

Boats by Xanthe



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Story Notes:

Episode tag. Out-take scene from Aliyah



Nominated for Best Post Ep/Missing Scene award in the **Tony/Gibbs category** of the **NCIS Awards, 2009**

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Gibbs sawed at the wood steadily, methodically, taking no particular satisfaction in the task. It was time. In fact, he had known the time was brewing for awhile now; he'd just been waiting for his gut to tell him when. He never liked it, but it had to be done.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Gibbs glanced up to see Tony standing at the top of the stairs. He had at least changed out of the suit he'd been wearing these past few days. Now he was dressed in a pair of old grey sweatpants and an equally old looking black tee shirt. Gibbs guessed that getting dressed in anything wasn't easy with a broken arm, and Tony had clearly opted for comfort over style. He looked younger dressed like that – more like he'd looked when Gibbs had first met him. His hair was still damp from the shower he must have recently taken, making it look darker and more messy than usual.

"This is how you get rid of them?" Tony asked, coming slowly down the stairs, walking like an old man. He looked tired, and his eyes were haunted. Gibbs wasn't surprised. It had been a long few days, and Tony had taken the worst of it. Besides, it was late, and that gruelling flight home from Tel Aviv had to have taken its toll on Tony, injured as he was.

Tony reached the bottom of the stairs, a confused, almost belligerent look on his face.

"This is what you do? After all that hard work? You just break them up into little pieces?"

Gibbs shrugged. "When I'm done with them - yes. That's exactly what I do."

Tony ran his good hand along what was left of the broken-up boat and surveyed the sacks full of chopped wood stacked neatly to one side.

"But you love these boats," he said quietly. "You spend months building them. Years sometimes."

Gibbs shrugged again and returned to his sawing.

"You can put all that effort into building something, into lovingly creating it from scratch out of raw lumps of wood, and then just take a saw to it, cut it up into little pieces, and throw it out with the trash?" Tony asked, and his voice held a world of hurt in it.

"Nope." Gibbs threw a piece of wood into a nearby sack and then turned back to start sawing a fresh piece.

"Sure as hell looks that way," Tony growled.

Gibbs stopped in mid-saw and fixed him with a glare. "I don't throw it out. I take all the sacks of wood out into the back yard, and I burn them."

"Oh, that's fine then! That makes it all okay!"

Gibbs sighed and stood up. He put the saw down.

"When the job's done, it's done." He gave another shrug. "This boat was as good as I could make her. There was nowhere else to go with her."

"Except out on the water," Tony pointed out. "You could, you know, actually sail one of the damn things!"

"I don't build 'em to sail 'em." Gibbs shrugged. "You know that. No way to get them out of here in one piece for a start."

Tony leaned against the wall. "Then why...?"

"Because I like the process, Tony! It's about the journey, not the end result."

"So it doesn't matter how good they are? They all get burned in the end?" Tony gazed at the remains of the boat, and then looked up to glare at Gibbs.

Gibbs glared right back at him. "Yeah. Even the best ones get burned in the end, DiNozzo."

Tony pushed himself away from the wall with his good arm and came towards him. "Even the ones you spent the most time with? Even the ones you spent the longest bashing and sanding into shape, so they're all shiny and polished and perfect?"

He was close now, so close that Gibbs could smell the scent of his shower gel. His green eyes were asking a different question entirely.

"Even the ones you loved working on the best?" Tony asked softly, in a broken kind of voice.

Gibbs turned away and grabbed one of the sacks. "Here," he said, handing it to Tony. "As long as you're here you might as well make yourself useful." He nodded his head to the pile of chopped up wood.

"I've got a broken arm," Tony pointed out. Gibbs shrugged.

"So use your other one."

Tony sighed and started collecting the wood, one-handed, and putting it into the sack. Gibbs picked up his saw and started breaking up the last part of the boat.

"Boat I loved most was never one of the shiny, polished, perfect ones," he said as he

worked.

Tony stuffed a handful of wood into the sack and wiped a sawdust covered hand over his forehead.

“Boat I loved most was the first one I made. She was...quirky. She didn’t sit right – listed to one side and was uneven in places, but...I loved that boat. She gave me such a hard time, and every time I fixed one thing that was wrong with her it just threw up another – but she was fun, you know. She was a challenge. She made me laugh.”

“Boats can make you laugh?” Tony queried doubtfully. Gibbs grinned.

“Oh yeah.”

“What happened to her? You burn her too?” Tony asked. There was a little sheen of sweat on his forehead, to which a smattering of sawdust had attached itself.

“Nope.” Gibbs shook his head.

Tony grabbed another piece of wood and somehow managed to bash his broken arm with it. He gave a little growl of pain, dropped the wood on the floor, and cradled his sore arm.

“Jesus!” he cursed, grimacing.

“Sit.” Gibbs gestured with his head at the stairs.

Tony went and sat on the second to bottom step, still cradling his arm. He rested his head against the banister, dislodging some sawdust from his hair in the process. Gibbs resumed sawing, aware of Tony’s eyes on him the whole time.

“You didn’t even try and get Ziva to change her mind,” Tony said eventually. Gibbs glanced over at him. “You just let her walk away without a fight.”

“That what you think happened?” Gibbs asked.

“There was no time for anything else. One minute she was coming with us – hell she even had her bag with her - and next she was staying behind. I’m not blaming you. We lost her because of me, and my screw up.” Tony shrugged. “And you were fine with her leaving because...well, I guess it was just her time for the woodpile, huh?” He glanced at the sacks of neatly piled wood.

Gibbs rolled his eyes. Tony stared at him some more.

“You pissed with me for losing her?” He asked at last. “No, don’t answer that. I know you are. I fucked this whole thing up, and now Ziva’s gone. I lost her for you – for all of us.”

“Wasn’t you that lost her.” Gibbs shrugged.

“Oh for God’s sake, Gibbs!” Tony exploded. “We all know it was. I killed the man she was in love with, and she was never going to come back to NCIS after that.”

“She gave me a choice, Tony!” Gibbs snapped, throwing down his saw again. He walked over to where Tony was sitting and stood in front of him, hands on hips.

“A choice?” Tony frowned. “What kind of a choice?”

Gibbs just raised an eyebrow. Tony gazed at him, startled.

“Me or her? She made you choose between us? Christ, Gibbs, that’s so fucked up. I’m sorry you were put in that position.” Tony shook his head and then realisation crept into his eyes. “You chose me?” He sounded so surprised that Gibbs wanted to shake him. “I mean...you didn’t even need to think about it?” Tony frowned. Then he looked up at Gibbs. “Why? I mean, I get that we’ve worked together a long time, but I screwed up – and that happens a lot, and it pisses you off - and she’s...well, I know you and she are close, and she isn’t anywhere near as irritating as I am, and you never had to headslap her anywhere near as often to get her to shape up.” He made a face and dropped his gaze.

Gibbs sighed. “You’re right. She was all polished up and shiny and Mossad-trained when I first got her. You, on the other hand...” he grinned. “You’re all my own work. Of course I damn well chose you, DiNozzo! Why the hell does that surprise you?” He leaned forward, put a finger under Tony’s chin, and tipped up his face to make him look at him. “Listen to me. You didn’t screw up on this one. I told you to watch Rivkin, and you did. You followed up new intel that led to him. You tried to bring him in, and he resisted arrest. You shot him in self-defence. Then you took one for the team, just like you always do, Tony – maybe a little too often.”

“I should have followed protocol. I should have taken back up when I went to Ziva’s apartment.”

Gibbs nodded. “Yes - you damn well should! And Ziva should have told us what the hell was going on, and Eli David should have kept his agent the hell out of our back yard. You might have messed up a little on protocol, but you weren’t the one deceiving me, or forcing ultimatums on me. You’re a pain in the ass, DiNozzo, but you’re also the finest damn agent I ever worked with.”

“Really?” Tony’s eyes gleamed with a kind of puzzled pleasure at hearing those words.

Not for the first time, Gibbs wanted to get his hands on whoever had screwed with Tony’s view of himself, way back when he was just a kid, and left him so clear on all his faults and so fuzzy on all his good points.

“Really.”

Tony grinned that stupid big goofy grin of his. “Could you maybe write that down, or tape it

or something? Or just, you know, say it when McGee is standing nearby..."

Gibbs slapped the back of his head.

"Just joking, Boss. So that's why you chose me?"

"No." Gibbs shook his head.

"It isn't?" Tony frowned.

"No."

"Then why?"

Gibbs clasped Tony's face in his hands, leaned down, and kissed him on the mouth. Tony floundered for a moment, but Gibbs didn't think for a second that he'd misjudged this. He was right. Tony gave a sudden sigh and melted into the kiss, and then his good hand came to rest on Gibbs's hip. Gibbs held his face tight and continued kissing him for a long time, until he was sure there couldn't possibly be any more doubt in Tony's mind. Then he released him.

"That's why. Clear now?"

Tony gazed up at him from stunned eyes, his mouth still slightly open. Gibbs reached out and knocked some of the sawdust out of his hair.

"Clear," Tony murmured.

"Good." Gibbs turned back to the remains of the boat. "How's your arm?" he threw over his shoulder as he tidied up.

"Uh...still hurts, but between Ziva throwing me around, and her father squeezing it, and that God-awful flight home, and Abby hugging me, and me bashing myself with bits of wood that's hardly surprising...uh...why?"

Gibbs finished filling up the last sack and threw it on top of the others. Then he turned back to Tony with one raised eyebrow. Tony's eyes glimmered.

"Oh! Right! The arm is fine! Doesn't hurt at all! I might need some help getting undressed though." He shot Gibbs a lascivious wink. "That a problem?"

Gibbs gave him a predatory grin in return. "Oh, I don't think so."

Gibbs glanced around the room with a sense of satisfaction at the newly emptied space. It was time to start again – build something fresh.

"Why now?" Tony asked.

“My gut told me it was time.”

“I wasn’t talking about the boat.”

“Neither was I.”

Gibbs returned to the stairs, and Tony got to his feet eagerly as he approached. His broken arm threw him off-balance, and Gibbs put out a hand to steady him. Gibbs held Tony up with one hand and pulled him in for a kiss with the other. Tony’s mouth opened easily the second their lips touched, and Gibbs slid his tongue inside and explored purposefully. Tony melted against him again, and Gibbs felt a quiet sense of satisfaction in his gut. He kissed Tony for a long time, taking care of Tony’s injured arm where it was nestled between their bodies.

“I never answered your question,” Gibbs said, when he finally came up for air.

“What question?” Tony frowned, nuzzling a little trail along his neck that made Gibbs’s cock harden in anticipation.

“The one about my first boat. The one I loved best.” Gibbs moved his hand down and cupped Tony’s ass firmly. “I didn’t build her in here. I built her out in the garage. When she was done, I took her down to the marina. I go and take her out and sail in her every so often.”

“I thought you said she was kind of quirky?” Tony said, with a little frown. Gibbs grinned.

“Oh yeah! She is. Still lists to one side, and I’m always fixing her up when she goes wrong, but I love that boat. All the others – they’re just for the pleasure of the building. That one – she might not be perfect, and she may be messed up every which way, but she’s for keeps.”

He leaned forward, captured Tony’s mouth with his own, and kissed him again. Then he pulled back a little way so that he could look into those gleaming green eyes.

“Just like you.”

The End

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