neck. His fingers itched with an urge to stroke the exposed piece of skin between the collar of Tony's shirt and his hairline.

"No...but you know Tony - even if he did, I doubt I'd know about it," Pete replied, with a shrug. "He never likes anyone to know what he's really feeling underneath the big act. You must have figured that out."

"Oh yeah." Gibbs nodded.

He knew all about the famous Tony misdirect, had witnessed it at close quarters over the past seven years – hell, he'd seen it at an embryonic stage, all those years ago, back in Ohio. Tony had perfected it since then though, and finely honed it during his years at NCIS. Gibbs was sometimes impressed by just how polished it now was, as buffed up, shiny and dazzling as could be. It had to be, to distract people and to keep them from catching a glimpse of the kid who got thrown out of school for sleeping with another boy; the son disowned by his father for not being what he was supposed to be; and the young, desperate hustler who turned tricks in bars.

Yeah, Tony had a lot to hide and god knows he'd learned how to hide it damn well. His personality was like quicksilver – the serious, capable agent always carefully concealed behind the attention-seeking idiot, so nobody would ever piece all the clues together and see the real man behind the mask. Except Gibbs – and he only saw because he remembered two weeks spent in a motel room back in Columbus, Ohio a very long time ago with a kid who called himself Andy.

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1991

With sleep, medication and rest – to say nothing of several sessions of highly pleasurable sex - Andy recovered quickly, and the cuts and bruises on his body soon faded. It was pathetically obvious that he loved having someone around who cared about his state of health, even if it *was* Gibbs whose actual displays of caring rarely went beyond an injunction to take his meds, and a terse insistence that he eat and sleep at regular intervals.

The few days in that room, eating, sleeping, fucking and not getting drop-down drunk every night had a positive effect on Gibbs too, and for the first time since his family died he started to feel like his old self again.

Gibbs was aware they couldn't stay locked up in this little bubble of make-believe forever though. He didn't have any plans for the future, because up until now he hadn't been sure

he had one, but he was damn sure that any such plans didn't include spending the rest of his life holed up in a motel room with a nineteen year old boy.

Gibbs was under no illusions that this was something that could last. Andy was soaking up every crumb of gruff paternal affection Gibbs could throw his way, and Gibbs was happy enough to throw it, such as it was, but he didn't want to start enjoying it too much. Kelly was gone, and Andy wasn't any kind of substitute. Gibbs knew he was using Andy as much as Andy was using him; they'd both found something in each other that they needed at this particular point in their lives. It was an escape, a lifeline, and it helped - god knows it helped - but it wasn't something that was going to go anywhere.

After a few days of avoiding the world Gibbs decided it was time to start figuring out a way to solve this. He took Andy out to a nice restaurant, both of them washed and shaved and wearing clean clothes, and waited until the kid had devoured enough to feed a small army, before sitting back, and clearing his throat. Andy looked up, anxiously.

"Is it now?" he asked.

"Is what now?" Gibbs frowned.

"I've been waiting for the lecture for days," Andy shrugged. "The one on the subject of allowing myself to get beaten up in exchange for cash."

"Well it was a pretty dumb move on your part," Gibbs said. "I know he paid well, but you've been off work and off college for days as a result so that kind of defeats the object, doesn't it?"

"I didn't \*know\* it was going to be that bad when I agreed to it, Jethro!" Andy protested. "I thought I could handle it."

"Well you couldn't, and that's my point," Gibbs told him, with an impatient flick of his fingers. "I also don't think you can handle being a hustler for much longer. To be honest, you're just not that great at it, and it's dangerous - you could get arrested, or hurt, or killed."

"Wow, you're a real optimist," Andy muttered.

"And you're a fantasist," Gibbs shot back. "Now speak to me, Andy - I need to understand what goes on in your head."

"Not much," Andy grinned.

"Seriously - what's the plan here?" Gibbs asked sharply, in no mood to be won around by the kid's undeniable charm. "Why don't you just quit college and get yourself a real job? Surely that's got to be better than sleeping in dumpsters and letting some guy kick you around?"

“No,” Andy said quietly.

“Why the hell not?” Gibbs demanded. “You can save up, go back to college later. It’ll buy you some time.”

“No,” Andy said again. “I’m not screwing this up. It has to be now.”

“Why?” Gibbs frowned, genuinely puzzled. “Is this about your dad? Are you trying to prove something to him? Do you think he’ll come around if you get your degree?”

Andy’s shoulders hunched automatically, and Gibbs sighed.

“You think he’ll love you if you can prove to him you’re worth it?” he asked quietly.

Andy laughed out loud. “Oh you think you’ve got me all figured out, don’t you? Well, it’s not that simple, Jethro.”

“Then why?” Gibbs gazed at Andy speculatively. “You said you wanted to be a private investigator but that isn’t the plan, is it?” he murmured.

“No.” Andy shook his head. “At least...it’s not the main plan. It’s the backup plan.”

Gibbs thought about those expensive sneakers in Andy’s bags, and the kid’s sheer athleticism, and all the sport he’d been watching on TV these past few days. Those shoes in Andy’s bag had been high tops, which meant...

“You tall enough to play pro basketball?” he asked. Andy looked up sharply.

“How did you...? Oh never mind,” he sighed. “You’re good at figuring stuff out about people, Jethro.”

Gibbs grinned, and rubbed his jaw. Maybe Franks had been right, and he *would* make a good agent.

“I’m still growing,” Andy said, “and I’m good – very good. It’s not all about height – I’m the best ball handler the team has.”

“So that’s it. This is your best shot at turning pro, which might just earn you enough money to impress your father and get you back in his good books - because I’m not sure what happened there, or what you did to piss him off but you’ve fucked up big time with him. If that doesn’t work, you get the degree at least and that’s more than he expects so maybe that’ll be enough.”

Andy threw back his head, downed the last droplets from his glass of coke and then glanced around, looking for the waitress.

“Could we leave now and go back to that bar? I liked you more when you were stinking

drunk," he said.

"No," Gibbs said firmly.

"What about you?" Andy flung at him. "You keep nosing around in my life but I know fuck all about you. Why do you cut your hair like that? Are you in the military? What's with the road trip and all the drinking? You said you were running away from something – what the hell are you running away from, Jethro? You fuck me like you've fucked guys before but you're not gay. You don't look at women when we're out but you sure as hell don't look at men either. You fuck like you just want to get off and you don't care how or who with, and then you get weird about kissing, like it does matter after all and you haven't figured out why. What's your story, Jethro?"

He said all this in a low, even tone, not even close to losing his temper, but Gibbs was impressed. It was like a switch had been flicked, and he was seeing a very different side to Andy. The kid was undeniably smart – much smarter than he seemed with all the clowning around. Gibbs leaned back in his seat and gazed at Andy, without saying a word. Andy gazed back at him defiantly but Gibbs was confident that he wasn't the one who was going to break. He started tapping his fingers on the table in a dull, monotonous beat.

They stared each other out for a long time, the tapping of Gibbs's fingers the only sound between them, and then finally Andy dropped his gaze and looked down at the table.

"My father is a drunk and a bully," he said. Gibbs stopped tapping, and leaned forward. "He paid for me to go to all these expensive schools but he never once asked me what I wanted. He had all these plans for me – I was supposed to get a business degree and join him in the family business but that's not me." Andy glanced up at Gibbs, and he looked suddenly much older than his nineteen years. "Seriously, that's not me. I want to have some fun, Jethro, and I don't think his plans included that. If I can't make it in basketball then I want to be a private investigator, or a cop, or something cool. Besides, if I worked with him I'd annoy the hell out of him. I also wouldn't be able to..."

He broke off with a shrug.

"Hide that overactive libido of yours?" Gibbs asked. "And the fact that you're not exactly fussy about which gender you sleep with? He know about that?"

Andy was very still for a moment, and then he gave a curt little nod. "Yeah. He knows," he said tightly, and Gibbs had no doubt at all there was a story there. He wondered if that was behind the cold tone of that letter the lawyer had written to Andy on his father's behalf.

"If he already knows..." Gibbs began.

"Knowing is one thing – accepting is something else." Andy made a face. "He's kind of unforgiving. He divorced my mom because she embarrassed him by getting drunk in public the whole time but he drinks more than she ever did – he just hides it better. Hiding's okay – getting caught isn't."

Gibbs leaned back in his seat for a moment, and thought about it. If he was going to get involved – and he didn't kid himself for a second that he wasn't already involved up to his eyeballs – then he needed to know more.

"You're what – a sophomore? You must have made some friends at college – couldn't you at least bunk down with one of them until you figure out a way to make some money?"

"You don't get it," Andy said, with a firm shake of his head. "I don't want them to \*know\*."

"Why the hell not – if they're your friends?" Gibbs frowned. "Your mom was paying your way through college but she died. Your dad won't help out – where's the shame in that?"

"Like I said...I don't want them to know," Andy stonewalled, his eyes narrowing.

"You don't want them to know you're broke, you don't want them to know you're a hustler, you don't want them to know you're bisexual...that's one hell of a double life you're building up around you, Andy," Gibbs pointed out. Andy shrugged. "You sure you can keep it all straight in your head?" Gibbs asked. "Can't be easy."

"I can handle it," Andy said confidently, and Gibbs had no doubt at all that he could.

"If the basketball thing doesn't work out, you'd make one hell of an undercover cop," he grunted. Andy grinned, clearly loving that idea. "So when's your next game?" Gibbs asked unexpectedly. Andy looked surprised.

"Thursday night. Why?"

"Your dad ever come watch you play?" Gibbs asked. Andy laughed.

"Nope. Never." He shook his head vehemently. Gibbs suppressed an urge to drive to Long Island right now, find Andy's father, and slam his fist into the man's face. He thought he was doing well, unravelling the mystery that was Andy, but there was still something that wasn't slotting into place, and he couldn't put his finger on what it was.

"I want to watch you play," he said suddenly. "Can I come along on Thursday night?"

Andy's face was a study in various emotions – surprise, bemusement, and an almost pathetic kind of joy. Gibbs saw the ten year old in him again, and while he knew he was just getting in deeper it was worth it to see that look in Andy's eyes.

"Yeah. You can come," Andy said casually, as if his entire face hadn't just lit up at the suggestion. He thought about that for a moment, and then leaned forward, and spoke straight into Gibbs's ear. "And talking about coming..." he whispered.

Gibbs sighed.

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2008

"You guys must be hungry," Pete said to Gibbs. "Why don't I arrange some food? Take out okay? Chinese?"

"Fine." Gibbs shrugged. He was hungry but with all that was going on he hadn't given it much thought. Neither he nor Tony had eaten since that sandwich on the plane hours ago, and Tony wasn't exactly famous for doing without food for any length of time.

Pete walked away to arrange it and Gibbs decided that Tony had had long enough on his own out there.

He went outside, and took a sharp intake of breath as the icy cold air hit him. Tony had left his jacket inside and wasn't wearing anything warmer than a shirt. He had to be freezing. He was standing underneath a single outdoor light, which shone on his dark hair, illuminating a few paler strands, making him look more like Andy than Gibbs cared to think about right now.

"Christ it's cold out here," Gibbs said, going over to stand beside him. Tony glanced at him.

"Yeah. Feels good. My head was pounding being locked up in that stuffy dark room. Feels like it's starting to clear now."

"Yeah." Gibbs nodded, glad that Tony was acknowledging just how goddamn awful that room had been. "Pete's getting us some food. I said Chinese would be okay."

"Thanks." Tony looked down at his shoes, and then glanced at Gibbs. "Sorry you're being dragged into all this, boss," he said quietly.

"My choice to come along," Gibbs shrugged.

"About that..." Tony began, looking up, directly at him.

His face was illuminated by the overhead light, and his gaze was open and honest, and in that instant Gibbs knew that Tony remembered every single minute of those two weeks all those years ago, and he knew exactly who he'd spent them with.

Gibbs wasn't surprised; he didn't believe in coincidences, so he'd always suspected that Tony had tracked him down to NCIS and applied for the job with the agency in the express hope of seeing him again. He thought maybe it had started out as curiosity on Tony's part, just the usual DiNozzo nosiness, but then Gibbs had been intrigued enough about how the kid had turned out to offer him the job, despite the many black marks on his resume, and Tony had clearly been intrigued enough to take it. Gibbs remembered Tony's job interview, and how they'd both pretended those two weeks in a motel room had never happened – just like they were still doing, seven years later.

Gibbs shifted his weight slowly from one foot to the other, gazing back at Tony stonily, his eyes hard and his face impassive, giving nothing away. Gibbs knew that Tony was looking for some sign – any sign at all – that would show that Gibbs remembered but Gibbs couldn't give him that sign – with it came accusations, revelations and no doubt a whole truckload of unintended consequences.

If only he'd known back then what he knew now, would he have still done the same thing? He didn't even have to think about that; he knew he would. Tony was here, wasn't he? He was here, alive and if not exactly well then better than anyone might have expected given kind of life he'd been leading back then. What was it Mike Franks had once said to him after the murder of his family? That he was battered and bruised but not broken? That was Tony too – maybe that was as good as it got for either of them, considering who they were and what they'd done in their lives – and what had been done to them.

Tony's gaze faltered when he didn't find what he was searching for and he shook his head. "Thanks," he muttered, looking back down at his feet.

"Pete thinks you might hate him," Gibbs said. Tony looked up again immediately, an expression of surprise on his face. "For stealing your inheritance," Gibbs explained.

"Too right I hate the thieving little shit," Tony replied, and then he grinned. It wasn't up to his usual standard but it was something. "Of course I don't hate him," he said. "Pete's one of life's good guys. My Uncle Nico was as much of a bastard as my father. Pete and I used to get together and swap horror stories. My dad didn't have a good word to say about Pete when Uncle Nico was alive – he moaned about him all the time because Pete was everything he wanted me to be, and he was so competitive with my uncle that he felt like Nico had got one up on him by having this perfect child. Then Uncle Nico died, and I got thrown out of school again, and Pete was heading off to do a business degree so Dad decided Pete was the son he should have had. Turns out Uncle Nico was up to his eyeballs in debt when he died, so Dad put Pete through college and then welcomed him into the business after. He got to wash his hands of the real son and get his hands on the prodigal. That wasn't Pete's fault though and I don't blame him for it."

"Christ that's fucked up," Gibbs said, startled by that story into saying more than he'd intended. He looked into Tony's eyes and saw the shadows that lurked there, and wondered how Andy had felt, still barely more than a kid, knowing his dad had found such an easy replacement for him. That put a whole new dimension on the way he'd viewed Gibbs all those years ago. Suddenly that request that he call Gibbs "Dad" took on a different perspective. He'd seen his father get a replacement son – maybe it wouldn't be so hard for him to get a replacement father. If only things were that simple.

"Welcome to the DiNozzo family," Tony grinned. "'Fucked up' is the family motto. At least Dad's always been honest with me about how totally worthless he thinks I am – he's never lied to me about it."

Gibbs thought about the lie he'd asked Tony's father to tell just a short time ago, and then about that massive great lie he'd told Tony seventeen years ago, and was still telling him

now, in a way. Who was the good father, he wondered? The one who lied to his son - or the one who subjected him to the brutal, honest truth?

"Truth's over-rated," he muttered, leaning back against the wall of the house.

"Yeah, well, you would say that, boss," Tony said, with a sideways glance at him. Gibbs raised an eyebrow. "Your track record with telling us anything isn't exactly stellar," Tony pointed out. "You had to be blown up and comatose before we found out about your past, and then there were a couple of cases where you hid stuff from us. Important stuff. Stuff we should have been told," he added firmly.

Gibbs considered slapping the back of his head but Tony was right – and he guessed it took them being here, with all that was going on around them, to make him brave enough to say it.

"You can't talk," he pointed out with a grunt because Tony was the master of the misdirect after all. Gibbs just kept his mouth shut and dared people to ask, whereas Tony sent them off in the wrong direction with a series of smart comments and idiotic jokes.

"Yeah. Well." Tony flushed, the tips of his ears turning a pale pink colour under the lamplight. Neither of them wanted to go there.

"Would you rather be lied to?" Gibbs asked. "If it was a lie designed to help you, or maybe even to protect you?"

Tony turned to him, and they stared at each other for a long moment, the past hanging perilously between them.

"Depends on the lie," Tony said softly.

## Chapter 2 by Xanthe

1991

Gibbs took his place in the gym and glanced at his watch. Andy had been like a cat that got the cream for the past few days. He was fully recovered from the beating he'd received, most of the cuts and bruises now almost completely gone, and he had so much energy that it had been all Gibbs could do keep up with him.

The sex, predictably, had been both frequent and satisfying, and between bouts Andy had taken him around town and showed him just about everything there was to see. Gibbs had also insisted he attend his classes again, and hang around with his friends; Gibbs had given him a key to the motel room so he could come and go. It was intriguing, getting to know the college student instead of the hustler. He could now see that there were two very distinct sides to Andy's personality and he suspected Andy was very different when he was with his friends compared to the way he was when Gibbs was alone with him.

Gibbs sat back as the teams emerged from the locker room, and saw Andy search the crowd for him, his gaze restless until it settled upon him. Then he gave a big grin and a massive thumbs-up sign. Gibbs rolled his eyes.

Andy was right about one thing – he *\*was\** good at basketball. In fact he was the best on a strong college team. Gibbs watched him leap around the court like a hurricane, outclassing his opponents, a whirling force of nature as he passed, dribbled and jumped. He was infused with a wild, exuberant energy that was familiar to Gibbs from his performance in the bedroom. All the same, Gibbs wondered whether his performance on court was enhanced to a certain degree by having someone in the audience to show off for. Andy always did like to have an audience – whether for his idiotic jokes, endless knowledge of movie trivia, or even just when he wanted his erection admired.

Andy's team won easily, 52 – 29, and Andy accounted for almost half his team's points. He wasn't as tall as some of the other players but he had a springy leap that made up for that, and his cocky sense of triumph when he scored and the low-level chat he kept up trying to distract the players on the other team made it clear that he was having a great time.

Gibbs went down courtside after the game ended, and Andy came running over.

"Did you see that three pointer?" he asked Gibbs excitedly. He'd scored from mid-court just before the buzzer, a testament to both his timing and his showmanship. "Did you see what I did there?"

"Yeah, I saw," Gibbs said, grinning because Andy's excitement was infectious. At that moment a throng of Andy's team-mates and friends surged over to join them, in a testosterone-fuelled mass of exuberance, excited by their victory.

"Hey, Tony, we're going to be pouring the beer down your throat tonight," one of them said, grabbing Andy in a neck lock. Andy pushed him back and they had a minor tussle.

“Did you see those hot girls watching in the second row?” another kid asked, gesturing. Andy glanced over to where a gaggle of girls was standing, pretending they weren’t looking at the team but casting surreptitious glances their way all the same. Andy’s face split from ear to ear with a grin that boasted of his supreme confidence in the imminence of a new sexual conquest.

“Tonight, my friends, we get lucky,” he leered. “Just observe the master at work – watch and learn!”

Gibbs stood back and studied Andy interacting with his friends, and then, suddenly, the last piece of that jigsaw slotted into place. Andy didn’t want his friends knowing about the reality of his life because he wanted \*this\*. He wanted acceptance, wanted to keep up the persona he’d had when he started out here. He was the frat boy, the player, the rich kid without a serious thought in his head, and that was how he fitted in here. It was what his friends wanted him to be, what they expected of him - and what he wanted to be when he was with them. They didn’t want to know about nights in a motel room with a man old enough to be his father, and they sure as hell didn’t want to know about him spending nights in a dumpster, or blowing strangers in bar restrooms for cash.

No, this, right here, was the world Andy belonged to – it was the only world his upbringing had equipped him for, and he was trying to hang onto it as best he could by caddying at the country club and hanging out with the frat boys, kids who had led similar lives to him. No wonder he didn’t want them knowing – Andy’s experiences would set him too far apart from them, and change the nature of their friendship, and, fundamentally, Andy just had too much pride to allow that to happen. Gibbs could understand that kind of pride; the unbending kind that would break rather than yield. Finally he recognised in Andy something of himself, and he felt a certain empathy for him and what he was trying to do, misguided and dangerous though it was.

One of the kids joking around with Andy turned to him, and Gibbs recognised – too late – the boy he’d talked to at the country club the previous week.

“Hey – you’re Tony’s dad aren’t you?” he asked.

Gibbs looked at Andy for one long second, and Andy looked back at him, with anxious eyes, both of them clearly wondering what he was going to say – not least because the kid had used Andy’s real name. In the end, the answer was simple – there was only one thing he could say.

“Yeah,” Gibbs said, putting an arm around Andy’s shoulder and squeezing. “Yeah, that’s right - I’m Tony’s dad.”

He didn’t even want to think about the way that made Andy look at him, because he was all too well aware of just how much that had meant to the kid. Andy slid a sweaty arm around Gibbs’s waist, and leaned against him for a moment.

“Thanks, Dad,” he whispered into his ear.

Noise erupted around them as another group of their friends joined in the celebrations, but all Gibbs could see was Andy, looking over at him every few seconds, his eyes glowing. Then the team left to hit the showers and the crowd started to disperse.

Gibbs walked over to where the coach was sitting, and took a seat beside him. He was a big man, with thick, dark hair, and a bushy moustache.

“Good game,” Gibbs said. “I’m...uh Tony DiNozzo’s father.” He held out his hand and the coach took it and shook.

“Nice to finally meet you,” he said. “Tony’s told us a lot about you.”

“Really?” Gibbs raised an eyebrow, wondering what the hell Andy had told them about his father.

“Yeah.” The coach nodded, grinning, the ends of his moustache drooping over the sides of his mouth, giving him a lugubrious look. “Way he made it sound you’re about the best dad in the world. Always sending him money, calling him before each game to wish him luck – said you were too busy working to come watch a game, but looks like you finally found the time to see your boy play.”

“Yeah.” Gibbs shook his head wryly at the image of the fantasy dad Andy had created. It sounded very Andy. “Listen...just how good is Tony?” he asked. “He was pretty impressive tonight but does he have a chance of turning pro?”

The man hesitated before replying, obviously weighing his words. “If he could make it to the pros, then he’d be here on a scholarship and he isn’t, as you know.” The coach stroked his moustache thoughtfully. “He’s good - damn good - but I think he knows he’s never going to be tall enough to turn pro.”

Gibbs nodded. He’d suspected this was another of Andy’s fantasies, and he also suspected that Andy knew it was a fantasy too – just like having the perfect father, and living the life of a spoiled rich kid when he was flat out broke and hustling to get by. All the same, if the fantasy kept him in college and helped him get his degree, what did it matter?

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Andy emerge from the locker room, his hair wet, and he and his friends made a beeline for the pretty girls standing courtside. Andy was grinning, clowning around and talking too fast – most of it total crap Gibbs suspected but the girl he was trying to impress was giggling inanely so it was working.

This was where a kid like him belonged - not out there, turning tricks in bars. Gibbs turned back to the coach, and held out his hand.

“Thanks,” he said. “You’ve been a great help.”

“No problem, Mr DiNozzo. Nice to finally meet you. You take care now.”

Gibbs returned to the motel room alone. It felt strange, after the past couple of weeks of being holed up here with Andy, to have the place to himself. He found himself missing the kid but he wasn't expecting him back tonight. They hadn't exactly talked about it but Gibbs was pretty sure that a hot girl who was willing to put out trumped your dad any time. He packed up his stuff, which didn't take long, and then he sat down and wrote a short note:

Dear Andy,

It's time for me to move on. The room is paid for until the end of the month so that gives you three weeks to figure some stuff out. I've left you some cash under the pillow for food. Do not go back on the streets.

Take care,

J

He left it on the table with a grimace. He knew this was going to trigger all of Andy's abandonment issues but it was the best way. Andy would bounce back – it was a knack he had. Besides, Gibbs really did need to move on. It was time.

He glanced around the room, at the ruffled bed where they'd fucked so many times, and at the TV, which had almost driven him insane from an exposure overload. Then he picked up his bag and left.

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2008

Tony gazed at Gibbs and Gibbs gazed back at him. He could tell him, he thought. He could just open his mouth and tell him. Maybe it'd even be a relief after all these years but they were both in such a different place now, and such different men. Did either of them want to be reminded of those two weeks in that motel room seventeen years ago and how fucked up their lives had been back then? What the hell must Tony think of him, he wondered. Last thing Tony knew Gibbs had abandoned him, just like his real father. So why come chasing after him ten years later, and why work with him for seven years, neither of them ever saying a word about it?

Pete broke the impasse by sticking his head out of the door. "Food's here," he said. "Damn – it's freezing out here. You guys should come in."

Tony gave one final glance at Gibbs, and then returned to the kitchen. Gibbs felt a muscle in his jaw twitching with tension. "Depends on the lie", Tony had said. Well, this was a massive lie, too big to be ignored if it ever came out; the kind of lie that would change everything between him and his agent. Maybe it wouldn't come out, and they could continue to play this game of purposefully not remembering around each other. It would sure as hell be easier that way.

He was kind of surprised the truth hadn't come out already, maybe during one of those Christmas Day phone calls between father and son, but it clearly hadn't. He'd braced himself these past seven years, ever since Tony joined NCIS, knowing that if Tony ever found out then he'd say something – he'd have to - but he never had so Gibbs was sure he didn't know.

He took a deep breath of the icy air, and followed the two cousins inside. That feeling he'd had in his gut when he woke up this morning had been right, and the storm clouds were now all around them. He had no idea how this would play out - all he could do was wait and see.

He joined Tony and his cousin at the dining table where they were opening up the take out. He took his seat opposite Tony, who, now he'd got his head together, was back in full charm offensive mode, mask firmly in place so nobody would see how much he was hurting right now.

"For an almost-dead guy he has a lot to say," Tony grinned. "I thought he'd be more...you know...out of it."

"He has been these past couple of days," Pete said. "That's why I called you. That conversation he just had with you is the most he's said to anyone in a week."

"Well, you know, this is his last chance to win one final argument with me," Tony said, handing Gibbs a take-out box of noodles. "I can see why that would make him rally. He always did like a good fight. Especially with me."

Gibbs sat back in his seat and ate. He was hungrier than he'd thought and the hot food warmed him after being outside in the cold night air.

"So how's business?" Tony asked Pete.

"It's good." Pete nodded, talking around a mouthful of rice. "Your dad was still coming into the office and bugging the hell out of everyone until a few weeks ago. That was despite officially retiring last year." He grinned at Tony and rolled his eyes.

"Poor Pete." Tony grinned back.

"His business instincts are still sharp though," Pete said. "We're in good shape - just about to expand into a big new office building."

"Hah – see, if I'd joined the business, like he wanted, I'd have bankrupted you years ago," Tony grinned. Pete laughed.

"Yeah, I remember when we both helped out there together that one summer," Pete said. "You were about fourteen? I've never had so much fun or got into so much trouble – you were just crazy back then, some of the stunts you pulled. I hope you're a better federal agent than you were an office boy."

"He is," Gibbs grunted.

Tony looked up, startled. Gibbs pushed the box of noodles towards him. Tony hadn't put anything on his plate yet, and Gibbs had a feeling this was going to be a long night.

"Eat," he said.

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1991

It was raining. It rained all night, just like the night he pulled Andy from the dumpster a couple of weeks ago. Gibbs enjoyed driving through the rain – it kept him focussed, and matched his mood somehow. He arrived at the offices of Weston & Grant just as they were opening the next morning.

The receptionist didn't sound like the woman he'd spoken to on the phone so maybe she was a different one.

"I need to speak to Daniel Weston," he said.

"Do you have an appointment?" She glanced at a large, leather-bound appointment diary on her desk.

"No, but he'll see me," Gibbs said confidently. "Tell him it's about Tony DiNozzo, and tell him it's urgent."

She looked at him with alarmed eyes, and Gibbs guessed that nothing this dramatic ever usually happened in the sedate offices of Weston & Grant; then she nodded, and disappeared.

A couple of minutes later a tall, bespectacled young man emerged from a nearby office, a puzzled frown on his face. He had an earnest, scholarly look about him, and Gibbs immediately got the impression that this was a man of integrity.

"Uh...I'm Daniel Weston. You wanted to see me, Mr...?" He held out his hand, looking at Gibbs speculatively.

"Gibbs." Gibbs shook the man's hand firmly. "And yes I do. It's about Tony. Can I have a few moments of your time?"

"For Tony – yes," Weston told him, ushering him into his office. Gibbs glanced around at the orderly stack of files on the desk and on the floor. This man was methodical and hard-working. He wasn't some hot-shot high flier. He was someone who had to work at what he did, and was conscientious to a fault.

Weston sat behind his desk and gestured that Gibbs take a seat in front of it.

"Is Tony okay?" Weston asked anxiously, leaning forward. "Someone called here last week when I was on vacation and said he'd been hurt."

"That was me, and he had," Gibbs said. "It seems his father is less concerned about him than you though."

Weston sat back in his chair with a sigh. "I've known the DiNozzo family all my life. Tony is like a kid brother to me. A real handful of a kid brother," he added, with a faintly exasperated smile. "I can't comment on Tony's relationship with his father but I'm fond of the kid. And you didn't answer my question – is he okay?"

"He's recovered physically if that's what you mean," Gibbs said. "But he's in trouble and needs help – financial help."

Daniel Weston shook his head. "I can relay this news to his father but I'm afraid I already know what his answer will be."

"So do I," Gibbs replied shortly. "So don't bother telling him. He's not interested. I want something different from you."

Weston frowned.

"I want to employ your services," Gibbs said. "Will you take me on as a client – for Tony?"

"I don't understand," Weston said.

"I have some money that I'll never touch," Gibbs told him, thinking of the payout he'd got from Shannon's death that was burning a hole in his bank account "It's no use to me but it'll help Tony. It comes with conditions."

Weston was frowning even more now.

"He passes all his classes – hell, he attends all his classes - and he works hard. That's where you come in. If he fails or flunks out then the money stops; you make that clear to him."

"I'm not sure I really understand," Weston said.

"Yes you do," Gibbs said curtly. "I want to help him but I don't want him knowing it's me. I don't want him feeling like he owes me anything, or he has to repay me. When he graduates he's on his own. Money stops."

"I won't lie, Mr Gibbs," Weston told him. "Are you asking me to pretend the money comes from his father?"

"No." Gibbs shook his head. "I'm asking you not to say it doesn't."

"I don't see how..." Weston began.

"It's easy," Gibbs cut in tersely. "How about something like – "Dear Tony, I've been instructed to send you the enclosed. Your tuition, board and rent will be paid for monthly from now on...etc etc". No need to say \*who\* instructed you. Tell him to send any correspondence on the subject to you, not to his father. I believe Tony's father has already made it pretty clear he doesn't want to hear from his son in any case."

"And if Tony asks who the money is from?"

"If he asks, which I doubt he will, then I'm sure you'll think of something to tell him - but I want to remain anonymous," Gibbs said firmly.

Weston gazed at him owlshly from behind his spectacles.

"Do you want to help Tony or not?" Gibbs asked him softly. "You said he was like a kid brother to you."

Weston thought about it for a moment, and then leaned forward again. Gibbs noticed how sharp his blue eyes were, behind the spectacles. This man was nobody's fool.

"What kind of a person \*ever\* has money they know they'll never touch?" he asked.

"Someone who lost the two people he loved most and doesn't want the cash settlement he got for it," he replied tersely. Weston's eyes widened. Gibbs took a check out of his pocket and handed it to Weston.

"This won't be enough to see him through another three years of college," Weston told him, glancing at it.

"I know." Gibbs nodded. "I'll send you a sum monthly until he graduates."

"You sure you can afford this?" Weston's gaze travelled over his unshaven jaw and his casual clothes, dishevelled from his long, overnight drive.

Gibbs gave a tight grin. "I can afford it," he said. "Have you got any more objections or will you handle this for me?"

Weston thought about it for a moment, and then nodded. "I'll do it. To be honest...you're not the kind of man I can imagine many people say no to."

Gibbs managed a wry grin at that, and rubbed the stubble on his jaw thoughtfully. "Don't tell Tony's father about this," he said. "This is just between me and Tony. It's got nothing to do with him."

Weston nodded again. Then he got up, came around to the front of the desk, and perched

on it, right in front of Gibbs. He leaned forward and gazed at him, sharp blue eyes blinking earnestly from behind his glasses.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked.

"Like I said – I lost everyone I loved and I was looking for a reason to get up in the morning," Gibbs told him. "Now I have one. I'm helping myself as much as I'm helping Tony."

"What did he tell you about himself?" Weston asked. "I wouldn't want to take your money under false pretences. He might have lied."

"Oh he lied – about a lot of things," Gibbs laughed. "But I'm good at seeing through lies. It's kind of my job – or at least it will be, soon."

Weston raised an eyebrow. Gibbs got up and drew an envelope out of his jacket pocket.

"Here's my address if you need to contact me," he said, handing the envelope to Weston. "Send me his exam grades at the end of every semester and any updates you think I should know. Do not give him my address. Do not tell him who his anonymous benefactor is. Do not contact me unless it's important."

Gibbs held out his hand and Weston took it, and shook it firmly. "I still don't understand why you're doing this," he said. "What's Tony to you?"

There were all kinds of suspicions in Weston's eyes, and Gibbs thought that at least some of them were pretty much well-founded. He wondered what Weston knew of Tony's sexual preferences, and whether he'd guessed how he might be funding himself through college since his mom died.

"He's just a kid who needs a dad," he said. "And I'm a dad who just lost a kid. That's all." It wasn't all – it was a hell of a lot more complicated and fucked up than that - but it was something Weston could understand. His expression softened.

"I'm sorry – and thank you, Mr Gibbs. This really is most extraordinarily generous of you. I'll make sure your instructions are followed to the letter."

"Good." Gibbs nodded curtly, and then turned on his heel and left.

He walked down the road to a phone booth, stepped inside, and reached into his jacket pocket for a scrap of paper that had been scrunched up in there for weeks. He dialled the number.

"Franks? It's Gibbs. That job you offered me? I'll take it," he said. He heard the NIS agent give a gruff laugh on the other end of the line.

"Knew you'd see sense eventually," Franks said. "You can start on Monday."

"I'll be there," Gibbs said. That only gave him a couple of days but he didn't give a damn about that; the sooner the better.

"8am sharp." Franks added. "Don't be late. I'm a hell of a boss to piss off." And then he put the phone down.

Gibbs made his way back to his car and sat there, gazing at the steering wheel. He'd finally come to terms with his loss back in that motel room but learning to live with it was going to take longer. Every day he woke up and they weren't here it hit him in his gut and made him wonder what the hell he had to live for. Now he had no choice. For the next three years he had to get up every day and go to work to make enough money to put Andy through college. Maybe, when those three years were up, he'd have found some way to live with the gaping hole in his heart.

Maybe.

~\*~

2008

Tony fell silent as they finished their meal, and Gibbs guessed they both felt an imminent sense of dread about going back into that room. He wasn't sure if he preferred it when they all stood quietly around at the bedside, or when Tony and his father tore into each other. Neither was particularly appealing but if Tony wanted him to go back in there with him then he'd go.

Finally they couldn't delay it any more and Tony pushed his plate away and stood up.

"Time to go back into the ring for round three," he muttered. "I think he's ahead on points but there's still some fight left in me."

"You've been pulling your punches," Gibbs pointed out. "I understand why but keep your guard up and make sure he doesn't land a knockout blow." He gestured with his fists in front of his face, in a defensive posture.

Tony shook his head ruefully. "One thing you need to know about my dad, boss – he always wins."

They walked slowly up the stairs and back into the room. DiNozzo was still asleep. Gibbs went over to his usual spot next to the window. He hooked his finger in the dark green silk drapes, pulled them aside an inch, and looked out at the full moon and the bright stars shining in the clear black sky.

He turned back to find that Tony had sat down in a chair beside the bed again, and Pete was sitting at the end of the bed. Gibbs pulled up a chair, sat down by the window, and listened to Tony and Pete chat in quiet voices about little stuff – mainly Pete's wife and kids. After an hour or so, DiNozzo opened his eyes and looked at his son as if he didn't know who he was, and then recognition crept in and he grunted.

"You still here, Tony?" he asked. "I thought you'd have left by now. Where are you staying anyhow? Not here." He glanced at Pete suspiciously. "I told Pete you weren't staying here."

"Not here, no. In the hotel on Old Country Road," Tony assured him.

"Good. I meant what I said back then, after you got expelled from Drewes and I sent you to live with your mother. I don't want you spending another night under my roof," DiNozzo said.

"Yeah, I know," Tony said wearily. "Seriously, Dad – you're dying. Let's forget about this stuff. Pete and I were just reminiscing about the good old days."

"You remember when Tony and me came to work in the office that summer when we were kids?" Pete said, leaning forward, doing his best to aid Tony in the whole "let's play nice" thing he was clearly working so hard on right now.

"I remember," DiNozzo chuckled.

"I think you were relieved when fall came," Pete added, with a grin.

"You had ambition, even then, Pete," DiNozzo told him. "I could see that. You didn't fool around like Tony. You knew what you wanted to do with your life. Tony never did."

"I did," Tony said quietly. "It just wasn't what you wanted to hear so you never listened."

"Oh yeah, I remember now - you thought you could throw a ball around for a living. Whatever happened to that, huh?"

Tony's shoulders hunched, and Gibbs winced. "I busted my knee, Dad," Tony said. Then he sighed. "And I wasn't good enough in any case."

DiNozzo raised his eyes heavenward, and Gibbs wondered if this was the knockout blow he'd been trying to land since he'd first set eyes on his son again. He was a stubborn old bastard, and this was his last chance to win this old argument with his son before he died.

"Story of your life," DiNozzo muttered. "And what did you major in again, Tony?"

"Phys Ed," Tony said quietly.

"Phys Ed," DiNozzo crowed. He might be dying but he had scented blood and he could see he had his son on the ropes now. Tony looked defeated, his body language completely dejected. He'd taken too many body blows and it wasn't a fair fight in any case; Tony was essentially too nice to fight back as hard as he could against a dying man. Gibbs thought maybe it was time Tony retired from the ring; he might not be able to win but there was no reason why he should stay and allow his father to kick him when he was down.

"Phys Ed." DiNozzo shook his head again. "Pete here got a business degree, and my son studied Physical Education. What the hell damn use did you think that would be?"

Gibbs wondered if he should step in and get Tony out of here, but then it was too late, and suddenly that dead body he'd been dreading, that seventeen year old corpse he'd been waiting for all this time, blindsided him by rising to the surface with unexpected speed.

"If you thought it was such a waste of time, why did you help pay for it after Mom died?" Tony asked quietly.

DiNozzo gazed at him blankly. "Pay for it? I told you, Tony, I wouldn't spend another dime on you after you got expelled from Drewes. That was your last chance – you knew that and you blew it. I wasn't going to throw good money after bad. I didn't pay for anything."

"But then you..." Tony paused, a puzzled look on his face. Gibbs got up from his chair. Tony glanced at his father, and then at Gibbs, and Gibbs could see the exact moment the shocked realisation showed on his face. "No, no of course you didn't," Tony said softly to his father. He ran a hand through his hair, and got up. "I've been...kind of an idiot," he said in a strangled tone. He glanced at Gibbs again, his jaw tight, and then he turned and strode out of the room.

Pete gave Gibbs a startled look.

"I'll go after him," Gibbs said.

His heart was pounding as he ran down the stairs after Tony. He had no idea what he was going to say when he caught up with him, and that look in Tony's eyes hadn't been pretty.

The front door was open when he reached it; he ran out onto the driveway just in time to see the lights on their rental car disappearing as Tony screeched out of the gate at high speed. Gibbs cursed, and went back into the house, slamming the door behind him.

"What the hell is going on?" Pete asked, coming down the stairs. "Did Tony finally have enough? I'm not surprised. My uncle was behaving like a total bastard. What happened back there though? Did I miss something?"

"Yeah. You missed something," Gibbs told him. He got out his cellphone and punched number one on his speed-dial; he wasn't exactly expecting Tony to pick up so he wasn't surprised when his call went straight to voicemail, Tony's teasing, pre-recorded voice at odds with the way Gibbs had just seen him.

"Maybe he needs some time to himself. That was pretty heavy," Pete said.

"Maybe." Gibbs pressed number two on his speed-dial; it rang a few times and then McGee's bleary voice answered.

"Hello? Boss? Is that you? You do know it's two o' clock in the morning don't you?" McGee

said with a yawn.

"I don't care what the hell time it is, McGee – I need you to get a fix on Tony's cellphone."

"Tony's cellphone...is Tony in trouble?" McGee asked, his voice suddenly sounding wide awake. Gibbs could hear him getting up.

"Just do it, McGee," Gibbs snapped.

"On it, boss. Uh, boss? Where are you?" McGee asked. "Tony said something about going to Long Island but he didn't say why..."

"Just call me back when you have a fix on him," Gibbs said, in a voice like thunder. He snapped the phone shut to find Pete gazing at him, a startled look on his face. "What?" he growled.

"You sound just like my uncle chewing someone out at the office, back before he got ill." He gestured with his head towards the upstairs bedroom. "Tony must find that kind of familiar."

Gibbs's anxiety spilled over in the way it usually did – to full blown rage. "I am nothing at all like that bastard upstairs!" he roared. Pete took a step back, and Gibbs fought to get himself back under control. "I'm a different kind of bastard," he said in a calmer voice. Pete managed a nervous grin.

Gibbs commenced pacing around anxiously, waiting for McGee to call back. Pete sat down on the bottom step of the stairs, clearly unsure what the hell was going on.

"Is Tony going to be okay?" he asked.

"If I can get to see him, and talk to him, and explain something to him, then he will be," Gibbs said, hoping Tony didn't lose control of his car driving like a maniac out there.

"Can you tell me what's going on?" Pete asked.

"No," Gibbs replied shortly. His cellphone rang and he snapped it open. "McGee? What do you have for me?"

"I've got a fix on Tony's GPS – he's...well he seems to be driving around in circles," McGee told him, in a puzzled voice. "What's going on, boss?"

Gibbs thought about it. He didn't like the idea of Tony driving around out there in his current state of mind, but on the other hand he thought Tony might need the space right now. The last thing he wanted to do was make it worse by requisitioning Pete's car and driving after him while he was circling around out there. That might end badly.

"Nothing," he said to McGee. "Just keep an eye on the signal and tell me immediately he

stops somewhere."

He snapped his phone shut again and turned to Pete. "I need your car," he said.

"Okay." Pete, like so many people before him, knew not to argue with Gibbs when he was in this kind of mood. "Look, I'm really worried about Tony. He looked really shaken when he left," Pete said, getting up and reaching into his pocket for his keys.

"Go back to your uncle," Gibbs told him. "I'll take care of Tony. He isn't your responsibility – he's mine."

"He's my cousin!" Pete protested.

"Yeah." Gibbs gave him a scathing look. "And you've been so scared of that vicious old man up there that you never stood up to him the way Tony did, did you? At least Tony's got some balls."

He grabbed the keys out of Pete's hand, ignoring his stupefied look, and strode out of the front door, slamming it shut loudly behind him. He found Pete's car and got in. At that moment his cellphone rang again.

"McGee – what do you have for me?"

"He's just pulled up somewhere," McGee said, and Gibbs could hear his fingers clicking away on his keyboard.

"Where?" Gibbs demanded impatiently.

"Uh...seems to be a hotel near your current location, boss. The Holiday Inn in Westbury. Is that where you're staying?"

"You can go back to bed now, McGee." Gibbs threw his cellphone down on the seat beside him and drove Pete's car down the driveway and out of the gate at 70 mph.

There was no traffic on the roads at this time of night and he drew up outside the hotel within minutes. He parked the car and ran inside, heading straight for Tony's room. There was no reply to his knock on the door so he picked the lock without a second's hesitation – only to find the room empty. He wondered if Tony was in the bar, and considered calling McGee back to make sure he'd got this right. Then a thought occurred to him; Tony was just as good at picking a lock as he was – hell, he'd taught him.

He took out his key and let himself into his own room. It was in darkness, and for a moment he thought he'd guessed wrong – and then he saw Tony, standing by the floor-to-ceiling window at the far end of the room, one arm resting on it, his forehead pressed against his hand as he gazed out.

"Tony?" Gibbs said, turning on the light.

Tony didn't turn around. "No," he said firmly. His shoulders were hunched and he looked like a man who had taken too many body blows this evening - one more might have him out for the count.

Gibbs thought about it for a moment. Seventeen years led inexorably to this single point in time and there was no use pretending any more.

"Andy?" he asked.

Tony moved his head to look at him. "Yeah," he said softly. He looked unbelievably tired, and in his current vulnerable state Gibbs thought he really *\*did\** look just like Andy again. "So you do remember," Tony murmured, never taking his eyes off Gibbs.

"I remember," Gibbs nodded.

"Well of course you do. See, I was never sure before today. I could see how you'd forget two weeks all those years ago – they were probably far more important to me than they were to you anyway – but I guess it's a lot harder to forget someone when you've put them through college."

Gibbs wasn't sure what to say.

"Christ, Gibbs!" Tony exploded. "All these years you knew what you'd done for me and you never said a damn thing!"

"I didn't want you to know." Gibbs shrugged. It sounded pretty lame now but it had all made sense at the time.

"Clearly." Tony walked slowly towards him. He came close, too close, and Gibbs stood his ground, wondering where the hell this was going.

"Why?" Tony asked, and there were a dozen unanswered questions in his voice and a whole world of pain.

"I had the money and you needed it," Gibbs replied, as if it had really been that simple.

"No – why did you run out on me?" Tony asked. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet, and then fished around inside it. He found a very old, very tattered piece of paper and handed it to Gibbs. It was surreal, after all this time, seeing his own writing on the note he'd left for Tony on the night he'd walked out.

"You kept it, all this time?" Gibbs asked.

"Why are you surprised? I tracked you down, didn't I?" Tony ran a hand through his hair, leaving it standing up on end. "You've always been my little obsession, boss, and in the end it was too much for me - I just had to find out what happened to you. Took me awhile but

being a cop helped. Then it turns out you were recruiting agents and, well, you know me...that was too much for me to resist. I had to see you again – had to see if you remembered me."

Gibbs remembered the interview. He'd seen the name on the resume and wondered what the hell was going on, but, like Tony, he'd been too intrigued to resist.

"I wondered if you were there to confront me, but you never said a thing," Gibbs murmured.

"Because you never gave any sign that you knew me!" Tony protested. "And what was there to say? 'Hey – I'm the guy you fucked ten years ago – how about a beer for old time's sake?' You were on marriage number four at the time and not many married men want to hear that kind of thing."

"I couldn't figure out what you wanted – so I thought I'd offer you a job and find out," Gibbs said. "Never did figure it out though. Why did you stick around so long, Tony?"

"The same reason I tracked you down. The same reason I kept your note all these years. The same reason I never took that job in Spain that Director Shepard offered me a few years ago. The same reason I'm here right now," Tony replied, in a heated tone. Gibbs stared at him, and Tony shook his head. "You really don't get it, do you?" he said quietly.

Gibbs held his gaze for a long moment, and then nodded. He sat down on the side of the bed and rubbed a hand over his jaw, feeling it rasp over the stubble. "Yeah. I do," he said. "I do, Tony."

Tony paced around the room. "There were things I didn't understand back then," he said. "They became clearer over time. I pieced it all together slowly, over the years, bit by bit, like some giant jigsaw of Gibbs. Wasn't hard to finally figure out what you were on the run from; it was soon after Shannon and Kelly had been killed, wasn't it?"

Gibbs cleared his throat. "Yeah."

"You used to look at that gun you kept under the pillow like you wanted to stick it down your throat and pull the trigger."

"Yeah." Gibbs nodded.

"Sometimes I was scared you would."

"I was thinking about it."

"I know. I was terrified I'd go back to that room and find you in there with your brains blown out. Or else that you'd kill yourself in your damn car. You were drinking a hell of a lot – you can't always have sobered up when you set off again and there was a look in your eyes that sent shivers up my spine. Then it went away, after..." He hesitated.

"After you let that guy knock you around for cash?"

"Yeah." Tony shook his head, a little grin on his lips. "I didn't always make the best choices back then," he muttered wryly.

"Ya think, DiNozzo?" Gibbs raised an eyebrow.

"Nobody ever took care of me before then, boss. Dad never gave much of a shit about me, and Mom cared but she was so drunk all the time that I was always the one taking care of her. And it turned out that when you weren't drunk you were kind of cool – a bit scary but cool. And then you ran out on me."

"It wasn't going anywhere, Tony," Gibbs said wearily. "I'd just lost my family – I wasn't ever going to be what you wanted me to be. The only way I could see to help you was to leave."

Tony stopped pacing. "I fell for you, boss," he said quietly. "I really did. Took me a long time to get over you walking out. Pressed all my buttons."

"Yeah, I knew it would," Gibbs sighed. "Had to do it anyway."

"I got back to the motel room that evening just in time to see your car pulling away."

"I didn't think you'd be coming back that evening. I thought you'd found a date," Gibbs said, surprised. Tony frowned.

"No – I looked around and you'd gone. I chased after you but I was too late." He sat down on the bed beside Gibbs, looking deflated. "I know," he sighed. "I was just a screwed-up kid and you weren't in any shape to fall for anyone, let alone someone like me. I can see that now but not back then."

"You were just looking for a father, Tony - and having met your dad I can see why," Gibbs grunted.

"It was always more than that," Tony replied. "I'm not saying that wasn't part of it, but it was always more. You know that. I mean, trust me, I have never – ever - had any sexual fantasies about my father." He shuddered. "And some of the things we did...they weren't exactly things you do with close relatives." He gave a ghost of his usual bright smile, and then it faded. "Christ, I still can't believe you sent me all that money. Three years. You sent me money for three years."

"Gave me a reason to get up in the morning," Gibbs told him. "When things were tough. It made me take the job at NCIS – it was the kick in the ass I needed to keep going."

"Why didn't you want me to know?" Tony asked. "I mean, all those years making that fuck awful yearly phone call to my father because I felt it was my duty, because he'd relented and paid for me even though he thought I wasn't worth it. Why let me believe it was him?"

"You were the one who wanted the fantasy," Gibbs pointed out. "The perfect dad, playing pro basketball, the double life...I didn't want you to be hustler any more, or to have to feel grateful to some guy you fucked when you were down on your luck. That was kind of the point. I wanted you to forget about that, and lead the life you'd chosen to lead with your friends. That's what I wanted to give you."

Tony stared at him. "I guess I'm not the only one who knows how to lead a convincing double life," he muttered.

"What do you mean?" Gibbs frowned.

"Always trying to make people believe you're a bastard?" Tony grinned. Gibbs slapped the back of his head.

"I *am* a bastard, Tony – don't ever forget that," he said, with a faded grin of his own.

Tony fell back on the bed. "Christ I'm tired," he yawned. "That fucking room and my fucking father...now, *he's* a bastard."

"Yeah. He really is a piece of work. I always wondered who screwed you up so badly and now I know."

"I can't believe he's really dying," Tony said, putting his hands beneath his head and gazing up at the ceiling. "After all these years of doing battle with him – I just can't believe it. It doesn't feel real." He looked over at Gibbs. "How did it work? Danny Weston made me send him all my term papers and got really pissy with me whenever I was slow about it. I thought it was my dad hassling him to make sure I didn't screw up and knowing the money would dry up if I slacked off kept me focussed. I suppose you knew me well enough even back then to know I wasn't a model student," he grinned.

"You didn't screw up though. Weston sent me a report every semester – you never flunked a class. I wondered if you would when you busted your knee – thought that might throw you but it didn't."

"Nah – you were right – I was never really going to be tall enough – or good enough - to turn pro anyway." Tony shrugged, but Gibbs knew that he must have had a hard time dealing with the loss of that particular fantasy. "What happened after I left college? Did you check up on me?"

Gibbs shook his head.

"Weren't you ever curious to see how I'd turned out?" Tony frowned. "Weren't you tempted to show up at my graduation or something?"

Gibbs shook his head again. "No. It was in the past. I'd learned how to live without my family – it wasn't easy but I'd found a way of getting by. I was working in Europe at the time

so I couldn't have gone to your graduation in any case. And I'd done what I set out to do."

There was a long silence. Tony glanced at the clock on the night-stand, and then he glanced at Gibbs.

"It's late. I don't want to be alone tonight, boss. Can I sleep in here?"

Gibbs hesitated.

"On the floor maybe?" Tony grinned. "With a blanket?"

"Like there's any chance you'd stay on the floor all night," Gibbs snorted, rolling his eyes. "Yeah, you can sleep in here, Tony – in the bed. I'm too tired to argue anyway."

They both stripped down to boxers and tee shirts, and then climbed into the bed. Gibbs turned off the light and closed his eyes, feeling completely and utterly exhausted. He felt Tony lying stiffly beside him and could almost hear him waiting for Gibbs to fall asleep so that he could...

"Oh for god's sake," he sighed, moving his arm. Tony rolled over immediately, and rested his head on Gibbs's shoulder, and threw his arm over Gibbs's midriff, then slid his leg over Gibbs's legs so that they were entangled, and it felt much like it had all those years ago – like being suffocated by a giant puppy. Tony was heavier now, but the weight of him, the feel of him, and the smell of him felt strangely familiar, even after all these years.

Gibbs relaxed, and felt Tony relax against him now that he was clinging on like a limpet, in his favourite sleeping position - and within seconds they were both fast asleep.

The sun was shining through a gap in the drapes when Gibbs woke, illuminating a single bright stripe down the centre of the bed. Gibbs blinked. He was still lying on his back, and Tony was still lying half on top of him, his hand resting on Gibbs's chest, his tousled hair soft beneath Gibbs's chin. It felt like the years had rolled back, and they were in that motel room again. Gibbs moved his hand and ran it lightly down Tony's arm, trying not to wake him. It had been hard, these past seven years, working with Tony, \*worrying\* about Tony, and never allowing the fondness he felt for Andy to bleed over into their working relationship.

He remembered that time Tony had the plague, and Director Morrow had ordered him to call Tony's father and let him know that his son was close to death. That had been one of the few direct orders Gibbs had disobeyed in his life. He didn't want Tony's father anywhere near him, especially not when he was ill and vulnerable. Besides, he suspected that his own presence would help Tony far more – if his father had been there Tony might have died just to get away from the coldness and the accusations. All he'd had to do was tell Tony to live and he had.

A cellphone rang, breaking into his thoughts, and Gibbs reached out a hand to locate it on

the nightstand, where they'd both thrown their phones last night. It was Tony's phone ringing – he glanced at his agent, still fast asleep despite the noise, and answered the call himself.

"Yes?"

"Uh...Tony?" Pete's voice.

"No, it's Gibbs," he said. There was silence for a moment. Gibbs wondered if Pete was smarting from what he'd said to him last night, but he didn't regret saying it. All Tony's family tiptoed around his father like he was some kind of god – Tony was the only one who didn't and he'd suffered years of crap as a consequence.

"Oh. Right. Is Tony there?"

"Yes." Gibbs glanced down at Tony. The only part of him that was visible was his tousled hair.

Another hesitant silence. "Is he okay? Can I speak to him?"

"He's fine, and no you can't. He's asleep, Pete."

There was another silence and he could almost hear the cogs in Pete's brain turning as he tried to figure out why Gibbs and Tony appeared to be sharing a room.

"What do you want, Pete?" Gibbs growled impatiently.

"It's my uncle – it looks as if the end is near now. I thought Tony should know. If he wants to say goodbye he should come straight over."

"I'll tell him." Gibbs shut the phone and tossed it back onto the nightstand. Tony woke at \*that\* sound, and jumped, startled. His head emerged above the blanket and he gazed at Gibbs blearily.

"Not a dream then," he muttered.

"Nope."

Gibbs looked at him. They'd only had a few hours sleep, and Tony had been shattered when they'd gone to bed. He looked a little better now but Gibbs wasn't used to the expression of naked vulnerability he saw in his eyes. Usually Tony was so good at disguises that it was easy to be taken in by them. Now it looked as if he was too tired and emotionally wrung out to bother – or maybe it was just that he trusted Gibbs enough to let him see him with his guard down.

"Didn't think it would feel this easy," Tony said, with a little grin. Gibbs raised an eyebrow.

"Waking up in bed with you again after all these years - I thought it'd feel weird but it

doesn't. It feels like it used to."

"Yeah." Gibbs nodded because it *did*. It felt lazy and comfortable and he wanted to lie here all day like this, holding Tony, but he couldn't because of what Pete had just said. He braced himself, because this wasn't going to be easy for Tony. "Pete just rang," he said quietly. Tony grimaced.

"I must have freaked him out running out like that last night."

"Yeah – you did, but he didn't call about that," Gibbs said. Tony sat up. "He said – if you want to say goodbye then we need to go straight over. Your dad's not got much longer."

There was no reaction. Tony just sat there, hair messy from sleeping, eyes barely awake.

"You don't have to go," Gibbs said. "You don't owe that bastard anything."

Tony thought about that for a moment, and then he moved his head and placed a quick, almost furtive kiss on Gibbs's cheek, as if he wasn't sure Gibbs would allow it, before sliding out of the bed.

"Yeah. I do have to go," he said, getting up and walking towards the door, picking up his clothes as he went. He opened the door and then glanced back. "I need to make sure he actually dies," he said, with a faint hint of one of his usual stupid grins.

Gibbs took a hurried shower and got dressed and then knocked on Tony's door. Tony opened it and stood there, unmoving; clearly he was finding it hard to access his usual armour in the current circumstances.

"Changed your mind about going?" Gibbs asked, seeing the sense of dread in Tony's eyes.

"No. Just...trying to get up the strength to climb back into the ring," Tony replied. "Still feeling a bit punch drunk."

"You can do it. You're down but not out yet," Gibbs told him. Then, without even thinking about it, Gibbs did the one thing he thought might help him get through the day; he took Tony's jaw gently in his hand, pulled his chin up, and kissed him on the lips. It wasn't a long kiss - it wasn't really more than a brief press of his lips against Tony's - firm, purposeful and reassuring, but it seemed to work. When he pulled back Tony seemed to have found some resolve, and he gave Gibbs a decisive nod.

"Yeah. That did it. Let's go," Tony said.

Pete had clearly done a lot of phoning around because the kitchen was full of people when they got there. Everyone was walking around quietly, or gathered in huddled groups, talking in undertones as if Tony's dying father could hear them all the way down here. Pete was arranging them into groups to take up to say goodbye.

Gibbs had never been part of a large, extended family like this, and it felt strange to be with all these people who were waiting around for one man to die. He wasn't aware people did this hanging around a dying man's bedside thing any more but it seemed they did; he felt like he was trapped in a movie. Gibbs followed Tony up the stairs and back into the bedroom he knew they both hated, to find a couple of women sitting by the bed, one of them crying loudly into a handkerchief.

"That's Aunt Maria," Tony whispered.

"Were she and your dad close?" Gibbs asked, startled by the decibel level of the tears.

"No, she cries like this about everything. There are pictures of her crying her eyes out at my parents' wedding," Tony replied, with a grin. "Although...with hindsight, tears were probably appropriate on that occasion."

Tony's father seemed to have shrunk overnight, and Gibbs thought Pete was right; the old man clearly didn't have much longer left.

Tony sat down on a chair beside the bed and Gibbs stood beside him, allowing his hip to touch against Tony's shoulder for reassurance because god knows Tony needed as much of that as he could get right now.

Tony's father slipped in and out of consciousness. When he was awake there was something angry about him, and Gibbs got a sense of the man's fury. He wasn't ready to die yet. He was old but a long way off from extreme old age. Just a few months ago he'd been running his business, and, no doubt, terrorising his staff, and now he was reduced to this – a shrunken shadow of himself, shuffling towards death, and he was livid about it.

When he was conscious he was lucid, although he was clearly struggling to get his words out now, in contrast to the way he'd been the previous day. Gibbs thought that if anything he'd probably rallied yesterday just because of Tony, his rage towards his son spurring him to a last few moments of coherency before he surrendered to the inevitable.

It was a long day. People came and went, everyone looking subdued and a little scared, as if they weren't sure what they were going to do when the old man died. Gibbs could understand that; like all the best monsters, Tony's father had acquired a retinue of people who were attracted to his strength and certainty, and they had come to depend on him. Gibbs felt a quiet sense of pride in Tony, as he sat there silently. He, at least, had dared to stand up to his father, and while the price for that had been high, he'd shown that he was his own man and would lead his own life - and damn the consequences.

Late in the afternoon the old man regained consciousness again, and looked straight at Gibbs. Gibbs looked straight back at him; unlike most of the other inhabitants of this room, he wasn't scared of him. The old man gave a grunt, as if he recognised that fact, and Gibbs saw a glimmer of that fury in him again. DiNozzo relished a fight, and he longed to be well again so he could take on the challenge that Gibbs represented, and finally claim victory in his war with his son. Gibbs suspected that there were a number of battles this man still

wanted to fight.

Gibbs stared the dying man out, and DiNozzo stared right back at him. Gibbs raised an eyebrow, and then leaned forward, under the pretence of adjusting the man's pillow.

"It's not too late, old man," he whispered into DiNozzo's ear. "You can still say those words to Tony that we talked about yesterday. If you don't say them now then it will be too late. This is your last chance."

He knew the old man had understood. He saw the recognition in his eyes – and with it one last, faint hint of total obstinacy - and he knew in that second that he would never say those words. DiNozzo raised a feeble hand to brush him aside.

"Where's my son?" he whispered, in a thin, reedy voice. "Where is he?"

Gibbs moved back to his former position and Tony leaned forward.

"I'm here, Dad," Tony said.

DiNozzo shook his head. "Not you. I mean Pete. Where's my son Pete?" he cried, looking around.

He saw Pete, sitting on the side of the bed opposite Tony, and patted his hand feebly. Gibbs felt a surge of anger on Tony's behalf, but when he looked down at Tony he saw a glint of amusement in his eyes; Tony clearly admired his father's insistence on prolonging their feud to the bitter end if nothing else.

Gibbs was glad the old man hadn't managed to deliver a knockout blow just before his death, but then he had a sudden flash of realisation as to why: It was because of him. It was because he'd let Tony sleep in his bed last night, and kissed him on the lips this morning. \*He\* had given Tony the armour he needed to deflect anything his father threw at him.

Gibbs watched as DiNozzo turned and gazed at his son, his eyes flashing triumphantly in expectation that he'd landed the final, decisive punch that would give him his victory, once and for all. Gibbs wasn't going to give him the satisfaction. He decided they'd all played fair with this old monster for long enough; he didn't deserve for them to pull their punches any more.

He moved his hand, placed it on Tony's shoulder, and squeezed, and at the same time he flashed DiNozzo a victorious, derisive smile. He didn't say anything but his smile said it for him: "He's mine now, old man. You've lost. He's won. He's got me now - you can't hurt him any more."

Tony seemed to understand perfectly that there was an unspoken battle going on. He glanced at his father with amused eyes, making it clear that he just didn't care any longer, and then he glanced up at Gibbs, and smiled at him.

DiNozzo's look of triumph faded, and his lips twisted into a bitter line, his jaw clenching spasmodically as he gazed at Gibbs and Tony, his eyes dark in defeat. Then he closed his eyes and his head rolled sideways and Gibbs realised, before anyone else reacted, that he'd died. He heard Tony exhale loudly, and Pete mutter something, and then Aunt Maria started wailing.

The next hour or so passed in a blur of people talking in muted undertones, as if they could somehow still disturb the dead man. There were phone calls and arrangements to be made - and Pete was in his element.

"Pete's a small detail kind of guy," Tony whispered to Gibbs, as they stood by and let Pete take centre stage. "He loves this kind of thing."

Pete was speaking to the funeral home on his cellphone, arranging for the collection of the body after the doctor had finished certifying that Tony's father was dead. He finished the call and came over to them, and Gibbs was surprised to see that his eyes were glassy. Maybe the old man really had been more of a father to him than he'd been to Tony.

"Your dad and me talked about the kind of funeral he wanted. He had...well, you can imagine that he had some strong views on that so it's all been arranged for some time now," Pete said.

"Great. I'm glad I don't have to handle that. You're as organised and efficient as ever, Pete," Tony said, patting his arm affectionately. Pete rubbed his hand over his eyes.

"I'm going to miss him, Tony," he whispered.

"Yeah. I know, Petey." Tony wrapped his arm around him, and Pete buried his face in Tony's shoulder, his own shoulders shaking suspiciously. Tony, by contrast, remained dry-eyed as he comforted his cousin. Eventually Pete drew back, and pulled a large, white handkerchief out of his pocket. He blew his nose noisily, and then took a deep breath and got himself together.

"Uh...the funeral will take place the day after tomorrow," he said. "I can tell you what's been planned if you want..."

"No." Tony shook his head. "This is your show, Pete."

"You are going to be there, aren't you?" Pete asked anxiously. Tony nodded.

"I'll be there," he replied. "Don't want the family gossiping about me not showing up - they've gossiped about me enough over the years as it is. Look - we're going to head back to the hotel now. Call if you need anything, okay?"

They drove back to the hotel in silence. Gibbs wondered what was going on in Tony's head - he had no idea how he was feeling right now: Upset? Angry? Relieved? They drew up and Gibbs parked the car and turned to look at Tony to find that Tony was already looking at

him. His eyes were dark but determined.

"Look," Tony said. "Say no if you want, because I don't want your pity, but...would you fuck me, Jethro? Would you fuck me like you fucked me that first time - really hard? Would you fuck me so hard that I can't think about anything else except being fucked? Except being fucked by \*you\*?"

Gibbs gazed at him expressionlessly.

"I'm sorry," Tony grimaced, looking away. "I shouldn't have asked."

Gibbs thought about what had happened in that room back there. He'd just staked his claim to this man, and he wouldn't have done that if he hadn't meant it. He reached out, put his finger under Tony's chin, and drew it up so that he was looking at him again.

"I'll fuck you," he said, surprised by how throaty his voice was. "But that time I fucked you before – that first time - I was in a bad place. I didn't have anything to give you back then. I do now. If I fuck you this time I'll want to keep fucking you – now, tomorrow, when we go back home, hell – forever probably. I won't be one of your three week flings and I won't share you with anyone else. If this is what you want too then go get what we need and come meet me in my room. If it isn't – then I'll be here for you but I won't fuck you. Understand?"

Tony stared at him, his eyes wide and startled. "I understand," he replied.

"Good. Then it's your call."

Gibbs got out of the car and slammed the door shut behind him, then walked into the hotel and up to his room. He took off his jacket and threw it on the chair, and then took a deep breath and sat down on the side of the bed. He had meant what he said but it had taken him by surprise all the same – not that he'd said it but how much he wanted it.

He wondered if Tony was capable of committing to one person the way he'd asked, and whether he'd want to give up all the women and the occasional furtive flings with men, just in order to have him. He remembered how insatiable Andy had been but that had been a long time ago and Tony wasn't nineteen any more. Gibbs had no doubt he still had a pretty active libido though – this was Tony after all. And he might be vulnerable right now but he was still capable of making this decision, and knowing exactly what he was getting into if that was his choice. He wondered how long Tony would take making up his mind but he hadn't expected the knock on the door quite so soon.

He got up and opened it, to find Tony standing there with a tube of lube in one hand and a pack of condoms in the other. Gibbs looked at them, and then at him.

"You sure?" he asked.

"Jethro – I've been in love with you since I was nineteen. I'm sure," Tony replied, his eyes

deadly serious.

Gibbs took the condoms and lube off him and threw them on the nightstand, then he grabbed hold of Tony's jacket, pulled him into the room, kicked the door shut behind him, pushed him against the wall and kissed him. Tony made a little squeaking sound of surprise, and then recovered, wrapping his arms around Gibbs's waist. He was a lot beefier now than he'd been seventeen years ago but he still tasted the same, Gibbs thought, as he opened Tony's mouth with his tongue and pushed himself deep inside.

He held Tony against the wall as he plundered his mouth with ruthless efficiency, needing to explore him and reacquaint himself with how it felt to kiss him. He remembered the surprising softness of Tony's lips, and the half-remembered rasp of stubble on stubble.

He grabbed Tony's hair and pulled his face even closer, his hand tangled in the thick softness, remembering how he'd enjoyed holding him like this that first time he'd kissed him. Tony kissed him back just as eagerly – with more finesse than years ago but just as good. Gibbs drew back.

"You've been practising," he said.

"It has been nearly two decades," Tony pointed out. "I picked up a thing or two in that time."

"I don't even want to know how many people you've kissed since then," Gibbs growled, feeling his possessive streak kick in. Tony grinned.

"Maybe not as many as you'd think," he said. "Not everyone found me as charming as I know I am. I never have managed to figure out why." He gave another, more self-deprecating grin, and Gibbs gave a little grunt of amusement. He wasn't fooled though – Tony's armour wasn't at full strength again yet, and he wondered whether it ever would be around him. Maybe he'd been right earlier, and Tony was letting him see him with his guard down because he trusted him. After all, Gibbs had known him when he'd been a fucked-up kid blowing strangers in bars – he didn't have to pretend around Gibbs.

Tony's eyes were dark with need, and Gibbs saw in them everything he'd been through over the past couple of days. Tony nuzzled into his neck, his arms tightening around Gibbs as he held onto him for dear life.

"Please fuck me, Jethro," he whispered desperately into Gibbs's ear. "I need you to fuck me."

"I know." Gibbs put his hand on the back of Tony's head, holding him close. "It's okay. I know. Ssh." He kissed Tony's ear, feeling Tony press against him, his body shaking. "Ssh. It's okay. I've got you." He rocked Tony for a couple of minutes, kissing his hair and ear repeatedly until the shaking stopped. When he thought Tony was over the worst of it, he released him.

Tony stood there, looking as if he didn't know what to do next, so Gibbs did it for him. He pulled Tony's jacket off his shoulders and pushed him over to the bed.

"Get undressed, Tony," he whispered throatily in Tony's ear. Tony shivered but complied immediately, taking off his clothes with mechanical, shaky movements of his hands. Gibbs got undressed too, watching Tony the entire time. He took a moment to enjoy seeing Tony's naked body after so long. He'd filled out a lot – his legs, his shoulders, his neck – and he had considerably more chest hair than he'd had back then. He was much more solid now as well, but it suited him. His cock was pulsing, standing erect, and Gibbs felt his own cock harden in response as he looked at it.

Tony got onto the bed, on all fours, and glanced at Gibbs expectantly over his shoulder. Gibbs shook his head.

"Not like that," he said. "I know you think that's what you want but it isn't. I can make it better than that. Let me take care of it for you, Tony. Just do what I say and relax."

He guided Tony firmly onto his back, and then lowered himself down on top of him, covering his upper body with purposeful kisses. Tony gazed at him in the semi-darkness of the room, his eyes completely trusting. Gibbs took Tony's head between his hands and kissed him on the mouth again, gently, slowly, taking his time, and Tony seemed to unwind beneath him, his body relaxing, muscle by muscle. Gibbs kissed him insistently but tenderly, until every single ounce of the tension that had built up in the past couple of days had dissipated, and Tony was boneless beneath him. Only then did Gibbs reach for the lube.

He pushed Tony's legs apart and slid a finger inside him, never once taking his eyes off Tony's face as he worked his finger in and out of Tony's body. Tony opened up sweetly for him, offering himself up with a trust that Gibbs found surprisingly arousing. It didn't take long to make him ready, and then Gibbs rolled a condom onto his hard cock, and settled between Tony's legs. He nudged himself against Tony's entrance, and then moved forward, sliding his cock easily into Tony's welcoming heat.

It felt so good that it took his breath away, and he hung there for a moment, looking down on Tony as a wave of pleasure rippled along his cock and through his entire body. It had been so long but it still felt as good as it had all those years ago. The last time he'd fucked Tony, he'd been too lost in his own grief to care that much about pleasing him. He'd wanted the release that came with thrusting into a hard, willing body, and had enjoyed the fact that Tony was a sturdy, robust recipient of everything he could throw at him.

This time around he did care about pleasing Tony. This time around Tony was fragile, and Gibbs wanted to make sure he got what he needed. He adjusted his position and thrust into him, and Tony gave a little gasp. He wrapped his legs instinctively around Gibbs's body, desperately trying to force him in even deeper, and Gibbs complied, thrusting harder next time. Tony never took his eyes off him, and Gibbs kept his own gaze locked with Tony's as he fucked him with long, deep strokes.

Time stood still and there was just the motion of his hips, and the feel of Tony's body

clenched hard around his cock, and the sensation of being \*in\* Tony again after all this time. There was the deep connection of Tony's gaze, and the total trust he saw in it, and the little sounds Tony was making, those old, familiar sounds that he hadn't even realised he'd been missing.

He leaned forward and kissed Tony's mouth, and Tony arched up into him, moaning. Gibbs kissed him and fucked him, kissed him and fucked him, and he didn't think either of them wanted to come because they both wanted this sense of connection to last for as long as possible. Finally Gibbs knew he was close, and he took Tony's hard cock in his hand and began rubbing it firmly with each inward thrust of his hips. Tony was whimpering loudly now, his gaze never leaving Gibbs's face.

"Come for me," Gibbs told him. "Come for me, Tony."

Tony convulsed beneath him, and then he spurted out over Gibbs's hand, gasping for breath as he came. Gibbs smiled at him, and continued thrusting into him with slow, measured thrusts, feeling his own climax build. He liked the way Tony was looking up at him as he fucked him, liked how loose his body was now he had climaxed, and how good it felt to be inside him.

Gibbs felt himself starting to climax and he gave a groan of pleasure as he came, still keeping his gaze locked with Tony's. He hung there for a moment as he got his breath back, and then reached forward and stroked Tony's hair, and ran his hand lovingly down the side of his face. Tony's breath hitched, and Gibbs leaned forward and kissed him again. Tony's body rose up against his, seeking the connection, and Gibbs kissed him with a kind of quiet, purposeful passion, needing to make Tony understand the way it was going to be between them. He wasn't going to be walking out this time around; Tony had someone who was going to be there for him from now on.

Finally, Gibbs drew back, and pulled himself out of Tony's body with regret. Then he broke gazes for the first time as he removed the condom and chucked it into the trash. Afterwards he got into the bed beside Tony and pulled him over so that Tony was in his favourite position, head resting on Gibbs's shoulder, arm slung over his body, legs entwined in his. He pulled up the sheets around them and held Tony close, and Tony burrowed into him like he never wanted to be released.

"Thank you, Jethro," Tony murmured into his chest. "I was right you know," he added.

"About what?" Gibbs asked, feeling lazy, sated and genuinely happy for the first time in years.

"You do know how to give a good fuck," Tony said, glancing up at him with a grin.

"That wasn't fucking, Tony," Gibbs told him, dropping his head down to claim another kiss from Tony's lips. "That was making love."

They spent all that night and the following day in bed. It was strange how familiar that felt, even after all these years. Gibbs read the paper while Tony watched TV, throwing his pillow around the bed and pursuing it to get comfortable with only slightly less fidgeting than when he'd been a teenager. Gibbs wasn't complaining. He liked it best when Tony ended up lying with his head and shoulders resting back against Gibbs's bare chest, his hand loosely wrapped around the remote as he endlessly changed channels. Gibbs slung his arm around Tony's body and pressed the occasional idle kiss to his hair, continuing to read his paper whenever Tony wasn't making him look up at whatever trashy piece of TV he was watching. Gibbs's only comment most of the time was a grunt but that seemed enough to satisfy Tony.

They had room service delivered and ate that in bed too.

"I wish we could stay here," Tony said, diving straight into the donuts.

"Worried about the funeral?" Gibbs glanced at him over his glasses.

"No...well, yes, but that's not it. Just...all we ever had was this, Jethro. Us, holed up in a room somewhere. We never had work before, or life, or, you know, nosy co-workers." Tony grimaced.

"Tony, none of your co-workers comes close to you in the nosy stakes," Gibbs pointed out, with a roll of his eyes, all too well aware of Tony's insatiable appetite for gossip and almost non-existent respect for other people's privacy.

"True," Tony grinned. "But how do we handle this? When we go back to DC? What happens then, Jethro?"

Gibbs saw the flash of anxiety in Tony's eyes, and he took off his glasses and put them on the nightstand. Clearly they had to talk about this.

"You think I'm going to run out on you again?" he asked.

"No. Yes. Probably." Tony shrugged. "I know you said it wouldn't happen but things will get very complicated when we go back. You're not a man who likes complications, Jethro."

"Tony – I have three ex-wives. I'm *used* to complications," Gibbs pointed out.

"Yeah, but this – me – I might be one complication too far," Tony said quietly. "How *are* we going to handle it when we go back home?"

"Well, I'm not going to enter into that double life shit you're so good at. I can't go around lying the whole time. It'll irritate the hell out of me," Gibbs replied.

"Yeah, well, your whole 'ask me anything personal and I'll break your legs' approach won't work for me," Tony told him. "I don't have the steely glare and head-slapping down to a fine art yet, either. Nobody's going to be scared off the topic by me – diversionary tactics are all I've got."

"So we have a basic difference of style," Gibbs grinned.

"But then again we always did," Tony grinned back.

"Look, Tony, nothing's going to change back at NCIS," Gibbs told him. "I'm not going to suddenly start calling you 'sweetie' and patting your ass in the squad room, and you're not going to start making goo-goo eyes at me across the room when you're sitting at your desk."

"It's tempting..." Tony grinned. "But no," he added, as Gibbs shot him a warning glare.

"Work's work," Gibbs said firmly. "I won't be treating you any differently there and if you treat me any different your ears will start ringing from all the head-slaps you'll get. Got it?"

"Got it, boss," Tony said smartly.

"But I'm not hiding, and I'm not lying, or making up any kind of shit, so don't ask me to. If people find out – well I don't really give a damn."

"Could be awkward though," Tony pressed.

"You ashamed of me?" Gibbs shot back. Tony looked confused.

"No...just...you're new to this, Jethro, but a lot of people really aren't comfortable with the whole bisexual thing. I've always found it easier to hide it than risk getting caught."

"That's your father talking," Gibbs grunted.

"Maybe." Tony's eyes were suddenly bright and intense. "But do you want to know what kind of a formative experience it was to be in love for the first time, to be really in love, and to creep out every night to meet him, so you could fuck, and then to be caught with your dick in his ass and your hand on his cock, and have the school principal haul you off him by the scruff of your neck?"

Tony's fingers clenched into fists, the half-eaten donut now abandoned. Gibbs sat back, startled.

"Do you have any idea what it was like to have the principal \*scream\* at you for being depraved, and dirty, and evil, while your dick is hanging out and the boy you were just fucking is being hauled up too, and he's looking at you like you've betrayed him. Then he's saying that maybe it wasn't the mutual thing you thought it was, and he wasn't as totally into it as you know he was, and that sounds like it's one step away from you \*raping\* him and you sure as hell know that wasn't what happened. And then you're dragged back to the principal's office and it's the middle of the fucking night and he's calling your \*father\* and telling him about it and saying he has to come and get you now - \*right now\* - because you've disgraced yourself, and the academy, and the family name and you can't be allowed to stay there for another single second in case you decide to stick your dick into some other

boy's innocent fucking ass."

Tony broke off. He hadn't raised his voice the entire time, he'd just talked in a low, intense undertone, but the emotion in his eyes was heart-breaking. Gibbs nodded to him to continue.

"And then you have to pack up your stuff with someone watching you the whole time in case, I don't know, you corrupt some other boy while they're not looking, and then, worst of all, you have to sit in a car for the long drive home beside a father who can barely stand to look at you. And you sit in your room for a few days until he can bring himself to talk to you and you wonder why this whole thing is making everyone go so crazy when it was just sex, and you \*like\* sex - with girls, with boys, whatever - and it was hot, and it felt good, and nobody got hurt so what's the big fucking deal?"

Gibbs watched and waited, needing Tony to let all this out, because he doubted he'd ever told anyone else about it in his entire life. Tony took a deep breath, and his eyes darkened. Gibbs knew he was scaring himself by how much this all hurt – that maybe he hadn't even known it hurt this much because he'd kept it bottled up for so long.

"What happened next, Tony?" he asked softly. "Tell me."

"What happened next is that my father finally called me into his study but only to tell me that he'd disinherited me, and he'd arranged for me to go and live with my alcoholic mother, and that he wasn't going to pay for my education again because that was just throwing good money after bad. Of course he'd always known I was trouble, and a dumb little shit as well, but he never thought I was a fag and he fucking hates fags and why couldn't I be like my cousin Pete instead of embarrassing him and the family, and did I know he had a business to run and what the hell would people think of him? And then he got his \*lawyer\* to drive me to my mom's house because he couldn't stand the sight of me. Then when she died, he showed up at the funeral and told me he hadn't forgiven me and he wasn't going to spend another dime of his hard-earned cash on me unless I proved to him that I wasn't going to be worthless my entire life and that was going to take some doing because he didn't think I had it in me."

"It's a good thing he's dead," Gibbs commented, "'Cause I want to go over there and kill the son of a bitch all over again."

"Yeah, so now you know, so don't sit there, Gibbs, and judge me for hiding it, for pretending to be oh-so-freaked out when I discovered I'd kissed a transsexual during an undercover op, or for flirting like crazy with every hot girl I see just so people never suspect my tastes are a little broader - because I \*know\* just what happens when you get caught with your dick in the wrong place and I don't want to go through that again."

"I wasn't judging you, Tony," Gibbs said quietly. He reached out and put a hand on Tony's shoulder, wondering if he'd shrug it off, but instead it seemed to calm him down and he nodded, and managed a faint grin.

"I know. I know that. I just...don't think I can be any different," Tony told him. "This is the only way I've ever found of protecting myself, Jethro."

"Okay. Then we take it one step at a time," Gibbs said. "I'm not in any hurry and I won't tell anyone without talking to you about it first."

"Okay." Tony nodded.

"But it's going to come out one day," Gibbs said. "And it won't be as bad as you think. You're not a kid any more, Tony, and you can handle it. Christ, if I can take it then I'm damn sure you can."

Tony laughed at that. "Yeah. I'm guessing that's going to shock a few people. The whole ex-marine, three ex-wives, tough guy federal agent thing will confuse the hell out of them. You'll just stare them down though, boss, if anyone dares to say anything."

"And you'll joke your way out of it. Like I said, difference of styles – but both of them work, in their own way. Now come here."

Gibbs pushed the half-eaten donut aside, ignoring Tony's squawk of protest, and kissed him on the mouth. Tony opened up immediately and Gibbs felt his hard cock pressing into his thigh.

"Christ – it was just going to be a kiss," he muttered after he released him. Tony grinned, looking a little shame-faced.

"You've always been my wet dream, Jethro; around you my body is always going to think it's nineteen."

"I'm flattered," Gibbs grinned, kissing him again. He slid his hand inside Tony's bathrobe, found his hard cock, wrapped his hand around it, and then rubbed it with long, firm strokes. Tony started making his usual orgasmic noises and Gibbs silenced them with another deep kiss, caressing his cock the entire time. Tony gasped, his body convulsing against Gibbs as he was thoroughly and expertly kissed and jerked off at the same time, and then he came over Gibbs's hand with a series of happy little squeaks.

Gibbs laughed and released him, then leaned forward and kissed his forehead.

"Your father is dead, Tony," he said. "And you've been living by my rules for the past seven years anyway, remember?"

"Uh, I don't think you have a rule to cover this situation, boss," Tony pointed out, grinning up at him.

"You're right." Gibbs nodded. "Here's a new rule. Rule number twelve: Never feel guilty about being who you are."

"I think there's a rule number twelve already," Tony frowned. "Isn't it 'never date a co-worker'? Because we're kind of breaking that one."

"That's why we're replacing it with the new rule," Gibbs said impatiently. Tony laughed.

"Okay. New rule number twelve. I'll try and remember it, boss!"

Tony grew quieter as the day turned into evening. He received a few phone calls from Pete about the funeral arrangements, and each one made him quieter still. Gibbs felt in his gut that this wasn't good. They still had one last hurdle to jump – he'd feel a lot happier when the funeral was over and he could take Tony back to DC and love him back to his usual self. Annoying though Tony's usual self could be, he'd take it over this hunched-shouldered, dark-eyed version any day.

Neither of them slept much the night before the funeral. Gibbs lay awake, gazing up at the ceiling, one arm around Tony, while Tony lay in his usual position, head on Gibbs's shoulder, tracing one finger in endless little circles over Gibbs's chest.

Gibbs was relieved when the morning came and they could finally get this over. They washed, shaved and dressed in silence, and Gibbs wondered what he could say that would make this any easier for Tony.

"What's going on in there?" he asked eventually, pressing a finger to Tony's forehead as Tony buttoned up his stiff, formal white shirt.

"Just...mixed feelings," Tony replied, fumbling with his cufflinks. "I'm not sad he's dead but...I just wish it had been different between us, you know?"

"Yeah. I know." Gibbs took the cufflinks out of his hand, and threaded the first one through his shirtsleeve.

"I did love him, Jethro," Tony sighed. "As fucked up as it always was between us, I did love him."

"I know that too," Gibbs said, fastening the other cufflink.

"And then there will be everyone staring at me. They all know why I got expelled from Drewes and god knows it was years ago but it's the best gossip they've ever had so they'll never let it drop. You'll almost be able to hear the whispers. 'Is he married yet?' 'Is he gay?' 'Does he have a girlfriend?' 'Who's that guy with him?' 'Are they together?' 'Hey, Tony's date is \*hot\*!'"

Tony grinned and pressed a kiss to Gibbs's freshly shaven cheek.

"And then there's the will – they're reading that after the wake and everyone is pretty sure I've been disinherited but they'll be hoping for some nice, juicy scandal there too. They'll all

be looking at me to see how I react. Nosiness kind of runs in our family."

He grinned again, but his hands were shaking slightly as he reached for his black tie and began knotting it.

"And I don't \*know\* how I'll react," Tony said quietly, making a mess of the knot and starting again. "I don't know if I'll just feel relieved the old monster is finally six feet under, or whether I'll screw it up and say something inappropriate at the graveside. Or even whether I'll do something really dumb, like cry, because there's still a kid inside me who loved his dad and just wanted him to love me back and now it's too late."

Gibbs batted Tony's hands away and undid his second completely useless attempt at a knot, jerking it apart with terse, purposeful movements of his fingers. He thought about what he'd asked Tony's father to tell him, and how he'd even asked him lie to him if it wasn't the truth, and how the old bastard had remained stubborn to the end. He wasn't sure that Tony's father \*had\* loved him, and he was damn sure he hadn't been proud of him, but, in the end, he also wasn't sure that really mattered right now. What mattered was that Tony heard those words from somebody; somebody he loved and respected, somebody he looked up to almost like a father – and somebody who really did mean them.

He did up Tony's tie for him, and adjusted the knot with a smooth flourish of his fingers. Then he rested his hands on Tony's shoulders and looked him in the eye.

"I love you, Tony – and I'm proud of you," he said firmly. Tony gazed at him, wide-eyed. Gibbs squeezed his shoulders. "You hear me, son?"

"Yes. I hear you." Tony said quietly, and Gibbs knew that it meant far more coming from him than it ever would have done coming from his father.

Tony's whole body seemed to change; his shoulders broadened, and he stood up straight, no sign of even a hint of self-doubt, his eyes clear and focussed. Gibbs helped him into his jacket, and then they walked out there together, side by side.

Tony didn't cry, and he was graceful and charming to a fault throughout. Gibbs could feel the eyes of hundreds of relatives and family friends on them both, could hear the little ripple of whispers as Tony walked down the aisle of the church, could see how people were studying the black sheep of the family, assessing and scrutinising him.

He was proud of the fact that Tony held his head up high and didn't react. He didn't pull any stupid faces or make any inappropriate jokes, and afterwards, when they went back to the house, he made the rounds of the guests, shaking hands, smiling, making polite conversation and behaving with the utmost dignity.

After an hour or so of that, he returned to where Gibbs was standing, grabbed his arm, and pulled him to one side.

"Okay, I'm done. We have to get out of here before I snap, boss," he hissed out of the

corner of his mouth. "All this being on my best behaviour is exhausting." He caught the eye of an old lady with immaculately coiffed white hair and smiled at her benignly. She smiled back, nodding at him approvingly.

"I'm ready to go when you are," Gibbs told him. "The car's all packed up and the shuttles fly every half hour."

"Then let's find Pete and say goodbye."

Gibbs followed Tony out of the room and they found Pete in the hallway talking to Daniel Weston.

"Pete – we have to go now," Tony told his cousin.

"You're not staying to hear the reading of the will?" Pete asked, surprised. Tony glanced at Weston.

"Nah. I don't think there's any point," he said.

Pete looked embarrassed. "Look, Tony, I'm sorry..." he began.

"Don't be," Tony interrupted him. "Despite what he thought, I never did want his money." He glanced at Gibbs. "And I'm more than happy with what I got out of this trip," he added.

Pete looked at Weston and then back at Tony. "Look...there's one thing I want to give you – if you'll accept it? It's not from your father – it's just something I'd like you to have."

Tony frowned, looking puzzled. Pete reached into his pocket, pulled out a set of keys, and threw them to Tony.

"It's outside," he said.

Tony glanced at Gibbs, still looking confused, and all four men walked out of the door and onto the driveway. Tony took one look at the bright red Ferrari standing out front and gave a whoop of sheer joy. Gibbs couldn't stop himself laughing out loud at the expression on Tony's face; he was like a kid with a new toy as he circled the car, still whooping as he traced one finger over all the gleaming red metal.

"You sure about this, Pete?" he asked, fondling the car in a way that was positively obscene.

"I'm sure, Tony. She's all yours," Pete beamed.

"What about the rental?"

"I'll get someone to take it back to the airport for you," Pete told him.

Tony made another circuit of the car and then stopped beside Gibbs, a shit-eating grin on

his face.

"How about it, boss? Feel like a road trip back to DC?"

"Sure," Gibbs said, grinning back at him. "You know me – I like road trips."

They transferred their luggage from the rental car into the Ferrari, watched by the little crowd of people who had gathered out front, intrigued by all the commotion.

They said their goodbyes, and then Tony got into the car and rested his hands lovingly on the steering wheel. Gibbs got in beside him. Tony was silent for a moment, and then he turned to face him.

"You know, I don't think I ever said thank you," he said. Gibbs raised an eyebrow.

"For putting me through college. I have no idea where the hell I'd have ended up if you hadn't done that. You pretty much saved my life. "

"Just returning the favour," Gibbs said softly, remembering how close he'd come to blowing his brains out back then, and how taking care of Andy had given him something to live for.

Tony nodded, understanding. "Yeah – but thank you all the same," he said sincerely. "I might be saying it years too late, but I want to say it."

"You're welcome, Andy," Gibbs said softly. Tony's eyes sparkled in response to the name, and he gave a bright, goofy smile that was all Andy. "Now – let's go home," Gibbs said.

Tony nodded. He glanced out of the window at the little crowd of people who were gathered around them, and then a spark of total mischief flashed in his eyes. He looked sideways at Gibbs, then leaned over, took hold of Gibbs's head in his hands, pulled him towards him, and kissed him on the mouth – hard and passionately - for several seconds.

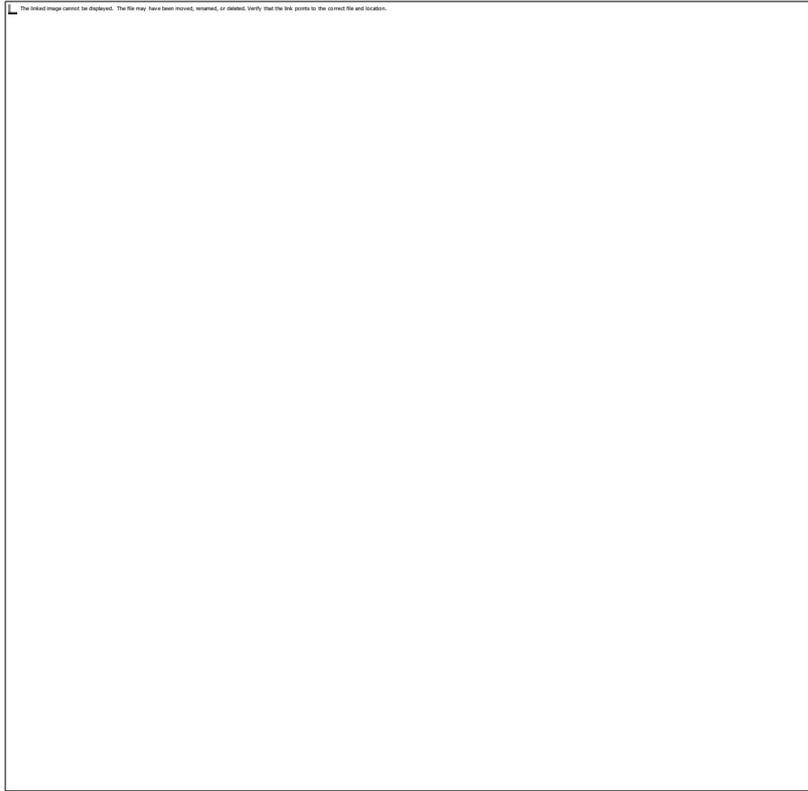
A little murmur went up from the watching crowd, and Gibbs could feel Tony grinning into his mouth as he kissed him, and then he was released. Gibbs raised an eyebrow.

"What happened to the not being comfortable with anyone knowing thing?" he asked.

"Hey – new rule number twelve, remember? Besides, I wanted to give them something \*else\* to talk about for the next couple of decades," Tony said, with a jaunty wave at the crowd. He put the car into gear, released the brake, slammed his foot on the accelerator, and they shot down the driveway at high speed.

"So...I was thinking...we could...I don't know...stop over at a motel along the way, fuck each other's brains out, and maybe get roaring drunk as well, just for old time's sake?" Tony said, with a sly wink. "Whaddya say, Jethro?"

Gibbs rolled his eyes, but he grinned anyway. "Sounds good to me, Andy."



The End

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